

A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF RACE, ETHNICITY AND IDENTITY IN CUBA

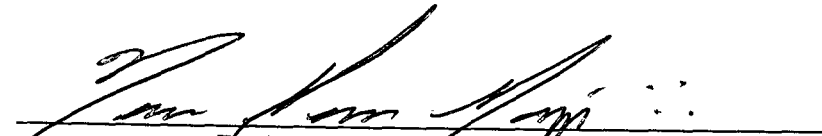
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ABSTRACT

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The Cuban colonial and early republic societies were divided not only by race but by ethnicity, class and caste¹. The slaves' identities would be influenced by their shipmates and fellow slaves working beside them after they arrived. These identities would play an important role in Cuban history and culture and were used by Castro to build support for the 1959 Revolution and to continue support for his regime after he took power. Castro's claims that the Revolution eliminated institutionalized racism are supported by political propaganda used by Castro to present a picture of a unified non-racist society, but not by statistical analysis or cultural studies.

Despite the claims made by the Cuban propaganda and the ruling elite, racial prejudice remains a real issue in Cuba. On what basis does the regime claim there is no racism? What evidence exists in support of and contrary to the regime's stance? How does contemporary literature on and off the island address or portray racism in Cuba? In order to determine this thesis and answer these questions, the following procedures will be implemented: a review of fictional and non-fictional literature, music and media and a look at historical and political viewpoints. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database will be used along with statistics from the United States Department of State and the CIA to establish populations. The use of these

¹ For this paper, race is defined as the classification of people based upon physical characteristics such as skin colour and facial features. Ethnicity is defined as the classification of people based upon common regional and cultural characteristics such as language and religion. Class is the division of people based upon economic, political and social characteristics. Castes correspond to heredity and are defined by law. In Cuba's colonial years there were three castes: white, free people of colour and slaves. Castes are stratified by classes.

sources helped to draw a picture of the Cuban populace and better understand the dynamics of the race, ethnicity and identity issues.

A review of the literature, both scholarly and artistic, and relevant databases suggests that the Cuban government presents an overly optimistic portrait of race relations. The evidence demonstrates that racism persists as a serious problem in Cuba. Socio-economic factors that addressed health and education inequalities ended many discrimination practices within employment and improved the quality of life for many Afro-Cubans. However these policies failed to address underlying racism within Cuban culture and institutions. The Cuban government's silence on the subject of race allowed for racism to persist. Nevertheless, propaganda under Castro reified the myth that racism was no longer an issue.

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RACE, ETHNICITY AND IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY CUBA -

INTRODUCTION

Cuba – a diverse island country – has been slow to develop a national identity. Handicapped by class and caste differences, Cuba’s identity is tied to its colorful and often tumultuous history of immigration. The concept of nationhood, or nationalism, began developing in the late eighteenth century. However, according to Antoni Kapcia, between 1750 and 1820, Cuban “nationalism” did not exist or existed in only an embryonic form.² The first indications of the formation of a Cuban identity were in 1868 with the first war for independence nearly a century later.³ It was at that time when the people on the island began to create a consciousness of what it meant to be Cuban and a realization that they were different from their Spanish rulers. Even in 1910 when the Cuban Republic was only 12 years old, Irene Aloha Wright wrote, “...there is no Cuban people.”⁴

Settlers of Cuba did not identify themselves as Cubans. Settlers of Cuba came from all over Western Europe, the Canary Islands, Africa and from modern day Venezuela, Colombia and other Caribbean islands. Immigrants to Cuba brought with them their identities from their homelands, and this was how they identified themselves for generations. This was not only true of the immigrants who came freely, but also those who were enslaved and imported to the island and those who were brought as contract labourers.

The Africans brought to Cuba as slaves were influenced by shipmates and fellow slaves working beside them after their arrival. From these contacts, Africans created an identity that

² Kapcia, Antoni. *Cuba: Island of Dreams*. New York: Berg Oxford, 2000, p. 21.

³ Kapcia *Cuba*, p. 21.

⁴ Wright, Irene. *Cuba*. Havana, Cuba: H.E. Swann, 1910, p. 83.

would play an important role in Cuban history and culture. Castro used former slaves' identity to build support for the 1959 Revolution and to continue support for his regime after he took power. Castro claimed that the 1959 Revolution changed the history of race, ethnicity and identity on the island and more importantly eliminated racism. Despite the propaganda, Castro's claims are not supported by statistical evidence. Research shows that while race seemed to no longer play a role in Cuban culture, race and ethnicity remain a large part of Cuban cultural, historical and political life. The 1959 Revolution created a cultural cohesion, but it did not remove hundreds of years of racism, the notion that one's own ethnic stock is superior, or discrimination or prejudice based on racism on the island. The Revolution changed the economic status of many Afro-Cubans. However, they still remain outside the political and social mainstream. Whites still hold positions of power both within the government and within the Cuban Communist Party. Interracial marriages are still frowned upon by white Cubans. In addition, Afro-Cubans are still portrayed in a negative light in much of contemporary Cuban literature. Racism remains a viable part of Cuba's culture.

Historians prior to the 1990s focused on Cuba's European and Amerindian ancestries. Caribbean historian Irene Wright's 1910 description of Cubans stated that even the blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl was tainted by the blood of the Negro⁵. Wright argues in her book *Cuba*, that Cubans were descendents of Spanish masters and Negro slaves⁶.

During the Republic years from 1902 to 1959, Siboneyismo, or the romanticization of the role Cuba's indigenous people played in Cuban culture, was promoted through Cuban art and literature. African influences were often times ignored or downplayed. Mark Sawyer in his study of race and politics in Cuba argues, "While the Independence movement put an end to slavery

⁵ Wright, Irene. *Cuba*. Havana, Cuba: H.E. Swann, 1910, p. 87.

