John Cassidy writes: One night not long ago, in a new restaurant in Havana called VIPs, the owner, a white-haired Catalan named Jordi, was speculating about what life might be like in Cuba after a reconciliation with the United States. “Come, let me show you,” he said confidingly, leading the way to a large outdoor space between the neighboring building and his own, an eighteenth-century villa built for a Spanish *marqués*. Gesturing with his hands, Jordi indicated where he was building an open-air bar and eatery, a wine cellar, a “chill-out area.” “It will be a club for friends,” Jordi said. “Friends with money.”

Inside, Hugo Cancio, one of Jordi’s friends in the new transnational élite, sat at a corner table. A Cuban-American businessman, Cancio lives in Miami but shuttles to Havana so often that the VIPs menu has named his favorite dish for him: the Don Hugo Paella. Cancio is fifty-one, tall, with an athlete’s shoulders and a limber gait. He was accompanied by his daughter Christy, who had recently finished college in the U.S. Their table looked out on a square bar, a dozen tables full of smartly dressed people, and a huge screen, with Chaplin’s “Modern Times” on a continuous loop. On his iPhone 6, Cancio showed me a selfie that he and Christy had taken earlier that day with Conan O’Brien, who was in Havana taping his show. O’Brien had invited them to join him at El Aljibe, an open-air restaurant that is popular with diplomats and Cuba’s senior *nomenclatura*. “What do you think?” Cancio asked me, smiling. “Cuba’s changing, man.”

Last December, after five decades of Cold War enmity and eighteen months of secret talks, the United States and Cuba announced that they had agreed to normalize relations. It was a rapprochement so long in coming that younger generations, without much memory of invasions, embargoes, and the threat of nuclear obliteration, barely knew why the bad feeling was so ingrained in the politics of both countries. Cancio is a casualty, like many others, of all that preceded this tentative settlement. He left Cuba in the Mariel boatlift of 1980, in which as many as a hundred and twenty thousand Cubans made a traumatic exodus to the United States. Thirty-five years later, as the C.E.O. of a holding company called Fuego Enterprises, he moves freely between Cuba and the U.S. After spending years cultivating connections in both countries, he has become an intermediary sought after by the increasing numbers of Americans—investors, politicians, celebrities—who are going to Cuba. He is pleased to tell you about his private meeting with Sting, or with Paris Hilton. When Google visited Havana recently, a delegation came to his office to discuss the local situation. In February, Cancio spoke to a gathering of political conservatives in Washington, D.C., and in April he addressed an audience in New York at a conference about Cuba organized by the Wharton School of Business.

Cancio is recognizably Cuban, but he is also a man of earnest American discipline. He meditates and does a hundred pushups each morning. His bedtime reading lately is Hillary Clinton’s “Hard Choices” and a volume by Deepak Chopra. In 2012, he launched *OnCuba*, a bimonthly magazine stocked with ads, profiles of artists and musicians, and articles on tourist destinations. In the past year, he has added a quarterly art magazine, aimed at collectors and investors, and a real-estate supplement. Cancio has ambitious plans to expand Fuego Enterprises. In 2010, after Raúl Castro announced sweeping reforms to open up the island’s economy, allowing more Cubans to own their own businesses—known as *cuentapropismo*—and to buy and sell property, Cancio assembled a team to assess investment possibilities. He and his partners decided to focus on media and entertainment, and then move into real estate, tourism, and telecommunications. “Our goal was to position ourselves quickly, so when the market opened we would be among the first to be established,” he said.

For now, Fuego is distinguished more by its potential than by its assets. “If you look at the financials of the company, it’s a very speculative investment and not a lot to get excited about,” Thomas Herzfeld, who manages the Herzfeld Caribbean Basin Fund, one of Fuego’s largest investors, said. “But if you look at Hugo there’s everything to get excited about. He’s a leading expert on Cuba, he’s well respected there, he cares about Cuba and its people.”

