

**ASCE XIXth Annual Meeting  
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**Speech of Tom Gjelten**

I should make clear at the outset that I am here in my private capacity as a writer about Cuba and not in any way as a correspondent for National Public Radio. Anything I say here today is my private opinion.

Having gotten that out of the way, I want say how delighted I am to have this opportunity to address an ASCE meeting. I have been a member for several years. My big regret is that I did not join early enough in your history to have met Felipe Pazos who I believe is one of the more honorable and interesting figures in modern Cuban history and who plays a small but significant role in my book.

I must also say I am a little intimidated here. I have spoken on the subject of Cuba quite a few times, but I am used to audiences who don't really know the first thing about the place! It's been pretty easy to entertain them. But much of what I have learned about Cuba has come from reading the proceedings of your ASCE meetings, so I face quite a challenge today, trying to add to what you already know and think about. I have written a book about the Bacardi connection with Cuba. I spent about eight years all together researching it, in Cuba, here in Miami and in Washington. This is actually something I know pretty well, but beyond that I claim no special expertise and can only share informal observations.

You know, Bacardi partly sponsored our official reception last night. Now, this is not a Bacardi conference. I'm not a Bacardi propagandist. But there is an intriguing story behind this Bacardi-Cuba connection and I found it worth exploring.

What makes it relevant here is that this Bacardi-Cuba tie is as much a story about Cuba as it is about the Bacardi family and their rum company. My idea in this book was to use the Bacardi story to explain Cuba in a new way ... in a way that might prompt non-Cubans to re-think their presumptions about modern Cuban history and also to give Cubans and Cuban-Americans a richer appreciation of their own national struggle. There are many clichés in the popular understanding of Cuba and many mis-conceptions, and I have found the Bacardi story to be useful in correcting those. The Bacardis are important not just for what they did in Cuba but for what they represented: Cuban patriotism, civic values, and progressive business leadership.

Unfortunately, this is in many ways a *what-if* story. First: What if Fidel Castro and the rest of the leadership in 1960 had accepted the Bacardis' offer to assist the Cuban revolution – rather than rejecting it? We can speculate about that. And then there's a second question: What if the Bacardi example of enlightened leadership had been the rule in the Cuban business world in the 1950s rather than the exception? That's just as important. In both regards, I think Cuba would be a very different place today.

Now, the what-if game is interesting. It's a way to re-consider the history of what happened and why. But on its own it doesn't take you very far. I'll start there, but I want to go on to draw some lessons from this Bacardi-Cuba story that have relevance today.

First, though, the history.

I know that many of you here today were born in Cuba and are old enough to remember what it was like before it changed.

I don't have to tell you that the Bacardis were a Cuban family or that the Compañía Ron Bacardí played an important part in Cuban national life. You know how Bacardi rum was served everywhere, along with Hatuey beer – which of course was made by Bacardi

You know that Bacardi was one of the original sponsors of Cuban baseball, and you may recall that when Cuban baseball games were first carried on television, Hatuey beer was a sponsor.

You should remember the radio program “Fiesta con Bacardi” on Radio CMQ. You know that Bacardi sponsored Celia Cruz and her Sonora Matancera orchestra. Those of who spent any time in the Bacardi hometown of Santiago during carnival time remember that Bacardi basically hosted the festivities, sponsoring the entertainment and the parade and naming the carnival queen.

You remember that one of the most beautiful office buildings in Havana was the art deco Edificio Bacardi, and you know the Bacardis as a family were among the strongest supporters of the anti-Batista struggle and that they celebrated the triumph of the Cuban revolution in January 1959.

