

Somos Cubanos: Afro-Cuban Resistance and Adaptation, 1902-2002
by

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I. Introduction

“In the nation beloved by me I would like to see born the nation that can be without hate, and without color. In the generous game of limitless thought, I would like to see building the house, rich and poor, black and white” (qtd.in Kirk 130). In October 1889, José Martí, a leader of *Cuba Libre*, the insurgent movement to fight for independence from Spain, spoke these words to express a vision of a new *patria* built on equality where citizens would not be identified by race, heritage, class or religion, but by a common Cuban national identity. Motivated by his words and a promise of emancipation from slavery, thousands of Afro-Cubans took up arms in support of the *Cuba Libre* movement.

During this time black men such as Antonio Maceo, “the Bronze Titan,” were able to rise through the ranks of the military based on their skill and achievement and were not excluded based on the color of their skin. In this post-Haitian revolution era, European colonists were fearful of additional slave revolts and would not arm blacks under any circumstance; Cuba was a rare exception (Helg 4). Afro-Cubans participating in the liberation movement understood the significance of fighting alongside white *mambises* and began to believe that a free Cuba could meet Martí’s social promise of a new racially united nation (Helg 119). In the article “ ‘Race and the Cuban Revolution’ Review of *Castro, the Blacks and Africa* by Carlos Moore,” Lisa Brock and Otis Cunningham explain that “because the Cuban fight for independence and abolition from slavery shared the same historical stage, there developed an ideological congruity between the fighting for equality for blacks and against colonialism” (n.pag.). Sadly, Martí was killed on the battlefield in 1895. However the war with Spain continued under the passionate leadership of the *Cuba Libre* revolutionaries to create a Cuban society under a new social paradigm in alignment with his ideal nation.

After many years of fighting, United States intervention brought an end to the war and ushered in the political transition of Cuba as a new nation-state. Cautiously optimistic of the U.S. post-war on-the-ground presence, many Afro-Cubans still believed that their sacrifice and efforts in the fight for independence would be recognized and honored through executing the promise of Martí's ideal nation (Pérez 160). In addition to their military sacrifice during the wars of independence, slavery had been abolished and blacks had begun a process of emancipation.

Metaphorically, the Cuban national narrative embraced an image that the new nation would be racially democratic and built on the principles of Martí's vision of a "race-less nationality" (Ayorinde 33). In reality, during the first quarter of the 20th Century a social hierarchy based on preferences of ancestry, class, and race that mirrored colonial society was instituted.

Having undergone three significant national transitions during the first hundred years of nationhood; *Independence*, *the 1959 Revolution*, and *the Special Period*, and facing a fourth in the millennium with the transfer of power from Fidel to Raul Castro, there is a growing sense that the aforementioned social hierarchies will no longer be accepted. In his article "Recreating Racism: Race and Discrimination in Cuba's 'Special Period' " Alejandro de la Fuente states, "as in previous transitions, blacks will not quietly acquiesce to displacement or exclusion from a nation they helped create" (n.pag.).

Frustrated by the continued exclusion from the nation building process, blacks in Cuba have sought various strategies of resistance and adaptation to hold the republic accountable to promises made during the time leading up to its founding (Planas 89). In this thesis, I will examine strategies applied by Afro-Cubans in response to national leaders who during periods of

political transitions, failed to deliver on the colonial promise of “one” nation; raceless and non-discriminatory.

Chapter one entitled “Cuba Libre,” will examine the construction of the conditional promise of freedom in exchange for Afro-Cuban participation in the Wars of Independence. Cuba had been fighting for independence from Spain since the 1830’s. In 1868, Manuel Céspedes, a wealthy Creole sugar mill owner, organized a massive rebel movement that included his slaves who he freed to help with the insurrection. This led to the Ten Years War. The rebels were defeated, however, the spirit of independence continued along with growing international pressure to end the slave trade in Cuba and to emancipate all slaves. Approximately 500,000 slaves were imported to Cuba between 1812 and 1865. In the 1850’s, the combination of Afro-Cuban freemen and slaves made the black population over fifty-six percent (Benson 26-27). Due to Haiti’s recent independence caused by a slave rebellion, many plantation owners were fearful of slaves overtaking the island if freed and therefore; were reluctant to emancipate their slaves (Jiménez 37-38). Through an agreement with the British, Spain abolished slavery in 1886, at a time when sugar profits had begun to decline and the nation was experiencing an economic depression.

During the time period of 1878 to 1895, José Martí, a young writer, journalist and activist travelled to the United States to leverage support for the independence movement within the Cuban exile community (Kirk 48-49). While traveling around the United States, disgusted by the discriminatory treatment of blacks, Native Americans and Chinese, Martí was inspired to design a new social paradigm in his *patria* that would support social equality without regard to skin color or national heritage (107). Upon his return to Cuba, Martí gained support for his vision of a free, united Cuba and was elected party leader of *El Partido Revolucionario Cubano* (the

Cuban Revolutionary Party). Martí was killed in 1895 before his vision was realized. In 1898, the United States joined in the Cuban Independence War after it was believed that one of its naval ships, the USS Maine, was attacked by the Spanish, although later it was discovered that a boiler on the ship had exploded. In three months, the eager, young, U.S. navy had defeated the Spanish and gained ownership of Cuba, as well as Puerto Rico and the Philippines (Thomas 369). Cuba had traded one colonial master for another, as the U.S. did not formally grant sovereignty to Cuba until 1902 after integrating the Platt Agreement into the new nation's constitution. This act allowed the U.S. military to occupy the island according to certain terms and conditions, one of which was the exclusion of Afro-Cubans in decision making capacities.

In response to their exclusion from the nation-building process by the new Cuban government, Afro-Cubans, especially veteran leaders from the independence wars, formed their own political party, the *Partido Independiente de Color (PIC)*, in 1908 (Andrews 129). In 1910, Senator Martin Morúa Delgado, a mulatto, sponsored an amendment in the Cuban Congress to outlaw political parties composed of a single race. The general consensus in the literature regarding Morúa Delgado's motivation is that he believed racial distinction in the new nation-state would only continue to fragment the social structure and impede "up-ward mobility" among Afro-Cubans (Helg 122). Others in the government simply viewed the organizing of a black political party as a potential threat to national security (Thomas 227). Consequently, over two hundred PIC party members were arrested and imprisoned (Andrews 129). In protest, remaining members of the PIC party planned an armed demonstration in *Oriente* Province in 1912 to overturn the Morúa Amendment. Militia of the Cuban government met them with a "campaign of extermination" and several thousand Afro-Cubans were killed, including most of the PIC leadership and rank and file, as well as bystanders, around 3,000 in total (Andrews 130).

This event influenced social integration strategies later pursued by Afro-Cubans that ranged from public school integration campaigns to subversive expressions of African heritage through religion, dance, and music.

Chapter two, “Race and Revolution,” will focus on Fidel Castro’s rise to power on a wave of anti-Batista sentiment and his leveraging of Afro-Cuban loyalty in support of his “new society” (Strug 14). Ruben Fulgencio Batista Zaldívar seized military power of the Cuban nation on September 4, 1933 through the Revolt of Sergeants where he overthrew the government of Gerardo Machado (Sierra, “Batista” n.pag.). A mulatto from *Oriente* province, Batista offered an initial glimmer of hope for Afro-Cubans. However, even as President he faced racial discrimination, as he was not allowed to enter certain public and private facilities. The fact that even the President of Cuba encountered racial discrimination dampened the hopes for the realization of Martí’s dream of a Cuba based on the equality of all its citizens.

During his presidency, Batista was known for using brutal force against his opponents. In David Strug’s article, “Why Older Cubans Continue to Identify with the Ideals of the Revolution”, Alicia, a seventy-eight year old Afro-Cuban who participated in his interview, lived near a police station during the Batista era and recalls the “cries of jailed political prisoners”(n.pag.). She stated that “one felt the pain of these people being tortured. It was horrible”(n.pag.). It is no surprise then that she and her neighbors were fearful of going out at night, especially if Batista was traveling through, “If you were caught on the block, they [the police] would round you up” (n.pag.). Living conditions among Afro-Cubans and others were also poor prior to the 1959 revolution. “Forty-five percent of Cubans had never been to school and half of them were malnourished to some degree. Most dwellings lacked running water, and most homes had dirt floors” (Strug n.pag.). The island’s elite were also frustrated with Batista for

his on-going governmental control, brutal force against anyone who spoke out against him, the shutting down of the University of Havana after many student protests, and his preference for U.S. investors and members of the U.S. mob in opening large-scale gambling enterprises. Instead of re-investing revenue back into the economy and the nation's general fund, Batista pocketed many corporate kick-backs for himself and members of his inner circle, enriching the quality of life for very few Cubans (Sierra, "Batista" n.pag.).

Fidel, the son of a wealthy Spanish sugar planter and the former maid of his father's first wife, became interested in social justice issues while pursuing a law degree at the University of Havana (A&E T.V. Network 1). Later a follower of former senator Eduardo Chibás who fought against government corruption within the Cuban political system, Castro began to shape his ideas about Cuban nationalism, anti-imperialism, and socialism (1-2). In 1953, Castro "attacked the Moncada Army Barracks in Santiago on July 26" in his first attempt to overthrow Batista (Sierra, "Batista" n.pag.). Having failed, Fidel and several of his accomplices were sent to prison while others were killed. Freed in 1955, Fidel and his brother Raúl went into exile in Mexico where he met Che Guevara and organized an insurgent plan. After a second failed attempt in 1956, Fidel and Che escaped to the *Sierra Maestra* Mountains to further organize. Finally on January 1, 1959, they triumphantly entered the streets of Havana. With some skepticism, most Cuban people were ecstatic that Batista was no longer in power.

Within his first hundred days of office, Fidel immediately implemented a *Proclamation Against Racism* and amended the laws to abolish racism, specifically outlawing racial discrimination and segregation. According to Sara Lobman's article, "How Revolutionary Gov't Outlawed Racist Discrimination," blacks were now allowed to go into public spaces such as

beaches, parks, pool clubs, schools, and hotels alongside of whites (n.pag). In a speech delivered on March 22 1959, Castro addressed the nation:

...are we a small people who need each other, need the effort of all, and are now to be divided into white and black?... Are we to be weak and also divided by color?... We have to uproot the last colonial vestiges, conscious of making that phrase of Marti a reality: he said it before, we have to repeat it now, that a Cuban is more than white, more than black, and we are Cuban. (Robaina, "20th Century" 102-103)

Clarence Luanes observes that the new law also minimized racial distinction by blacks, "any effort at expressed racial group consciousness for blacks as well as white Cubans, could and would be determined to be racist"(76). Fred Quintano states, "... for Cuban blacks, with their grievances declared addressed by Fidel Castro, this meant that their claims for distinction was a threat to the regime and repressed" (11). The consequences of the suppression of grievances expressed by Afro-Cubans would become evident throughout Castro's reign, particularly through economic disparities. However, immediately following the revolution, many Afro-Cubans interpreted Castro's new order as an opportunity for them to achieve the social mobility they had been denied historically. For example, Carlos Eire's shares an exchange with his Afro-Cuban housekeeper a few days after Fidel came to power when she says to him, "pretty soon you're going to lose all this. Pretty soon you'll be sweeping my floor. Pretty soon I'll be seeing you at your fancy beach club, and you'll be cleaning out the trash cans while I swim" (4).

Fidel launched an island-wide social campaign funded by the government that included compulsory education, healthcare, food and nutrition, public housing, and full employment. In education alone, "black educational advancement was most impressive ... Afro-Cubans

capitalized on the opportunities created by the post-1959 revolutionary government to such a degree that racial disparity in education almost disappeared” (Andrews 163).

Castro’s swift actions to modify the law to reflect his vision of Cuba proved that he had the power and the commitment to fulfill his promises for creating a new nation built on the principles of José Martí. In response, the Afro-Cuban community joined the revolutionary movement taking full advantage of Fidel’s social programs, active engagement in military affairs, and participation in the various unions of the Confederation of Cuban Workers. Gonzalez and McCarthy frame this exchange as a “social compact” that “the state promised to deliver a better life to its citizens in return for their support and devotion to the Revolution” (7).

Chapter 3, the “Soviet Withdrawal and its Impact on Race Relations” will analyze the negative impact of the sudden withdrawal of Soviet financial resources on racial equality within the nation and the rising voice of dissatisfied Afro-Cuban youth. Castro’s infusion of state funds to subsidize critical social programs supported his elimination of discriminatory practices and helped to reduce social hierarchies. According to Dr. Johnetta B. Cole:

...the primary cause of the oppression of black people in Cuba was an inegalitarian economic system ...socialism struck at the heart of that cause. When unemployment was totally eliminated, it was the single most important blow against racism as it eliminated competition between workers for what had been a limited number of jobs. (9)

Thirty years after the revolution the quality of life of Afro-Cubans had improved significantly. According to Alejandro de la Fuente in “Recreating Racism: Race and Discrimination in Cuba’s ‘Special Period;’” life expectancy among Cubans of all races (i.e. black, mulatto and white) was close to that of developed countries, illiteracy was eliminated, the proportion of blacks and mulattos who had graduated from high school was higher than whites, and blacks and mulattos

were well represented in the professional labor force, including composing 31% of workers employed in the Cuban medical field (n.pag).

