



Cuba: Racism and Revolution in the Afro-Cuban Experience

by Abdul Alkalimat

This article is in response to the continuing discussion of how the Cuban revolution has dealt with the task to eliminate racism as a fundamental feature of socialist transformation. First it must be stated that this issue has never been ignored by the Afro-Cubans who have suffered from the oppression and exploitation of racism in their own country. On the other hand inside Cuba the reality of racism has not been fully dealt with, while outside Cuba the issue is most often raised to attack the revolution. This is a debate that is now raging outside and inside Cuba. It is a debate that ought to be raised everywhere inside of Africa and the African Diaspora. In fact, the issues speak to the struggle for socialism in the 21st century for all progressive forces in the world.

The reason for this essay first developed as a result of two letters exchanged between activists in the US Black Liberation Struggle regarding racism and the struggle for freedom, justice and equality in Cuba. One article took a position against what it perceived as the failure of the Cuban revolution to eliminate racism against Afro-Cubans (<http://afrocubaweb.com/actingonourconscience.htm>), while the other letter rose in defense of the Cuban revolution (<http://www.blackeducator.org/cubasolidarity.htm>).

I signed the letter in defense of the revolution but could not let it end there as this was too dangerous a contradiction within our movement about the experience of such an important country. The debate continued. This article has been developed to raise the level of our understanding of the dialectics of the Cuban revolution and how the unfolding of events requires us to grasp the dialectical motion of history and not simply to let perceptual knowledge of specific events dominate our consciousness. We also need to acknowledge and give respect to the response by Cuban comrades (<http://www.havanatimes.org/?p=16838>).

And now the debate is emerging out of the Afro-Cuban community itself. An article by Roberto Zurbarano was published in the New York Times that was critical of the conditions faced by Afro-Cubans was followed by an article by Esteban Morales who responded and challenged his accuracy and revolutionary commitment. Of course, this is not a new subject as Morales and others, especially in the National Library, the National Writers Union, etc. have been

having discussions for the last few years. The people in Cuba know their situation very well, and certainly better than others looking at Cuba from afar.

I hope this essay helps to deepen our grasp of general lessons from the Cuban struggle, as we focus our main energies on our own revolutionary struggle. Movement activists need to sharpen this debate in the context of extending our solidarity to the Cuban revolution. The African American liberation struggle and the fight for socialism in the US are in complete solidarity with the Cuban revolution. This paper aims to clarify this point.

Fundamental issues are at stake in an analysis of Cuban nationality. One usually starts with the historical ideals of the Cuban revolutionary process, that all of us in Cuba are Cubans, descendants of Africa and Spain alike. But in every instance the question is always whether the practical experience fits that ideological ideal. And as the internal struggle in Cuba has unfolded historically there is the simultaneous external battle with the forces acting against the Cuban revolution as a whole. Whether the external force is Spain, the US or other forces of Globalization, patriots of Cuba always rise to the defense of the revolution. On the other hand a key qualitative barometer of any transformative change inside Cuba is the condition of the Afro Cuban. They have faced successively slavery, racist segregation, class exploitation, and uneven development in the emerging global economy and how they fare to a great extent is a measure of the success of the Cuban revolution, externally and internally.

Every society has a master narrative, the voice of hegemony. This often contains the story of the nation/country, its origin and its stages of development and transformation, including major figures and social movements. The requirement for a patriot is to be an embodiment of the master narrative, its voice, something you have to know and to feel as well. This becomes the collective will of the society. And at the same time there are always alternative narratives that must negotiate with the master narrative because they also have a basis in fact and



Statue of Antonio Maceo in Santiago de Cuba.

Source: http://pr.indymedia.org/uploads/2006/08/antonio_maceo.jpg

cultural reproduction.^[12] A society is a complex of social networks and forms of cultural literacy, and while one dominates it does not exist without constant interaction with what everybody else is thinking and doing. The African legacy speaks in Cuba today despite whatever silences have dominated for whatever reasons. Cuban history is not a utopia but is (like everywhere else) a dialectical process of conflicting forces representing classes, nationalities, colonialism and

neocolonialism, etc. Its genius, however, is that this history has been impacted by revolutionary forces for the last 150 years. The master narrative in Cuba has always been corrected by the agency of the silenced ones, the Afro-Cubans. This is a major issue that has to be taken up at the beginning of this paper. The master narrative of one Cuba (Black and white) has been put forward by patriots of Cuba who often spoke out of the white experience to convince other white people of the morality and logic of their arguments. This has been a critical historical force for a free and independent Cuba. On the other hand, Black Cubans (of all colors) have always spoken for themselves, and their critical patriotic embrace of the master narrative always advanced the freedom struggle. They always took into account their own voice; they have been the ones who have often been the main participants in war, in labor, in politics, and always in cultural production. No African contribution, no Cuban political culture as we have known it. One Cuba – same words from different people, but often with a different meaning.

So what I propose to do in this article is to summarize recent research on the three main stages of the Cuban revolutionary process and the experience of the Afro-Cuban people and their leadership.

- 1. Stage one, 1526 – 1902: Abolitionism and the fight for independence***
- 2. Stage two, 1902 – 1959: Anti racist struggle against US Neo-colonialism***
- 3. Stage three, 1959 – 2013: Anti globalization struggle for national sovereignty***

Our focus in each stage is on critical aspects of Cuban history: the political economy of capital and labor, the main narrative of the Cuban revolutionary process, and the agency of Afro-Cuban activism. More specifically the Cuban history of revolutionary transformation consists of successive struggles with Spanish colonialism, US neo-colonialism, and the forces of globalization both socialist and capitalist. In every instance, we have two alternatives and equally important approaches to historical interpretation. On the one hand, we have to carefully place the event in its historical context and clarify the alternatives that presented themselves, especially the alternative actually chosen by key political actors. On the other hand, we have to make a comparison to where we are now.

In the first instance, we can view history within the context of its own time and demonstrate how history moved forward from there. But also, we must always indicate how these developments still had far to go relative to where we are today. Without both we remain stuck in the past or in the present without a past. We need to fight for a future we have never had but we need, a future beyond the past and the present for the full emancipation of humanity.

One more point of clarification. During every period Afro-Cuban political and cultural action covered a wide diversity of positions and social formations. We will be focusing on the dynamic Afro-Cubans in the revolutionary movement, and not the reactionaries or the apathetic. For every slave revolt, there were traitors, but it is also true that every time the Cuban revolution has made an advance it has been because of the fundamental patriotic impulse of Cubans of all colors and cultures. And, always a major force, Africa is in the soul of Cuban political culture. So we are interested in two main trends in Cuban revolutionary history – the unity of all sons and daughters of Cuba, both Black and white on the one hand, and on the other hand as oppressed people the Afro-Cubans have always organized in their own interests to achieve the overall goals of the revolution based on the relentless struggle against all forms of racist oppression and exploitation. The first trend is applauded by all in the revolutionary movements, but the second one has always been a point of contradiction faced by Afro-Cubans not willing to remain silent or not willing to accept delay, deception, or disregard.

Stage 1: Abolitionism and the fight for independence[\[13\]](#)

There is a long history from the time of the Spanish invasion of the island to the independence of Cuba, over 400 years from 1492 to 1898. However the historical origin of human settlement takes place almost 300 years before with the arrival of native peoples that constitute the original inhabitants of the islands – the Siboneys, the Guanahacabibes, and the Tainos.[\[14\]](#)

José Martí describes the first approach of the native peoples in the Caribbean when the Spanish landed in Hispaniola:

As friends they had received them, the white men with their beards; they had regaled them with their honey and their corn, and even King Bebechino gave a handsome Spanish his daughter Higeumota as a wife, she who was like a wild pigeon and a royal palm. They showed them their mountains of gold and their rivers of golden waters, and their adornments all of fine gold and they had put on these adornments on their armor. And these cruel men hung them with chains; they took away their women and their sons; they put them in the depths of the mines to drag the weight of stone with their forehead, and divided them and marked them with a brand.[\[15\]](#)

The subsequent arrival of the Spanish in Cuba was therefore known to be an invasion. Proof of this is because the Guanahacabibe leader, Hatuey, rallied the indigenous people to resist and fight them on their arrival. Based on stops at other islands they knew that “the God that these tyrants adore is the Gold that is hidden in the entrails of our land.” When the Spanish landed they had to fight from that very day. Hatuey was captured and burned alive in 1512.[\[16\]](#)

Subsequent arrivals of the Africans and the Chinese were conditioned by this initial history of a war of invasion and a policy of genocide against the indigenous people. A reputation of barbarism was reproduced by each generation of Spanish colonialists. Hence, history constantly kept negating the view that the oppressed should trust their oppressors.

1492	Spanish invasion led by Christopher Columbus
1526	Captured Africans forced into slavery in Cuba
1553	First recorded slave revolt
1812	The Aponte slave revolt
1843	La Escalera slave revolt
1867	End of slave trade in Cuba
1868	Cespedes frees slaves, begins 10 year independence war
1878	Betrayal of Zanjón, Protest at Baragua
1886	Abolition of slavery in Cuba
1887	The Directorio Central de las Sociedades de la Raza de Color
1898	Spain defeated
1902	"Independent" Cuba becomes US neo-colony

Chronology of invasion, slavery, abolition, and independence.

In less than three decades the Spanish colony of Cuba was importing slaves and developing the economy to serve Spain. There developed two main legs of the Cuban economy, tobacco and sugar.

It was Columbus who exported the first tobacco and imported the first sugar cane. Tobacco left Cuba with him on his return from his first voyage; sugar cane came in with the Admiral on his second voyage... The relations of tobacco and sugar with their workers have been different. Sugar has always preferred slave labor; tobacco, free men. Sugar brought in Negroes by force; tobacco encouraged the voluntary immigration of white men. [17]

This is the importance of slavery in the sugar plantation system. Sugar came to dominate the economy. By 1851 Sugar grew to over 80% of all Cuban exports. By 1862, 47% of all slaves worked on sugar plantations and only 5% on tobacco farms. The great sugar plantations were in the western regions of Cuba, while small farms with free Blacks were more common in the eastern region of Oriente. A major impetus came from technology, notably the introduction of the steam engine that transformed the sugar industry between 1820 to 1878. By

the end of the century the mechanization of the sugar mill was complete, but cutting the cane was done by hand. Just as in the US where the cotton gin had created a massive increase in the demand for slave labor to pick cotton, so in Cuba the steam engine led to an increase in the demand for slaves to cut the sugar cane.[18]

Knight analyses the production relations of rural Cuba from data in the 1857 census:

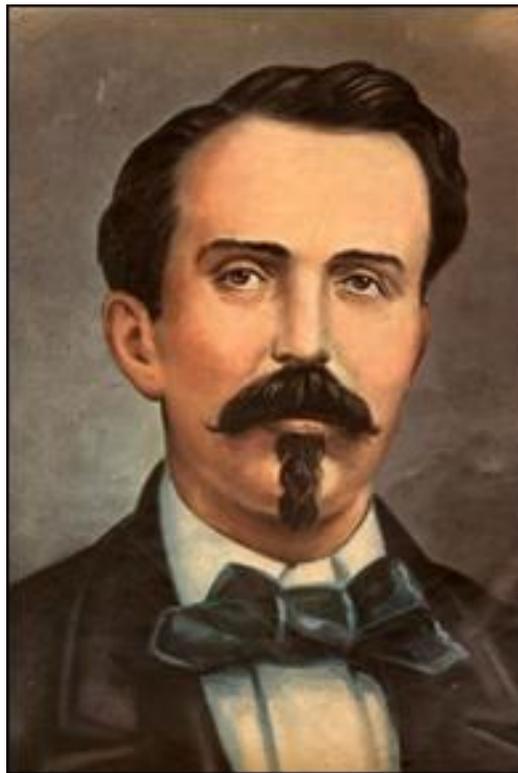
The total of 303, 375 registered slaves in the rural areas had 26,358 owners, an island-wide average holding of 11.6 slaves per owner. But the picture was very different in the plantation areas: 483 rural owners had more than 80 slaves each, yielding a total of 95,523 slaves for a mean holding of 197 slaves each. In other words, less than 1 per cent of the slave owners of Cuba held more than 25% of all the slaves in the island...These slaver owners...were very influential men in political affairs, and owned the largest sugar estates.[19]

Another development of great importance is the Haitian revolution of 1791.[20] This first successful Black insurgency led by Toussaint L'Ouverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, and Henri Christophe sent shivers through the networks of slave owning societies, alarming the owners and giving hope to the enslaved. After the formation of the new Haitian republic a campaign began in Cuba to avoid a similar fate. Over 30,000 expropriated owners of Haitian slave plantations moved to Cuba to maintain their way of life. They were a new source of propaganda to build and maintain Black scare tactics against the enslaved Africans. Of course the Cuban creole planters were the main source of the scare. Since Haiti, the largest sugar producer, was taken out of the global market of sugar run by the French and replaced by local small scale farming by a liberated people, the world market for Cuban sugar plantations was there for the taking.