That was not surprising: the Bacardi name had been associated in some way or other with every progressive political movement in Cuba over the previous century. In my book I relate the trajectory of that family and corporate patriotism, how it evolved over the years, beginning with the fascinating character of Emilio Bacardi, the son of the company founder and family patriarch, Facundo Bacardi. Emilio was the first Bacardi born in Cuba, and no member of the Bacardi family is more closely associated with the Cuban national cause. Even as he helped his father and his brother Facundo Jr. establish the family rum company in Santiago, Emilio was collecting funds for the Cuban rebel army and serving as an intermediary between the fighters in the hills and their supporters in the cities and outside Cuba. Twice he was arrested by the Spanish colonial authorities, and he served long prison terms in Spain, once during the Ten Years War and again in the final independence war. In 1894, he sent his 17-year old son Emilito off to fight under Antonio Maceo, and after the war Emilio served as the first elected Cuban mayor of Santiago when it was under a US military occupation directed by General Leonard Wood.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, under the direction of Emilio's brother in law, Enrique Schueg, the Bacardi Rum Company emerged as Cuba's leading industrial enterprise outside the sugar

sector, with a reputation for integrity and good management. And the Bacardis maintained their association with the democratic cause in Cuba by standing up first against the dictator Gerardo Machado and then against Fulgencio Batista. Both those dictators tried to bring the company under their control. Both failed.

As Cuba struggled to become a modern industrial nation, Compañía Ron Bacardi became the epitome of a responsible Cuban enterprise, known across the island as a model employer and good corporate citizen.

Let me here say a few words about what that meant at the time. In 1950, a team from the World Bank visited Cuba to assess the state of the national economy. Its main conclusions were that the country was excessively dependent on sugar and that economic growth was stagnant. “Social legislation and wage regulations ... have done much for the Cuban workers,” the team reported, “but further gains, if they are to be substantial and permanent, must come not so much from the redistribution of the national income as from further increases in its total amount.” The Bank team made it clear that private businesses needed to take more initiative, branch out into new areas, invest in new products, and develop new markets.

To underscore this point, the World Bank team distinguished between “static” and “dynamic” business management styles. “Static” firms think defensively, focusing on a preservation of the status quo. “Dynamic” firms pursue greater efficiency and productivity through technological change and innovation. Cuba’s problem was there were too many static firms, and too few dynamic ones.

It was a highly critical report, but the World Bank singled out one industry as exemplary. I quote: “After detailed investigation, the Mission is happy to report that it can suggest no improvement in production of Cuban rum.”

The Bank team was careful not to mention specific companies by name, but there was no doubt to whom it was mainly referring. The Bacardi company’s enterprising approach had always been evident. It was one of the first Cuban industrial companies to recognize the importance of developing an export market; and there are few examples in Cuba of a more successful diversification than the Bacardi decision in the 1920s to move into beer. The establishment of the Hatuey business was arguably the best and most important business decision the company ever made, for it brought a steady cash flow which the company was able to use to finance further expansion at a time when the capital market in Cuba was thin at best.

The Bacardi boss during the 1940s and 1950s was Jose “Pepín” Bosch. He was another Bacardi “in-law,” having married a granddaughter of Don Facundo, the patriarch. Some of you perhaps knew Pepín Bosch. He was a very activist entrepreneur, known for his bold management style, and he deserves much of the credit for Bacardi’s very dramatic growth during the thirty-plus years he ran the company.

Bosch was also a fervent Cuban patriot. He participated in the anti-Machado uprisings in the early 30s and then became known in Cuba for his fierce opposition to corruption during the 1940s and 1950s. Bosch even served for a short time as finance minister under Carlos Prío and established a reputation for integrity. By then, Bosch was one of the best known and most highly respected business leaders on the island.

Bacardi publicity during this period stressed the historic role it had played on the island, as a supporter of the independence movement, as a generous employer, responsible taxpayer and good corporate citizen. Its Cuban identity was underscored by its sponsorship of Cuban cultural life.

Its advertising slogan during this period referred to its *cubanidad*: Bacardi rum was *sano – sabroso y cubano*.

Another was, *el que a Cuba ha hecho famosa*.