Cancio told me that it will likely take three to five years to see real change in Cuba. In the meantime, the island, like any other country undergoing a radical transformation, is a confounding place to do business. In recent decades, businesses from Europe and Canada have invested in Cuba, with uneven results; many deals dissolve, with investors disappointed by returns or frustrated by the exigencies of working with Castro’s government. In a few cases, foreign businessmen have been abruptly jailed, on vague charges of corruption, and their businesses seized. Cancio’s partner Ariel Machado, also a Cuban, jokes about nightmares in which a shadowy rival reaches

out to chop off his hand with a machete.

To a visitor, Havana appears much the same as it has for decades—people at loose ends, distressed buildings—but there has been an explosion of small private enterprises and, with them, pockets of encouraging prosperity. For the first time since the sixties, when Castro declared a "revolutionary offensive" to "eliminate all manifestations of private trade," Cubans are being allowed to take charge of their material lives. People are better dressed; there are more cars on the road; and everywhere there are new restaurants and bars and hostels, where Cubans rent rooms to foreign visitors. In early April, Airbnb announced the launch of Cuban operations; by month's end, Governor Andrew Cuomo had flown in with a planeload of New York business executives for a trade summit, and an N.B.A. good-will delegation had set up training camps for Cuban athletes. On May 5th, the U.S. Treasury Department lifted restrictions on ferry services from Florida; the same day, Jet Blue said that it planned to begin flying between Havana and New York.

Tourism has surged nearly twenty per cent this year, and hotel lobbies in Havana are noisy with troubadours singing "Guantanamera" and odes to Che Guevara; buses and luridly painted old Chevys trundle sightseers around the city. There are Europeans, Canadians, Brazilians; one morning, I saw a group of elderly Chinese visitors dressed in safari clothing exploring the grounds of La Finca Vigía, Hemingway's home.

Increasingly, there are also Americans, mostly sixty-somethings on "cultural tours" but also college students and hipsters from New York and Los Angeles. People in Havana joke that the latest accessory for an evening out is an American friend. The city's harbor is being refurbished to accommodate U.S. cruise ships. Cancio's new travel arm, OnCuba Travel, offers guided tours to Americans with the slogan "Be the first to witness the rise of free enterprise in Cuba."

Havana's night life, once moribund, is alive again. In a former peanut-oil factory, La Fábrica de Arte Cubano hosts dancers, filmmakers, painters, photographers, and musicians. Across town, the Las Vegas Cabaret features a transvestite show. Havana, long a Soviet-style culinary wasteland, is now a fine place to go out for Spanish, Italian, Iranian, Turkish, Swedish, or Chinese, in restaurants frequented by foreigners but also by newly moneyed Cubans—what one of Cancio's young writers, Carlos Manuel Álvarez, describes as "specimens at the midway gallop between Cuba's iron socialist morality and a certain post-realignment Havana consumerism."

One day this spring, as I rode through the city in a taxi, a glossy black BMW raced past, and a policeman at the next intersection gave the driver a deferential salute. Until recently, the only known wealthy Cubans were a handful of musicians and athletes who, in a special government dispensation meant to dissuade them from leaving, were permitted to keep their foreign earnings. Even so, few were ostentatious, and, if they bought cars, they drove Peugeots or Hyundais. My taxi-driver explained that the car's owner was probably an "entertainer." Another Cuban musician, he told me wistfully, owned a Ferrari.

Officially, Cuba's changes are intended to bring about "more socialism," but few Cubans seem to believe that. "We're not only making peace with the Americans," one senior Cuban official told me. "We're changing everything. But not even those of us involved in the process know what that means yet." Cuba seems bound on a course not unlike that of Vietnam and China: hybrid Communist states in which citizens enjoy few political liberties but significant economic freedom.