Social advancement for Afro-Cubans ended when the Soviet Union withdrew financial support to Cuba in 1987 and subsequently collapsed in 1991. These events led to great economic instability in Cuba, which in turn resulted in the return of racial hierarchies. Oil, consumer goods, agricultural products and other essentials needed for daily life and production disappeared almost overnight with very few available alternative suppliers (Pérez, “Cuba’s Special Period” n.pag.). Washington Post journalist Eugene Robinson states, “the whole country, used to middle class living standards, suddenly had had to endure an awful poverty. There was no gasoline to fuel the trucks that brought food from the countryside to the cities, so people were hungry for the first time since the Revolution” (154).

To manage the nation’s rapid downward spiral, Fidel instituted an austerity program that limited the allocation of goods (Pérez, “Cuba’s Special Period” n.pag.). He also allowed the in-flow of U.S. dollars to help boost the economy through remittances and private joint-ventures between the state and non-U.S. nationals (Fuente, “Recreating Racism” n.pag.). This process created a severe class distinction as whites, with greater ties in the Cuban Diaspora in Miami and others cities, tended to be the recipients of remittances (E. Robinson 35). Fuente states that Afro-Cubans could not even benefit from *paladares*, restaurants inside of private homes, because many of them lived outside of the tourist routes in predominantly non-white housing projects that were deteriorating and had higher crime rates (“Recreating Racism”n.pag). Quintano concludes, “the bifurcation of the Cuban economy in the early 1990’s into dollar and peso currencies and the increasing supremacy of the dollar in the Cuban economy has effectively created the conditions for the marginalization of black Cubans” (15).

In addition to the a new system to create private wealth, the government also faced no choice but to defund many of the social programs that had given Afro-Cubans a fair opportunity to advance such as adequate healthcare, education, housing, and guaranteed employment. Fuente notes that the commitment to racial discrimination also ended in the workplace as in the fury to attract foreign investments, particularly in the tourism industry, the Cuban government turned a blind eye as foreign firms only hired whites and very fair skinned mulattoes in hotels and casinos (*A Nation*, 321). A 2002 study by Cuba's Center for Anthropology states that "whites accounted for 80 percent of the personnel in the tourist industry, compared with 5 percent for blacks" (Gonzales and McCarthy 58).

With limited access to dollars to purchase basic goods such as fresh fruit, toilet paper, and appliances, Fuente states that Afro-Cubans fought the growing economic disparity through active participation in the emerging black market (*A Nation*, 326). Older Afro-Cubans like Alicia, "believe it is important for parents to teach their children about the energy and sacrifice on the part of her generation that went into building the revolution and sustaining it through difficult times, including the special period" (Strug n.pag.). However younger Afro-Cubans who were born after the revolution are waning in patience with the revolution's motto of self-sacrifice while it ignores inequities. Eugene Robinson states:

Like it or not, the Cuban Revolution had produced, and now would have to deal with, a hip-hop generation- a cohort of young people who had no memory of life before the Special Period, who know all about the promises the Cuban Revolution had broken, and very little about the promises it had kept. (255)

Using the same social channels as the black market, Afro-Cuban youth in Alamar, one of the largest housing developments outside of Havana, began writing, performing, and recording

hip-hop (E. Robinson 106-107). Influenced by the African American sound that they heard over the airwaves from Miami, Afro-Cuban youth found a vehicle to express their frustration with failed government promises (E. Robinson 107). Raps like “¿Quién Tiró la Tiza?” “Who threw the chalk,” by Clan 537 opened public dialogue about growing racial disparities as it asked the audience who would the teacher blame for throwing the chalk, the white son of a prominent doctor or the unknown black son of a sugar cane laborer (E. Robinson 205). Eugene Robinson further notes that, “Cuban hip-hop sounds as if it isn’t really about the music at all, but about the screwed-up present and the uncertain future of the nation” (107). The government eventually tried to control the hip-hop movement after an incident at the *Eighth Annual Alamar Rap Festival* through the Cuban Rap Agency, however according to an interview with Papa Humbertico in “Havana Times,” journalist Yusimi Rodriguez learns that a strong underground movement still exists through social media (i.e. You Tube, Facebook, blogs) and black market export channels (n.pag). The Hip-Hop movement is even recognized in the mainstream as during the *15th Annual Arturo Schomburg Symposium*, Tomás Fernández Robaina, a researcher and professor in the National Library of Cuba credited the youth hip-hop movement with opening up new space for dialogue about race in Cuba (“The African”).

The transfer of power from Fidel to brother Raúl in 2008 symbolized yet another major transition in the continual development of the Cuban nation. More opened to private enterprise to stabilize the national economy, the government will be promoting self-employment or *cuentalpropistas* to help keep people employed. However, without access to U.S. dollars to purchase supplies and secure necessary permits, Afro-Cubans will continue to be disadvantaged.

As one of the few remaining socialist countries in the world, Cuba is at a critical juncture as it strives to define how it will manage the transition from its “redistribution revolution that

benefitted the lot of the Cuban people” and its archaic “powerful state apparatus” into a free enterprise system to sustain its economy (Gonzalez and McCarthy 5). Assumed to be complete loyalists to the revolution’s government for all of its advances, Afro-Cubans are a great topic of discussion among international diplomats and political scientists interested in the future of Cuba. According to the official Cuban 2002 census, 34.9 percent of the 11.2 million population is black and of mixed race ancestry. Most Cuban academics however increase the estimation to between 60 and 70 percent black or mulatto (Grogg, *Racism n.pag.*). Gonzales and McCarthy state “that Afro-Cubans taken together make up close to half the island’s population should give black and mulatto representatives political clout with which to press for greater racial equality in business and government” (65). Currently however, “Afro-Cubans occupy 33 percent of the seats in the National Assembly of People’s Power, and nine of the 31 members of the Council of State” the most powerful political body (Gonzales and McCarthy 60). Furthermore, Afro-Cubans only make up two Ministers of the 40-member Council of Ministers, 2 out of 15 provincial First Secretaries of the Communist Party of Cuba, 0 of the 15 Presidents of the Provincial Assemblies of People’s Power, 0 of the 10 top generals or senior posts in the Revolutionary Armed Forces, and 5 of the 24 member Political Bureau of the Communist Party of Cuba (61). What will be the place of Afro-Cubans in a new future state?

II. Cuba Libre

After actively participating in the liberation struggles of the Ten Years Wars (1868-1878) and the War of Independence, Afro-Cubans anxiously awaited to take part in Cuba’s nation building process as the country transitioned into independence. Article 11 of the nation’s new constitution granted citizenship to African-born and Cuban-born residents giving equal rights to all Cubans. With the law on their side, Afro-Cubans believed a new social paradigm, in the

reflection of Jose Marti's vision of racial harmony, would be implemented during the first decade of transition. Cuba on the other hand, struggled with how to fulfill its promise of racial harmony as "many members of the white elite felt that the Afro-Cuban population represented an obstacle to the nation building process" (Ayorinde 41).

In 1898, at the end of the War of Independence, 32% of Cubans were black and the nation knew it had to address its "black problem" as it wrestled over competing ideologies on social integration (Helg 24). Points of view ranged from racial fraternity based on *Cubanidad*, a multiracial identity, to a homogenous society of Spanish descendants and new immigrants, to assimilation of Afro-Cubans through education and "citizenship preparedness." In addition, the United States was concerned that Cuba would appoint Afro-Cubans, recent slaves in their eyes, into key leadership positions risking instability and a potential fall into "chaos" similarly to Haiti (Thomas 227). Afro-Cubans sought to overcome these obstacles through three paths of integration: assimilation, military participation, and political organization. The success of these efforts would establish the social standing for the masses of Afro-Cubans until the 1959 Castro Revolution.

José Martí, the leader of the *Partido Revolucionario Cubano*, promoted racial democracy and fraternity. He "believed that a sense of *Cubanidad* was necessary both to overcome the colonial mentality and to sustain revolutionary efforts" (Ayorinde 33). Martí further "dismissed the concept of race, stressing the need to find commonality that would forge national unity" (Ayorinde 34). His vision became a central ideological thought at the launch of The War of Independence in 1895 (33). Martí assured many Afro-Cubans with his promise that "this will be a revolution in which all Cubans, regardless of color, will participate," indicating that after the

war, a new social order would be established (Sierra, “Independence 3” n.pag.). As a result, Afro-Cubans joined the war effort as a strategy to secure a better way of life.

Martí’s vision was shaped during his travel to the United States where he was exposed to U.S. style racism while gathering support for the independence movement within the Cuban émigré community (Kirk 106-107). He believed that the social divisions based on race, as seen in the U.S., created fragmentation instead of the social cohesion that he was seeking for an independent Cuba (Ayorinde 34). In the framework of Cuba’s colonial social hierarchy, Martí knew that he would have to “alleviate white Cubans’ fears regarding the ‘black problem’” to build support of his vision (Ayorinde 34). He rationalized with whites that Afro-Cubans would not seek revenge against slavery in appreciation of their freedom and the “gift of equality” (Ayorinde 34). He also reminded them that blacks had fought side by side with whites during the Ten Years War, demonstrating their loyalty to the nation. He shared his thoughts in his speech “With All and for the Good of All” in 1891:

Must we be afraid of the Cuba who has suffered most from being deprived of his freedom in the country where the blood he shed for it has made him love it too much to be a threat to it? Will we fear the Negro-the noble black man our black brother- who for the sake of the Cubans who died for him has granted eternal pardon to the Cubans who are still mistreating him? ...Others may fear him; I love him. (qtd. in Foner 259)

Motivated by Martí’s declaration that they would become equal participants in the new Cuba, thousands of Afro-Cubans volunteered for the liberation army and joined the war efforts. Afro-Caribbean Winston James observes, “Martí’s consistent denunciation of racism and the articulation of his vision of a liberated Cuba, free of bigotry had an enormously important effect on dispelling doubts that some Cubans of color had about the nationalist leadership” (243). Trust

in the leadership of the liberation army was significant given the conditions that Afro-Cubans faced prior to the war. Only 11% of Afro-Cubans of all ages could read or write, as access to schools was limited and secondary schools were privately owned and did not accept blacks as students. In the area of employment, most Afro-Cuban men worked as farmers or sugar cane harvesters or in specialized trades such as blacksmith, woodwork or masonry. Afro-Cuban women dominated as house servants, laundresses, seamstresses or worked in the fields, occupations that required minimum education. Although Afro-Cubans could own land, only 4% of land that produced sugar and 9% of land that produced tobacco was either owned or rented by Afro-Cubans, limiting their involvement in these profitable industries (Helg 25-27). Afro-Cubans began to believe that the fight against Spain would secure a better way of life for them just as fighting in the Ten Year's War emancipated them from slavery.

Afro-Cubans made up close to 70% of the armed forces during the Ten Year's War. This War started in 1868 when Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, a crillo landowner, issued the *Grito de Yara*, a call to arms. He also freed his slaves to form the *mambises* (volunteer revolutionary soldiers) (Ayorinde 30). He issued them "45 fowling pieces, 4 rifles and a few pistols and machetes," setting one of the first examples of a slave master arming his slaves to fight in a liberation effort (Sierra 2 n.pag.; Helg 4). Céspedes did not force his slaves to join the revolutionary army, but promised them emancipation in exchange for their efforts at the end of the War. The Spanish army, recognizing the need for additional volunteer man power also recruited slaves with a promise of emancipation at the end of the War. These acts led to the eventual abolition of slavery. The Ten Year's War ended in 1878 and its association with freedom remained in the memories of Afro-Cubans. When matched with Martí's expression of a new Cuba free of racism, many believed that this transformation was very possible.

According to Ayorinde, “the majority of the revolutionary troops and around 40% of the generals and colonels were black and mulatto” (38). Other Afro-Cubans, including women, supported the war efforts as nurses, laundress, cooks, and carriers of equipment from one battle location to the next. Afro-Cuban leaders like General Antonio Maceo, the “bronze titan” became national heroes for their outstanding contributions to the war efforts. Cuban scholar Helg states: “their participation became a sense of pride” that “enabled many blacks...to build expectations regarding their futures based on new notions of justice and equality” (67).

The excitement of Afro-Cubans became short lived however. Martí died on the battle field early on in 1895, leaving a void in leadership to champion the inclusion of blacks after the war (Pérez, *Cuba Between* 160). One scholar stated the “racism of the new republic feared the Black presence emerging from the battlefields in the War of Independence from Spain, with the predominately Black Cuban ‘*Ejército Mambí*’ (Mambí army) at the front” (Covarrubias 64). Martí’s vision of racial fraternity never had a chance to institutionalize, and after his death colonial ideas of race dominated popular perceptions.