The Spanish settlers and their descendants began to divide into two distinct and contradictory communities. The peninsulares were immigrants born in Spain and remained colonial government bureaucrats and merchants loyal to Spain. The other section was born in Cuba and began to develop an island consciousness looking less and less to Spain, and was led by the creole elite of the slave based sugar plantations that dominated the economy. These two groups agreed on maintaining slavery but differed on the issue of Cuban independence. The creole plantation elite had to unite with the Blacks, slave and free, to fight for the independence of Cuba, but they were stuck with the issue of how to maintain the allegiance of their slave owning class if there was the implication that independence also meant the abolition of slavery. More specifically, the impulse for independence based on Black-white unity was

easier for the tobacco planters than the sugar plantation owners as the latter were clearly dependent on slave labor and lots of it.

The key figure that emerged as the best case for this emergent creole national bourgeoisie was Carlos Miguel de Céspedes (1819-1874). Céspedes was a lawyer/sugar planter in Oriente where less than 10% of the slave population worked on sugar plantations, and then worked along with free labor. This area was also influenced by the sizeable free Black and mulatto population, as well as the low intensity raids from the maroon communities hidden deep in the Sierra Maestra Mountains. Céspedes carried out actions that tried to advance the revolution using a slave military force but making it clear that he was also protecting the interests of the slave owning elite. His reputation is based on his historic freeing of his slaves, but his go-slow approach compromised his revolutionary impact. As president of the new republic (declared during October 1868) he announced in November that anyone who assisted plantation slaves to rise in rebellion would face the death penalty, and by December he clarified further that abolition would only be considered after independence.[21] He was clear: “When we...have forced the representatives of the Spanish government to leave Cuba precipitously, the revolution will take care of this vital question.”[22]



Carlos Miguel de Céspedes.

This emergent national bourgeoisie operated within its own historical limitations. It must be clear that Cuba (1886) and Brazil (1888) were the last to end slavery hence this slave society was particularly backward and defensive

against the global winds of abolition. One of the reasons for this is that every decadent slave owning class being overthrown sought rear guard action by resettling to Cuba, including from the slave owning US south preceded by those from Haiti. Céspedes is a national hero, a patriot, but flawed and limited by his weak policy toward abolition. (He was very similar but slightly better than the first president of the US, slave owning George Washington, because 90 years after the victory of the American revolution in 1776 Céspedes could at least offer the promise of a limited kind of freedom from slavery.) However, Céspedes acts in 1868 the same year as the 14th Amendment to the US Constitution)

Afro-Cuban Agency During Slavery

By contrast we can turn to the agency of the Afro-Cubans. Just as the Spanish polarized into the colonial and national, so the “white” Cuban (of Spanish heritage) categorization of “race”^[23] created three categories for Afro-Cubans: Pardos (visible Spanish ancestry), Morenos (Afro-Cuban with Spanish ancestry, mulatto), and Bozales (no blood connection to Spanish). While Afro-Cubans were mostly treated the same, these categories also represented a hierarchy of class and status.

The Spanish colonial government organized Afro-Cubans into militia to protect Cuba from the British. This gave a great deal of autonomy, leadership development and military training especially for freedmen. Of course they used the militia to serve the state and the institution of slavery, while at the same time the militia served to help organize the people for their resistance. This was mainly in Havana.

While the militia option facilitated some degree of autonomy within the mainstream of colonial society, a more fundamental autonomy was being allowed to flourish within the Afro-Cuban community itself, both slave and free. The Spanish allowed organization within each ethnic group, both so they would provide mutual aid to each other as a cost saving measure, and to keep energy diverted from political complaints to cultural expression without fully realizing that this very cultural affinity would be the basis for a politics of resistance. Cabildos de nacion were formed among people from the same region, especially the Congo or Nigeria.^[24] These were semi-public forms of organization. But there were also the Nañigos, aka the Abakua, male secret societies that maintained both a cultural and military orientation. All of these groups – the militia, cabildos, and Abakua – were actively involved in every major instance of resistance along with their related family-kinship networks.

After the indigenous the next source of resistance to Spain was the enslaved African who became a foundation for the new Cuban nation and a force in

shaping the dynamics of Cuban nationality. The first recorded slave revolt was in 1553 after slaves were introduced to the island in 1526. There was a low intensity war between the slaves and the slave owning society, continually breaking out in open rebellion on plantations, towns and sugar mills. Things got hot and violent on a regular basis. There are two well-known revolts that can demonstrate that these slave revolts were not only putting forward an agenda for the end of slavery but for the freedom of all Cubans from the shackles of Spanish colonialism: the Aponte Rebellion in 1812, and La Escalera in 1844.[25]

The Aponte Rebellion of 1812 was a major event that impacted the entire island.[26] José Antonio Aponte was a free Afro-Cuban carpenter/sculptor. His political leadership was rooted in the autonomy of Black organizations, being the head of the Cabildo de Changó Tedum (a Yoruba society) as well as in the elite leadership of the Ogboni (a powerful Abakua secret male society). Moreover he was a veteran captain of the Havana militia of Afro-Cubans. He was literate and politically connected. He was in contact with Black revolutionaries in the US, Brazil, Santo Domingo, and most of all Haiti. He had a letter from the Haitian leader Henri Christophe, and commitment for military support from the Haitian General Juan Francisco.

Aponte brought together a diverse network of groups. Their mission was “to abolish slavery and the slave trade, and to overthrow colonial tyranny and to substitute the corrupt and feudal regime with another, Cuban in nature, and without odious discriminations.”[27] The battlefields of the Aponte Rebellion spread over 500 miles, from Puerto Principe (now Camagüey) in the west to Bayamo in the east. However these were not coordinated as the main leadership was arrested and each location’s local leadership revolted on their own. A total of nine main leaders were executed. The head of Aponte was placed in an iron cage and displayed in front of the house where he lived, and his hand was displayed in another street. These Afro-Cuban freedom fighters got the same treatment as had the Arawak Indians 300 years earlier.



Carlota.

Another important slave rebellion is La Escalera (The Ladder), named after the ladder used to hold slaves while being tortured. This is known as one rebellion, but it is more accurately known as the 1844 conclusion of a couple of years of intense rebellions scattered over many areas but principally in Matanzas. One important instance, the revolt at the Triunvirato sugar estate, was led by three militants including Carlota, an enslaved Yoruba/Lucumi woman. She was part of a new Pan Afro-Cuban movement as Blacks began to unite and project themselves as the future of a new country. They built a network linked together by talking drums, concealed as part of the Cabildos cultural celebrations. Her most famous battle was when a comrade was captured and she led her collective swinging machetes to free her. News of her courage and success spread from plantation to plantation and sugar mill to sugar mill as an example to emulate. In fact the US government was stirred to prepare to intervene because the militancy had become so threatening. They hated her so much, the heroism of an Afro-Cuban woman daring to fight the colonial military, that when they caught her they tied her to horses that ran in opposite directions so as to tear her apart beyond any recognition.

A key antagonist that the Spanish had identified was the British agent David Turnbull who had been spreading abolitionist ideas and organizing resistance. They got him out in 1842, but revolts spread over the next two years based on Afro-Cuban leadership.^[28] Over 4,000 people were arrested, including over 2100 free Afro-Cubans and almost 1,000 slaves. In addition, in total figures 78

were killed, 1,292 sent to prison, and over 400 were sent into exile to Florida. At least 300 were killed by the whip on La Escalera/the ladder.

The critical agency of the Afro-Cubans was based on the unity of free and slave. Free Afro-Cubans became a source for material support, communication, education, and leadership. Of course it must be said that for every instance of resistance there were traitors, both slave and free, who would report on any new plans in hopes of being rewarded. But freedom was the dominant theme of the Afro-Cuban community. Out of this political culture came the great Afro-Cuban general Antonio Maceo Grajales.

Maceo

Maceo became an icon of the revolution, especially in the eyes of the Afro-Cubans.[29] He was the preeminent warrior committed to full emancipation of the Cuban nation: abolition of slavery, independence from Spain, and a democratic society in which rich and poor shared rights.[30] His general reputation is that of a military leader, “The Bronze Titan.” It is now clear that he was an ideological and political leader of the Cuban revolution as well. In ten years he rose from being a recruit to being a general in the liberation army. His fame was based on both his professionalism (maintaining discipline and not allowing racist practices) as a soldier and his personal courage leading the famous Mambise Calvary charge with swinging machetes in hand. Their screams of war sent fear in the hearts of the Spanish soldiers so much that frequently being outnumbered and outgunned they consistently used courage and military tactics to route the colonial troops.

The single most important event for Maceo and for the entire independence war was the dialectical opposition of the betrayal of Zanjón versus the protest at Baragua. Following a defeatist tendency after 10 years of war (1868-1878) an agreement was reached in the ranks of the creole bourgeoisie with the Spanish for a surrender. Foner sums up the costs of the 10 Years War:

No accurate figures are available, but the costs in lives for the Cubans was about 50,000 dead; the Spaniards 208,000. (It is impossible to tell how many Cubans were killed by Spanish cruelty.) The cost in money amounted to \$300,000,000. This sum was added to the Cuban debt, for Cuba was made to pay for the expenses on both sides.[31]

Maceo was committed to fighting on. He was outraged when he heard of the betrayal of Zanjón, and this response is another reason why Maceo became such a national hero. He refused to make an individual stand, and instead called all of the officers who had not yet agreed with the betrayal and gathered them at the spot where Maceo was to speak with the Spanish representative. They came,

with their soldiers, all 1500 of them at Baragua. He was building a new kind of army, one in which democratic discussion dominated political decisions while maintaining strict discipline in the command structure of all military action. This was an Afro-Cuban General of the independence army who by this time was a national hero. And he was now leading the most dangerous opposition to the colonialism and slavery imposed on Cuba by Spain.



Antonio Maceo Grajales.

The Spanish general Arsenio Martínez Campos was confident that this would be a moment of great triumph, the surrender of Maceo. But instead he got the shock of his life. Maceo came to discuss the end of slavery and the independence of Cuba and not the surrender that had been discussed with others ready to end the war. Here is the recorded exchange:

Martínez Campos then asked Maceo directly: "That is to say, we are not in agreement?" Not being contradicted he asked further: "Then hostilities will again break out?" "Hostilities will again break out," Maceo replied emphatically. Martínez Campos then asked how much time the Cubans would need before the outbreak of hostilities. "For my part," answered Maceo, "I do not find it inconvenient that they break out right now." ... Thus ended the historic and dramatic meeting." [32]

Although the actual fighting ended soon afterwards, it was not a surrender but a truce, a truce that would not have been possible without the leadership of General Maceo. Maceo had been able to beat back the opportunist policy of

the sugar plantation owning creole elite, they had only wanted to only grant freedom to those slaves who fought for independence and their own freedom but not enough to end the system of slavery. Now he was the main defender of independence in general. In fact after the Protest of Baragua the strategic unity of the abolition of slavery and the independence from Spanish colonialism was forever linked.