Cubans like Cancio have deduced that expressions of resentment will get them nowhere. One day, a pop-up protest blocked a road tunnel at the end of the Malecón, Havana's seaside corniche. Several dozen of the Damas de Blanco—the Ladies in White, relatives of imprisoned dissidents—had gathered to hold up flowers and pictures of their loved ones and to shout, "Down with the dictatorship!" Within ten minutes, police had herded the Damas onto buses and driven them away. All that was left was a mysterious group of civilians, shouting loyalist chants, and a few watchful policemen.

All around the city, even as *los cambios*—the changes—take root, there is a world-weary acceptance of the revolution's persistence and of its mistakes. When I asked Cancio what it meant to be a Marielito, he quoted a speech that Castro gave during the crisis, in which he repudiated the Cubans who had chosen to leave the country: "We don't want them and we don't need them." Cancio shrugged, smiled, and said, "Well, here I am."

Hugo Cancio's base in Havana— his office and his apartment—occupies the ninth floor of a fifties-era high-rise that overlooks the Malecón. The building has a quasi-official atmosphere, a remnant of the years in which every Cuban enterprise was run by the government. It once housed the operations room for Fidel's Battle of Ideas, a campaign to rekindle revolutionary fervor that has been superseded by Raúl's Changes. In the lobby, a pair of brusque concierges keep watch, and an elevator attendant sits all day, mutely pushing buttons.

The *OnCuba* office has a sleek lounge, whose gray-and-white walls are decorated with lyrics by the Cuban musician Silvio Rodríguez. One of them reads, "I prefer to talk of impossible things, because of the possible too much is already known." In three workrooms, a half-dozen young Cubans sit intently at white benches with new large-screen Apple computers.

Although the offices are in Havana, *OnCuba* is not officially distributed there; Cancio is accredited by Cuba's Foreign Ministry as a representative of the foreign press. *OnCuba* is printed in the U.S., distributed on charter flights that fly between Florida and Cuba, and sold at American supermarkets, bookstores, and newsstands. There are stories about rickshaw drivers, skaters, ballerinas, and this summer's Art Biennial. The magazine avoids politics, but it reports, boosterishly, on the burgeoning U.S.-Cuba relationship. Last year, Joe Garcia, a Cuban-American congressman from Florida, caused controversy when he signalled that he might be in favor of ending the trade embargo against Cuba. Cancio put him on the cover.

Cubans have always shown great initiative in finding alternatives to the anodyne government-sponsored news. For years, moonlighting engineers installed satellite dishes in homes, to bring in forbidden television shows. *La bola*, Cuba's bush telegraph, transmits news around the island long before it is covered by state media. The latest innovation is *el paquete* (the package), an electronic bundle of weekly news and entertainment, packed onto a USB stick and delivered by couriers on motorbikes. A few months ago, Cancio assigned a story on the subject, and the reporters found that *el paquete* was effectively the island's largest private business: it employs forty-five thousand Cubans, brings in one and a half million dollars a week, and reaches five million people—nearly half of Cuba's population. After the report, Cancio negotiated with the head of *el paquete* to have *OnCuba* included.

The magazine's Web site also reaches many Cubans, as well as government minders, and that is where it occasionally runs into trouble. To lead the investigative reporting team, Cancio hired an Uruguayan journalist named Fernando Ravsberg, who worked for the BBC in Cuba for two decades. Last summer, his reporters began covering places around the city where authorities were not regularly collecting garbage. At a disposal site on the outskirts, the journalists discovered a fetid encampment, where scavengers raked through garbage for items to sell. In Cuba, where the government has long boasted of its social-welfare system, such sights are shocking. "We did the garbage story," Ravsberg said, "and afterward, lo and behold, the state television came along and reported on it."

OnCuba reports on social ills as a crusading local paper might in the United States—enough to rile the authorities but not enough to be seen as subversive. Ravsberg cautioned his reporters not to overemphasize the scavengers' miserable lives. "They are young and were naturally affected by that, so I had to make them understand that it had to be put into the proper context," he explained. "Which Latin-American country does not have people living in garbage?"