One old magazine ad illustrating this theme showed a waiter serving Bacardi cocktails to a young couple at a café. In the background was the Eiffel Tower, so you knew this was in France. This of course at a time when many people thought the best things in life came from Paris. But the caption under the picture of the waiter with the bottle said: “Bacardi. It doesn’t *come* from Paris. It *goes* to Paris.”

It was *el que a Cuba ha hecho famosa*, the one that’s made Cuba famous.

It was with this background as a quintessentially Cuban company that the Bacardi name then became associated in the 1950s with the Cuban revolution. Bacardi family members were among the leading financial supporters of Fidel Castro’s 26<sup>th</sup> of July movement. Of course they were not unique in that regard. But Pepín Bosch in particular as Cuba’s best known industrialist played an important role. Virtually along among Cuban businessmen, Bosch was willing to take a public stand against Batista and advocate the revolutionary cause. He gave at least \$38,000 of his own money, in cash – and maybe much more -- to the 26<sup>th</sup> of July movement. And three weeks after the triumph of the revolution, Bosch personally delivered a Bacardi company check for \$400,000 to the new Cuban government – representing a payment of its expected income tax obligations in advance in order to put the new government on a strong financial footing. The Bacardis supported much of what the new revolutionary government set out to do, from agrarian reform to revising the tax code. And when Fidel Castro made his one and only official trip to Washington in April 1959, he chose just one Cuban businessman to accompany him: Pepín Bosch of the Bacardi Rum Company.

This is important, because one of the misconceptions out there is that Cuban corporations in those years were all Batista supporters who exploited their workers and opposed social and economic change. In this sense, I aimed to correct the view that associates the progressive revolutionary struggle in Cuba with Fidel Castro and Castro alone. There were others who were involved, including the biggest wholly Cuban owned industrial enterprise, the Bacardi Rum Company.

So this is the first what-if question. What if the Bacardis had been able to play the role in Cuba that they were willing to play? Many of you know Antonio Jorge of Florida International University, who along with Carlos Quijano here served in that first revolutionary government. Here's the question as Antonio laid out for me in an interview, referring to that 1959-1960 period:

You had entrepreneurs willing to divest themselves of a sizable portion of their assets and donate them to a revolutionary government in order to promote the economic development of the nation and cultivate solidarity. All the classes were ready to cooperate and make a success of the Cuban revolution. What a historic opportunity for the country!! And it was wasted.

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Now naturally you can say, So what? You could play this what-if game all day long and it really wouldn't get you anywhere. One reason I spend time explaining this is simply to set the record straight ... to explain to a non-Cuban American audience why so many in the Cuban "exile community" are so passionate in their opposition to Fidel Castro: It arises from a deep sense of betrayal.

But let's turn now to the other what-if question that arises out of the Bacardi story, one that I think has more implications for where we are today: What if the Bacardis and their company had been the rule in the Cuban business class rather than the exception? While there were other progressive Cuban families among the business elite, there were not enough. If more prominent Cuban businessmen had been as outspoken and activist and patriotic as Pepín Bosch, I think Cuban history would have turned out differently.

It's my view that one reason Fidel Castro was able to capture the Cuban Revolution is because it was associated so closely and so personally with him as an individual. Too many in the Cuban business class had an opportunistic outlook – willing to go with whoever was seen as benefitting their short term interest. I think it's clear now that there was a shortage of the kind of patriotism that could have mobilized a broad sector of the Cuban civic leadership behind ideas and programs rather than charismatic personalities. We always hear how Cuban nationalism has been such a powerful force in Cuban history. It seems to me that in 1959 and 1960 what Cuba needed was more *nacionalismo* and less *fidelismo*.

Too many Cubans were willing simply to leave the revolution to Fidel. Again, if the Bacardi example of pro-active, patriotic, energetic leadership had been the rule within the Cuban elite rather than the exception, Cuba might have turned out differently.

And this is where I jump to the Cuba of today – because I think this weakness of independent patriotic sentiment that helped make it possible for Fidel Castro to usurp the Cuban revolution is a problem that still plagues the country and represents a barrier to real political change.