In addition, the after-effect of the U.S. intervention in the War of Independence created an extra layer of complexity that further excluded the integration of Afro-Cubans from key positions within the new nation. According to Evan Thomas, U.S. President McKinley entered the Cuban conflict under great hesitation. Apparently, the President struggled with embracing the acquisition of Cuba as an asset: “Cuba was unready for independence... McKinley had little desire to make the island an American colony, but he feared that Cuba could become another Haiti, which had descended into chaos after slave revolts in the late eighteenth century” (227). To ease his concerns and those of many in the U.S. Congress, the United States forced Cuba to incorporate the Platt Amendment into its constitution. The Platt Amendment gave the United

States the right to “intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence, the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty; and validated all acts during its military occupancy” (Bevans n.pag.). This Amendment forced the Cuban government to constantly think through decisions regarding the management of internal affairs, particularly in regards to the inclusion of Afro-Cubans in the nation-building process. Thomas explains: “the Cuban’s revolution’s attempt to create a post racial society was at least a half century ahead of the consciousness of the average American soldier” (297).

The United State’s apprehension about Cuba’s ability to self-govern made the Cuban leadership more insecure about its black population and the perceived negative impact on its credibility as an emerging nation-state. Thus Cuba sought to implement strategies to “whiten” its population. Andrews observes that elites in Cuba were similar in thinking to many other Latin America leaders who were also “confronting the challenge of how to transform their ‘backward’ underdeveloped nations into modern ‘civilized’ republics” (118). Thomas states “the word ‘civilization’ was a loaded term to the Cubans trying to build a republic. It meant not just cleanliness and order but, they now realized, denying the darker races the power to govern” (394). Between 1902 and 1929, due to the government’s efforts to recruit Spaniards to the island, approximately 900,000 people arrived from Spain and the Canary Islands (Ayorinde 41).

Believing that lack of education and culture, not race, held Afro-Cubans back, higher educated and skilled Afro-Cubans pursued a path of assimilation (Ayorinde 42). Social organizations called *sociedades de color* were formed to instruct Afro-Cubans on how to alter cultural expressions and strive in the area of educational advancement. Aware of the Cuban government’s “crack-down” on African based activities such as carnival and African religious ceremonies, *sociedades de color* members also began to reject cultural expressions such as

drumming and the *rumba* or *son* dances that could be attributed to African traditions (Andrews 123). Instead they took up European instruments such as the piano, flute or trumpet. They even began dancing “the waltz, mazurka, and the polonaise rather than dances of African origin” (Helg 31).

Public education also became an important focus point during this period. Juan Gualberto Gómez emerged as leader of the *sociedades* and became founder of the *Directorio de las Sociedades de Color*. Gómez sought to “unite black societies and incorporate them into the struggle for Independence” and “orient the Afro-Cuban masses after abolition and to help them acquire education and adapt to the norms of white society” (Ayorinde 36-37). With a focus on education and “mutual aid” he organized a network of sixty-five *sociedades de colores* (Helg 39). Under the efforts of the *sociedades*, access to public schools by Afro-Cubans was increased in many municipalities, although some cities either refused to accept black students, or they charged an additional fee. Some even required the student to have a white patron (36-37). As a result, some *sociedades* opened private schools for black children to overcome these obstacles. The *sociedades* were not successful in engaging all Afro-Cubans in their educational campaign. Many rural Afro-Cuban families preferred the economic benefits of agricultural life over educational opportunities offered to their children (Helg 37-38). Furthermore, strategies implemented by the *sociedades* did not end racial segregation. Helg states: “conformity with the dominant culture, however, did not end racial segregation” (32). Only a few Afro-Cuban families, often mulatto in color, were able to socially advance due to access to educational opportunities, emigration abroad, and personal networks. The majority remained marginalized from social and economic opportunities.

After the war ended, Afro-Cubans began to realize that the Cuban government, led by the Liberal Party, was not taking steps to include them in the nation-building process. Still under control of the United States, Afro-Cubans were suffering. Immediately after the U.S. military arrived to fight the Spanish, General Valeriano Wyler instituted a process of “reconcentration” whereby he forcibly moved thousands of women, children, and the elderly from rural areas into towns in a form of an encampment to cut off food and information to the rebel army (Helg 85). Heavily populated in dense urban areas, between 170,000 to 300,000, people died of disease and malnourishment (Helg 85; Thomas 161). This policy was eventually overturned by the time the war ended, however the loss of life, harvestable land, and sense of community had been destroyed, forcing many Afro-Cuban families to start over from nothing (Helg 89).

Soldiers returning home were also devastated to see the conditions that their families had to endure and the limited economic opportunities available after their military service. Life conditions continued to decrease during this period for Afro-Cubans. Esteban Montejo, a former slave stated “the negroes found themselves out in the streets- men as brave as lions, out in the streets” (Pérez, *Cuba Between* 161). Although many Afro-Cubans built successful military positions during the war, the transition into civilian society was not as easy, given continued educational gaps. Seventy-two percent of Afro-Cubans could not read nor write and literacy was a requirement to be eligible to vote (*Cuba Between* 160-161). With only 28% of Afro-Cubans meeting the new federal suffrage requirements, they did not represent a large electorate and thus, were overlooked for many available public administration jobs that became stepping stones into the emerging middle class (*Cuba Between* 163). In the 1907 Census, the two public service fields listed included teaching and the armed forces. Afro-Cubans were significantly underrepresented; 440 out of 5,524 teachers and 1,718 out of 6,520 soldiers and policemen (*Cuba Between* 161).

Afro-Cuban war veterans were most disheartened over the growing disenfranchisement of blacks because they strongly believed that their military participation had secured a “better future for themselves” (Helg 78). Through the black press and direct interaction with newly elected officials of the Liberal Party, they began to ask for their “fair share” of participation in the nation-building process. They were told to “wait until the Americans leave”. This was an unacceptable response. Afro-Cubans “had been promised political equality and social justice. They received neither” (Pérez, *Cuba Between* 160). A group of Afro-Cuban veterans thus pursued a third path of integration which Serviat calls the creation of “the ‘hard’ line,” to make “their demands forcefully and even with violence, if necessary” (78).

Under the leadership of Evaristo Estenoz and Pedro Ivonnet, veterans of the Liberation Army from the War of Independence, thousands of Afro-Cubans began to self-organize to demand political participation in the new republic. They formed the *Partido Independiente de Color* (PIC) in 1908 with the primary goals to promote “Afro-Cuban integration and to end discrimination” (Ayorinde 43). Estenoz claimed, “freedom is not asked or begged for, it is won; and rights are not handed out anywhere, rights are fought for and belong to all. If we go on asking for our rights, we will die waiting because we will have lost them” (qtd. in Robaina, “20th Century” 96). PIC also advocated for equal access to “positions in public service and the diplomatic corps, and to end the ban on ‘non-white’ immigration” (Helg 147). In addition to Afro-Cuban specific issues, PIC also advocated for “improving the conditions of popular classes regardless of race” in areas such as free public education, abolition of the death penalty, and establishment of the eight hour work day (Helg 147). Philosophically, they promoted “pride in being black and Cuban” and “they wanted Afro-Cubans to be recognized as a full component of

Cuban nationality. Cuba was not to only be ‘*for whites and blacks,*’ as Marti had written; it was to *be black and white as well*” (Helg 151).

By 1910, PIC had approximately 9,000 to 15,000 members and had “146 registered municipal committees” (Helg 156). The majority of their constituents were in Oriente, a province with 43% of Afro-Cubans, the highest in the country (Helg 156). PIC also became one of the few organizations to represent blacks and mulattoes, representing a shift in the old social hierarchy that had created clear borders of class distinction between the two. Supporters appreciated PIC’s campaign to vocalize their own feelings of frustration and actively remind the Cuban nation that “Afro-Cuban expectations dating back to the independence wars had not been silenced by the vague equality guaranteed by the constitution” (Helg 159).

PIC leaders believed that their efforts, while challenging the status quo, would be protected by the new constitution ensuring equal rights (Helg 143). Legal rights did not matter to the Liberal political party who saw the formation of PIC as a threat to their “traditional hold over the Afro-Cuban electorate” and began to find ways to disband the organization (Pérez, *Cuba Between* 167). Martín Morúa Delgado, a mulatto and president of the senate, became a vocal opponent of PIC. He believed “everything had to be obtained as members of the Cuban society and not as individuals of one or the other race” (Helg 41). Consequently, he introduced legislation to make political parties based on a single race illegal, which if passed, would terminate PIC’s efforts as a formal organization. Counter to Estenoz and Ivonnet’s usage of the constitution to support their efforts, Morúa argued that “since the constitution gave Cuban citizenship to African born and guaranteed equality to all Cubans, racial privileges had disappeared from Cuba” and thus advocating for advantages based on race was now illegal (165). He fundamentally disagreed with black consciousness strategies. Helg states: “In fact, as

Morúa had sensed, the defense of blacks' freedom of thought, though guaranteed by the constitution, carried little weight against the tradition of labeling separate Afro-Cuban initiatives as racist and a threat to Cuba" (169). In the coming time period, Morúa's words would ring true as the Liberal party escalated its efforts to annihilate the PIC once and for all. Helg observes: "The Cuban government thereby verified that, if necessary, it could successfully use racism to mobilize whites against blacks who threatened the social status quo" (162).

With help from the local media, a public smear campaign against the PIC was spread throughout the country, recalling negative images from colonial times including the "scarecrows of the black rapist" and "black *brujo*" who allegedly kidnapped white children for African religious ceremonial rituals (Ayorinde 48; Helg 162). Rumors of black conspiracy revolts also spread; creating fear that the PIC was in the process of organizing black armed rebellions to overthrow whites. In response, the government began arming local governments, particularly in the Oriente province, so that they could create volunteer militia to protect their communities.

Supported by the public who wanted the government to respond to the PIC's perceived threat to society, in April of 1910, the government ordered the "mass imprisonment" of twenty-four PIC leadership including Estenoz and Ivonnet. The PIC was charged with "illicit association and conspiracy to foment an armed revolution" by the Attorney General, who argued that the PIC had planned to run a slate of candidates against the "legally elected government," the Liberal party, "in order to impose a black dictatorship" (Helg 172). A few days later, fifty-nine PIC members had been arrested from across the country and by December 1910, more than 220 people were arrested, not all of whom were PIC members (172). Even Afro-Cubans who indirectly supported PIC were harassed and according to Helg: "most Afro-Cuban

associations became objects of suspicion and had to prove their conformity to the social status quo either by silence or by the public condemnation of the PIC” (185).

Two years later in May 1912, freed from prison, the PIC leadership sought to run a slate of candidates for the upcoming November election and was waiting for final approval from the Cuban government. Frustrated, they decided to emulate other organizations such as the *Consejo Nacional de Veteranos* and stage an armed protest to gain attention (Helg 194). Word of their efforts quickly spread and “the government rallied immediate cross-party support for a policy of merciless repression” (194). The U.S. government, concerned about potential threat to U.S. property and investments, dispatched Marines (194). Although armed with little more than work tools during a staged protest, the public hype against PIC rapidly escalated, leading to the “bloodiest violence” on June 5th in Oriente. Thousands of Afro-Cubans, including Evaristo Estenoz and Pedro Ivonnet were killed by the Cuban army and volunteer militias (Helg 194). Helg states:

The massacre achieved what Morua’s amendment and the trial against the party in 1910 had been unable to do: it put a definitive end to the Partido Independiente de Color and made clear to all Afro-Cubans that any further attempt to challenge the social order would be crushed with bloodshed. (194)

Ramiro Cuesta, a black representative testifying before his colleagues, proved Helg’s point when instead of advocating for a decrease in disparities between blacks in white, he minimized the PIC movement as a “group of dissatisfied” (206). He also said “Afro-Cubans needed to forget their ‘small distress’ and to unite with whites to save Cuba” (206).

Afro-Cuban political organization would be suppressed until the 1930’s where the rise of the Communist Party included the integration of blacks, even within leadership positions

(Covarrubias 65). The strategies of the first decade after the War tested the Cuban nation's readiness to accept Afro-Cubans as citizens beyond simple words written in the constitution. Based on the minimal change in social conditions, along with the brutal force used by the government to maintain the status-quo, it appears that the nation failed, marginalizing a whole community of citizens who significantly contributed to the founding of the nation. Although unable to advance at this time, Afro-Cubans defined their civil rights agenda focusing on education for the masses, political representation, and participation in public administration positions. These desires would later be reflected in Fidel Castro's revolutionary campaign, creating another opening for black social integration.