One day in the office, I found Cancio talking with an editor about a photograph that he wanted removed from the Web site. Cancio told me that the photograph depicted a poet who had once been censured by the Party. "The person in that photo isn't even mentioned in the article. I don't think they even knew who the poet was. So my question was: 'What is the purpose of the photo, what does it contribute?' " When I asked Cancio about his role as house censor, he gave a tortuous explanation: "The purpose of our project is not to hurt anyone's feelings. It is to unite, find common points of exchange, educate, change hearts and minds. We want to be

faithful to the truth and to a new and dignified journalism for the country, but, if we can avoid hurting sensitivities unnecessarily, we should." But, he added, he had hired youngsters who were "not contaminated with paradigms and ideologies that can lead to incomprehension. I want to surround myself with people who love their country unconditionally but who are not bound to old and obsolete ideas."

Cancio was born in 1964—five years after Fidel Castro seized power—into a family of entertainers. His father, Miguel Cancio, founded the popular sixties band Los Zafiros, along with one of his mother's seven siblings, most of whom were also singers and musicians. Los Zafiros were inspired by the harmonious doo-wop of the Platters, but also incorporated influences from Cuban music and bossa nova. (The band's hit "I Have Come" was revived in "Breaking Bad," playing winsomely as Walter White's R.V.-cum-meth lab is destroyed by a bulldozer.)

With his parents often away on tour, Cancio was looked after by his grandmother, and though he showed talent as a percussionist, he was dismayed by his family's bohemianism. He recalls waking up before school to find the living room full of drunk musicians and coming home in the afternoon to find some of them still there, sleeping. "I decided then and there I didn't want to be a musician," he said.

Cancio wanted instead to be a doctor, like his grandfather, and he managed good enough grades to attend a boarding school in the province of Matanzas. Then, one night, when he was sixteen, he was caught telling a forbidden joke to other students in their dormitory bunks. Cancio recalls that it was one of the Pepito jokes, based on a beloved Cuban character, a smart-ass boy who pokes fun at everyone: "One day, Fidel asks his bodyguards to bring Pepito to tell him jokes; he wanted to laugh. So his bodyguards go to Pepito's house. Pepito was just waking up and didn't want to come, because he hadn't yet had his breakfast, but he finally went. When he got to Fidel's house, Fidel told Pepito he could have whatever he wanted. So Pepito asks for a hearty breakfast. When he is done eating, Fidel tells him, 'Pepito, I want you to know that soon all the children of Cuba will be eating a breakfast like the one you've had today.' Pepito says to Fidel, 'Did you bring me here to tell tales, or for you to tell them to me?' "

Cancio and his friends were hauled in by the school authorities, forced to recant in front of their peers, and told that they were being expelled. "They said we had betrayed the trust of the revolution," Cancio recalled. "From that moment on, I basically no longer had a future in the country, and my mother said we were going to have to go."

In those days, there was virtually no legal way to leave Cuba. Then, in April, 1980, the Peruvian Embassy grounds in Havana were overrun by thousands of Cubans seeking asylum. After an acrimonious standoff, Castro announced that all those who wished to leave could do so from the nearby port of Mariel—as long as they had a boat to take them. As Cuban-Americans scrambled to Mariel in yachts to evacuate relatives, Fidel saw an opportunity to get rid of Cuba's unwanted: State Security agents brought thousands of criminals from Cuba's jails and inmates from mental asylums and loaded them onto boats.

Mariel offered an unexpected way out for Cancio, along with his mother and his younger sister. Cancio recalled, "My mother told me that, to be able to go, I'd have to appear before a panel and say I was a homosexual. So I did that. I remember one of the panel members asked me, 'Are you a passive or an active homosexual?' " Laughing, Cancio told me, "I didn't know what that meant, so I said, 'Both things.' "

Cancio was taken to a holding facility in Havana, then to one near Mariel, a camp for unaccompanied males, where prospective émigrés waited along with newly released criminals. He was frightened, and worried about his mother and sister, from whom he had been forcibly separated. After a few weeks, he was put on a luxurious American cabin cruiser. As the boat left Mariel harbor, Cancio panicked and tried to dive overboard and swim ashore, but the American captain calmed him.