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I have been to Cuba on reporting trips about once a year for the last fifteen years, and one of the questions I have struggled to answer is why there has been so little movement for political reform there, given the depth of discontent among the people.

It is of course a totalitarian state, and the repressive apparatus is strong, but I'm convinced that other factors are involved as well. Cuba is also a paternalistic state. Cubans have come to depend on the state and even the Cuban Communist Party for almost all their social services, from education to health care, for all the permissions that are needed to go on with their daily lives, for their housing arrangements, their utilities, their transportation. And those services are delivered in a strictly top-down manner. You don't have any consumer movement there. These state-to-individual transactions are carried out strictly according to the rules and procedures handed down from higher authority.

What this system has fostered over the years, I think, is a culture of passivity. There is much to be lost and nothing to be gained by challenging authority. And this goes for the public servants as much as for the individual citizen. There is no reward for taking an initiative. I have found over and over again in dealing with the Cuban bureaucracy that when I present some official with some problem or question or challenge that he or she has not dealt with before, their reaction always has been to kick it up to someone higher – as opposed to making a judgment themselves. I have found that even when it's obvious that something needs to be done, no one wants to take the responsibility without a clear signal from above that it will be welcomed. There is no reward for taking an initiative. And for the individual consumer, there is no pay-off for demanding better treatment. It gets you nothing but trouble.

But this has a paralyzing effect on citizen activism. I spent four years in eastern Europe, from 1990 to 1994. I had the opportunity to explore how it was that countries there were able to throw off communism and overturn those regimes, which were also totalitarian. I see some fundamental differences between those countries and Cuba.

The nature of dissent in Cuba today is different from what it was in Eastern Europe. I'm not talking about the opposition to Fidel Castro that appeared in the early years of the revolution; I'm talking about dissent today. Much of it has actually sprung up within the context of the Cuban revolution, even in defense of socialism. We heard yesterday from Oscar Espinosa Chepe, a brave man who I have known for many years, along with his wife Miriam Leiva, one of the founders of the Damas en Blanco. You may also know Hilda Molina, the famous neurologist who was barred from practicing medicine by Fidel Castro himself and who was only able to leave Cuba to visit her son last month after waiting fifteen years for permission. Through most of their professional careers, she and Oscar and Miriam were *militantes* in the Communist Party. What got them in trouble and made them dissidents was that they dared in one way or another to challenge Fidel Castro's interpretation of the Cuban revolution.

Their dissent did not stem so much from a difference in political ideology as simply an unwillingness to fit in and take orders without question. It was not about their ideas as much as about their courage.

But how do you develop courage? There will always be brave individuals but to change a country you need collective courage. I think one phenomenon that characterizes Cuban society today is the extent to which it has become atomized. It is an irony that in this supposedly socialist nation, individuals essentially see themselves as isolated and unable to trust their own neighbors or confide in them.

How do you get past this? What's needed in a place like Cuba is collective movement. You did have that in eastern Europe.

And one difference I think is that in eastern Europe, even after forty years of communism, there was still a strong spirit of nationalism, separate and distinct from communism. Nationalism was actually seen as a bad thing in the Soviet bloc, something to be discouraged. So to the extent that it survived in places like Poland and Hungary, it survived in spite of and in opposition to communism. In Poland, for example, it was associated with the church.

And ultimately the anti-communist movement there was fueled by this nationalism.

In Cuba, however, it's a different story. Fidel Castro embraced Cuban nationalism and claimed its heroes, at least to the extent he was able. He usurped it. As a result, in Cuba nationalism or patriotism got transformed over the years into *fidelismo* and essentially disappeared as a distinct force.