III. Castro, Race and Revolution

Fidel Castro seized power at a moment in time when internal social reform and external geopolitical conflicts provided the right alignment to support his vision of a new Cuba adapted from José Martí's vision of a color-blind society. Internally, Cuba had recently experienced the rise of organized labor led by the Communist Party. The Communist Party had taken an unprecedented stance in support of the fight for equal worker's rights and access to employment free of discrimination. The nation had also undergone a leadership transition from the U.S. control of day to day affairs, to the rise of General Fulgencio Batista, whose authoritative rule was economically detrimental to the Cuban people. Externally, the increasing Cold War tensions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, also presented Cuba with new options in regards to trading partners. Since the Soviet Union's political model was more in line with Castro's political views and vision for his nation, Castro looked to align Cuba with the Soviet Union. Immediately after taking power, Castro moved swiftly, allowing his political agenda to be shaped through a balance of pushing forward his ideas yet also placating others in order to build strategic alliances

to further his platform. Fidel's first action, the removal of Batista from power, demonstrated his desire to distance himself from the West, particularly the United States. Afro-Cuban cultural scholar Christine Ayorinde states; "Fidel Castro has linked the Cuba of 1959 with that of 1868 and claimed to have vindicated history by fulfilling the mission of the heroes in Cuba's struggle for independence" (87). He also created a link with the Island's remaining Communist Party members who had galvanized the labor unions in the 30's and 40's, in order to align his movement with the working class and the poor and in turn, garner the support of the masses. Through his efforts, not withstanding his critics, Afro-Cubans were exposed to new opportunities for a better quality of life through education, elimination of discrimination in the workplace, and the desegregation of public spaces.

Politically castrated after the 1913 PIC massacre, Afro-Cubans found a new vehicle for social reform during the rise of organized labor during the "Second Period" from 1933-1959. The repeal of the Platt Amendment in 1934 and the withdrawal of the United States' military and provisional government allowed Cuba to manage its own day to day affairs for the first time since gaining independence. To many within the island nation, this transition of power reminded them of the hopes and dreams held at the turn of the 20th century when the War of Independence was won. Cuban scholar Alejandro de la Fuente states that "racism became identified with the United States' continuing influence in Cuban affairs" and "to fight imperialist domination effectively; racism had to be obliterated from the island" (*A Nation*, 188). At the same time, many elites believed that the racial question had been settled with the establishment of the 1901 Constitution that defined citizenship and suffrage (Fuente, *A Nation* 12). Though Afro-Cubans strongly disagreed that the racial issues had been resolved, the Morúa Law prevented them from legally organizing a political party or any political organization whose advocacy agenda was

based on one race, weakening their ability to gather a collective opposition voice. Therefore they were unable to champion the creation of legislation to enforce the provisions on racial equality present in the Constitution. Consequently, quality of life for Afro-Cubans had remained stagnant between 1913 until now. Once again, the discussion of race emerged as an unresolved social problem that sparked many emotional debates.

The trade union movement, led by the Communist controlled NOC and the *Partido Comunista de Cuba* (PCC, Cuban Communist Party), had become well established by the 1930's and provided a strong, alternative voice in the debates over race (Fuente, *A Nation* 189). Not beholden to either historical political party, the Liberals and the Conservatives, the unions' presence was a threat to traditional Cuban social hierarchy and there were real fears of an impending "social revolution" (Fuente, *A Nation* 175). Fuente states that the unions "reduce (d) the 'black problem' to a question of mal-distribution of resources, but in the process they facilitated other forms of cross-racial social action that could potentially transform Cuban society" (*A Nation* 189). The unions pointed to the Cuban government's lack of political will in moving the nation closer to Jose Marti's vision of a democratic racial society and began to champion an anti-discrimination strategy that was inclusive to all laborers (Fuente, *A Nation* 16). According to Ayorinde, "the growing labor movement attracted Afro-Cuban membership and gave those who had been disposed after the wars for independence another stake in the future of the country" (67). The unions "denounced the 'economic discrimination' against blacks' access to employment, the 'political discrimination' that prevented blacks from organizing, and the 'social discrimination' practiced in parks, theaters, and other public spaces" (Fuente, *A Nation* 192). To lead by example, they addressed racial discrimination within their own ranks and "Afro-Cubans militants were promoted to positions of leadership and were later elected to

various posts” (*A Nation* 193). The linkages between the trade unions and Afro-Cubans became so strong during the 1930’s that the PCC was seen as a “Negro Party” and non-union residents attacked its racial harmony campaigns as a “threat to national unity and stability” (*A Nation* 193).

To further advance their position, the unions negotiated cross sector support to successfully have anti-discrimination language included in the 1940 Constitution. Fuente states, “never before had racism been debated so openly at the level of the national government” (*A Nation* 220). Roberto Nodal emphasizes that Article 20 of the new 1940 Constitution states “it is declared illegal and punishable to practice any kind of discrimination owing to sex, race, color or class or other” (qtd. in Fuente, *A Nation*, 260). Unfortunately, the government again did not pass accompanying legislation that either defined discrimination or stipulated the punishments for those found guilty of discriminating. For more than ten years, the Communist Party along with other elected officials attempted to pass legislation. However, political instability interrupted efforts. One particularly disruptive event was Batista’s second military coup in 1952 (Ayorinde 68; Fuente, *A Nation* 244-245). Having pursued their efforts since the start of the 1930’s Fuente writes, “in a sense, the Communists had been successful. After more than ten years of systemic propaganda and mobilization, even their enemies recognized that some government action was required” (*A Nation* 241). The nation now just needed a strong champion to exert political will and transform the nation and move it beyond its colonial social practices.

In the shadow of the nation’s debates over race, Sergeant Fulgencio Batista rose to power through military coups in 1933 and 1952 in addition to being elected President in 1940 and 1954 (Sierra, “Batista” n.pag.). The 1930’s were a time of great political instability. For the first time, Cubans united to force the resignation of a President. Under pressure, President Machado resigned in 1933. The nation erupted in violence in the aftermath of his departure, when many

remaining Machado supporters were assassinated and affiliated businesses were burned to the ground (Argote-Freyre 51). Still operating under the Platt Amendment, the U.S. intervened and placed a provisional president, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, in power. Representing the grievances of enlisted men, Batista became active in “rebel cells” that were organizing to seize power during this period of chaos. At the time, the Cuban Army was greatly divided between officers tied closely to the Machado Administration and the enlisted men, including sergeants. Argote-Freyre, a Batista biographer, states that officers were “primarily from upper and middle class families” and they were “frequently nominated and promoted because of their political connections” (25). He counters this with the experiences of enlisted men who he states “often lived in shabby conditions in barracks that were left over from the U.S. occupation at the end of the nineteenth century” and that they were “assigned to officers as domestic staff and made to perform household duties...to instill a sense of inferiority in the enlisted men” (25). On September 4, 1933, as Machado left office into exile, Batista in collaboration with a student rebel group issued a decree in all of the nation’s newspapers announcing the *Agrupación Revolucionaria*, a “provisional revolutionary government,” as the new government of Cuba (Argote-Freyre 72). Under the new regime, Batista was promoted to colonel of the Army and immediately sought to re-organize the institution to address the grievances of the enlisted men. He ousted standing military officers and replaced them with younger, poorer and many Afro-Cuban soldiers (Fuente, *A Nation* 198).

Several months after the coup, Batista later forced President Grau, an initial supporter of the 1933 Revolution, out of office. Batista then commanded political authority through his new position as Chief of the Army. Batista garnered the recognition from the U.S. as the central leader of Cuba, even though he was not president, promising the U.S. ambassador “support of a

government more amenable to U.S. interest” (Fuente, *A Nation* 207). Over this decade, he put into power a series of “puppet” presidents while he continued to amass power behind the scenes with control of the military who did not hesitate to “strong arm” Batista’s agenda among politicians, business owners, and the public alike. Presidents Mendieta, Barnet, Gómez and Brú were installed and later removed by Batista between the period of 1934 and 1940. As the decade came to a close, Batista became more open about his own ambitions to run for president and widen his sphere of influence. Argote-Freyre states that “in the campaigns of 1939 and 1940...Batista appealed to friends and foes alike in his efforts to build a winning political coalition” (252). He reached out to the Communist labor parties, the PCC and the NOC, when other candidates were reluctant to do so and to the displeasure of the United States (Fuente, *A Nation* 208; Argote-Freyre 255). Batista also launched a mass literacy campaign which Argote-Freyre states “was originally envisioned as a campaign against illiteracy...that evolved into a comprehensive educational and health program that reached into virtually every abandoned corner of rural Cuba” (215). By the end of 1936, “more than seven hundred new schools were in operation serving thirty-five thousand elementary school children and twenty thousand adults” (218). Argote-Freyre observes that “the Batista of this period can best be described as a corporatist dictator with a populist agenda...because he espoused a central role for government in organizing, supervising, and mediating competing interests within society” (214). In 1938, in preparation for his candidacy in the 1940 presidential election, Batista drafted a social plan called the “Plan Triennial” that focused on “worker’s protection, land distribution, and massive education in rural areas” (Fuente, *A Nation* 208). Argote-Freyre called the “Plan Triennial”, “a document of youthful idealism” that contained Batista’s “fondest dreams for Cuba” (247-248). A man of humble roots as the son of sugar-cane workers, Batista indirectly

empowered many Afro-Cubans through his realignment of the military, his labor reform efforts to secure the Communist support, and his rural education program.

In 1940, Batista was elected as president, although the election was plagued by accusations that the military intimidated voters (Argote-Freyre 271). According to Argote-Freyre, “although the elections were tainted, it was the only time in his career that he could claim victory in a democratic election that was broadly recognized as legitimate” (274). In efforts to run for president, Batista had resigned as Chief of the Army. Upon his departure he stated “today I leave the ranks of an institution in which I have spent a great part, and the best part, of my youth. I leave the armed forces that gave days of unforgettable glory and tranquility to the Republic” (qtd. in Argote-Freyer 267). As a civilian, Batista ran into conflict in managing control of Congress and had to face off with his political foe, former president Grau in the election. During Batista’s presidency, Grau was able to garner greater political support and defeated him in the 1944 election (Sierra, “*Batista*”*n.pag.*). Batista left Cuba and entered exile in Florida. Mario Llerena summarizes that between 1944 and 1952 members of the *Auténtico*, Grau’s political party, became dissatisfied with growing corruption and scandal, not uncommon during this era, and splintered off into another political part called the *Ortodoxo* (18). A tense campaign battle ensued between the *Auténtico* and *Ortodoxo* parties through which Batista returned thinking that he may have another opportunity at winning the presidency. Underestimating the lack of support of the Cuban people, Batista tailed last in the polls and fearing defeat, conspired with fellow members of the army to plan a coup (18).

In 1952, Batista established himself again as the national leader through another military coup. He sustained the support of many Afro-Cubans by immediately appointing two Afro-Cubans to his cabinet and “several others to the consulate council, an advisory board

created by Batista to replace Congress” (Fuente, *A Nation* 244). Afro-Cubans saw this as an “opportunity to exercise some influence in government decisions, channel some patronage to their followers, and support Afro-Cuban clubs, which represented their main institutional base” (*A Nation* 244). Batista also sought to address racial tension by giving money to several Afro-Cuban social clubs to renovate their facilities to be as nice as private white social clubs (*A Nation*, 245). The intensity of the Cold War and Batista’s reliance on U.S. support to maintain power caused him to withdraw his support from the Communist Party, as well as distance himself from the labor movement. He also used this as an opportunity to “discredit any opposition to his regime as Communist inspired” and began to use more oppressive means to nullify perceived internal threats. (Fuente, *A Nation* 250). According to Jerry Sierra in his article “Batista,” “opposition was swiftly and violently crushed, and many began to fear the new government” (n.pag.). During this tenure, Batista also shifted his attention away from his social reform programs and began to just concentrate on the expansion of the tourist and gambling industries owned primarily by U.S. investors and from which very few Cubans benefited (Sierra, “Batista” n.pag.). As revenues from the booming casino industry went up, the quality of life for the majority of Cubans went down.

Frustrated by his leadership, diverse factions of Cuban society began organizing to force his removal from power. Fidel Castro and the 26th of July Movement was one group among several including university students. Initially, Batista resistance groups were comprised of mostly white, highly educated members of the middle and upper classes. Historical literature gives little to no account of Afro-Cuban participation in the anti-Batista movement. According to Fuente, many scholars and historians have attributed the lack of participation of Afro-Cubans to the perception that many more Afro-Cubans supported Batista than was really the case (*A Nation*

250-251). Fuente also notes that many scholars believe that racial equality was not a priority of the resistance movement (*A Nation* 252). As an example, they point to “Castro’s silence” on the issue of race in many of his earlier speeches such as “History Will Absolve Me” (*A Nation* 252). However, in a 1955 interview, Castro states, “our purpose is to continue his (Martí’s) work, because we are loyal to his ideas... because we are ready to turn into a reality the Cuba that he dreamed about” (qtd. in Fuente, *A Nation* 232). From this statement his desire for improved race relations may be inferred. In 1957, after a failed attempt in 1953, Fidel Castro and the leaders of the 26th of July Movement reached out to the labor unions to join their struggle, significantly increasing participation by Afro-Cubans (Fuente, *A Nation* 251). By promoting blacks to leadership positions within the revolutionary army, Castro demonstrated that he embraced the notion of racial integration. This treatment once again gave hope to Afro-Cubans and led them to believe that they were part of a political movement that would bring about social and economic change.