In Miami, Cancio was reunited with his mother and sister, who had come on another boat, and they spent several days in the Orange Bowl, where refugees were kept until their relatives or social services could provide

housing. Cancio recalls that he viewed his new surroundings as "a world of infinite possibilities"—a phrase that he still repeats, like a slogan. After a few months, the Cancios were given permanent accommodations in South Miami Beach, in a run-down Deco apartment building at Fourth and Collins.

Because of the criminals in their midst, the Marielitos quickly acquired a fearsome reputation in the United States. In Brian De Palma's 1983 remake of "Scarface," the vicious drug dealer Tony Montana is a Marielito. Not long after Cancio and his family moved to Miami, another Marielito pulled a gun on him and his sister outside their building. Cancio's mother, terrified of the crime in their neighborhood, forbade her daughter to go out on her own.

Cancio graduated from Miami Beach High and went to work, as a busboy in a kosher restaurant, then as a security guard, then hawking clothes at a flea market. He got a break selling cars at a Mitsubishi dealership, and within six months he'd become the sales manager. He moved on to a BMW dealership, and from there to pioneer Hyundai's sales operation in South Florida. One night, he met a young woman, Marian, of Puerto Rican extraction. They began living together, and they had a daughter, Cherie, and then Christy. By his mid-twenties, he said, "I had bought my first home, with a pool, and lived there with my family."

One day, during a trip to the Cayman Islands, he met a visiting Cuban tourism official who confided that Cuba and the U.S. were about to authorize "family reunification trips." Cancio returned to Miami and opened a travel agency offering "Viajes a Cuba." He also got an OFAC license—a waiver from the U.S. Treasury Department to do business with Cuba. When the family visits were duly authorized, Cancio says, his business was "all ready to go."

Despite his success in the United States, Cancio was overwhelmed by nostalgia for Cuba. In December, 1993, he and his sister return returned to spend Christmas with family in Varadero. Cancio teared up as he recalled knocking on relatives' doors to surprise them. At the family house, boyhood friends came over to say hello, except for one, who had joined Cuban State Security. "I went to his house, a couple of streets away, and I shouted at him," Cancio said. "But he didn't come out."

In April, 1994, with the Cuban economy suffering from the loss of Soviet subsidies, the Castro government held a conference to promote reconciliation with the exile community in Florida. It was a major about-face. Castro had repudiated the Cubans who left as *gusanos*—worms—and forbidden them to return home; he referred to Florida's Cuban exile community as *la Mafia de Miami*. Cancio, who describes himself as "naïve and politically out of the loop at the time," nevertheless found himself on the list of Cuban-Americans who were invited to the conference. He made a number of connections there, including several well-placed officials who have remained his friends.

On the last day, the attendees stood in line, and one by one they were introduced to Fidel Castro for a quick handshake and a photograph. As Cancio waited, he told me, "I thought about all the people who wanted to kill him, and then worried that his bodyguards could read my mind. But I didn't feel any hatred or animosity toward him. There he was: tall, pinkish, long hands and long nails. I saw him calling people by name. When it was my turn, he asked how my father was. He had seen a documentary about Los Zafiros."

Cancio watched the documentary—a portrayal of the decline of Los Zafiros, whose members had mostly succumbed to alcoholism—and decided to make his own film, focussing on the band's "height of success, rather than on their disintegration." He raised money, got permission to shoot in Cuba, and persuaded his father to be his chief consultant on location. "The film threw me into the entertainment world—the world of my family—but as a producer, not as a performer," Cancio said. "Zafiros, Blue Madness" had its première in 1997 at the Cine Payret, in Old Havana, and won the People's Choice Award at the Havana Film Festival that year.