Remember the line from "Under Cuban Skies," the film Plinio Montalván showed yesterday, by the independent labor leader who said that young people in Cuba today think only about leaving Cuba or surviving. They don't think about the country. That reminded me of an essay I read on the Cubanet website a few years ago from an anonymous commentator in Havana: He wrote that Fidel Castro, quote, "has destroyed any nationalist sentiment among the youth sector of the population. Emigrating to the United States or waiting for Fidel Castro to die, those are the favored options in Cuba. If there were a referendum to choose between sovereignty and annexation to the colossus of the north, the independent Cuban nation would perish unnoticed – *and this is the crime that history will not pardon.* "

This is the problem.

I actually think in some ways there is more Cuban patriotism here in south Florida than there is in Cuba. This is the passion that keeps many of you coming to these meetings year after year – or making films like "Under Cuban Skies" or supporting the Cuban cause in whatever way you do.

But your Cuban patriotism is not enough. As Carlos Saladrigas said yesterday, the movement for change in Cuba has to build within Cuba.

I am of course speaking as an outsider here, a non-Cuban, as a journalist and writer, on the basis of my reporting in Cuba, following on my experiences in Eastern Europe.

It seems to me that what's needed is a new Cuban patriotism, one that emerges on the island rather than here in the exile community.

And I expect that when and if it emerges it will be different. It will not be the kind of patriotism that was exemplified in the Bacardi story fifty or sixty years ago. It may be hard for some Cuban exiles to recognize it immediately and it may be a challenge to find a way to contribute to it.

I think you all understand and realize that there is now a gulf between the Cuban people on the island and the Cuban exiles here in south Florida, at least those who left many years ago.

Life in Cuba over the last fifty years has been very hard, and those who have not experienced it may not find it easy to understand and appreciate what it's been like. I remember an interview I did about ten years ago, when I first began exploring the Bacardi story in Cuba. I went to the Edificio Bacardi in Havana and talked to a barmaid who'd been there many years. There were still pictures on the wall of Bacardi gatherings from the 1950s, of Bacardi family members, and I asked her about them. She was not especially political at all and actually had very positive things to say about the Bacardis, but she talked about this gap between the experiences of those who stayed in Cuba and those who left. "They don't know how we live," she said. "They don't know what it is to be Cuban."

It was a non-political point. To know what it is to be Cuban today, one needs to know "how Cubans live." The hardships that must be endured, the problems that must be solved, and, perhaps most important, the compromises that must be made.

The Cubans who are courageous enough to defy the regime, to stand alone, to protest, to risk losing a job or going to jail, are relatively few in number. There are not enough of them to build a mass movement. If change is to come in Cuba, it must come from a much broader segment of the population. If there is to be a mass movement, it will have to include those Cubans who have not always been courageous, who have not always been willing to stand up, who have made compromises.

I think it is too easy on the outside to draw these sharp distinctions between the courageous dissidents and those Cubans who go along just to survive.

I recently came across an essay written a couple of years ago by a fairly prominent Cuban American blogger here in south Florida – I won't say his name – where he criticized the practice of sending remittances to Cubans on the island – for the same reason that many

have opposed them, because a significant portion of the money goes to the regime. It's better to keep the pressure on the regime, he argued. I quote;

Let Fidel take care of the Cuban people. And if the Cuban people remain content with that, if they are content being slaves, being second class citizens in their own country, being beggars of tourists and foreigners, living in squalor, with no hope and no future, scrounging for food and selling their asses and souls for scrap, then there is nothing else to say.

That is a highly un-sympathetic view of the situation in which Cubans live today, and I would also say un-helpful.

In my opinion, if there is ever to be a broad national movement for change in Cuba, it must draw on and include many Cubans who have made moral compromises, who are not politically pure. I think the key element that's needed is the development of a new sense of national pride – separate from the Cuban revolution and all that surrounds it. It needs to be grounded in this sense of “what it means to be Cuban,” and that is something different from what “being Cuban” meant fifty years ago.

I recall another Bacardi advertising slogan from the 50s – there are so many: “*Que Suerte Tiene el Cubano*”

That dates from the time when being Cuban meant something joyous ... somehow Cubans have to recover that feeling, but in a way that is independently of the totalitarian ethos of the Castro brothers and the Cuban Communist Party.