Ferrer sums up the meaning of Baragua with the following comment:

[Maceo] nullified the argument that Spain, the colonial power, civilized Cuba, its charge. Instead he portrayed the colonial power as the principal obstacle to the progress of civilization. The Spanish – not African – presence in Cuba was classified as the problem. In that meeting at Baragua, Maceo painted himself and his companions as the bearers of honor and civilization; Spain had lost its claim to both by tolerating and preserving racial slavery. Maceo had skillfully unmoored the categories of colonial discourse that posited Spain as civilizer and Cuba as uncivilized. That this inversion came not from a colonial subject but from a man of color made the inversion that much more of a challenge to traditional notions of honor and place in a colonial slave society.[33]

The end of slavery came slowly. It was dragged out and was marked by delay, deception, and disregard for the righteous demand to abolish slavery. The Spanish had been passing legislation to meet the growing demands of the abolitionist movement, but there was a big disconnect between the laws on the books and government implementation of legislation in Cuba. Scott argues that the end of slavery actually can be dated over the period from 1870 to 1886. A major beginning for this process was the Moret Law (1870) that was supposed to be the end of slavery. The main aspects were that any child of slaves born after September 1868 would be free, and any slave over 60 would also be free.

The young were virtually indentured as they had to work for food until 18, and if they stayed on the plantation or the sugar mill they had to work under slave like conditions for the means to survive. And the conditions for the slaves were so miserable that most slaves never made it to the age of 60. Furthermore, this approach helped the slave owner who could then put the older slaves off the plantation and not have to care for them. If they stayed, they had to work as before.[34]

1880 was another land mark year for delay and deception. They ended slavery and replaced it with a new system of forced apprenticeship for up to 15 years, significantly more than the average life span of a slave forced into a life of cutting sugar cane. The system was called “The Patronato” and the slaves renamed as “Patrocinados.” While it was another form of slavery, Scott points out it was not the same as things had been as now there was a mechanism to get

out of forced labor. Both sides had rights and obligations so there was a chance for Afro-Cubans to get free and many tried with some limited success. This is the main thesis put forward by Scott that freedom was a process that took some 30 years to complete, and then freedom was marked by racism, discrimination, and segregation.

The Spanish colonial regime was using their “emancipation con game” to regain the loyalty of the former slaves. They held out the illusion that the Spanish would grant their freedom, either because they were no longer slaves or could look forward to eventual freedom. But the bottom line was always to keep them working as much as possible and making profits for the plantation and mill owners. However, the Afro-Cubans were not willing to accept one form of servitude for another. They had been fighting for freedom and weren’t prepared to stop.

The formal end to slavery came in 1886, but without democratic rights. This was unacceptable to the Afro-Cubans because, as patriots of Cuba, they were demanding their democratic rights and would not accept new forms of racism, discrimination, and segregation. This two tier system was not the Cuba they had fought for. Liberation forces were not getting their full citizenship, and even officers who were Afro-Cuban were being forced to accept the mandate to make Cuba for the offspring of the Spanish who stayed in Cuba and not the Africans who stayed in Cuba.

Following the tradition of Afro-Cuban agency for freedom, (including those who formed free maroon communities, the cabildos de nacion, the Abakua, the slave revolts, and the Mambises fighters) when emancipation came in 1886, after most of the main Afro-Cuban organization had disbanded to join the mainstream of Cuban society. But since the problems continued, Afro-Cubans decided to organize once again in their own interests since colonial society continued to deny them any serious democratic rights. Now the organizations were mainly Pan-Afro-Cuban integrating various former cabildos members into common organizations fighting not to preserve their African identity under the conditions of slavery but fighting to end a system of oppression that they all shared in common.

Marti and Juan Gualberto Gómez

Two main organizational breakthroughs came shortly after the end of slavery in 1887. One was outside of Cuba, and one was there inside the country. Outside there were many patriots in exile, especially in Miami and New York, as well as Europe, including many Afro-Cubans such as General Maceo, Juan Gualberto Gómez, and Rafael Serra. On the other hand there was considerable action within Cuba, including the self-organization of the Afro-Cuban community.

These two Afro-Cuban geographies converged with other patriotic forces to carry out the next stage of the revolutionary process.

Local Afro-Cuban organizations consolidated into one national coordinating body, The Directorio Central de la Raza de Color.

A decisive step in the struggle for equality took place in Havana in 1887 when the Directorio Central de las Sociedades de la Raza de Color was created to represent “in the strictest legality” the interests of the people of color in their dealings with authorities. The Directorio also aimed at coordinating the actions of the sociedades of color, cabildos de nacion, and other black associations so that these groups would take a united stand against racism. Its ultimate goal was “the moral and material wellbeing of the raza de color” through the promotion of formal education and better “habits.”^[35]

The Directorio was clear in its manifesto about why the Afro-Cubans needed to self-organize:

The race of color has been...the one who has proportioned the largest contingent for the conquest of liberty yet who has had the least usufruct of the fruits of that conquest.”^[36]

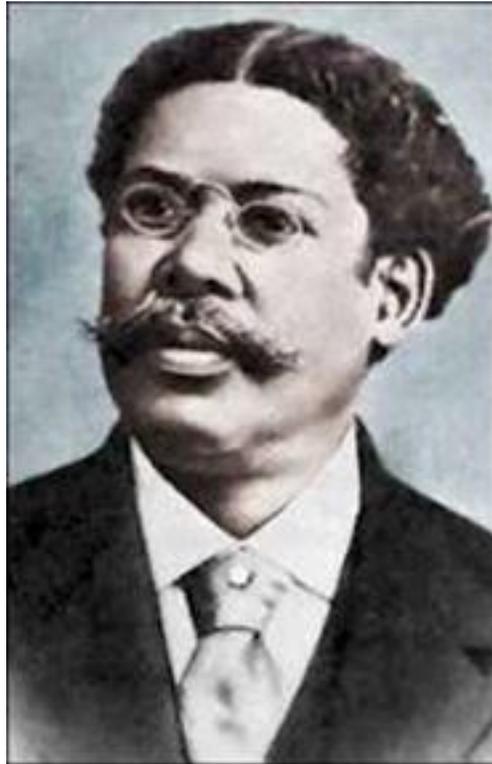
This initiative by Afro-Cubans became a key force in the Cuban revolutionary process.

Five years after the Directorio, in 1892, José Martí formed the Cuban Revolutionary Party and took up the fight started by Céspedes in 1868. This party took the struggle to a higher level of national aspiration based on a more firmly established national bourgeoisie now fighting Spain. They were also anticipating fighting the US, a predatory nation, becoming a new threat, moving with rising interest towards the annexation of Cuba.^[37]

The Directorio took on new importance when Juan Gualberto Gómez became president and organized a major week-long meeting in Havana attended by 100 local organizations. This was also in 1892. These two men (Martí and Juan Gualberto) agreed on some matters and disagreed on others, but the main posture was one of unity as it had been between Céspedes and Maceo. Martí and Juan Gualberto agreed on the need for a united struggle for national liberation, but disagreed on the need for Afro-Cuban autonomous self-organization in the fight for complete freedom against all forms of racist oppression.

Juan Gualberto Gómez (1854-1933) was born free because his parents, although they were slaves, were able to purchase his freedom, and then later purchased their own freedom. He was sent abroad to France (1869-1879) to become a

carriage maker but was able to get an academic education that sent him on to a career in journalism. His politics were partly shaped by his participation in the Paris Commune in France (1871). He returned to Cuba, founded an Afro-Cuban abolitionist newspaper (La Fraternidad) and joined the Little War (La Guerra Chiquita)[38], but was arrested and sent to prison in Spain, only able to return to Cuba after 10 years. But he had been writing and influencing the struggle in Cuba so when he returned he was embraced into the leadership of the resistance.



Juan Gualberto Gómez.

José Martí (1853-1895) was first generation born in Cuba (father born in Spain and mother in Spain's Canary Islands). He came of age politically during the Ten Years War (1868-1878). He was a young nationalist who opposed both Spanish colonialism and slavery, and on that basis became the ideological leader of the revolution and regarded as the father of free independent Cuba. More than that, he was a leading intellectual for all of the Caribbean and Latin America. His travels took him all over, especially the USA, Mexico, Guatemala, Venezuela, and many of the other islands and countries. His literary production for a man who was an activist and who died at the age of 43 is amazing as he wrote poetry, articles, and books for adults and children including a novel.

Martí was a visionary with high ideological ideals. More than anyone else he was the icon of the one Cuba philosophy – no Black person could do it, so it was left to Martí to commit both class and “race” suicide in the interest of a free and united Cuba. He was in direct conflict with the social Darwinist movement

that argued for a hierarchy of humanity and posited the theory that equality was biologically impossible, and in any case the history of change would be evolutionary and not revolutionary. He was clear on the US: "I have lived in the monster and know it from the inside."^[39]

Martí united with Maceo and Juan Gualberto in the final dialectics of the war with Spain. On the one hand Gómez was on the ground, a nationally respected journalist and a key force to unite and mobilize Afro-Cubans in the war for independence. On the ideological level Martí disagreed with Juan Gualberto Gómez on his intention to organize and mobilize an Afro-Cuban movement, but on the practical level he united with him as a key asset required to win the war. On the other hand Martí had to get the support of Maceo as he was the great Afro-Cuban military leader from the 10 Years War who defined through courageous action the strategic vision of the war of independence in the patriotic military Protest at Baragua. This was the politics of difference and unity at the highest level, proceeding on the basis of political unity.^[40]



José Martí.

This fight against colonization and slavery shaped Cuban political culture over 400 years. At every stage the main acts of resistance were created by peoples forging themselves into the new nation of Cuba. These were mainly people from Spain (Andalusia, Extremadura, Galicia, the Basque country, and Catalonia) and Africa (esp Nigeria and the Congo). The revolutionary vision, theory and policy was of this united Cuba as one people. However, this was not a description of life in Cuba. Cold blooded racism prevailed. The autonomous

agency of the Afro-Cubans was the main corrective to this disjuncture between the ideal and the material reality – For example, Maceo at Baragua, and Juan Gualberto Gómez with the Directorio. The voice of the oppressed has been a rudder for steering revolutionary action in Cuba.

Two big lessons emerge from this intense historical experience from 1553 to 1902. 1. Blacks were an integral part of the main force for independence and the end of slavery. 2. Blacks maintained the fight for consistent democracy through their own autonomous agency. This is a critical point for how to define the origin of Cuba, not as a Spanish colony but as an emerging nation in its own right. The African is not an add-on, but a primary source for Cuba. However, the Spanish colonial legacy has continued to be reproduced as racist oppression of the African heritage. So the Afro-Cuban has been forced to resist and be so doing has been more Cuban than those who affirm Spanish colonial racist practices.

US Neo-Colonialism[41]

The US was no innocent bystander regarding Cuba.[42] The basic policy was set by the US President James Monroe. He spoke in Congress on December 2, 1823 and stated that the Americas were the domain of the US and any foreign power that made advances there would have to contend with the US. This imperial policy became known as the Monroe Doctrine. This was directly motivated by US interests. By 1895 the US had invested “50 million in Cuba, with more than 50% in sugar. This was significant in that this represented 50% of the total capital of the sugar industry. This capital investment led to domination of sugar exports. Out of 1,485,224 bags of exported sugar in 1892, 1,154,193 bags were sent to the US.[43] So when it looked advantageous to the US they joined the independence war by initiating what became known as the Spanish-American War of 1898.

1823	Monroe Doctrine
1899	The Platt Amendment claims Cuba as a US neo-colony
1902	Cuba gains flag independence
1908	Independent Party of People of Color established
1912	Massacre of Afro-Cuban leadership
1925	Socialist Party (basis for Cuban Communist Party)
1933	Anti-Machadatos massacre
1934	Rise of Batista
1940	Cuban constitution
1948	Jesus Menendez assassinated
1953	July 26 attack on the Moncada
1956	Fidel and revolutionaries land in Cuba
1959	Cuba's second liberation

Chronology of the continuing struggle against US neocolonialism.