When he showed the movie in Miami, though, members of the anti-Castro exile community staged an angry demonstration, and a woman spat in Cancio's face. "It turned me into an activist to exercise my right in favor of cultural exchange," he said. He began to bring a different Cuban band to the United States every month, and formed a company to produce music videos. It was a sensible gambit: for decades, music had been among Cuba's most popular legal exports. Cancio mostly lost money on the bands' tours, however, and his dealings

with the regime infuriated Miami Cubans; he received threats, and a bomb was set off at a night club where one of his bands was booked. But the Cuban connection was lucrative in other ways. He brokered a deal between Cayman Airways and Cuba's official travel agency, opening up a way for Cuban-Americans to bypass the U.S. travel ban. Then, in February, 1996, two small airplanes piloted by anti-Castro exiles planning to drop propaganda leaflets over Havana were shot down, killing four Cuban-Americans. President Clinton signed a stringent new sanctions package—which, for Cancio, provided an opportunity. While most of the other Cuba-focussed travel agencies "scrambled to reinvent themselves," Cancio took his customers and put them on planes to Cuba via the Cayman Islands. "I made a bundle of cash," he said.

During the Bush years, things became difficult again: in 2003, in a crackdown timed to coincide with the U.S. invasion of Iraq, Castro arrested seventy-five dissidents, human-rights activists, and journalists, ushering in a period known as the Black Spring. After Cancio wrote an article condemning the repression, he was not allowed back into Cuba for a year. Angry, he stayed away for four more. He concentrated on producing music and investing in Florida real estate; he also set up a lobbying group, Cambio Cubano, to advocate against the U.S. embargo.

After Barack Obama took office, and tensions between Cuba and the U.S. subsided, the Cuban Interests Section in Washington contacted Cancio, asking him for a copy of "Zafiros." It was an overture. When a half sister in Cuba fell ill, Cancio was granted an emergency humanitarian visa to see her. During his visit, Cancio says, he was summoned for a meeting with members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. "They told me that they wanted me to resume my cultural activities on behalf of Cuba, and they apologized" for not allowing him to return. Cancio said that he would criticize Castro again if it seemed warranted. "At the same time, I told them I would never do anything against my country." For the government, Cancio was an appealing figure: a Cuban-American capitalist who was also a patriot, and not averse to working within the Party's limitations—especially if his business got a boost.

After returning to Miami, Cancio began signing up big-ticket Cuban groups for concerts in the U.S.: Los Van Van, NG La Banda, Pablo Milanés. He booked Silvio Rodríguez for his first U.S. tour, including a sold-out concert at Carnegie Hall. "We sold 1.8 million dollars' worth of tickets," he told me.

In 2011, the Cuban cardinal, Jaime Ortega, told Cancio that he had spoken with Raúl and become convinced that a transformation was coming. "I realized that my country was changing enormously," Cancio said. "I decided to get a lot more involved in the United States in helping look for a change of policy toward Cuba." He also met with Cuban officials, and told them that they "needed to be more open to Miami Cubans, too, and not treat us like fucking immigrants." In 2012, Cuba passed a new immigration law that lifted long-standing travel restrictions; it also permitted Cubans living in Miami to visit without overt stigma or sanction. "The rhetoric changed," Cancio said. "You no longer hear us referred to as *la Mafia de Miami*. We began to feel more at home in our country." He added, "They know that most of the new businesses opening up in Cuba are being done with Miami money."

Much of the investment coming into "the new Cuba" is opaque, but in Havana it is easy to see the signs of American money: glitzy new bars and restaurants, financed by investors in Miami and elsewhere. Since 2009, Obama has been raising the limits on remittances, and at least two billion dollars a year is now flowing into the country. Many of the homes being bought and restored in Cuba are also financed with Miami money, either with loans from Cuban-Americans to their relatives or with outright investments. The new property law allows only Cuban citizens to buy and sell real estate, so there is a booming business for front people, called *testaferros*. Cuban-Americans have an advantage, being required only to legally reacquire their Cuban nationality. Many are apparently doing so, and hanging on to their U.S. citizenship as well. In Havana, I met a successful Miami night-club owner who is converting his family's old home into a boutique hotel. He flies back to Miami every couple of months to bring cash from his U.S. bank in order to pay for the work.