Cuban music exists separately from state patronage. So does enthusiasm for Cuban baseball. It is healthy for Cubans to cheer their sports teams, even though they are all state-sponsored. I have been in Cuban establishments during the Olympics or Pan-American games or just during the Cuban baseball season; cheering for Cuban athletes is not necessarily cheering for the Cuban government.

I think it's healthy for Cubans to have pride in their cigars, even if they are made in state-owned factories.

And you know what? Cubans think their country makes good rum. As much as it may pain Bacardi to hear this, they no longer think of Bacardi when they say that. Fairly or unfairly, the rum of Cuba today is Havana Club. True, the rum industry in Cuba was expropriated from its rightful owners. The brands may have been stolen, but that's the Cuban rum industry that exists right now – and no matter who governs Cuba in the future, the rum industry – like the cigar industry – is something Cubans will want to keep. I'm not getting into who will own it or how litigation or compensation might work out, but there is pride today in Cuban rum, and I would say that's a good thing.

These are, in a tiny way, the elements on which a new Cuban patriotism could be constructed. Cubans once again will need to feel that Cuban music, Cuban sports, Cuban

cigars, and Cuban rum is theirs – not the property of the state – and I think that feeling will build gradually, as the power and domain of the state is weakened. It will not come from rejecting everything that is now associated with the state.

There may be moments here that unfold in ways that are hard to accept. Sticking with the rum industry, because it is the one I know best, my guess is that many of the Cuban executives now associated with it will be around in a post-Castro era, including some who got their jobs originally through Communist Party connections. One of the lessons of the Eastern Europe experience that I think does apply to Cuba is that, once a transition to capitalism begins to happen, much of the nomenklatura will overnight switch their allegiances and become fervent advocates of free market economics. Distasteful though it may be, that is how political and economic change sometimes unfolds. I have told the story before of a high ranking Cuban executive at Havana Club whom I interviewed while working on my Bacardi book. I asked him whether he thought that his company had a bright future and what place it would have in the western world.

His answer: “Well, he can’t live forever.”

You know whom he was referring to. There are many Cuban technocrats and functionaries who are ready for change, ready to welcome it when it comes, waiting for the Castros to disappear, even while even though they are now working within the system and declaring their loyalty to Raul and Fidel.

But for this to be a good transition and not one to a phony, corrupted version of capitalism, it needs to be surrounded by a new Cuban patriotism. The country needs the kind of entrepreneurial activism and creativity that Pepín Bosch and the Bacardi company exemplified fifty years ago. But it may also need some of the Cubans who have seen themselves as revolutionaries through these many years. Many of them are now ready to re-define what that means.

No one describes this moment better than Yoani Sanchez, the blogger who I’m sure a lot of you read. Not long ago, she wrote about how she runs every day into someone else who has become disillusioned:

There are those who turn in their Communist Party cards and emigrate to live with their married daughter in Italy, or those who choose the peaceful work of caring for their grandchildren and waiting in line for bread. ... I sense this conversion--slow in some, dizzingly fast in others—all around me, as if under the island sun thousands have shed their skins. But the metamorphosis proceeds in only one direction. I have not run into anyone – and I know a lot of people – who has gone from disbelief to loyalty, who has begun to trust in the speeches after years of criticizing them.

In this regard, I’m sure some of you caught the remarkable interview that the *nueva trova* singer Pablo Milanés gave to a newspaper in Madrid last December. For years, Pablo

Milanés has been a cheerleader around the world for the Cuban revolution and for Fidel Castro.

But he's now one of those Yoani talks about who has become disillusioned. "I don't trust any Cuban leader who is older than 75," he said. "They are doing nothing to move the country out of the paralysis we're in. Their old revolutionary ideas have turned reactionary."

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That's my assessment of where things stand in Cuba right now. Now in closing I want to return to the Bacardi story.