On January 1, 1959, Fidel Castro and the revolutionary army successfully entered the streets of Havana. On January 2, Castro declared “this time...the revolution is for real” (Fuente, *A Nation* 259). Although Castro framed his vision within the social-political philosophy of José Martí, some critics have stated that Castro lacked an implementation plan. The evolutionary process of the revolution, framed as socialist in 1961 and organized as communist in 1965, contributes to this sense among scholars and critics. Others believe that many of his “successes” were gained through the groundwork of others. George H. Read observes, “almost never does Castro identify the historical or contemporary sources or sanctions for his beliefs, values, attitudes, and goals. They are always presented as the thoughts of Fidel Castro” although many “come from the early work of Karl Marx” (135). As a young leader, Castro may have been naïve

about implementation of his vision however; he was swift to respond to public pressure that placed the question of race at the top of his agenda. The Communist Party published on the front page of its "*Noticias de Hoy*" newspaper the "most immediate tasks" that the new administration needed to do to create an "effective policy" against race discrimination (Fuente, *A Nation* 261). Fuente affirms that "race, segregation, and inequality were issues that revolutionary authorities could not ignore" and that "these issues were brought to public attention by various social and political actors who perceived the revolution as an unprecedented opportunity to redress previous inequities" (*A Nation*, 261- 263). Castro responded on March 22, 1959 in his "Proclamation Against Racism" speech to the people he stated:

Why do we not tackle this problem radically and with love, not in a spirit of division and hate? Why not educate and destroy the prejudice of centuries, the prejudice handed down to us from such an odious institution as slavery? ... Why does anyone need to be alarmed and concerned when justice is sought through persuasion and reason, not force? It is a struggle we must all wage together, all Cubans, against all prejudice... I am aware that I help the revolution when I try to unite Cubans and I can only unite Cubans on the basis of the disappearance of all injustice and signs of resentment.... We have to uproot the last colonial vestiges, conscious of making that phrase of Marti a reality: he said it before, we have to repeat it now, that a Cuban is more than white, more than black, and we are Cuban (qtd. in Robaina, "20th Century" 103).

Within the first hundred days of his regime, Castro immediately sought to eliminate public forms of racial discrimination by presenting consequences to people who discriminated in the workplace and in schools. He also desegregated public spaces. His strategy closely reflected the earlier efforts of the local Communists parties. Castro however was taken aback by the

visceral response of white Cubans. Alejandro de la Fuente observes that Castro's speech, "mounted an unprecedented attack on one of the central tenets of Cuba's complex system of race relations: the separation of public and private spaces" (*A Nation*, 265). Carlos Moore, a strong Afro-Cuban critic of Castro, even states:

Castro was the first to be taken aback by the vigor of the white uproar that followed his statement. At no point had he suggested, as it was not claimed, that Blacks should wield political power in Cuba. The racial question was to him an issue of humanitarian ethics, civil rights, and national goodwill. (22)

Instead of enacting legislation for an anti-discrimination policy, Castro increased the power of the state in managing the decision making of all public sectors of society (265). In his "Proclamation Against Racism" speech, Castro states "there should be no need to draft a law fixing a right inherent to human beings as members of society. Neither should it be necessary to legislate an absolute prejudice..." (Moore 20). Cuban cultural scholar Christine Ayorinde states that while "no specific legislation was issued to combat racism" Castro "did away with privileges and ended discrimination based on race and sex" (91). Recognizing that government action alone would not erase prejudicial thoughts and behaviors overnight and fearing continued social unrest from conservative whites, Castro publically stated that his policies only impacted public spaces and left private matters alone (Fuente, *A Nation* 265-266).

Desegregation of public spaces was a starting point in Castro's strategy because as Fuente states, "it turned the abstract goals of racial equality and national integration into concrete, tangible political acts with immediate results" (*A Nation* 268). He implemented incremental action steps in the desegregation of public spaces after many violent clashes between whites and blacks who sought integration into previous "white only" areas. In desegregating the beaches for

instance, Castro initiated a “sand and sea” only policy so that private clubs along the seashore did not have to open their doors to black beachgoers (Fuente, *A Nation* 268-289). Although incremental, Castro believed that segregation was the result of public ignorance. According to Moore, Castro said “there is exclusivism in recreational centers. Why? Because Negroes and Whites have been educated separately” (20). In public parks, especially in the city of Havana, Castro had the parks demolished and rebuilt with a new design that no longer encompassed private or separated sections (Fuente, *A Nation* 269). He also enriched recreational spaces in public schools because “white and black children must be together so that later the white man and the black man will be in a position to earn their living together at the same workplace” (qtd. in Moore 20).

Castro’s focus on education achieved multiple outcomes by not only increasing the literacy level and academic achievement among Cuban youth, but also by decreasing racial tension through cross-racial interaction among teachers and educators. Education critic Gerald H. Read states that under Castro, “the ultimate goal of the educational establishment is to remold and transform every individual under its control in the image of an ideal...” (131). Refined by the mid-1960’s, Read identifies the four main goals of Castro’s educational strategy as: 1) universal education from nursery school through university; 2) orient students in a Marxist doctrine; 3) combine education with technological principles, productive work, and research; 4) integrate working classes into the educational system (132). In 1961, Castro launched a comprehensive anti-illiteracy campaign that evolved with specific strategies for engaging older Cubans with “meager knowledge” (Read 141). “More than 15 million textbooks, technical pamphlets, workbooks, magazines, and newspapers” were printed by the Ministry of Education and distributed (141). To implement the massive literacy campaign of 1961 “Cubans of different

social backgrounds” were brought together and 30% of the volunteer teachers were black or mulatto (Fuente, *A Nation* 275). The same year, Castro nationalized private schools, eliminating “one of the most enduring pillars of racism in Cuban society” (275). Roberto Jorquera observes, “on the eve of the revolution, roughly 15 percent of Cuban primary school children and 30 percent of high school students attended private schools which were primarily white. The underfunded and poorly staffed public education sector further enforced the so called ‘colour-class system’” (3). Read acknowledges Castro’s education reform efforts:

This indeed is a huge undertaking for a newly established revolutionary government and involves a great investment of human resources and money for a nation that is still industrially underdeveloped, but it is a necessary investment if a successful and widespread transformation to a socialist state is to be achieved. (132)

Castro further envisioned education as a tool to reshape society. In analyzing the Cuban education system, Read states “the ‘New Cuban Man’ which this pedagogy is to create must be one ‘for whom work is enjoyment and not obligation, and for whom study is a permanent process. A man of culture, science and technology’ ”(137). The Castro regime thus launched several media campaigns to promote his vision. In one campaign, he used a narrative of an Afro-Cuban child who spoke of his ideal future that included access to milk, an education to get a good job, and a house with proper working amenities (Fuente, *A Nation* 271). Fuente’s analysis states:

Instead of aggressively asserting their right to an equal place in society, Afro-Cubans were asking for such basic things as food, education, and work. In turn, racial ideas would ‘perhaps’ begin to change when a new generation of Cubans, educated in a climate

of racial harmony, acquired the knowledge needed to understand that skin color did not define humanity. (*A Nation* 271)

The most radical social reform action administered by Castro was the elimination of discrimination in the workplace. Fuente notes that “state action was required to alter significantly the racial composition of the occupational structure, in order to confront embedded interests, habits, and hiring practices that had contributed to maintaining color lines in jobs” (*A Nation* 274). Castro’s workplace strategy became congruent with the Fundamental Law established in February of 1950. This law enabled the government to “nationalize” property that could be considered “public utility or social or national interest and that expropriation is necessary” (Sánchez 403). Castro’s first application of this law was the nationalization of the Havana Biltmore Yacht and Country Club due to its “exclusivity of the elite and its intimate links with foreign, mainly American, investors” (Fuente, *A Nation* 271-272). Legal analyst Ignacio E. Sánchez states that “fundamental property rights once safe guarded under the Constitution were the first to be illegally modified by the Castro regime to punish political foes and to reward friends of the revolution” (402). Fuente observes that “by 1963, 70 percent of agriculture, 95 percent of industry and transportation, 75 percent of retail trade, and 100 percent of banking activities had come under the direct control of the state. The State had become Cuba’s main employer” and thus able to greatly monitor the hiring practices of new workers in effect eliminating racial discrimination immediately (*A Nation* 275).

Additionally, Castro implemented the Organic Law of the Ministry of Labor in 1960 which regulated the hiring of new employees through a national registry system. According to Fuente, “neither unions nor employers could hire workers who had not been selected by the ministry out of the national register” (*A Nation* 274). While this system was created to reduce

employment selection based on race, Afro-Cuban journalist Roger Fumero observed, “since family income and need were weighed when filling vacancies, the new system was not, in fact, color-blind. It tended to benefit the poorest, among who blacks were overrepresented” (qtd. in Fuente, *A Nation* 274). Ayorinde observes that “a feeling of social equality was created by the redistribution of wealth and improved living standards for the formerly un-or underemployed” (91). In 1962, a national survey supports Ayorinde’s observation by stating that 70 percent of workers had a favorable attitude toward the revolution and 80 percent of black workers approved (Fuente, *A Nation* 276).

The fervor of Castro’s anti-racism pursuit ended shortly after declaring his revolution as a socialist movement in 1961. He believed that his efforts, which revolved around the theory that racism was the result of class distinction, had eliminated racism by redistributing resources and eliminating Cuba’s class structure. Ayorinde affirms, “after the revolution, the liberation of the oppressed classes represented by Afro-Cubans and other groups such as peasants, became the driving force behind efforts to eliminate the class structure” (90). Some Afro-Cubans agreed with Castro. Cecile, an Afro-Cuban survey respondent in a 2005 interview about seniors’ perspective on the revolution, declared, “racism is old and deeply rooted in our culture. Racial prejudice reflects the limitation of some individuals, but not that of our socialist society. Racism is not Fidel’s policy” (Strug 19). Lourdes Casal describes Castro’s position as being based on a Marxist view that “asserts the primacy of the class struggle and sees the elimination of racism as the inevitable and almost immediate consequence of the implantation of socialism” (qtd in Nodal, 262). Through declaring the elimination of public acts of racism, Castro fostered an environment of a “growing public silence on the issue” that made on-going discussions about racism “taboo” (Fuente, *A Nation* 279).

Castro's pursuit of other state priorities after 1962 signified that he believed the state had done its share in addressing the grievances of Afro-Cubans, particularly in comparison to the leaders who preceded him. According to David Strug who conducted a survey of older Cuban adults in 2005 prior to the 1959 revolution:

Forty-five percent of Cubans had never been to school and half of them were malnourished to some degree. Most dwellings lacked running water, and most rural homes had dirt floors... Racism, police brutality, political corruption and foreign control of key sectors of the economy led to frustration among large segments of the population.

(n.pag.)

Under the socialist model, Castro delivered his promise of a new nation by improving conditions for all, through which Afro-Cubans greatly benefited. Afro-Cubans had received an increased quality of life as no other Cuban leader had given before. By the 1980's measurable improvements among Afro-Cubans were noted. The massive literacy campaign of 1961 had eliminated illiteracy across the island. Disparities in educational attainment, even at the university level between blacks and whites, had also been removed. According to historian George Reid Andrews, by 1981, "a total of 11 percent of blacks and 10 percent of mulattoes were high school graduates, compared with 10 percent of whites (163). In addition 3.5 percent of blacks and 3.2 percent of mulattoes held university degrees compared with 4.4 percent of whites" (163). Blacks and mulattoes employed in the professions were identical to whites; 22 percent and 23 percent respectively (163-164). Thirty-one percent of Afro-Cubans were employed in the medical sector (Fuente, *A Nation* 309).

The sustainability of Castro's success would soon be challenged in the next phase of Cuban development with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the withdrawal of payments by

this main trading partner. In 1970, Gerald Read warned “the utopian and commendable dreams of Fidel Castro, which flow from his belief in the possibility of a better life for all Cubans, are in danger of being reduced to purely economic strategies” (142). In a moment when the state can no longer afford to provide for its people equally, how would decisions be made to distribute basic needs and what impact, if any, would this have on the Afro-Cuban population who had just recently made strides as beneficiaries of full Cuban rights?

IV. Soviet Withdrawal and Its Impact on Race Relations

Fidel Castro was dependent upon direct financial investment from the Soviet Union to successfully implement his social changes that significantly reduced institutional racial discrimination in the areas of employment, education, healthcare and housing. In a 1984 interview with Congressman Mervyn Dymally and Dr. Jeffrey M. Elliot, Castro stated, “eighty-five percent of our trade is within the socialist community and this is what gives us a solid foundation for the sustained growth of our economy” (179). When asked if Cuba traded its former dependency on the U.S. for the Soviet Union Castro responded, “...we consider ourselves the most privileged nation of all, because in a world where everyone depends on the United States, there is one country – Cuba-that does not” (179). Castro further argued, “and criticizing us for our dependency on the Soviets is like telling us, ‘look, we sank the ship – and you used a lifesaver!’ ” (179). Through this relationship, Castro was able to provide equal social and economic opportunities to all Cubans that enabled Afro-Cubans to achieve a living standard comparable to whites. For the first time, a new generation of Cubans was born in a society that no longer supported the social hierarchies of the colonial past. The dream of José Martí finally appeared to have been achieved.