The club owner told me that he also does much of his shopping back home. Despite the new money, in many places consumer goods still aren't available; Havana remains a challenging place to buy a Phillips screwdriver

or a pair of Nikes. In Varadero, I met a friend of Cancio's who had left with him from Mariel, thirty-five years ago. He explained that he flew each month to Miami, where he had worked for years as a waiter and as a taxi-driver, to pick up his Social Security check. He returned to Havana with a duffelbag stuffed full of consumer items to hand off to a fence and a few to sell: "Three cell phones, ten Lycras, ten toothpastes, ten vitamins, ten Omega-8s." Between goods that he smuggled into Cuba and rum and cigars that he took back to Miami, he earned an extra five hundred dollars a month—just enough to live on, he said.

One afternoon in Miami, Cancio drove me around in his black 7 Series BMW, passing Fourth and Collins, where the Marielito had pulled a gun on him and his sister. The neighborhood had changed a lot, he said. At South Point, which overlooks the waterway from the ocean to Miami Harbor, he pointed to the tallest apartment tower and informed me that Tom Herzfeld, his backer at Fuego, owned its triplex penthouse.

Cancio wanted a hamburger, so we drove to Lincoln Road Mall, an upscale pedestrian shopping strip. Cancio was wearing his usual gear—a designer polo shirt, fitted jeans, and Gucci loafers. He had on a distinctive gold watch with Gothic lettering. "It's a Cuervo y Sobrinos," he explained, a defunct Cuban brand that had been revived by a Swiss watchmaker; he had bought his at the factory, in Lugano. As we waited for our food, Cancio toyed with his iPhone, monitoring a series of e-mails, texts, and phone calls. One e-mail was from a prominent Cuban-American businessman with ties to Google, who wanted to confer about the employees' visit. Messages came in steadily, and he announced each one. As he finished his fries, he indicated a new one, from the editor of *Billboard*.

When potential investors visit Cuba, Cancio introduces them to local residents, as well as to businesspeople. "If you want to do business here you have to know the people and the culture," he said. The key introductions he provides are to government officials, some of whom wield considerable authority over the economy. As a middleman, Cancio knows that his success depends on delivering results to both the U.S. and Cuba, without prejudice. He likes to point out that, with each step toward restoring diplomatic relations, Fuego's stock has risen. A large American P.R. firm recently signed a contract with Cancio to represent clients who are interested in doing business in Cuba. So far, the most significant changes in U.S. law are loosened restrictions on travel and telecommunications, and Fuego is striving to take advantage. It owns MAScell, a Miami-based phone-card firm that is now operating in Cuba, and Cancio has also secured exclusive deals with two U.S. telecommunications firms, which he would identify only as "midsized, with annual revenues of five to seven hundred million dollars." He said, "For them, we've been doing a study of the Cuban market for potential business opportunities."

Around the time Fuego launched its real-estate magazine, it began bringing tourists to Cuba, hosting lunch visits at *OnCuba's* offices. At one of those sessions, Cancio spoke to twenty-five Americans of retirement age. As the tourists—comfortable shoes, bottled water—asked questions, he gave them what sounded curiously like a political stump speech. "*OnCuba* is a way to show that Cuba is changing—a new country, more tolerant, with defects, yes, but one that is changing," he said. The new Cuba he envisioned was "defined not only by the Castro brothers, or their enemies, or any particular group, but by the whole Cuban family."

That new Cuba is unlikely to come as fast as Cancio would like. Frank Mora, the director of the Latin-American studies center at Florida International University, and a former Deputy Assistant U.S. Secretary of Defense under Obama, told me that governments on both sides are slowed by caution and internal resistance. Of Cuba, he said, "The regime is overwhelmed at the moment, and there's an element of improvisation—as always with the Cubans—so they are going to go very slowly." The model is Vietnam, not China, he said. "They fear the speed of China's transition, and Tiananmen Square is their nightmare."

