Los Angeles—In 1933, Walker Evans traveled to Cuba to take photographs for The Crime of Cuba, a book by radical American journalist Carleton Beals. Beals' explicit goal was to expose the corruption of Cuban dictator Gerardo Machado and the long, torturous relationship between the United States and its island neighbor. As we continue to regard Cuba with great fascination, Evans' pictures take on new meanings and interest. More than seventy of these photographs are reprinted in Walker Evans: Cuba (Getty Publications, $24.95), now available in paperback, along with a provocative essay by noted writer and commentator Andrei Codrescu. Together they bring to life what Codrescu has called “the eternal Cuba.”

Codrescu argues that what Walker Evans saw in Cuba may not have been what he was supposed to see, not what Beals and his publisher expected him to find. Assigned to lend visual support to impassioned rhetoric, the hallmark of Beals' prose, Evans instead created beautiful portraits not distinguished by outrage or horror. As Codrescu writes, “[Evans] tried to photograph misery, but shapeliness got in the way.” From movie theaters to shantytowns, coal miners to loiterers, these “irresistibly photogenic” subjects present us with Evans' own Cuba, not Beals'. Looking closely at individual photographs, Codrescu shows how Evans was just beginning to combine his early formalist aesthetic with the social concerns that would figure so prominently in his later work, especially his renowned images of Depression-era America.

To capture the spirit of the imagery, Walker Evans: Cuba reproduces, without any cropping, 73 photographs at the full size Evans intended.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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For more information about the exhibition, please contact:
Desiree Zenowich
Getty Communications
(310) 440-7304
dzenowich@getty.edu

Kindly send two tearsheets of your review when published to:
Melissa Crowley
Getty Publications
1200 Getty Center Drive, Suite 500
Los Angeles, CA 90049-1682

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