World events soon changed Castro’s relationship with the Soviet Union. According to scholar Louis A. Pérez, Jr., the Soviet Union shifted its ideology in the late 1980’s and early

1990's to "progressively disavowed Marxist-Leninist tenets, dismantled socialist structures, and arrived at increasingly cordial accommodations with the United States" (*Cuba's Special Period* n.pag.). These changes had a profound effect on the eastern bloc nations that formed the Soviet Union. Through social up-risings, they began to seek independence from Russia and seek their own paths of economic development. Pérez states, "one by one, countries of the socialist bloc broke with the Soviet Union and eventually socialism itself foundered and fell among the Warsaw Pact nations" (*Cuba's Special Period* n.pag.). By 1991, communism had collapsed in Europe leading to the dismantling of the USSR. Pérez further states "the collapse of the Soviet Union led immediately to retrenchment of existing international commitments and a moratorium on new agreements. ... the Russians turned inward, wholly absorbed with severe economic dislocation and deepening political instability" (*Cuba's Special Period* n.pag.). The Soviet Union could no longer support Cuba neither as a military post nor as an economic trading partner. The devastation on the Cuban nation was immediate. Pérez explains that the loss of trading partners from the former socialist bloc and the suspension of economic relations "produced disarray and distress and plunged Cuba into a crisis that threatened to undo thirty-five years of social gains and economic achievements" (*Cuba's Special Period* n.pag.).

Since Cuba and the Soviet Union formalized relations in 1962, the value of the trade relation grew to an annual rate of \$8.7 billion in 1989 (Pérez, *Cuba's Special Period* n.pag.). After the Soviet's collapse, the value decreased to \$4.5 billion in 1991 and to \$750 million in 1993 (*Cuba's Special Period* n.pag.). According to Pérez specific areas impacted by the withdrawal of Soviet support were:

Oil imports decreased by almost 90 percent, from 12 million tons in 1989 to 1.8 million tons in 1992. Shipments of capital grade consumer goods, grains, and foodstuff declined

and imports of raw materials and spare parts essential for Cuban industry ceased altogether. Fertilizer imports declined by 80 percent, from 1.3 million tons to 25,000 tons; animal feed supplies fell by 70 percent, from 1.6 million tons to 450,000 tons. (*Cuba's Special Period* n.pag.)

Pérez also notes that shortages created a domino-effect on the economy as industrial plants and factories had to cease operations “due to shortages of fuel, inputs, and replacement parts” causing 50% of them to close (*Cuba's Special Period* n.pag.). In addition Pérez says that ‘factory closings, production declines, and transportation difficulties led to the displacement of nearly 20% of the population’ (*Cuba's Special Period* n.pag.). Cuba’s sugar crop also was impacted due to the shortage of agricultural products such as fertilizers, herbicides, and fuel. It declined from 8.1 million tons in 1991 to 4.2 million tons in 1993 (Pérez, *Cuba's Special Period* n.pag.). Finally Pérez states, new “housing starts fell hopelessly in arrears and the conditions of existing units continued to deteriorate in the absence of construction materials, replacement parts, and the resources for even routine maintenance” (*Cuba's Special Period* n.pag.).

Castro responded immediately with the implementation of the “Special Period,” that according to Pérez was “a series of contingency plans conceived originally for use during a time of war” that “established a framework within which to implement a new series of austerity measures and new rationing schedules to meet the worsening economic crisis” (*Cuba's Special Period* n.pag.). Contrary to Castro’s previous political position where “‘private ownership’ was a concept cosigned to history’s dustbin,” he now saw no other alternative to stabilize the economy except through introducing free-market strategies (Robinson 54). J. Richard Planas in his article “Political Changes and Social Attitudes in Cuba during the Special Period” observes:

This state of the Cuban Revolution may be seen as the transition process of a nation that was ideologically, politically, and economically interrelated with a system [the Soviet's] that was different from the present international order. Such a transition involves the regime's overall adaptation to very demanding circumstances and the pursuit of two basic objectives: Cuba's economic survival and its own political redefinition. (83-84)

Castro needed hard currency in order to purchase goods and supplies from trade partners who refused to accept the Cuban peso, so he legalized the U.S. dollar (Pérez-López 386). He also allowed forms of self-employment and private agricultural markets to relieve some of the demand on state resources. Finally he opened the door to foreign investment, especially in the tourism industry. Foreign investment significantly boosted the tourist industry through joint ventures between foreign firms and the Cuban government. Jorge F. Pérez-López states in his article "The Cuban Economic Crisis of the 1990's and the External Sector," that "between 1989 and 1993, the number of international tourists visiting the island doubled (from 300,000 to 600,000) and gross income increased more than four-fold (from 166 to 720 million pesos)" (389). Employment opportunities created in this sector paid its employees in U.S. dollars, making these jobs highly desirable.

Daily life of the Cuban people was severely impacted in part by the declining economy and by Castro's response. Pérez states:

Rationing quotas frequently failed to supply enough food for more than two weeks of each month, driving vast numbers of people into the black market to supplement official monthly allotments. The disappearance of more than 300 medicines from local pharmacies, together with food shortages, threatened the health and nutrition of all sectors of the population...By the end of 1992, 40 percent of national bus service and

train schedules had been suspended...Bicycles replaced automobiles as the principal means of personal transportation. ...Blackouts were imposed daily, often lasting as long as eight and ten hours a day...Not only was it difficult to secure food, but it was becoming increasingly difficult to cook and preserve it. (*Cuba's Special Period n.pag.*)

Eugene Robinson observed;

The whole country, used to middle class living standards, suddenly had had to endure an awful poverty. There was no gasoline to fuel the trucks that brought food from the country side to the cities, so people were hungry for the first time since the revolution...there was no toilet paper, no underwear, no meat, no milk, no hope. (154)

Fuente states, "in the 1990s, the government lost legitimacy, support, and popularity, as well as economic resources" (*A Nation* 326). In efforts to maintain the support of the Cuban people, Planas states that Castro had to "switched rhetoric" from Marxism-Leninism to a nationalist tone that invoked the image of José Martí and he reminded Cubans of past sacrifices in order to promote unity during this "Special Period" (86).

While the nation struggled to survive as a whole, Castro's stabilization practices re-introduced a social hierarchy back into Cuban society that disproportionately negatively impacted Afro-Cubans. According to Fuente, "Cuban authorities probably expected that the crisis would not have a racially specific impact" as the "high levels of equality and effective racial integration" achieved by 1980 "should have guaranteed a color-blind impact of market forces" (*A Nation* 318). In reality, the legalization of the U.S. dollar created a new class division. U.S. dollars were introduced into the local economy primarily through annual remittances sent by family members living in exile in Miami and other parts of the U.S. By 1997, annual remittances amounted to about \$800 million (Fuente, *A Nation* 318). Robinson's states: "he made

it legal for Cubans to hold and spend U.S. dollars, in effect welcoming a monetary invasion by the hated *yanquis*. This made it possible for some Cubans to get by on money sent by relatives in the States... (117)”. Fuente attributes the disparity in remittances to the racial composition of the senders. Since 83.5 percent of Cuban immigrants living in the United States identified themselves as white in the 1990 U.S. Census, Fuente assumes that a similar percentage will go to whites accounting for \$680 million out of the total \$800 million sent to the island in 1997 (*A Nation* 319). While visiting Cuba on journalism assignment, Eugene Robinson recorded the sentiments of an Afro-Cuban waiter:

He asserted that the young whites and their families were being sent money by their aunts, uncles, and cousins in the United States. Since most of the Cuban Americans in Miami were white, it made sense that most of the relatives they were helping back in the homeland were white as well. (35)

Limited access to U.S. dollars prevented Afro-Cubans from purchasing basic goods available on the black-market that the government could no longer provide such as food, personal hygiene items, and household appliances. Afro-Cubans also were unable to participate in self-employment opportunities such as taxi drivers, tour guides, or owners of *paladares* (home based family owned restaurants) because they lacked money to acquire needed equipment or supplies or to pay for the government permits to operate such businesses.

Within the tourism sector, a pattern emerged of racial preferences for whites and mulattoes with light skin, as the State relaxed its enforcement of hiring practices to accommodate new foreign investment. Fuente states, “the government is interested in providing them [foreign firms] with as friendly an environment as possible, including the strict control of labor unions and their bargaining capacity” (*A Nation* 321). Fuente goes on to add: “a significant proportion

of those who enter these jobs are hired directly by the managers and foreign investors, further limiting the state's capacity to guarantee a color-blind labor policy" (*A Nation* 321). According to Fuente, blacks and mulattoes made up 38% of those employed in the tourist sector in the early 1980's (*A Nation* 319). A 1994 survey conducted in the most popular tourist areas of Havana and Santiago revealed that 40 percent of respondents "agreed that blacks do not have the same employment opportunities as whites" in the tourist sector (*A Nation* 319). One respondent to the survey stated "I do agree that there is an aesthetic criteria in the selection of tourism personnel that favors whites. In my company, out of sixty workers, there are three blacks" (*A Nation* 320). Another responded remarked that "in the fanciest store in the city – La Maisson – all workers are white and out of fourteen models only one is mulatto. It is so rare to find black women in tourism that where there is one, people comment that she must be going to bed with an important boss" (*A Nation* 320). Consequently the great strides that had been made in reducing racial discrimination in the workplace were now being significantly reversed.

Ayorinde notes that while "Afro-Cubans are underrepresented in the most desirable jobs in tourism and joint ventures with foreign companies or investors" she cautions that "at previous points in Cuba's history, there is often a tendency to blame foreigners, in this case business partners who supposedly demand white staff," suggesting other contributing factors that supported discrimination against blacks (142). Fuente highlights the phrase "good presence," which he describes as a "racialized construct that is based on the belief that blackness is ugly and that blacks – their formal schooling notwithstanding- lack proper manners...in their social relationships" (*A Nation* 320). Fuente further states that a lack of "good presence" is used by hiring managers and the general public to describe certain "aesthetic" and "cultural factors that are frequently noted to justify the exclusion of blacks" based on the lack of "physical and

educational attributes needed to interact with tourists” (*A Nation* 320). These beliefs have been ingrained in the Cuban culture since the days of colonialism. Based on data from a research study by the *Centro de Antropología*, Ayorinde notes that while Castro’s revolution reduced institutionalized racism, racist attitudes are still perpetuated among individual attitudes and in the family sphere (143). Fuente adds, “what disappeared from public discourse found fertile breeding ground in private spaces where race continued to influence social relations among friends, neighbors, coworkers and family members” (*A Nation* 322). Fuente shares a quote a forty-year old white male who used the revolution’s social reforms to justify his perspective on race:

I have a theory that could be considered fascist, but to me blacks are inferior to whites in regard to their intelligence coefficient. In support of this theory I contend that in Cuba, where for thirty-five years blacks have had the same opportunities to study, there is no evidence that they can equal whites. How can one not think that genetic heredity affects them neurologically and makes them different, that is inferior? (*A Nation* 324)

Ayorinde concludes that “contrary to revolutionary aims, current elites reflected the same cultural norms as the historically dominant class” and that “these tend to exclude blacks from the determination of what is aesthetically pleasing or universally relevant” (145). Fuente asserts that “the ideology of racism was not created under the Special Period, but it acquired visibility and growing social acceptability during the 1990s” where “the erosion and deepening crisis of legitimacy of the current political system thus create new spaces for racist ideas and practices to operate and flourish” (*A Nation* 326). Afro-Cubans responded to the widening economic disparities through migration, participation in the informal economy, and the emergence of the hip-hop movement.

In 1996, an estimated 50,000 people moved to the City of Havana from the eastern provinces, the majority were Afro-Cubans seeking new economic opportunities (Fuente, *A Nation* 328). The eastern provinces of Cuba have remained underdeveloped since before Cuban Independence. Fuente notes that after access to hard currency became legal for all Cubans in 1993, “dollar stores” were opened outside of traditional tourist areas according to the “availability of dollars in the general population” (*A Nation* 328). Fuente continues to say that “40 percent of these stores were located in Havana. Conversely, the eastern provinces of Granma, Santiago de Cuba, and Guantánamo had only 10 percent of the total” (*A Nation* 328). In this assessment, Fuente concludes that the location of dollar stores signified where the greatest economic activities occurred during the Special Period. Based on his analysis, this appeared to be Havana. Migration to the city thus was a rational choice for many Afro-Cubans, in spite of uncertainties as to what would happen once they arrived and in the face of growing racial tensions. Fuente observes, “the migration of people from the eastern provinces to Havana has been frequently interpreted as a black assault on the city” (*A Nation* 327). Fuente further observes that “the presence of these Afro-Cuban immigrants in Havana was linked to an increase in violence and petty crime...” with racial connotations (*A Nation* 328). In 1997, the Cuban government banned all migration to Havana and began sending people back to their communities in mass (*A Nation* 328).