Mora suggested that there was no certainty that more capitalism would lead to more democracy. "I think Obama is making a bet that this will help make the Cubans the agents of their own change," he said. "I think Raúl is making a bet that this will ultimately strengthen the hand of the Party. There will be people making more money, and some may transfer that economic power to a desire for political reform. On the other hand, those same people may help put the brakes on by supporting the regime, so as to protect their investments."

Despite the excitement in the United States, American investment in Cuba is still essentially notional. "The number is zero," John Kavulich, the president of the U.S.-Cuba Trade and Economic Council, told me. Although Obama has introduced a few exceptions to the U.S. embargo, much of it still stands. And its effect is compounded in Cuba by what Kavulich described as an "internal embargo." As Kavulich points out, you can give a relative in Holguín money to start a hair salon, but he'll need to ask the local bureaucracy for a license to import shampoo.

Luis René Fernández Tabío, an economist who does research for the government, said that Cuba must be wary. "If the free market were allowed here, there would be nothing left for the Cubans in seventy-two hours," he said. "The challenge for us is to make sure the Cuban population understands that socialism is the way to vouchsafe Cuba's national sovereignty. A prosperous and sustainable socialism." When Obama and Castro appeared on television to announce the restoration of relations, Obama stood and talked in detail about the future he hoped to encourage in Cuba. Raúl Castro, wearing a military uniform, remained in his seat and spoke in generalities—a display of ambivalence that Cubans have not failed to interpret. Although his government has entertained many proposals from U.S. businesses, it has committed to almost none. The government, which controls three-quarters of the economy, is far more concerned with policing than with growth. The Cuban-American lawyer Pedro Freyre, who represents a number of companies interested in doing business in Cuba, told me, "If the Cubans could run their economy the way they run State Security, then Cuba will be the next Singapore." But as long as the Castros are alive everything will depend on being able to deal with the government.

When I asked Cancio about the difficulties of negotiating with the government, he took a long time to answer: "It's, uh, it's not a comfortable place to be." A few days earlier, he'd been summoned by officials to discuss a complaint. The meeting had gone on for three hours. "They came over all flattering, like, 'We love what you do,' " he said. " 'It's not us, but some guy in the bureaucracy who doesn't understand anything. You don't want to jeopardize everything you've done over one little thing.' " Cancio explained that there was a group of hard-liners within the Department of Revolutionary Orientation who opposed him. Their channel for attacking him was a small group of Cuban journalists, who called him "the Americans' Trojan horse." But Ravsberg suggested that Cancio had allies, too: "Cancio is *atendido*"—meaning, roughly, protected—"at a very high level, above the Ideological Department." Who would that be? "Technically, the next person higher is Díaz-Canel." Miguel Díaz-Canel is the Vice-President, picked to succeed Raúl Castro when he steps down, in 2018. "And then it's Raúl."

Over lunch, Cancio said that if he had a guardian angel he didn't know who it was. "I have always thought that I don't have any clout, but that they are using me," as a test of how far the *cambios* can extend without threatening the Party's authority. Cancio told me that a well-connected Cuban friend had recently called to invite him to his house. "He said, 'I have some guys here who are talking about you.' I got there, and there were three officials, and they were drinking Blue Label. I recognized one of them. He had caused me problems years before. When he saw me, he exclaimed, 'This guy, he's a son of a bitch.' Then he said, 'Drink with me.' And he said to his friends, 'This son of a bitch has won a space in Cuba, more even than we have, maybe. He's a *cabrón*' "—a clever bastard. What the man said was resentful, but it was also a grudging recognition of a slow but profound change. "He kept saying, 'You're a *cabrón*, man, and you deserve everything you've achieved.' " ♦