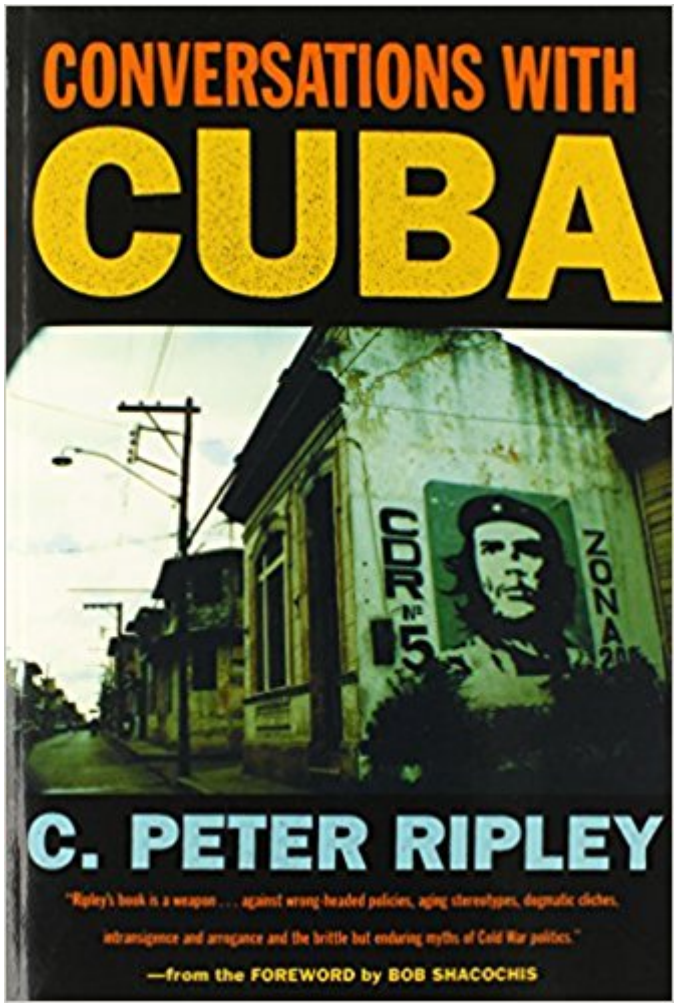
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Conversations With Cuba



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Synopsis

Here is a fresh story behind this passionate, struggling, frequently discouraged, but always proud country, told by ordinary Cuban citizensÃ¢â ¬â ¢the people who still struggle with a revolution that is far from over. Sparked during his high school and college years by his admiration of the Cuban revolutionÃ¢â ¬â ¢the first successful bourgeois revolution of the twentieth centuryÃ¢â ¬â ¢C. Peter Ripley subsequently developed a fascination with Cuban culture that took him on five illegal trips to the struggling country between 1991 and 1997. During his travels, Ripley visited and revisited the Cuban landscape and its people, closely following the lives of citizens who were deeply influenced by the revolution and its effects. Through his experiences and observations, Ripley taps into the reality behind his long-romanticized perceptions of the Cuban Revolution.Conversations with Cuba takes place during the height of the "special period," the ambiguous name given to the years of hardship following the end of the Soviet Union's vital aid to the country, isolated by the U.S.-led embargo, and preceding Cuba's as yet unrealized revitalization. Ripley guides us on a first-person journey through this bustling economy now reduced to soap shortages, one meal a day, and desperate attempts to locate an economic salvation in foreign tourism. He shows us people with a faith and pride in their nation and its revolutionary ideals that is as frequently conflicted as it is fierce. We come to know Pedro, a plumber and black marketeer; Roberto, who introduces Ripley and his companions to the enforced discrimination behind Cuban tourism; and Neddie, a schoolteacher whose early confidence in the Revolution is later seriously challenged by the harsh realities of the "special period." Ripley's most involved relationship is with Paulo, a college student turned black marketeer who becomes Ripley's guide and friend during his travels. Paulo's discontent with his country and his own circumstances is tested through the course of the book, and, guided in part by his foreign guest, he ultimately experiences a drastic transformation, trading his desire to leave Cuba for a new dedication to his heritage and a persistent hope for Cuba's revolutionary future. These individuals and countless others encountered in Conversations with Cuba reveal a moving portrait of a country and an uncommonly civil society shaped by Ã¢â ¬Å“patria,Ã¢â ¬Â• courage, tenacity, and a simultaneously critical and optimistic belief in their revolution, within an ambivalent reality of tension and change.