The presence of the informal economy provided another pathway for Afro-Cubans to access goods and U.S. dollars. Fuente states that “blacks have actively resisted displacement from the most lucrative economic activities through participation in the informal...economy...in order to access the indispensable hard currency” (*A Nation* 326). While participation could include the sale of any goods or services not sanctioned by the government including needed

personal care items such as toilet paper and soap to live chickens or seafood, *jinetismo* was the most popular form of participation. Fernandes describes *jinetismo* as a practice where “*jinetes* earn an income and acquire consumer goods through their contact with foreigners, either befriending them or engaging in a romantic or sexual relationship with them” (590). Fernandes observes that compared to “the \$7 - \$15 per month possible by working full-time in a government job, a *jintero* can make between \$40 and \$80 per day helping out a tourist” (590). The government began cracking down on *jinetismo* by the end of the Special Period.

The Cuban Hip Hop movement began in the early 1990’s in high density housing projects on the outskirts of Havana, such as Alamar, that were occupied primarily by Afro-Cuban working class families (Fernandes 578). Closely linked to the African-American Hip-Hop movement in the U.S., young Afro-Cubans were influenced by more conscious rappers such as Common Sense, Mos Def, and Talib Kweli who cultural critic Sujatha Fernandes states: “spoke a language of black militancy that was appealing to Cuban youth” (580-581). These rappers were bold in their telling of African American life and its challenges. Early Afro-Cuban hip-hop artists began emulating them through telling their own life stories of police harassment, food scarcity, inability to find employment, and the growing class divide caused by the circulation of the U.S. dollar. Fernandes states: “rap music in Cuba is shaped by a highly specific set of social and economic conditions, including the demographic restructuring of the urban metropolis and increasing racial inequalities in the special period” (578).

Pioneering hip-hop artists took political risks with their lyrics, often openly criticizing the Cuban government for its failure to protect a quality of life for Afro-Cubans promised through the revolution. And they also explicitly defined their black identity in contradiction to Cuba’s national narrative of racial democracy. Eugene Robinson observes:

All of Cuba's rap stars are venting into the same outer limits, rampaging through areas of discourse that have been unexplored for decades: calls for racial solidarity. Blasts against discrimination. Bitter denunciations of the arbitrary and heavy-handed police. Narrative tales of the bizarre world travails of daily Cuban life. Cuban hip-hop sounds as if it isn't really about the music at all, but about the screwed-up present and uncertain future of the nation. (107)

"*Hermanos de Causa*," a hip-hop group, wrote a rap called "*Tengo*," a play off of Nicolás Guillén's poem of the same name. Fernandes suggests Guillén's poem was selected to present a "striking contrast to the post-revolutionary euphoria of Afro-Cubans who saw in the Cuban revolution the possibilities of an end to racial discrimination" compared to the current conditions that Afro-Cuban youth were facing (585). This sampling of *Hermanos de Causa's* "*Tengo*" reveals some of their reality and frustrations:

<i>Tengo una raza oscura y</i>	Discriminated cause I'm black.
<i>Discriminada.</i>	
<i>Tengo tantas cosas que no</i>	Got so much that I can't touch.
<i>Puedo ni tocarlos</i>	
<i>Tengo instalaciones que</i>	Got all these places I can't go in.
<i>No puedo ni pisales</i>	
<i>Tengo libertad entre un</i>	Got freedom in a parenthesis of
<i>paréntesis de hierro</i>	steel. (West-Durán, 25)

Another rap, "*¿Quién tiró la tiza?*" by rap group Clan 537, questions which student will the teacher blame for throwing the chalk, the doctor's son or the builder's son? In his essay "Rap's

Diasporic Dialogues: Cuba’s Redefinition of Blackness”, Alan West-Durán observes how this song reflects race through class to highlight class distinctions within Cuba’s social reality:

<i>¿Quién tiró la tiza?</i>	Who threw the chalk?
<i>El negro ese.</i>	It was the black kid. Yes he did.
<i>¿Quién tiró la Tiza?</i>	Who threw the chalk?
<i>No fue el hijo del doctor</i>	Not the doctor’s kid
<i>No, porque el hijo del doctor</i>	No, because the doctor’s son
<i>Es el mejor.</i>	Is the best one. (West-Durán, 24-25)

Fernandes states, “rappers also highlight causes of racial justice within Cuba and make demands for the inclusion of marginalized sectors in processes of economic and political changes” (576).

West-Durán states that Cuban hip-hop artists “are working on the premise-consciously or not – that Cuba, historically speaking, could barely consider itself a nation if it treated such large amount of its populations [blacks and mulattos] as second-class citizens” (33).

In addition to lyrics, members of the Cuban hip-hop movement defined their identity through the adoption of certain cultural attributes to mark their presence in the larger society.

West-Durán states:

It is also matched by the clothing worn (baggy pants, baseball hats, NBS jerseys and sneakers), hairstyles (dreadlocks) and body adornments, including tattoos. Through these practices, they are expanding notions of Cuban blackness by questioning previous models of African-Cuban respectability. (33)

Fernandes observes that “some of the more black nationalist Cuban rappers wear hand printed African shirts, dreadlocks, or natural “Afro” hair-styles, and others wear hand crocheted caps, and t-shirts with images of cannabis, Bob Marley, or Selassie...” (600). Their cultural expression

defied the national Cuban narrative of a color-blind society by inserting an Afro-Cuban identity in the midst of a national crisis to advocate against growing inequalities. Their style did not go unnoticed as Fernandes quoted an article by Pita, the Minister of Culture, where he “derided rappers for wearing hats, long pants and stocking caps in a hot climate not suitable to such apparel” and suggested that young Cubans were seeking to “break down exclusive boundaries erected by a Cold War climate by dressing in the attire of the ‘enemy’ ” (600). After interviewing several Afro-Cuban hip-hop artists, Eugene Robinson summarizes:

There were clearing space for themselves in the society as black Cubans- as part of the African Diaspora connected to other black people around the world, victims of racism, constituents of a group to which not all Cubans belonged, inheritors of a unique culture, possessors of their own special blackness. (124)

Fernandes states, “in the absence of any organized political movement or forms of association among Afro-Cuban youth, Cuban rap provides an avenue of expression and cultural resistance in Cuban society” (577). Not since the massacre of *Partido Independiente de Color* members in 1912, had Afro-Cubans dared to publically organize with the goal of soliciting the government’s attention to the needs of the Afro-Cuban community.

Although over 500 groups had emerged by 2000, the Cuban government was slow to recognize hip-hop as a social movement. Eugene Robinson states:

Like it or not, the Cuban revolution had produced, and now would have to deal with, a hip-hop generation – a cohort of young people who had no memory of life before the Special Period, who know all about the promises of the Cuban revolution had broken and very little about the promises that it had kept. (255)

Fernandes states that “initially, commercially oriented rap was promoted by the Cuban state as a way of diluting the radical potential of the genre” (594). She states that, “commercial rap was also exploited by the Cuban state for its revenue-earning potential, as part of a larger push to attract foreign funding through Cuban music and arts” (594). Eventually, it recognized the need to take a more active role as Fernandes observes, “the Cuban state has realized the need to relate more to the ‘underground’ rappers, partly because of the increasing appeal of their radical message to large sectors of black youth in Cuba” (594). According to Fernandes, the Minister of Culture had the first serious meeting with “underground” rappers in July 2000 and he walked away “impressed... ‘with the level of commitment they have to this country and the seriousness and rigor with which they take on real problems, at the same time rejecting commercialism’”(594). Planas states that the “pressures of the Special Period had forced the regime to relax previous social controls” and that “youth were being granted a wider cultural space...in exchange for political support” (85-86, 88). Fernandes believes that the State also realized that if it could “harness the energy of these rappers” to bolster “image of Cuba as a mixed race nation with African roots” it could address growing Afro-Cuban cynicism “in an attempt to reconstruct national unity and to regain popularity” (595). As the government increased its understanding of the benefits that alignment with the hip-hop movement could bring, it began to increase its support of Cuban rappers. It created the *Agencia Cubana de Rap* (The Cuban Rap Agency) under the Ministry of Culture to formalize management and production of the “underground rappers.” Through a system called *empresas*, the *Agencia* controls the production, promotion, and distribution of Cuban rap music (Fernandes 597). Fernandes states, “the increasing visibility of Cuban rap has facilitated a shift to an acceptance by political leaders that racial discrimination exists in Cuban society” (597). Just as artists used

the rhetoric of the revolution to ask the government what was it doing to help Afro-Cubans, the government is now using the rappers' messages to challenge the general public's acceptance of racial discrimination. West-Durán summarizes, "the revolution" gave "Cuban rappers the tools (educational, cultural, and ideological) with which to analyze these problems" and their strategy has successfully held them accountable to its promises (33).

During the Special Period, the emphasis of the government's stabilization policies on individual competition for resources was a radical shift for a society that had become indoctrinated with the revolution's socialist approach. The scarcity of resources created new class distinctions as the government shifted its role as provider of the people over to private sector groups such as family members abroad sending remittances or foreign investors who hired in the tourist sector. Consequently, Afro-Cubans and other segments of society that had no wealth, social standing, or international relationships prior to the revolution entered this time period at a severe financial disadvantage. In addition, the economic distress ignited old racial prejudices. Fernandes states, "in a period of increasing racial tensions and racial inequalities, Afro-Cubans find themselves deprived of a political voice" (579). Fortunately, the post-revolutionary generation of youth that Eugene Robinson described had no fear in expressing the wrongs of the time period. They did not denounce the Cuban government, but sought out a collective voice in which to hold them accountable to the socialist promises made during the revolution and to provide greater relief during the Special Period. Fernandes states, "through their texts, performances, and styles, Cuban rappers demanded the inclusion of young Afro-Cubans into the polity and they appealed to the State to live up to the value of egalitarianism enshrined in traditional socialist ideology" (584). Eugene Robinson identifies the Hip-Hop Movement as the start of a new Cuban civil society: "in Gdansk, grassroots civil

society developed in the shipyard of Prague, in the coffeehouses and drawing rooms. In Havana, I was seeing a tropical version of civil society take root in the hot, sweaty, sexy, swinging dance halls” (104).

The Special Period created a great threat to the stability of the Castro Administration. The financial withdrawal of the Soviets led many international observers to believe that a regime changes was inevitable. Within Cuba, many citizens questioned if the ideas of the revolution had failed and if day to day life would regress back to pre-revolutionary conditions. The increase in racial tensions raised this question for many Afro-Cubans who were old enough to remember pre-revolutionary society. In the midst of uncertainty, a collective voice emerged among Afro-Cuban youth that demanded attention to their needs and the overall needs of blacks. These youth, empowered by their linkages to the international hip-hop movement, boldly spoke about the actual conditions of Cuban daily life. For the first time, many outside of Cuba were able to hear the actual voice of Cubans, unfiltered by the government, and gain a better understanding. Originally distributed through black market trade routes, this music continues to be shared at an even faster rate via electronic social media networks YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Skype, etc. In raising awareness about their concerns, they have inserted space for public dialogue about previously taboo subjects such as race, and have led the foundation for civil society to exist in Cuba. It is through the harnessing of the power of the people that social reforms will be able to continue in Cuba as the nation faces greater uncertainty in the transition of power from Fidel to his brother Raul.

V. Conclusion

Cuba has faced significant political and economic transitions that have hampered its ability to solidify a strong national identity that includes all segments of society as envisioned by

the great revolutionary, José Martí. In spite of legal statutes that defined citizenship and that aimed to make discrimination illegal, Cuban society remains stratified based on class and race. As the nation prepares for additional transitions toward a free market economy, historically disadvantaged groups are at greater risk of falling behind in terms of economic and social progress. Many international observers are particularly concerned about the ability of Afro-Cubans to overcome present-day vulnerabilities so that they too can take advantage of new economic opportunities becoming available in Cuba on a daily basis. If historical patterns can be an indicator of future success, Afro-Cubans have proven that they have the collective will-power to survive this transition.

Since Cuba's independence period, Afro-Cubans have implemented strategies of resistance and adaptation to insert their presence in the nation-building process. Successful strategies that have had the most impact on advancing their social status include: military participation, political organization, and educational attainment. Through these efforts, Afro-Cubans have not only advocated on their own behalves, but have created public space for open dialogue to advance the rights of other disadvantaged groups such as rural residents, immigrants, women and sexual minorities.

Motivated by the hopeful words expressed by José Martí of a new Cuba, Afro-Cubans joined the rebel army in mass during the War of Independence. Afro-Cuban men such as Antonio Maceo rose through the ranks of military leadership and contributed greatly to the success of the war. Their active participation enabled Martí to begin the conversation of increasing rights for Afro-Cubans as a fundamental structure of a post-independent Cuba. Martí once asked; "must we be afraid of the Cuban who has suffered most from being deprived of his freedom in the country where the blood he shed for it has made him love it too much to be a threat to it?" (qtd. in Foner

259). Consequently, blacks were granted citizenship in the new Cuban nation under Article 11 of the constitution. Their citizenship status however, meant little after the war when Afro-Cubans were denied participation in the nation-building process. The provisional government established and managed by the U.S. instituted its own racial practices that complemented colonial Cuban perceptions about race. Consequently, blacks were treated as second-class citizens.