The subject of this little address was supposed to be "Bacardi and the Future of Cuba." If there's to be a connection, what might it be? And more broadly, what role can other old Cuban patriots play in the future Cuba?

Clearly, there are many western corporations already active in Cuba and many more waiting for a chance to establish themselves there. You have a market of ten million people who have been deprived of consumer goods for a long time. You have human and natural resources on the island that have not been developed to their full potential. There is clearly an opportunity in Cuba for western firms to invest and prosper, provided some minimum conditions are met. That's a subject that's been thoroughly examined here at ASCE over many years.

Bacardi Limited is obviously one of those firms well positioned to do business in Cuba – one of many.

But what's unique about Bacardi in the corporate world is that to some extent it still has a Cuban identity. For one reason: It remains a company almost entirely owned by a single Cuban family. There is no other company like that in the world today.

The question is how much Bacardi has changed as a company since it left Cuba. How significant is that national identity?

In my book, I use the story of the Bacardi Cuba connection over the last 150 years to explain the evolution of Cuba. But the story also works the other way: The company's changing connection to Cuba over the years provides a yardstick by which we can measure how the company has evolved over that time.

In the course of researching this book, I found a little essay that Zenaida Bacardi, a granddaughter of Emilio Bacardi, wrote back in 1974, when Pepín Bosch was still running the company. She addressed this essay to Emilio, saying "You have a successor (meaning Pepín Bosch) who follows your path, *one who sees in your factories not just a means of making a profit but a way to raise high the name of Cuba.*"

That's the standard. Clearly Emilio saw his family business that way. So to an extent did Pepín Bosch. But in this era when shareholders, even family shareholders, care about their dividends and the value of their portfolio and the welfare of their heirs, can any Bacardi executive really care about the Cuban national cause?

I think we have seen in the last few years that there are significant differences between public and private companies. Companies that go public subject themselves to what business writer James Surowiecki describes as “a minute-by-minute referendum, in the form of the stock price, on the health of their operations.”

Publicly owned companies have to worry all the time about how fiscally healthy they appear. A vote of no confidence, in the form of a declining stock price, can have mushrooming effects.

A wholly owned family company like Bacardi doesn't have to worry so much about that. I think what's remarkable about the Bacardi-Cuba story is that this company, now under the leadership of a sixth generation and nearly fifty years after being exiled from its homeland, still has as much of a connection to Cuba as it has, without immediate regard for any financial benefit. That is what explains the ongoing Bacardi support for various Cuba causes, even such little ones as this ASCE conference.

Still, Bacardi Limited is now a global spirits conglomerate. Very few of its consumers associate it with Cuba anymore. If it ever goes back to Cuba to do business, it will have to justify the move on business grounds - to make a profit – and not “to raise high the name of Cuba.”

But that is not to say it would be just another company competing for a piece of the action in a post-Castro era. The name Bacardi still means something in Cuba – especially in Santiago, where even the young generation knows something of Bacardi history. There's still a Bacardi Museum in Santiago. There's the Elvira Cape library, founded by and named for Emilio Bacardi's wife. I think it would be healthy for the Bacardi name to be re-associated with Cuba, on the foundation of its history – perhaps first in a humanitarian role, perhaps as a patron of Cuban culture.

We could once again see a Bacardi-sponsored baseball team, or Bacardi-sponsored floats in the carnival parade in Santiago.

It is by no means possible to pick up where things left off fifty years ago. To some fervent Cuban revolutionaries, Bacardi became an enemy of Cuba by virtue of its association with US Cuba policy, and that could mean the company would have to move carefully in returning to Cuba. You may know that a commentator in Granma warned darkly last fall that Bacardi would not be allowed to “reconquer Cuba.” But there is a Bacardi role to play

If Cuba is to move toward freedom and democracy and prosperity, a Cuban national identity and Cuban pride need to be re-established, and that is something the Bacardis and all other Cuban patriots in exile today should be able to support.

Thank you