The US was keen to keep on top of the Cuba situation. On January 25, 1898 the USS Maine arrived in Cuba, a highly visible move as it was the 2nd battleship commissioned by the US Navy, and the biggest. On Feb 15 the USS Maine exploded and 260 American naval personnel were killed or wounded. After expanding to other battle fronts, with Spanish defeats in Cuba and the Philippines, a peace treaty was signed on Feb 6, 1899. The US President McKinley stated that the US had a mandate to rule Cuba “because God has pre-ordained American expansion and responsibilities.”^[44]

In quick step the following events sealed Cuba’s fate. In 1901 the Platt Amendment, an imperialist ploy, was added to the first Cuban Constitution of 1902. In 1902 President Theodore Roosevelt pulled US troops out of Cuba, and then in 1903 Cuba signed the Cuban-American Treaty perpetually giving the US government rights to a military base, hence the current situation at Guantanamo. The US supported the first President of Cuba, Tomas Estrada Palma, as he had once proposed that Cuba be annexed by the US! The US so dominated Cuba that it had become a neo-colony, really only able to have its own government in 1902, almost five years after the defeat of the Spanish. This led to racism being institutionalize, now with the instigation and blessing of the new US rulers

Of course this meant that the aspirations for Afro-Cuban freedom were beat down by US racism being institutionalized during the entire historical period of the Republic (1902 – 1959). For 60 years Cuban Blacks were as much “second class citizens” as African Americans in the deep US South. The American dilemma was as much a Cuban experience as in the US.[45] The issue here is values and ideals versus the reality of social life. Marti and Maceo were the two headed face of independent Cuba, the ideal, but the reality was racist oppression for Afro-Cubans. This produced a civilizational crisis, one of science, religion, and culture.

There was a great disconnect between the Afro-Cubans and their history versus the descendants of the Spanish colonizers and their history. In the extreme this produces a fundamental crisis of human understanding grounded in the very soul of a society – What is culture? What is civilization? Can Blacks and whites live together? Can you be Black and Cuban at the same time? These were and are fundamental questions in Cuba, and more generally throughout the world. The age of globalization puts questions of identity on a new footing that disrupts the past and thrusts everyone into the chaos of global culture. So as Cuba moved past colonialism into neo-colonialism the conditions demanded that they go beyond the visionary ideology of Marti.

Ortiz

The 20th century demanded a theory rooted in social science research to anchor the meztizo nature of Cuban identity in the systematic study of the empirical reality of Cuba. Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969) emerged as the anthropologist to provide such a theory - transculturation.

The bulk of his contributions to Cuba’s intellectual life and public culture stemmed from his seminal research on all aspects of Cuba’s African-influenced, orally transmitted traditions. He validated the use of Afro-Cuban as an analytical construct while insisting that Afro-Cuban cultural forms were integral to a unified Cuban national identity. He also addressed the problem of racism and the workings of race as a social rather than biological category.[46]

Ortiz made a journey from being hostile to Black culture, to being an advocate of tolerance and multicultural understanding.

I am of the opinion that the word transculturation better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another... In the end, as the school of Malinowski’s followers maintain, the result of every union of cultures is similar to that of the reproductive process between individuals: the offspring always has something of both parents but is always different from each of them.[47]

The central concept transculturation is a model of five stages, which according to Ortiz describes Cuba through stage four, but not yet five: hostility, compromise, adjustment, self-assertion, and integration. He was the scholar-activist who took the ideological orientation of José Martí and brought it into social science. The first and main ideological intervention was the argument that “racial differences” were myth and had to be replaced by differences in cultural heritage. Moore states, “Ortiz began to question the validity of racial constructs and to propose that Cubans define themselves in terms of shared cultural heritage rather than shared ancestry.”^[48] Therefore change was possible and his theoretical model attempted to map this change.



Robert E. Park, Fernando Ortiz, and Frantz Fanon.

It is interesting to compare the thinking of Ortiz with an earlier sociologist, Robert Park, and a later psychologist, Frantz Fanon. All three models have a teleological thrust as they have predetermined ends. Park (sociologist) worked with Booker T Washington, and then as a Sociology professor at the University of Chicago where Park developed his “race relations cycle.” As a liberal in the US (he also served on the Board of the Chicago Urban League) he theorized reform based on his version of Anglo-conformity. He wrote after the first Great Migration of African Americans to Chicago, and theorized that the desires of the Black middle class would prevail, and as such he posited yet another

framework guiding the reforms of the civil rights movement. Fanon (psychologist) wrote as a theorist in the Algerian war for national liberation, hence he advanced a framework for revolutionary transformation in which the oppressed fought to overthrow the oppressive system after stages of embrace (assimilation) and rejection (nationalism). Park wrote in the context of western colonial dominance (ending in “assimilation”) while Fanon wrote in the context of the African revolution for national sovereignty (ending in “revolution”).

Robert Park (1926)	Fernando Ortiz (1942)	Frantz Fanon (1959)
Contact	Hostility	Contact
Competition	Compromise	--
Accomodation	Adjustment	--
Assimilation	--	Assimilation
--	Self-Assertion	Nationalism
--	Integration	Revolution

Comparing the models of Park, Ortiz, and Fanon.

Ortiz (anthropology) wrote within the US neo-colonial domination of Cuba and faced the legacy of Cuban racist slavery, with its relative degrees of freedom, covered over by the racist segregationist practices imported by the Yankee rulers and their “one drop rule.” He began his career as a racist criminologist following the school of the Italian Social-Darwinist Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909) who advanced a biological theory of crime that targeted Black people as slow witted and criminally inclined. However, Ortiz was active in progressive politics and also interacted with a wide variety of Black people in his research, going deeply inside the Afro-Cuban community. Black people turned him around and he became an advocate of Afro-Cuban humanity.

The one Cuba thesis of Marti was ideological and the political goal for revolutionary transformation, just as the integration phase of the Otiz model has never been fully realized in everyday life, though it has repeatedly been affirmed in the official documents since the founding of the Republic. Ortiz campaigned for the full embrace of the African influences in Cuban culture and the recognition of the many forms of Afro-Cuba organizations. So in the end Ortiz makes an insightful critique of how the Cuban authorities attacked Black self-organization alleging that this was against the national unity of Cuba, that in the end all they did was drive these Black organizational forms underground and polarize rather than embrace. This is how Ortiz puts it as early as 1921:

The government persists in attacking the external and antiquated forms and does not take care to note the persistence of the internal essence. Thus disappeared the Cabildo, together with all of its positive features: mutual air, the insurance against illness, the bases, in short, of a traditional and rigorous mutuality...How much better would it be if we today had mutualist cabildos and public dances with African drums and not temples of brujeria, of clandestine or openly tolerated nature.[49]

The main contribution of Ortiz was to provide a rational theoretical framework for grasping the deep contradictions in Cuban society between the two external influences of Cuban heritage – Spain and Africa.

Afro-Cubans agency during the Republic

The shifting politics of the new country hinged on working to balance two wings of its ruling class: its emergent national capitalists restructuring society into their form of indigenous class rule, and the Comprador capitalist class under the supervision of their Yankee rulers, focusing on the export of raw materials and all other forms of wealth extraction. The clearest example of how these forces came into conflict emerged at the very beginning of the Republic. The independence army was full of Afro-Cubans. It has been estimated that Afro-Cubans were 40% of the officers, and 60% of the soldiers.[50] However, after the war these Afro-Cuban patriots were pushed aside and discriminated against. In 1901 out of 7,000 appointments to government jobs only 100 went to Afro-Cubans.[51] Yes, some few did get inside Cuban civil society and the government with positions of economic security, but the vast majority returned back to the degraded status they had under slavery.



The leadership of the Party of Color.

Source: <http://www.asetbooks.com/Us/Espanol/EspanolIndex.html>

Of course this was a repudiation of the goals of the revolution, full emancipation for all from colonialism, slavery and every vestige of its institutionalized racist legacy. Again the Afro-Cubans responded with courage and self-determination forming the first Black political party in the Americas in the 20th century in 1908. The Independent Party for People of Color (PIC) was formed with many of the activists who had been in the *cabildos de nacion* and the *Directorio* for the societies of color. “A Black independent political party was finally organized under the leadership of Evaristo Estenoz in Havana on August 7, 1908.”^[52]

The response of the new government in 1910 was to declare any organization based on a non-white membership to be illegal, thus driving the new party underground. The curious aspect of this is that this law was an amendment initiated by the only Black member of the Senate, Martin Morua Delgado. In fact he was President of the Senate, yet racism as government practice meant he could not bring his wife to official government receptions. During the independence war Morua Delgado joined the independence struggle towards the very end, after the formation of the Republic, and his high position within the government, his perspective changed. He now believed that Black forms of organization would only make a bad situation worse. However, as the situation got worse anyway the PIC decided to have a public militant protest to shock the society into making reforms to open the society up to become more democratic. They emerged in protest fully armed. Again the Black scare hysteria took over and the government mobilized vigilante action and killed

over 3,000 thousand of Afro-Cubans, including all of the leadership of the party. This is known as the massacre of 1912.



Evaristo Estenoz.

After this the divergence of the nationalist-assimilationist polarity became more located in the cultural realm as politics became more tied to soliciting patronage from mainstream political forces with less independent Black agency. This worked because Black men got the vote and by 1907 constituted 37% of Cuban voters, hence they were a fixture in the “vote market.”^[53] The assimilationist position was very much how to gain acceptance for Afro-Cubans into mainstream Cuban society. First and foremost this meant disassociating from Africa, hence reconfirming the old distinctions: Pardos (visible Spanish ancestry), Morenos (Afro-Cuban with Spanish ancestry, Mullaatto), and Bozales (no blood connection to Spanish), while maintaining cultural distinctions to clarify any color ambiguity – you were “out” based on dark skin color as well as any cultural practices linked to Africa.

The Black middle class began to emphasize education and cultural conformity as the best path to acceptance into the mainstream. This included being a good catholic rather than practicing any form of African religion, at least not in public. The Black middle class formed organizations to consolidate their class and to exert leadership over the entire community. The leading example of this is the Club Atenas formed in 1917.



Club Atenas.

Source: http://media.elnuevoherald.com/smedia/2008/12/27/16/119-buildxoo_AfroCuba_latin_YU.embedded.prod_affiliate.84.JPG

Machado

The US became as much in command of Cuba as had been Spain. With few exceptions the US maintained a client-patron relationship with every Cuban president, each one selling more and more of Cuba to the Yankees. After the suppression of the 1912 PIC and the massacre of Black political leadership, the next most important historical experience was that of the 5th Cuban president Gerardo Machado who served from 1925 – 1933. Pappendemos explains his success this way:

Machado's political success during the 1924 presidential election was largely driven by his Platform of Regeneration to end political corruption and give life to his populist declarations. These were demonstrated in public works projects such as constructing the Central Highway; making high-level Black political appointments; and in designating the anniversary of the death of Black general Antonio Maceo [December 7] as a national holiday. [54]

In fact Machado was embraced by the Afro-Cuban middle class elites, as demonstrated by a grand tribute to Machado in 1928 sponsored by Club Atenas and joined by almost 200 Black societies.

But who was Machado? He was manager of the “American and Foreign Power and Light Company,” with sworn loyalty to the US. US President Calvin Coolidge said this:

“Under Machado Cuba is a sovereign state...her people are free, independent, in peace, and enjoying the advantages of democracy

This view by the US president represents the US control of Cuban sugar production: 1906 – 15%; 1920 – 48%; and 1928 – 75%. [55]

There was a dialectical relationship that Machado had with Afro-Cubans of different classes:

While Afro-Cuban intellectuals, professionals, and government employees gathered in the exclusive club Atenas to honor the president for opening some opportunities for Afro-Cubans in the government bureaucracy, most Black workers were struggling to survive in a declining economy that would soon fall into depression. [56]

Contrary to the imperialist fantasy of Calvin Coolidge the workers of Cuba began a new movement of organizing labor with support from the Cuban Communist Party that had been established in 1925. Also that same year the workers founded the National Federation of Cuban Workers, the first national labor organization in Cuba. Fundamental to this was the organization of sugar workers, led by the Afro-Cuban communist organizer Jesus Menendez. They were so militant and advanced that after the dictator Machado was driven out by a general strike in 1933 the sugar workers were encouraged to assert their power by seizing the sugar mills and organizing soviets by the Afro-Cuban communist Blas Roca. [57] They did so:

Black workers (who constituted the bulk of the field laborers tended to lead the seizures of sugar properties, while lists of imprisoned sugar workers held in Havana contained several Anglo surnames, a sure sign of the presence of a strong British West Indian contingent. [58]

After Machado left and the workers movement was in full swing in 1933, under key leadership by Afro-Cuban communists, a racist counterattack was organized to divide Cuban society. The Cuban KKK and other such groups spread rumors of a movement for a Black takeover of Cuba, and targeted the few Black people in high official positions. Peoples were attacked, homes and businesses burned, and in some cases people were killed. So, Black people became the victims to prevent the revolutionary goals of ending racism and class exploitation. [59]



Jesús Menendez.