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Customer Reviews

Present-day Cuba continues to be a mystery to most Americans. The historical travel restrictions, though not as prohibitive as in earlier years, continue to limit the number of Americans who visit this island, Communist since the late 1950s. Ripley, a historian of the black experience in the United States, has written a personal and sensitive description of the Cuban people. Based on five trips he made between 1991 and 1997, his latest book examines Cuba’s common citizens, whose lives are intimately connected to the Cuban revolution. Sympathetic to the revolution, Ripley paints a more positive picture of Cuba’s recent history than does the mainstream press. Although not entirely objective, the text is well written and informative. Of interest to academic libraries with Latin American collections and public libraries with a Latino patron base.AMark L. Grover, Brigham Young Univ. Lib., Provo, UT Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In the 40 years since the Cuban Revolution, much has changed there. Ripley, through five visits in the 1990s, uncovers the attitudes of this contradictory island country. Despite most people’s unwillingness to criticize the government, there are subtle expressions of dissatisfaction, mostly from the younger generation that does not remember the revolution itself. However, there are enough Cubans who, despite their sometimes squalid conditions, still utter "Vive la revolucion!" Indeed, during the course of the book, Ripley relates how dollars began to be accepted as well as pesos and even how U.S. customs doesn’t go out of its way to prevent black-market cigars from entering the U.S. His romanticism of the revolution gets tested; the family he meets each visit is largely in Castro’s corner, but many of the women would move to the U.S. if given a chance. Ripley’s breezy writing style spotlights well these noble, fascinating people and their often complex story. Joe Collins --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Just visited Cuba and the book filled in and clarified some of the information I learned in Cuba. Good writing also.

Great

I agree with the reviewer who noted that this book gives a different perspective than the typical Cold War paranoid view of Cuba. The changes in Cuba from trip to trip were evident in the author's descriptions. Clearly, the book is slanted toward the Cuban people and away from the Castro regime. However, it did give a nice view of daily life for the ordinary citizen. After a while, though, the book seemed to drag on. Overall, though, it was nice to have a new view of Cuban life, and it clearly showed how the embargo is only hurting the Cuban people.

This book blows. Buy the book by Christopher Hunt, "Waiting for Fidel", which is funnier and more accurate (albeit also flawed by a no-fun author). This book tries to be ponderous, serious, weighty, but with no analysis, just postering. The author is an ... (or at least claims to be) when Cuba is in fact crying out as a place to have fun. The author tries to engage in seditious conversation about politics at every turn, when most people (and I have visited Cuba) just want to get on with life. What a bore and waste of money. I almost think the author threw together this book so he can claim that he is a professor who has published. By the way, the author should educate himself when railing against the U.S. embargo as the root of Cuba's ills--according to the Cato Institute, the embargo is not that disruptive--the fault lies in communism. But again, I don't care about politics, just trying to point out how limited in scope the author's views are....braying about politics, never having fun...on and on and on and...well, I've made my point.

In a time when US activists will argue that a young boy should not be reunited with his Cuban father, C. Peter Ripley's Conversations with Cuba is an important book. In a distillation of his experiences gathered in multiple visits to Cuba in the 1990s, Ripley introduces the reader to the changes taking place in Cuba. Combining his skill as an astute observer and articulate writer, Ripley challenges the language and imagery long used in the west to isolate and create mistrust of Cuba and its revolution.Conversations with Cuba makes plain that a diversity of opinion exists within Cuba about the revolution. Ripley discusses the dual problem Cuba faces as it transitions to a capitalist economy while continuing to care for its people as promised by the original revolutionary cadre of

Fidel, Che, and others. Ripley learns that the struggle to achieve these potentially conflicting goals creates dissatisfaction for some, while for others an abiding faith in the revolution persists. Through the revolutionary affirming experience of his "fixer", Paulo, Ripley asks the reader to reconsider the long-held, rarely questioned stereotypes of Cuba. Just as Paulo reconsiders his views about the revolution, Ripley offers hope that the US can abandon the negative views of Cuba and consider the island and its people as they really exist.

Superior work that puts the reader on five tours of Cuba and allows you to talk to Cubans who stayed and to experience the wonderful island paradise. The writer admits that he idealized the Revolution and wants it to work but still shows the numerous ways that it hasn't work and that the island is in trouble. I enjoyed his conversations with Cubans and the Cubans' resilent nature. Great background information for a novice to Latin American relations like myself who only recently gained interest in the island due to its recent commercial musical success. Conservatives and Castro haters will dislike Ripley's point of view, which may be unfair -- the work seems intellectually honest.

I didn't know much about Castro's Cuba before picking up Ripley's book, and never thought I would have more than a casual interest in the subject. All that has changed since reading Conversations with Cuba. Ripley's vivid and moving portraiture of ordinary Cubans caught between their allegiances to the revolution and their hopes for future is absolutely compelling. His cinematic feel for the sun-splashed landscape and the paint-flaked cityscape is memorable. This is no Michelin guide to exotic lands and interesting places; it's a Badeker guide to the soul of modern Cuban. A wonderful book.

This is an articulate and compelling perspective on Cuba in a period of rapid change. An important and exceedingly well written first-hand account of Cuba told by an well-informed compassionate viewer with all senses completely engaged and interacting directly with the Cuban people. A good antidote to less well-informed authors presenting Cuba as monochromatic and repressed. This is an important and timely book, required reading for those interested in today's Cuba and tired of literature devoid of passion.

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