Afro-Cuban war veterans were disheartened when after being promised hope, they returned from the battlefields unable to support themselves, much less the families they had left behind. Job opportunities were almost non-existent without a political recommendation. With a seventy-two percent illiteracy rate, Afro-Cubans were at a disadvantage since eligible voters had to be literate to participate in the elections. Consequently, Afro-Cubans were not able to become a political constituency through the regular process.

Frustrated by the Liberal party's exclusion of their participation in the post-war nation-building opportunities such as employment or participating in the newly established government, Afro-Cuban war veterans organized. In 1908, Evaristo Estenoz and Pedro Ivonnet emerged as leaders and formed a new political party called the *Partido Independiente de Color* (PIC). Utilizing the black press to spread its message, PIC's platform called for free public education, the abolition of the death penalty, and the establishment of an eight-hour work day which would not only help Afro-Cubans, but also the "popular classes regardless of race" (Helg 147). With approximately 9,000 to 15,000 members by 1910, PIC promoted "pride in being black and Cuban" (Helg 151). Although they sought non-violent participation in the political process, their presence and growing membership threatened the established political parties' monopoly over the masses and conflict ensued. First, the Morúa Amendment declared the PIC party illegal due to its formation based on issues of a single race. Next, members of the party,

including the leadership were arrested in mass across the country. Then during a public demonstration to advocate for the retraction of the Morúa Amendment, President José Miguel Gómez feared an intervention by the U.S. and sent in the Cuban army. Along with local vigilantes, the army massacred approximately 3,000 Afro-Cubans including PIC founders Evaristo Estenoz and Pedro Ivonnet (Helg 194).

Although set-back by the PIC being made illegal and the subsequent government approved massacre of Afro-Cubans, Afro-Cubans continued to pursue strategies that pushed for social advancement. During the 1930's the Communist labor movement's adoption of an anti-discrimination platform opened the door for Afro-Cubans to join the unions and participate in multi-racial movements to increase job opportunities. For the first time, many Afro-Cubans were able to participate in a labor force that offered worker protections such as a contract between the worker and the employer, consistent wages, time-off, and a structured work day. Prior to becoming president, Batista promoted many Afro-Cuban soldiers to officer positions during the Sergeants' Revolt of 1933, enabling them to achieve middle class standards. Batista also began an anti-illiteracy campaign that established schools in rural Cuba.

Batista's efforts highlight another issue important to Afro-Cubans; education. Since 1887, with the founding of the *Directorio Central de las Sociedades de la Raza de Color*, Afro-Cubans have pursued participation in public education as a strategy for social advancement. Under the leadership of Juan Gualberto Gómez, some educational gains were made by increasing access to public elementary schools, providing scholarships to assist in paying for school fees, and by opening up private schools. However, only a small percentage of the total Afro-Cuban population benefited from these reforms. Later, Fidel Castro's revolution spearheaded the greatest educational reform by opening access to free education from primary school to the

university level. Although elementary school was compulsory, many Afro-Cubans continued to participate in higher educational opportunities, including adults who were encouraged to go back to school as part of Castro's anti-illiteracy campaign. The government's investment in education, complemented with active volunteer participation led to incredible educational achievement in Cuba.

Victorious in his ascent to power, racism was one of the first social problems that Fidel addressed within his first hundred days in office. Influenced by Marxism, he believed that racism could be eliminated through the deconstruction of class structures. A strong social development plan became the foundation of his political platform. In her essay, "Poverty and Vulnerability in Cuba Today," María del Carmen Zabala Argüelles states, "while the rest of Latin America embraces the reigning belief that economic growth will solve the problems of poverty and inequity...Cuba has placed its bets on universal social policies"(n.pag.). Zabala further states:

This Cuban model places special emphasis on equity, consistent with its aim of social justice. Equity does not pertain only to the distribution of income; it includes equal opportunities and universal access to social services, with specific attention to disadvantaged groups so they can benefit from the existing structure of opportunities.
(N.pag.)

To re-enforce the dismantling of class structures, Castro enacted laws that prohibited racial discrimination. He also invested public resources in universal healthcare and education throughout his presidency. As a result, the quality of life for Afro-Cubans significantly improved.

The sudden financial withdrawal of the Soviet Union in 1987 and its eventual collapse in 1991 significantly impacted Castro's ability to continue to fund his social agenda. He declared "a Special Period in a Time of Peace" and implemented drastic market-reforms to sustain the Cuban

economy. Alejandro de la Fuente states in *A Nation for All*, that while the Castro Administration recognized the potential impact based on class, they underestimated the specific negative impact based on race, having thought they had eliminated racism (318). The progress gained by Afro-Cubans during the first 30 years of the revolution was quickly undermined by the economic policies implemented during the special period. In her article “Dissidents Work for Racial Integration” Patricia Grogg observes that:

The economic crisis in Cuba triggered by the collapse of the East European socialist bloc and the break-up of the Soviet Union...complicated the situation and widened the gap between people who were already socially disadvantaged and the rest of the population. The recession was a factor that reproduced and exacerbated social, and therefore racial, inequalities, given the historic links between race and class.... (N.pag.)

In response, a collective voice among Afro-Cuban youth emerged out of the Alamar housing development. The Cuban Hip-Hop Movement was founded as a non-violent outlet for youth to express their concerns and ease their frustrations about the deteriorating quality of life around them. Influenced by the U.S. African-American Hip-Hop Movement, cross-regional alliances were formed between the two movements that exposed Cuban hip-hop to the world market. In recognition of its attraction of foreign capital, the Cuban government encouraged hip-hop through creating a state agency, the *Agencia Cubana de Rap*, to manage artists. While the content of the mainstream hip-hop music, that sanctioned by the government, discusses non-controversial themes, underground hip-hop music continues to raise questions about race relations, reveals frustrations with impoverished conditions, and promotes black pride.

Distributed through the black-market, the underground hip-hop movement has opened the dialogue about race and social conditions in private spaces as never before. This achievement

contradicts the view of many such as Edward Gonzalez and Kevin McCarthy who believe, “what Afro-Cubans lost under the Castro regime was their former ability to form independent race-based associations with which to express their identity and advance their interests” (54).

In fact, new civil society groups such as the Citizens’ Committee for Racial Integration (CIR) are now being formed in Cuba. Manuel Cuesta Morúa, one of CIR’s founders, stated that the organization “is pursuing recognition and racial integration, not conflict or racial pre-eminence” (Grogg, *Dissidents* n.pag.). Morúa believes that civil society organizations such as CIR “should seek ways to achieve the self-recognition of black people who are not represented in proportion to their demographics and their cultural contributions to Cuba” (*Dissidents* n.pag.). The opening of public space for such an exchange has opened up discussions for civil rights for other groups such as women and sexual minorities.

In 2008, an ailing Fidel Castro formally transferred power to his brother Raúl. Cuba now stands at yet another critical juncture as Cuba continues to face economic challenges. In her July 25, 2010 *Philadelphia Inquirer* article, “One Sleepy Workforce,” journalist Anne-Marie Garcia states “the global financial crisis and the \$10 billion in damage inflicted by three hurricanes in 2008, have forced [Cuban] authorities to run a deficit of 5 percent of GDP, leaving them unable to pay back credits received from China and elsewhere” (A8). Consequently Raúl Castro immediately implemented a number of free-market strategies since taking office. These have included permitting the opening of small businesses involving 200 designated activities such as “hairstyling, carpentry, shoemaking and dance instruction” along with car washes and *paladares* –privately owned eateries (Wilkinson, A6). In the *L.A. Times* article, “Now Open in Cuba” by Tracy Wilkinson, Cuban’s Deputy Labor Minister Carlo Mateu states that “more than 325,900 Cubans had taken out licenses to open, run or work at private businesses” (A6). In addition to

small private enterprises, Raúl Castro has allowed the buying and selling of property among island residents and according to Circles Robinson in his *Havana Times* blog, “Cuba Loan Program to Begin Dec. 20,” Cuban banks will soon extend credit to small businesses (n.pag.). Finally, Raúl has reformed the educational system by requiring an entrance exam for higher education to reduce the number of university applicants, instead steering more students toward “mid-level technical careers” in agriculture (C. Robinson, “Cuba Reforms” n.pag.).

While these free-market reforms may stabilize the economy, there are rising concerns because Raúl has not presented a complementary social agenda to protect the rights of the disadvantaged, as had his brother. Zabala states that it is “social protection- free and accessible healthcare, education and social security, guarantees of employment, wages and basic foodstuffs, and residential subsidies – that keep social exclusion to a minimum” (n.pag.). In his silence on social development, Raúl’s public statements imply that the Cuban people, not the previous administration’s economic policy, have contributed to the economic downfall of the nation through their overreliance on the government. In a speech to the people cited in Tracy Wilkinson’s article, Raúl states:

We must continue to gradually recover international credibility for our economy. The biggest obstacle that we face...is the psychological barrier formed by inertia, indifference and insensitivity...Without changing our mentality, we will not be able to carry out the changes necessary to sustain [Cuba’s] irrevocable socialist character. (A6)

In defense of his call for the elimination of a half-million jobs in 2010, Raúl stated: “we must erase forever the notion that Cuba is the only country in the world where you can live without working” (Grogg, “Cuba’s Union” n.pag.).

This transition in political thought and economic strategy has added a growing sense of uncertainty among the general Cuban population. In Patricia Grogg's article "Cuba's Union Calls for 'Unity' in Face of Layoff" one disgruntled worker states: "for years they told me full employment was an achievement of the revolution, and now they're talking to me about 'inflated payrolls.' I don't understand anything"(n.pag). Circles Robinson observes in his *Havana Times* article "Cuba's Housing Market Realignment," that the new housing policy "will cause some collateral damage in the long run. The most serious seems to be that social classes will become divided by neighborhoods with the consequent emergence of a gap between the rich and poor, just like in the rest of Latin America"(n.pag). Wilkerson observes in "Now Open in Cuba" that "with credit virtually nonexistent, most [perspective small business owners] must scramble for other sources of capital, such as remittances from relatives in the United States and Europe" (A6). Finally, Damien Cave states in the *New York Times* article "Cuba to Allow Buying and Selling of Property, With Few Restrictions," that "many Cubans say they are afraid that the market system will leave them in the lurch" (A4).

Among Afro-Cubans, the future is even more uncertain. Louis Nevear highlights findings from a 2006 study of racism in Cuba funded by the European Union in his *New America Media* on-line article, "'Obama Effect' Highlights Racism in Cuba":

Not only was racism alive and well in the workers' paradise, but it was systemic and institutional. Blacks were systematically excluded from positions that involved coming in contact with foreign tourist (where they could earn tips in hard currencies), they were regulated to poor housing, complained of the longest waits for healthcare, were excluded from managerial positions, received the lowest remittances from relatives abroad, and were five times more likely to be imprisoned. (N.pag.)

Patricia Groggs also states in her article “Dissidents Work for Racial Integration:”

Participants in the dissident-organised workshop complained that black sectors of the population have fewer opportunities for getting better-paid jobs, receive less in expatriate remittances from abroad and live in the poorest neighborhoods with the worst housing, all of which makes them more vulnerable. (N.pag)

In another Grogg article, “Racism – ‘Taboo, Complicated and Thorny’ Issue”, Esteban Morales-an Afro-Cuban – states, “equal rights does not mean social equality. We do not have the same social standing, nor the same opportunities. This is what has generally happened to non-white and black people in Cuba (n.pag).” Raúl Castro’s free-market economic strategies threaten to weaken the social status achieved by Afro-Cubans during the revolution unless he soon advances a complementary social agenda that will even the playing field between Cubans with access to resources and those without.

Moving forward, it is crucial for Afro-Cubans to formalize their position in the political process to mitigate concerns during these rapidly changing times. Currently, Gonzales and McCarthy state that “Afro-Cubans occupy 33 percent of the seats in the National Assembly of People’s Power” although they make up close to 50% of the Cuban population (60). Afro-Cubans also only “make up nine of the 31 members (29 percent) of the Council of State;” a more powerful governing body (60). Gonzales and McCarthy conclude: “in sum, a predominantly white leadership continues to lead Cuba’s racially mixed society” (61). Just as Cuba has made unthinkable strides in transitioning into a free-market economic system, I hope that the government will make complementary strides in opening its political process to become more democratic. When this happens, Afro-Cubans will have a greater opportunity to participate in the political process and establish representation proportional to their percentage of the

population. If not, they must continue their historical pattern of resistance and adaptation to ensure their inclusion. Afro-Cubans have proven that despite social and economic marginalization, they are an empowered group determined to build a nation that is not white, not black, just Cuban.

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