Garvey had made some in roads, especially among the immigrant English speaking workers. The Cuban UNIA was second only to the US in membership (52 branches[60]), although he only got cordial greeting from the middle class social clubs like Atenas. Garvey was interested in the activities of Booker T Washington. It is interesting that the Black middle class in Cuba, though in opposition to the program advanced by Marcus Garvey, was also attracted to the thought and program of Booker T Washington as well. This ideological unity is clearly advanced in Washington's 1895 speech in Atlanta.[61]

The wisest among my race understand that the agitation of questions of social equality is the extremist folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing. No race that has anything to contribute to the markets of the world is long in any degree ostracized. It is important and right that all privileges of the law be ours, but it is vastly more important that we be prepared for the exercise of these privileges. The opportunity to earn a dollar in a factory just now is worth infinitely more than the opportunity to spend a dollar in an opera-house.[62]

It is important to be clear that finding ways to survive and achieve a stable social existence motivate and drive every social group. The Black middle class in Cuba always sought to have a working relationship with whoever was in charge – they had no choice. And given the fact that Black male Cubans had the vote since 1902 a system of patronage politics was set up, so nearly all Afro-Cuba leaders had some “deal” with the business class and the state. This

extends to the workers movement as well. The critical question here is the source of revolutionary thinking, and the social basis on which these ideas can take root.

At this same time there developed a Black cultural renaissance with a twist:

Artists chose to move the basis from the “guajiro” to the marriage of Europe and Africa.[63]

This became a paradigm shift in mainstream consciousness from “white” to “off-white” by incorporating aspects of the Afro-cultural life into exotic commodities consumed by the Cuban mainstream and exported to a global audience. This global moment has been summed up by Robin Moore:

This was the era of the tango, the “jazz craze,” “bohemian” Paris, the Harlem Renaissance, the primitivists, the fauvists, naïve kunst, and a host of related movements drawing inspiration from non-European traditions. The arts of the “people without history,” or at least certain conceptions and representations of them, became fashionable even among the elite. From today’s perspective, the 1920s can be seen as a crucial first step in the gradual democratization of music making, paralleled by the emergence of genres such as calypso and samba, and presaging later developments such as rhythm and blues, salsa, and reggae.[64]

However, this put the Afro-Cuban middle class in a trick bag because they had been forced to mimic “white mainstream society” to play by their rules and most of all repudiate anything Africa. A musician put it this way in terms of the elite Club Atenas:

In the Club Atenas things got so absurd that orchestras were obligated by the “Comission de Orden” to play waltzes, fox-trots, danzones, or boleros, and were decisively prohibited from including any rumbas, sones, or mambos. Meanwhile, the “high-society” whites were going crazy dancing Black music, and traditionally ended their fiestas with a street conga.[65]



Dancing at an AfroCuban social club.

Source: http://media.elnuevoherald.com/smedia/2008/12/27/16/134-Dancexoo_AfroCuba_MHL_ho.standalone.prod.affiliate.84.JPG

Machado turned into the opposite of his promise by manipulating the electoral process in 1928 and getting a second term of even longer years than before. This second term Machado became a full-fledged dictator. He banned Garvey and the UNIA.

There were polar opposite positions, from the far right and left, that separated Afro-Cubans out of mainstream Cuban society, one was the segregationist KKKK and the other was the Black belt thesis of the CP that argued for regional autonomy for Afro-Cubans in Oriente Province.. Both of these positions were repudiated. And, as sort of a civil rights type reform effort, in 1933 a “bi-racial” Committee for the Rights of the Negro was formed. All of this was patterned after the political culture of the United States, from all positions from the right to the left. In Cuba there is no nation without the full participation of those who originally came from Spain and Africa, so any form

of separation was destructive of the revolutionary history of the Cuban people, all of them.

The next president was Carlos Miguel de Céspedes, who was not a total friend of the US as he was enough of a nationalist to want to end the Platt Amendment. After all, he was the son of the first president and personified national pride. The US was annoyed, and engineered the so called “Revolt of the Sergeants” led by Batista in 1934. They installed him as their Cuban strong man from 1934 to 1944 (sometimes as president and sometimes not), and again from 1952 to 1959. From 1944 to 1952 he lived a fully subsidized luxurious life in the USA. He was even elected to the Cuban Senate while living in the US.

Batista

Batista became the main social control force for the rulers of Cuba but not a member of their class nor their social life. He was a very light skinned mulatto, but even as president of Cuba he was still excluded from membership in the racist clubs of Cuba’s ruling elites. This is the incredible proof of the racism that crippled Cuba. In fact in 1937 a major international incident of Cuban racism is when a Black US Congressman from Chicago, Arthur Mitchell, visited Cuba and was denied accommodations for dinner in the Hotel Saratoga (Havana) because of his skin color, in spite of the fact that he was a member of the US Congress![66] This became an international incident and helped to brand Cuba as a part of the African Diaspora under US influenced racist domination.

Given the dominance of racism, Batista was cunning enough to try and build bases of support by sharing government resources with outlying constituencies that he felt could be won over to support his administration. Part of this was his sharing of the profits from the national lottery. He financed the Black Clubs, even allocating \$50,000 for the Club Atenas to build a building in Havana.[67] He even financed workers organizations:

In 1939, Batista allowed the newly organized Confederation of Cuban Workers to hold its first meeting. And he twice gave lottery monies to the organization for the construction of the Workers’ Palace – its headquarters....And after Batista announced that sorteos (lottery funds) were available for Black societies, many of those that petitioned his administration for Black clubs were leaders of local trade organization.[68]

The most important development, however, is how Afro-Cubans were so central to the development of the working class organizations and the Communist Party.

Between the 1930's and the 1940's, in fact, the proportion of Black leftists who were union organizers and/or in the leadership of Communist Party organizations (under their various shifting titles) and who ran as Communist in several elections surged in response to the post-revolutionary (1933) prominence of the popular classes and to Communists' emphasis on the issue of racial justice.[69]

As elected President in 1940, Batista led the writing of a new Cuban Constitution, opening this process to progressive forces including the Cuban Communist Party. The constitution had two articles of particular importance for the Afro-Cubans.

ART. 20. All Cubans are equal before the law. The Republic does not recognize exemptions or privileges. Any discrimination by reason of sex, race, color, or class, and any other kind of discrimination destructive of human dignity is declared illegal and punishable. The law shall establish the penalties that violators of this provision shall incur.

ART. 74. The ministry of labor shall take care, as an essential part, among others, of its permanent social policy, that discriminatory practices of no kind shall prevail in the distribution of opportunities for labor in industry and commerce. In personnel changes and in the creation of new positions, as well as in new factories, industries, or businesses that may be established, it shall be obligatory that opportunities for labor be distributed without distinctions on a basis of race or color, provided that requirements of ability are satisfactorily met. It shall be established by law that any other practice shall be punishable and may be prosecuted officially or at the instance of the aggrieved party.[70]

However, these were for the most part merely words on paper as Cuba remained a society organized around racist segregation.

This was the max time for the commodification of Cuban life – gangsters, sex trade, drugs, and gambling. Cuba became the playground and cash cow of Mafia bosses Meyer Lansky and Lucky Luciano.[71]

One thread of struggle throughout the Republic has been that of the University students. Julio Antonio Mella, founder of FEU was also a founder of the Cuban community Party. He was assassinated in Mexico by the order of Machado after the party formed in 1925. Then came José Antonio Echeverría and at the same time Fidel Castro Ruz, who was a student at the law faculty of the University of Havana.

Events were moving fast, and several organizations advanced attacks against the Batista government, but the most important was a group headed by Fidel

Castro, a young lawyer. Batista made his coup and grabbed power on March 10, 1952, followed 16 months later by Fidel leading an assault on the Moncada Garrison in Oriente Province (on July 26th, a date that gave the movement its name). The attack was not successful, so they were captured but eventually released under pressure as part of a general amnesty the Batista government was forced to enact. At his trial Fidel gave a speech that became a manifesto for the revolution, "History will absolve me."



Fulgencio Batista.

After gathering in Mexico, and being joined by Che Guevara, the revolutionary forces in the Granma boat land Cuba on Dec 2, 1956. A new stage of the Cuban Revolution was carried forward by the bearded revolutionaries of the July 26th Movement.

Struggle for national sovereignty

On the basis of these two historical stages of the Cuban historical experience (colonial slavery and the neo-colonial republic) we can make some generalizations that can help us understand the revolutionary experience since 1959. In the first instance the external enemy was Spain, and next came in US Yankee imperialism. Both colonial powers imposed racist restrictions on the Cuban people, separating people on the basis of color and cultural practices. The main resistance always came from a patriotic mobilization of Cubans, people from all parts of the Islands, from all classes and all colors and cultural

backgrounds. This was always the fundamental contradiction facing Cuban patriots. But that's not all, as Cuba has never been so simple.

The external global economy and dominant influences from the major foreign power (Spain or USA) represent the objective conditions that have to be engaged. Whether the global economy expanded and raised the price of sugar by extending the Zafra or not, racism was always decisive. The brunt of any economic crisis would fall on the Afro-Cubans. This has always been partially hidden as the official population statistics have always underestimated the African connection. This is a fundamental contradiction between what we believe is real and what is objective. Because of the devaluation of Black and all that is African everywhere in the African Diaspora people end up choosing white if they have a choice regardless of what generally recognized type their skin color might be. They do it in the US and they are doing it in Cuba. Census statistics are highly contested in light of this.

The complexity of Cuba's class, color and cultures represents advances and setbacks in every stage. When facing Spain, there was both Spanish colonialism and slavery. The comprador bourgeoisie was loyal to Spain and dominant, but had to face the nationalist impulse of a national bourgeoisie. Both wings of the Cuban Bourgeoisie wanted to maintain slavery, but differed over supporting Spanish rule. The national bourgeoisie needed the slaves to fight for and with them hence they had to promise some kind of freedom, although they vacillated and tried to renege at every key point. When facing US neo-colonialism, a similar situation emerged with a segregated labor force and racist separation of social life. However, during the Republic a fighting working class developed with its base and leadership disproportionately Afro-Cuban.

The pattern seems to be that Black-white unity in Cuba has been a necessity for transformative social change. This has been more so true in the realm of fighting to change power and control of the state, than it has in any actual changes in the consciousness and behavior of people in everyday life.

On the other hand when Afro-Cubans have organized in their own organizations they have been either accepted or rejected based on changing conditions. The Spanish supported these organizations, but in the end they proved patriotic and were decisive in the independence war. The neo-colonial regime also supported the middle class Black organizations as class forms of social control over the masses of Black working people, although when these organizational forms were forced to go underground, they still provided a vital force for social change. So, one lesson is that the self-organization of people that is historical and organic can't be suppressed, and another is that such organizations among Afro-Cubans have always been patriotic and a positive force in the struggle to advance the Cuban nation. In sum, the continued

formation of the Cuban nation represents the dialectic between the patriotic class forces and the anti-racist forces against any form of discrimination against Afro-Cubans, especially their own Afro-Cuban societies. There can be no Cuban cultural unity without equality of its diversity. Why? Because there has been no Cuban struggle to end its many forms of colonial and neo-colonial rule without the full and equal participation of the Afro-Cubans.

The task that has always united the majority of Cuban people is the independence and national sovereignty of their country. The challenge has always been to realize these aspirations based on equality for all Cubans, Black and white. The revolution of 1959 threw off the shackles of US domination and its neo-colonial Cuban lackeys, and little Cuba stepped out on the world stage for all nations. It faced the great forces of globalization, socialism and capitalism, the USSR (CMEA) and the USA (World Bank and IMF).

