



July 13, 2016

African American Students Back from Cuba

Building on my 2011 to Cuba, this time with my daughter Tia, I helped lead a youth delegation to Cuba from one of Chicago's premier social justice schools, Village Leadership Academy (VLA). The VLA's youth delegation traveled to Havana and Santiago de Cuba. The delegation explored the unique history and culture of each region, and we engaged with Cuban artists, entrepreneurs, educators, youth leaders, and rural residents to better understand the Republic of Cuba's emerging relationship with the U.S. and how imperialism, globalization, and sustained resistance have shaped Cuban culture and life.

On December 17, 2014, President Obama announced the beginning of a normalization process between the United States of America and Cuba, starting a new chapter in U.S.-Cuba relations. A major step in this process was reached on July 20, 2015, when Cuba and the United States reopened their respective embassies and reestablished diplomatic relations. The U.S. Embassy in Havana occupies the same building on the Malecón as it did prior to the severing of diplomatic relations. Even with the recent changes, the U.S. trade embargo with Cuba remains in place, and most transactions between the United States and Cuba continue to be prohibited. Since 2000, certain U.S. exports of agricultural goods and medical devices have been permitted.

It was such an honor to work with VLA's Principal Nakisha H. Hobbs and her team of teachers on this historic journey, with all the violence in Chicago, Ms. Hobbs should be praised for her vision to make this experience possible for inner-city low-income African American students from the South and West Sides of Chicago. It was also an honor to have the support of West Suburban hospital's CEO Patrick Maloney. Mr. Maloney helped to sponsor the trip, helping students get to Cuba.

Sincerely,

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District