The revolution took power, i.e., a relatively small social movement took power, and had to quickly become a government administration. There was a mass exodus of people who felt threatened by the change, especially professionals like doctors, and in general well to do white people who had maintained close ties abroad in any case. So overnight, on January 2, 1959 the July 26th Movement led by Fidel Castro took power. However, the mostly “white” Cubans in positions of authority in the many diverse institutions of Cuban society remained where they were. The transition took time, and the new leadership had to formulate policy to unite people of the old social arrangement (who had benefited from racist privilege) while building something different, unity for the new society without racism and class exploitation.

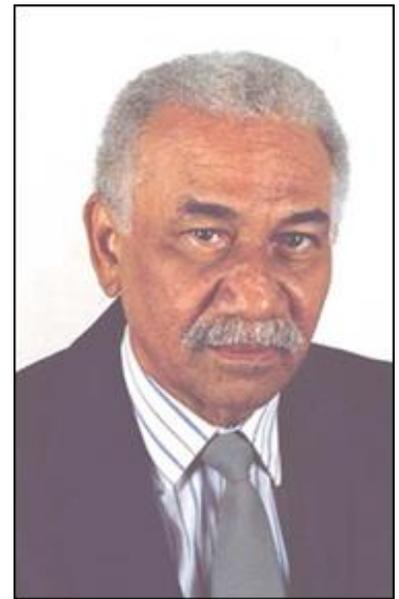
Establishing the principles and practices of the revolution

The July 26th Movement consistently stated its agreement with a strong anti-discrimination policy for the Cuban revolution. This is clear in the first Fundamental Law of the Revolution (Article 20) established one month after taking power (Feb 7, 1959):

Any discrimination by reason of sex, race, color, or class and any others that injures human dignity is declared unlawful and punishable.[72]

The basic process of creating the new society ran into direct conflict with US interests, and their massive hostile reaction put a strangle hold on the Cuban economic and social life. In March the Cuban government nationalized the phone company, taking it from the US International Telephone and Telegraph. The Agrarian Reform Law was passed in May that limited land holdings to 1,000 acres and began the process of democratizing agricultural production. They brought in Soviet crude oil but the US owned refineries refused to process

it, so Fidel nationalized them in June. In July the US canceled all orders for Cuban sugar. Fidel responded by nationalizing all US companies in August, and then the US banks in September. In 1960, Fidel came to New York, was discriminated against in a mainstream “downtown” hotel, and instead went “uptown” to Harlem to stay at the invitation of Malcolm X. By the next year 1961 the US had broken ties with Cuba, had begun training counter revolutionaries, and had sponsored the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in April. Later that year in December 1961 Fidel announced himself a Marxist and that the revolution was for socialism.



Ernesto “Che” Guevara and Fidel Castro, and Juan Almeida.

Cuban policy at first went beyond simply outlawing discrimination. Fidel made a very important televised speech on March 22, 1959. He made sweeping statements about making the vision of Marti finally realized, so he elaborated a vision of an integrated and totally free society with no discrimination in any way. Cuban society apparently was not ready for this kind of “revolutionary” transformation. A Haitian poet living in Cuba, Rene Depestre, reported the reaction of the Cuban public:

The entire white bourgeoisie and most white petit bourgeois, even those who would then have given their lives for the revolution, were panic stricken as if the Cuban Prime Minister had announced an atomic attack against the island on the following morning...The whole sinister mythology constructed in the days of slavery resurfaced in men’s consciousness along with its imaginary procession of evil instincts, lubricity, physical filth, pillage and rape...The volcano of Negrophobia was in eruption. [73]

The next year in 1960, in the 1st Declaration of Havana, Fidel stated that the Cuban state guaranteed "the right of Negroes and Indians to "the full dignity of Man;" but also more proactively the following was proclaimed that "The duty of peasants, workers, intellectuals, Negroes, Indians, young and old, and women, (was) to fight for their economic, political and social rights"[74] Che called for agency[75] when he visited the University of Las Villas and spoke to the faculty

the days when education was "a privilege of the white middle class" had ended. "The University" he said, "must paint itself black, mulatto, worker, and peasant." If it did not, he warned, the people would break down its doors "and paint the University the colors they like." [76]

However, this call for agency was not something that meant Black agency could be organized as an autonomous force. In fact, one of the serious decisions made by the Cuban revolutionary leadership was to follow the pattern of closing down all the Black organizations, forcing these networks underground. Their solution was to maintain the Marti idealism as the subjective solution, while the revolutionary process created policy to change the objective situation. The fundamental approach was to focus on how changes in Afro-Cuban access to jobs and education will lead to changes in private spaces and the overall consciousness of society. The Cuban revolution impacted Afro-Cuban quality of life via class focused policy, and great gains were made. One of the greatest of these projects was the literacy campaign in 1960. However, the legacy of racism was not destroyed, and some developments since 1959 have created new social contradictions that feed the continuation of racism in Cuba.

Socialist transformation via moral incentives

Cuban first reached out to the US, while at the same time challenging US domination of the economy. The US was furious and tried to shut Cuba down. The full US blockade of Cuba began in 1960. The US bombed the Cuban air fields on April 15, 1961, Fidel announced that Cuba was socialist on April 16, 1961, and the next day the US sponsored the Bay of Pigs failed invasion. During these first two years there was a mass exodus of the professionals and middle class strata that was supported by US neo-colonialism. This was a radical reduction of available doctors, lawyers, and university professors.

1959	July 26th Movement takes power from Batista
1959	March 22 Fidel calls for an end to racism
1960	Fidel and Malcolm X meet in Harlem
1960	US sets up an economic blockade around Cuba
1961	Literacy Campaign
1961	US-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion attempted
1962	Cuba becomes allied with USSR
1987	Battle of Cuito Cuanavale (Angola)
1991	USSR ends special relationship with Cuba
1996	Helms Burton Act intensifies US Blockade
2006	ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas) by Hugo Chavez
2008	Fidel resigns
2011	6th Congress of Cuban CP, last for the July 26th generation
2011	Cuban CP Central Committee 30% Black

Chronology of the Cuban revolution and the crisis of globalization.

As Cuba faced the tug and pull of global politics they decided to close ranks. The Bay of Pigs (April 1961) and the Soviet missile crisis (October 1962) were critical points requiring the highest level of unity and mobilization of the Cuban people.[77] In this conflict the Cuban CP decided to close ranks, close Black organizations and declare the issue of racist discrimination to be a settled question. The Club Atenas was closed down:

The 1961 resolution dissolving Atenas spelled it out clearly: among other reasons, the club was being closed because “discrimination due to race, sex, age, or social condition had disappeared” in Cuba’s socialist society.[78]

Just as Barack Obama won the loyalty of the Black middle class even while a representative of the imperialist class, so Batista won the relative support of the Afro-Cuban middle class. Both are tragic developments.

Among the forty-two civic and professional institutions that demanded Batista’s resignation in March 1958, not a single Afro-Cuban society was listed.[79]

There was a great shift in Cuban global relationships as they wrenched free from the US and entered into a tight relationship with the USSR. This lasted from 1962 to 1991, and was firmly consolidated when Cuban became a full

member of the CMEA in 1972. The USSR impacted what kind of Marxism was adopted, and what level of technological development (based on trade and direct aid) was possible. Moreover, it impacted the economic thinking about how to advance the Cuban revolution.



Women soldiers in Cuba.

Source:http://inapcache.boston.com/universal/site_graphics/blogs/bigpicture/cuba_2011/bpl.jpg

The basic story of the Cuban economy continued to be sugar. As the US tried to put a hurt on Cuba with a total trade embargo, Cuba turned to the USSR for economic trade and support. They agreed on a subsidized price for Cuban sugar. This led to the idea of expanding production to 10,000 tons by the 1970 zafrá (the sugar harvest). They did not achieve this goal, so it was a policy setback. But more than just that, it was a great example of voluntary labor for the revolution, a great effort for the revolution, action driven by moral and political incentives. This was not a solid economic plan as it drove Cuba toward their colonial and neo-colonial past to be tied to the political economy of sugar and tobacco. The revolution was not being driven toward a diversification of the economy for sustainable self-sufficiency. This also pulled Cuba into the China-Soviet struggle within the socialist camp as China was providing rice to Cuba while also needing it to support the Vietnamese in their war with the US, and their own home market. Of course in this context it must be mentioned

that Cuba sent at least 10,000 pounds of sugar to Vietnam as part of their international solidarity.

There was an underlying struggle between two lines in the revolutionary ranks – one to continue spreading revolutionary struggle, while the other argued to align with the USSR and build incrementally within the socialist camp. One was associated and led by Carlos Rafael Rodriguez and the old cadre of the Cuban CP, and the other with Che Guevara and the revolutionary struggles for national liberation associated with China. Che was a revolutionary idealist wanting revolution in his lifetime, who was willing and ready to give his all including his life – which he did in Bolivia in 1967! Che called for moral incentives to guide the masses in their revolutionary transformation. Rodriguez was a party official who had served in Batista's cabinet as part of the Soviet sponsored Popular Front strategy. Fidel held these different wings of the revolutionary leadership together giving support to each set of policies as his pragmatic sense of proportion has led him to keep Cuba's revolution going longer than any other current case.

A great advance was made toward the democratization of knowledge. The new revolutionary regime faced an education crisis that would threaten any serious democracy:

The last national census taken before 1959 was in 1953, and it reported an illiteracy rate for Cuba as a whole at 23.6 percent. The rural rate was much higher. That same census found that 64 percent of children within the age range of compulsory education were not attending school. It also discovered that only three percent of those attending were completing the compulsory requirement. Many rural zones lacked certified teachers. Universities were accessible only to privileged elite who chose overwhelmingly to study the lucrative fields of business and law while rejecting scientific courses needed to bring Cuba out of underdevelopment.[80]

1961 was proclaimed “Education Year” and 100,000 young people left home for all parts of rural Cuba, joined by other volunteers who taught in the urban areas. This was controversial from the point of view of the accountant's balance sheet of lost work and school time. However, while only some fought in the Sierra Maestra mountains, now the entire society was experiencing the needed revolutionary transformation. The greatest victory was the youth of Cuba were being united with the masses of Cuba people. 700,000 Cubans were taught to read, and thus school attendance went up: 1959 – 64%, 1970 – 88%, and 1986 – 100%! Of course, this means an aggressive program of building schools, training teachers, and building public agreement. Also, Cuba is noted for having wide spread availability of television, an important tool for popular education for people of all ages.

A counter-revolutionary force continued fighting for another several years.[81] A major event that rallied the nation was the brutal murder of an Afro-Cuban literacy campaign volunteer named Conrado Benítez. Once again the freedom of Cuba was linked to the heroic martyrdom of an Afro-Cuban.



Conrado Benítez

However, while this has been a great equalizer for all Cubans, the legacy of the past has continued with a marginalization of the impact of Africa on Cuba, and the Afro-Cuban at the heart of defining Cuban identity, treating Afro-Cubans an addition to something that already existed. This is not ice cream and cake, two different things. If Cuba is the cake, then Africa is part of the basic recipe of a cake that is not yet fully cooked. Cuba is not a white country although it has been dominated by the Spanish and the US state (and by the way Spain and the US are not entirely white countries either!) A critical issue is how all Cubans are taught about the Black co-founders of this nation. The crisis is that the ideal of Marti of all Cubans has been historically replaced by the dominance of the Spanish heritage over the African heritage. Esteban Morales sums this up:

We can easily realize that there is very little, or almost nothing, taught about the racial question in our schools....It is clear that in the schools skin color is not mentioned; in our educational system the study of slavery extends barely to the end of the 19th century, without much reflection on its consequences. In our teaching we cover very little of the cultures of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East; the study of race barely forms part of our academic university curriculum and, in our scientific

work, there is little in the way of research on those themes. Thus, how could it be possible to get to the bottom of our cultural roots, and even more so, eventually overcome the problems of racism and discrimination.[82]

However in sports and music the role of Afro-Cubans reflects the soul of home grown Cuban culture. But there remains a contradiction between the heritage of Spain (ballet) as art and the cultural heritage of Africa as folklore. The evolutionary process requires a negation of these (pasts) toward a higher synthesis (future).

While a close ally of the Soviet Union, Cuba carried out one of the most progressive foreign policies of any country especially in relation to African and the African Diaspora. Especially in this way did Cuba maintain its independent path in world revolution. Angola is a good example. Immediately upon getting their independence Angola was threatened by South Africa. Fidel created Operation Carlota (named after the great warrior Afro-Cuban woman who fought against slavery in 1844) and sent 35,000 troops to Angola. More than that, eleven years later the Cuban were a decisive aspect of defending the freedom of Angola in the Battler of Cuito Cunavale having sent 55,000 troops including air support and heavy artillery. This battle was the largest battle fought in African since World War II. Black people, Angolans and Cubans, fought South Africa and its US ally and won. Fidel sent an elite unit charged with protecting Havana, and by so doing he put the very survival of Cuba at the service of African liberation.

A final indicator of how the Cuban revolution linked with the African armed struggles was the campaign carried out by Che, Dreke, and the company of Cuban who fought in the Congo.[83] Of course the lessons from this intervention were mainly negative: you can't export revolution, revolutionary forces must emerge organically from the people and their struggles, and there must be a revolutionary theory and ideology to unite revolutionary forces. Raul summed up Che's Congo campaign this way:

It wasn't possible to unite the Lumumbist forces and make them a cohesive unit. A time came when the internationalist column was fighting alone on unknown terrain. Faced with such adverse circumstances the column had to leave that country. It wasn't defeated by the enemy, but the purpose of its mission couldn't be achieved, because of the absence of an organized patriotic movement.[84]

Che left the Congo and ended up learning the same lessons in Bolivia at the cost of his life.

The most pervasive program of Cuba's foreign policy of internationalism has been its provision of medical professionals to serve in countries all over the

world. In all parts of the African continent Cuban doctors have made the greatest continuation back to Africa from the African Diaspora, from the little liberated territory called Cuba. One of the great strategic goals has been to make sure that each generation has a transformative revolutionary experience. After 1959, the great Literacy campaign gave a revolutionary identity to a new generation of youth. Angola touched almost every family in Cuba. Cuban medical staff is on the cutting edge of every third world crisis serving the people and remaining sensitive to the revolutionary process in the world. They set up special schools in Cuba for people from these areas fighting all forms of colonials and imperialism, to promote self-determination.



Art by Wilfredo Lam. Source: <http://latinartjournal.com/wp-content/uploads/Lam.jpg>

Within Cuba change was taking place but not on par with Cuba's role in the world. The critical point is that formal de jure forms of discrimination were against the law and abolished, but informal de facto norms maintained old patterns. Black Cubans were making advances in education and the military, but in many institutions of government and media Blacks were underrepresented. Fidel's theory was that ending discrimination in the workplace and in education would wipe out all forms of prejudice and discrimination in public and private life. Many changes took place but widespread forms of prejudice and de facto discrimination continue to be socially reproduced.

The most important aspect of the quality of life for all Cubans is the state of the economy. All contradictions are impacted by an economic crisis, and doubly so for Afro-Cubans.

Special period experimentation via material incentives

The Socialist bloc took a major hit when capitalist roaders took over with Gorbachev and Yeltsin.[85] The privileged client relationship the Cuba had was ended and hard times came down hard. They called this a "special period." It began in 1991 and in many ways continues today. Over a three year (1989-1992) period Cuba lost 75% of its international trade and its GDP declined over 50%.[86] Without major external support and with increased decline in living standards in the special period the state turned to market forces and material incentives to energize the economy and stimulate growth and a rise in standard of living. Family remittances from US and Europe came from those who registered themselves as over 85% white.[87] Those who stayed in Cuba, the most patriotic, Black people, were hit hardest because they received overwhelmingly less remittances. So during the special period the twin enemies of Cuba began to rise again, class differences and racist attitudes and actions. This is the kind of struggle that has emerged in every one of the former socialist countries.

There is a class-crime dialectic and we need to check the positive and negative in each. In addition to tobacco and sugar, tourism has been a mainstay of the Cuban economy, and it continues to be an engine for jobs since 1959. On the one hand while tourism is open to the entire island, the Cuban government has restricted joint ventures that include working with global corporations to its form of enclave tourism on key beaches. The beaches are open to the entire public, but the hotels are private. And there are jobs involving tips often in hard global currencies. There is a negative side of this for Afro-Cubans for they are underrepresented in the tourism sector in terms of jobs and positions of authority, and when employed are usually not in public contact positions so they get less tips. Intentional or not this fits the racist pattern of the US.

These contradictions have even led to disproportionate levels of arrest and imprisonment of Afro-Cubans. It is estimated that 57% of prison inmates are Black. But it is also important to realize that as a socialist country Cuba has approached the problem of youth anti-social behavior (involving a high per cent of Afro-Cuban youth) with an educational "social work" program aimed at forming the basis for self-determination unleashing the youth to develop programs to deal with the issues they feel are important for their quality of life and for sustaining the revolution.



Left, Wilfredo Lam. Right, one of his paintings.

Source: http://24.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_m9oons6bLe1qgc6fa0r_500.jpg

More profoundly as a fundamental policy move to stimulate economic growth and to sustain the population food production and distribution has been open to a private market. The government market is used to provide a safety net for food and to control price, whereas private markets have been allowed to develop under specific conditions. This has been expanded to cover 178 types of jobs that can become a private business venture.[88] On the one hand in this way there is the unleashing of a middle class, while trying to avoid the kind of capital accumulation that can lead to a new economically based capitalist class. On the other hand, the joint ventures for a large part are connected to the Cuban government through the military, a connection that continues right up to and including the Political Bureau of the Cuban CP. This too follows the pattern in the former USSR's transition to Russia, and in Deng Xiaoping's

China in which the capitalists are invited to join the Central Committee of the CP of China. As Malcolm taught, history is the best teacher. It's time for clarity and vigilance.

This last Cuban Communist Party congress was supposed to be the transition of a new generation of leadership. Part of this was set back by virtue of having to sack one set of prospective successors after another from top government posts. The founding revolutionary generation is passing on and the majority of the people were not alive to experience before 1959. No revolution has made it through the next couple of generations yet, so in global terms Cuba is a rare case study for what advances can be made after 50 years of socialist policies, and what can be sustained after the founding generation makes their transition. The most dangerous crisis is that of opportunism and corruption within the government and the party. An important example of how this connects with the crisis of racism is the case of Esteban Morales Domínguez.



Esteban Morales Domínguez

He is a scholar from the University of Havana who has specialized on the relations between the US and Cuba. He is also an Afro-Cuban and has become a major voice calling for dialectical and historical materialism in the study of the Afro-Cuban experience so a revolutionary policy for equality and social justice can be scientifically developed. The ideal of Martí can be the guiding spirit but the social science of Ortiz is needed for a materialist approach to eradicate racism and to give proper respect to the African origin of Cuba in folklore and art at its highest levels. He wrote a critique of opportunism in the

party and government and was shortly thereafter purged from the party. He challenged the decision and internal party democracy led to a reversal of the decision and he was reinstated. Shortly after that Raul Castro gave an important speech where he pointed out the danger of opportunism and corruption within the revolution and therefore people had to be ever vigilant and practice criticism self-criticism whenever necessary.

Esteban Morales then continues dealing with the condition of the Afro-Cubans within the context of supporting and defending the Cuban revolution. He has a book out in Cuba and one (in English), *Race in Cuba*, published by Monthly Review in 2013. He is a firm and righteous two fisted revolutionary, to fight

Variables of Historical-Colonial Legacy

Colonization - Slavery

Capitalism - Slavery

Slave Trade - Illegal Commerce

Racism - Racial Prejudice - Discrimination

Fear of Blacks

Whitening policies

Ethnicity-race-color of skin

Slavery - Abolition

Slavery - Annexation

Slavery - Independence Movement

Variables of Republican Frustration

North American Intervention - Frustration of Independence

Racism - Discrimination during the Republic

Racism - Cuban capitalism

Variables of Socialist Revolutionary Society

Points of departure for racial groups

Inequality - social policy

Cuban racialism - Revolutionary idealism

Economic crisis - welfare model

Racial prejudices - discrimination - racism

Race - National Project.

Research program for anti-racist studies.[89]

both capitalism and racism. So when he answers Roberto Zurbano by saying the Cuban revolution began in 1959 I think of the line in the Movie Reds when John Reed says to Emma Goldman who is threatening to boycott a meeting, "Dammit Emma, this may not be the revolution you wanted, it's the revolution you got, so get up and lets go to the meeting." The only line forward for Black liberation is through the fight for socialism. To the extent that socialism is pushed back in Cuba so to that extent will the virulent racism of the past be resurrected. All of freedom loving humanity wants the Cuban revolution to maintain the journey, and yet we must be ready for whatever happens.

Esteban Morales proposes Black Studies as a research program grounded in the empirical variables listed in Table 5:

Variables are the stable social phenomena that characterize the system of contradictions at an essential level for each stage in question.[90]

Clearly this is the case with the recent unexpected events in Venezuela. The importance of Venezuela is threefold for Cuba: the revolutionary bonding of Cuba and Venezuela led by Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro, the exemplary sharing of resources (oil from Venezuela and medical technology and personnel from Cuba), and the fact that each country has an African heritage at the heart of their national identity.

Hugo Chávez is the first president in Venezuela's history to claim and honor his Indigenous and African ancestry. In an interview with Amy Goodman in 2005, President Chávez said, "Hate against me has a lot to do with racism. Because of my big mouth, because of my curly hair. And I'm so proud to have this mouth and this hair, because it's African." [91]

African Americans and the Cuban Revolution

The African American people have a long history of interacting with Cuba as it has always been seen as part of the African Diaspora and the Cuban people as common sufferers under the evil racist government regimes set up to serve US imperialism and not the Cuban people.[92] This has been true in each period of Cuban history. Good examples during the slave period are Frederick Douglass, Martin Delaney, and Henry Highland Garnet.

During the slave period African Americans consistently showed their solidarity with the fight for Abolition of slavery and independence from Spain. But within the US they knew to watch their own ruling class. Frederick Douglas, in a 1851 essay titled "Cuba and the United States," starts with this clarity: "Our voracious eagle is whetting his talons for the capture of Cuba." [93] Further, in the wake of the Civil War, he encouraged African American youth to go to Cuba and join the anti-slavery patriots fighting the Ten Year War for their independence (1868-1878).[94]

Martin Delaney was so taken by the anti-slavery struggle in Cuba that he named one of his sons after the great Afro-Cuban poet Placido who was murdered in the 1844 massacre known as La Escalera. Placido also heavily figured in Delaney's book Blake, or the Huts of America: A Tale of the Mississippi Valley, the Southern United States and Cuba. Serialized in 1859, it is often hailed as African America's first novel. Blake, the central character, travels

throughout North America and Cuba organizing a general slave insurrection; in Havana he receives instruction and inspiration from Placido.[95]



Raul Castro (left) and Esteban Lazo, currently president of the Cuban Parliament. Source: <http://www.infolatam.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Raul-Castro-y-Esteban-Lazo-cuba-655x497.jpg>

Henry Highland Garnet, a great abolitionist minister, was not only focused on the US but also Cuba. He led the formation of an organization dedicated to providing political, moral, and material support for the Cuban patriots fighting for the end of slavery and their independence, The Cuban Anti-Slavery Committee. Ofari puts it this way:

Another issue that drew his attention was the plight of Blacks in Cuba. During the 1870's, a small movement for Cuban independence had begun to grow among African Americans. The key to emancipation on the island was the overthrow of Spanish rule. The movement had the support of Douglass, Downing, P.B.S. Pinchback, the Black lieutenant governor of Louisiana, and other Black spokesmen. Garnet organized a Cuban Anti-Slavery Committee in early 1873 and served as the

group's secretary. The committee collected five thousand signatures on petitions, which it presented to Congress and to President Grant at the White House.[96]

Douglass had predicted the US intervention in Cuba nearly 50 years before it finally took shape. The US became the key architect of the Republic with the stranglehold of the Platt Amendment on Cuba's sovereignty. One unintended consequence of this was a tightening of the ties between Afro-Cubans and African Americans, especially in music and sports.

During this time the struggle of the Afro-Cuban working people became a permanent aspect of the overall working class movement. This was clear when Paul Robeson took an invitation from the International Longshoreman's Union to do a series of concerts to raise money for the sugar workers in Hawaii and Cuba. His efforts led to funds going to Jesus Menendez, and then after his murder to his widow as well. During the Republic African Americans were treated to the kind of racism that defined Afro-Cubans as second class citizens just as in the USA. Notable cases were Arthur Mitchell and Josephine Baker. They were proud of Batista as a man of color, but opposed to his failure to end racist practices and policies even though the 1940 constitution was clearly anti-racist.

As the revolution was launched three tendencies vied for the Cuba connection. Two weeks after the July 26th Movement took power Adam Clayton Powell made an early visit. Appearing with Fidel Castro in a Havana rally, he expressed support for ending racist discrimination and the desire for the US to support this new government. This failed gesture was followed by a delegation led by Joe Louis, famous boxer who was also tied to the tourism industry serving the African American middle class. Also on the delegation were over 70 editors of Black newspapers interested in learning about the new country full of Black people. This failed as the US Black middle class was not autonomous nor strong enough to resist political pressure to conform to US foreign policy. The left alternative emerged in the form of the "Fair Play for Cuba Committee." Richard Gibson, Black journalist working for CBS, and others on the left formed this committee to counter the media attack on the Cuban revolution. They did educational work and organized tours to Cuba.

So within the first year it was clear that this new Cuba was a profoundly radical project that would incur the wrath of US imperialism. Mainstream options were closed, so they had to turn to the movement. Their main connection to the Black Liberation Movement begins with Robert Williams and Malcolm X. Robert Williams was the fearless leader of Black militants in Monroe, North Carolina who armed and confronted the KKK. He developed this militancy within an NAACP chapter based on recruiting Black veterans of the US military. The July 26th Movement was just months away from being armed

guerrillas themselves and so believed that Williams was a viable option in US politics. Richard Gibson of the Fair Play for Cuban Committee took Williams on a trip to Cuba June 1960. This trip was a success and in July, the very next month, Williams was leading a new Black delegation that included among others Amiri Baraka, Harold Cruse, John Henrik Clarke, Sarah Wright and Julian Mayfield. The revolutionary spirit was at high tide and the delegation was transformed by this Black country taking such a giant stride only 90 miles from the world HQ of imperialism.



Malcolm X and Fidel Castro.

Source: <http://think.files.wordpress.com/2008/07/malcolm-and-fidel.jpg>

In two months, a Cuban delegation to the UN being led by Fidel Castro was denied hotel accommodations causing an international incident (September 24, 1960). Malcolm X invited the Cuban delegation to reside at the Teresa Hotel in Harlem, and they accepted. Masses of Black people gathered to welcome Fidel and the delegation, and stood guard as they witnessed third world heads of state come to Harlem to visit Fidel. Malcolm X met with Fidel and had an important discussion helping Malcolm X continue his intellectual and political synthesis of global revolutionary experience. Fidel was meeting his African American revolutionary peers in Robert Williams and Malcolm X.

As with the economy so with relationship between Cuba and the Black liberation movement. The forces remaining true to the Cuban revolutionary experience supported revolutionary nationalists who were taking up armed

resistance, while others were focused more on the civil rights movement. There have been four major examples of the alliance between Cuba and the armed militant wing of the Black Liberation Movement:

1. Robert Williams: [97] After visiting twice in 1960, the very next year Robert Williams was able to escape a trumped up kidnapping charge in the US to live in exile in Cuba from 1961 to 1965. At first he was able to both use the radio to broadcast his program "Radio Free Dixie," and printing presses to publish his newsletter "The Crusader." But he was a revolutionary nationalist and that was not in favor by the surrogates for the Soviet party, the CPUSA. Williams gradually was limited, and increasingly was outspoken about what he perceived as continuing patterns of racism. Even with such great changes as the literacy campaign and land reform, the persistence of racism was glaring to Williams. The government declared racist discrimination a thing of the past, but this was true about the de jure aspect but not the de facto aspect.

2. Stokely Carmichael/Kwame Toure:[98] The first major trip was during a 1967 OSPAAAL conference. He led a SNCC delegation during a summer of urban rebellions, especially Detroit. Carmichael over stated the case when he likened the uprising to the revolutionary struggles of the third world. But to the revolutionary forces in the third world, this was a new development inside the imperialist monster and this courageous young warrior was given top honors and respect by these third world revolutionaries. Again, Carmichael's move toward PanAfricanism and not communism strained relations from both sides.

3. Eldridge Cleaver/Huey Newton: [99] The Black Panther Party was a national organization that embraced the armed militancy of Malcolm X and Robert Williams. In their armed confrontations with the police they were subject to legal persecution and assassination attempts. This led several Panthers to escape the US, with many managing to get to Cuba, including Eldridge Cleaver (1968-69) and Huey P. Newton (1974-1977). As with Robert Williams the key question here is how and under what circumstances would Cuba be able to assist in the planning and training of revolutionary armed units that would carry forth a plan for Black Liberation. The main organization they were connected to was the Communist Party USA, an affiliate of the CP USSR, who was adamantly against what it considered foolhardy and dangerous. This was a great influence on Cuban policy. On the other hand the policies connected to Che opened up such dangerous possibilities. The Panthers were so infiltrated by the political police that no such plan was possible.

4. Assata Shakur: As a militant in the Black Liberation Army Black Liberation Army She was involved in an armed confrontation with the New Jersey State Police and a BLA member was killed as was a state trooper, along with other being wounded including Assata. After being tried and imprisoned

she escaped and was eventually granted asylum in Cuba in 1984. She continues to live there under the protection of the Cuban government.

The result of this intense interaction with Black radical activists is that while the Cubans hosted activists who lived there as individuals, in the end there was no qualitative leap in organizational capacity as a result of Cuban support or their own organizational capacity. The main error seemed to have generally been the lack of a plan within the limitations of the hospitality provided by the host country Cuba. The greatest gain seemed to have been made by Robert Williams and his propaganda work (radio program and newsletter), although his symbolic presidency of the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) and the Republic of New Africa (RNA) did not produce sustainable organizational development as he was out of the country.

Another significant sector interacting with and writing about the Cuban revolution were Black intellectuals/activists. There are many people who have networked via trips to Cuba, especially people who were active during and as a result of the 1960's. These include scholar-activists like John Henry Clarke, Robert Chrisman,^[100] Danny Glover, Johnetta Cole,^[101] James Early,^[102] and Lisa Brock.^[103] Cuba has been a special focus for journals: The Black Scholar has had special issues on Cuba in 1973, 1977, 1984, and 2005. The U Mass journal, Contributions in Black Studies published a special issue in 1994, "Ethnicity, Gender, Culture and Cuba."^[104] Souls, then a journal from Columbia University under the editorship of Manning Marable, published a special issue in 1999 – "Race and Revolution in Cuba: African American Perspectives."^[105]

Another venue has been conferences in which important ideas are discussed and people network. Some proceedings have been published in the Black Scholar and summed up in many other radical journals as these conferences have been held in almost every profession and academic area. One particularly important conference for this paper is the 1990 conference held in Cuba^[106] followed by the important New York Conference on Malcolm X.^[107] An important feature of the documentation of the 1990 Malcolm X conference is a video of a statement from Fidel Castro to the Black Liberation Movement. A video of this important statement is on the website of the proceedings.

On the cultural front warm and friendly relations continue to strengthen between Afro-Cuban and African Americans in the US. This ranges from poets like Nancy Morejón, film maker Gloria Relando, the jazz musician Chucho Valdés, and the librarian Marta Terry González. The new creative energy is driving a bonding via hip hop.

But all is not well within Cuba as the tourist market is turning Santeria into a commodity and subverting the authentic organic historical meaning of this religious practice. Marx and Engels warns us about the market in the Communist Manifesto. It has

left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment”. It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom — Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation. [108]

A commodified Afro-Cuban heritage will cease to be the people’s heritage. This has attacked and destroyed much of African American cultural production so we can see the future coming.

Three fights are required for the liberation and future of Cuba:

- 1. The fight to continue down the anti-capitalist path**
- 2. The fight to end racism and give proper respect and historical importance of the African influence in creating the Cuban nation.**
- 3. The fight to resist and overcome the influence of the imperialist policies of the US**

If we isolate one of these with no regard for the others then we place the Cuban revolution in danger. One major tendency is to target the continuation of racism as a way to discredit the Cuban revolution. This is the approach of Carlos Moore. Moore volunteers to be an agent of US imperialism by playing the race card against the revolution. Henry Louis Gates, on a PBS TV series in the US, has targeted the end of racism as requiring a revolution. [109]

This leads us to the open letter charging racism in Cuba [110] and the letter supporting the Cuban revolution. [111] The great majority of people who signed both letters share a commitment to social justice and it is unfortunate that this divide over racism in Cuba became such a public polemic. In the first case there is the issue of what is known about any particular policy or practice, including the imprisonment of an alleged political criminal. Secondly there is the issue of how you raise criticisms of a revolution from within the context of the great imperialist power. The Cubans have always been available for a conversation. Third, as the crisis in the world deepens we have to give support to people within the Cuban context as they are the ones who will carry the revolution

forward. We have recently seen the exchange from leading Afro-Cuban intellectuals, Zurbano and Esteban Morales.[\[112\]](#)



Clockwise from top left: Nancy Morejón, Gloria Rolando, Marta Terry González, and Chucho Valdés.

Summation

So, does racism exist in Cuba? Yes. Is Cuba a racist society? No.

Racism and its legacy nurtured by the traditions and cultural imperatives of western domination exist everywhere. There is no place free from racism, deep in the very structure of how all of it is all put together from social existence, to cultural expression, to paradigms of consciousness. On the other hand, there has always been struggle against all of this. And certainly this has been true in Cuba.

Context is everything. Cuba is the best case in the African Diaspora for fighting to end racism and class exploitation, and all other forms of oppression. However the class struggle is going to intensify in Cuba. One important manifestation of this class struggle is whether the Afro-Cubans can be mobilized into a fight that brings the anti-racist and socialist programs together. Capital is going to play the “color” card hard, and the survival of Cuba returns to the crisis of the Zanjón sell out versus the protest at Baragua, only now the form is whether the market will rule over continuing the revolutionary transformation of Cuba because it’s the best way they have found to divide the working class and suppress wages.

So there are two related tasks for progressive forces in the US:

1. Our primary international responsibility is to vigorously oppose our own ruling class, to end the blockade, to fight to repel the Helms-Burton Act, to support the Cuban 5 held political prisoners in the US – in sum, to change US policy in fundamental ways. Of course the ultimate solution is to end the rule of capital in the US, because any other form of détente will simply be another form of warfare.
2. Our moral and political responsibility is also to support revolutionary forces within Cuba to maintain the socialist path. The USSR, China, and Vietnam are in a process of opening their society to global capitalist penetration. In fact these economies are being reengineered based on capitalist models leading to polarized class inequalities and multiple of forms of degeneracy and gangsterism. This danger is lurking in Cuba as well though not yet fully unleashed. This is a vital struggle that will be waged by the Cuban people.

We can sum up by stating three major points:

1. The Cuban revolutionary process has always been advanced by all sectors of Cuban society, especially Afro-Cubans. They fight against external enemies and the internal enemies who cling to the racism that continues the Spanish colonial and US neocolonial legacy, promoting class exploitation.
2. The main enemy in this historical period is US gangster imperialism promoting permanent war. Obama is the current governmental leader of this

state that functions as a tool of Wall Street finance capital. We can't be fooled when US capital paints its face black.

3. The Black liberation movement has the historical task of opposing US imperialism at home and abroad, and this includes steadfast support and solidarity with the Cuban revolution.

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