⁶ Wright, *Cuba*, p. 87.

and brought formal citizenship rights to Cubans of colour, the Cuban Revolution eliminated vestiges of formal segregation that remained in society. It addressed many private forms of discrimination that had been untouched in the Republican Period.”⁷ The Cuban identity would not develop until after the 1959 Revolution and with its development came the acknowledgement of the influence of African cultures on Cuba society, art and history. Journalist Pedro Perez Sarduy argues that African descendants in Cuba “more than anywhere else” have “demonstrated great individual and collective achievement” and have been more collectively organized to resist oppression. This organization has gained them official recognition, which has allowed for their integration into a “national self-identity.”⁸ They also make up a significant portion of the population. The Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies at the University of Miami estimates that blacks and those of mestizo, or mixed, descent, represent as much as 62% of the population.⁹

The Castro regime used the historical role of Afro-Cubans to promote the revolution and to give the appearance that racism is no longer an issue in Cuba. One of the ways Castro promotes this claim is by supporting global liberation movements of African Descendants, such as in the United States, Angola and South Africa. Evidence of this can be seen in the arts, the media and job opportunities during the Special Period or the years of economic hardships following the disbanding of the Soviet Bloc. American Black Power leaders, who sought exile in Cuba, described Cuban racism as idiosyncratic. Black Panther Raymond Johnson, when speaking to Associated Press writer Fenton Wheeler in June of 1969, stated, “We think there’s

⁷ Sawyer. Mark Q., *Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) p. 175.

⁸ Perez Sarduy, Pedro and Jean Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices: On Race and Identity in Contemporary Cuba*. (Gainesville: University of Florida Press) p. xi.

⁹ “Ethnicity.” Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies at the University of Miami. 2001 www6.miami.edu/iccas. (Accessed 4/22/12).

racial discrimination in Cuba." He went on to describe it as "a peculiar kind of racial discrimination." Johnson argued that white Cubans "have a subconscious conspiracy to maintain control of the island" and the Cubans "have a misunderstanding of the political, cultural and revolutionary thinking of the black revolution," that they are "lagging in the revolution of the mind."¹⁰ On the other hand, Castro feared the Black Power exiles' influence on Afro Cubans and restricted their movements. The Castro regime became active in armed struggles on the African continent as part of his foreign strategy to expand the revolution, but also as a political move to show solidarity with African and Afro-Cubans. Racism in Cuba is hidden by the lack of statistics based on race and ethnicity. Cuban officials focused early efforts on eliminating unemployment, housing shortages, illiteracy rates and health care issues. By doing such, they eliminated much of the racial discrimination which existed in Cuba. Statistics kept by the Cuban Government are based on income, education and life expectancy, but not by race. However, very few Afro-Cubans hold high ranking positions in the Cuban government or in the Communist party. White Cubans are still opposed to interracial marriage. Great strides have been made, but racism is still part of Cuban society, and evidence suggests that racial and ethnic differences still exist.

There are many African ethnicities in Cuba. Their influence on Cuban culture, however, has been downplayed. Until recent movements drawing attention to the African Diaspora, most Afro-Cubans were lumped together and efforts to identify them or to increase their influence or role in society were nearly non-existent. When African ethnicities were acknowledged, it was by names given to them by slave traders, slave owners or Spanish and Cuban authorities. Multiple

¹⁰ Wheeler, Fenton. "Life Worse in Cuba, Unhappy Black Panthers Wail." *Miami Herald*, June 26, 1969, accessed April 22, 2012. www.latinamericanstudies.org/hijackers/raymond-johnson.htm.

ethnicities were categorized by place of purchase or common language rather than by actual ethnicity. The creation of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database has helped identify origins and ethnicities of many African slaves.

In addition to multiple African ethnicities being categorized in broad terms, Cubans have been catalogued for censuses and other legal documents based upon appearances. Someone who has fair skin and light eyes may be listed in records as white, although a sibling who has darker skin may be listed as black. To complicate research further, in colonial days, a person could purchase whiteness. If a Noble father had a son with a person of color, the father could buy papers from the crown which would designate his offspring as white. How a person was classified in the seventeenth century may affect how his ancestors would be classified in Cuba today.¹¹

Even today, racial identifications in Cuba are fluid. Individuals who are of mixed descent may fall into one of three basic categories, each of which has a plethora of subcategories based on combinations of skin, eye and hair color and facial and hair features. With the exception of those individuals who fall at the edge of the spectrum, Cubans can be declared by an observer as white, mulatto or black.¹² Because of the fluidity and the power of perception, stereotypes have flourished and race remains an issue.

The development of a national identity has been slow. While peoples of the island began to develop a sense of being Cuban during the wars for independence in 1868-78 and 1895-98, it was not until the 1959 Revolution that the people of Cuba considered themselves Cubans. Past regimes had been unwilling to include Afro-Cubans in their political agendas. However, by failing to include the Afro-Cubans in the history, literature and politics, the national identity

¹¹ Perez Sarduy and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, pp. 83-84.

¹² Perez Sarduy and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 86.

could not fully develop. Partly because excluding Afro-Cubans kept the majority of Cubans out of that national identity and also because of the extent to which intermarriage has led to the dispersion of African, European and Indigenous heritage despite skin colour. Early Cuban painters, writers and other artists ignored the African influence and focused on being Amerindian. Cuban poet Nicolas Guillen included siboneyism in his works. Guillen spoke of native ancestors and employed Amerindian names guava, cocuyo, tabaco in his poems. He wrote of the firefly, the cigar, the Indian and the Cuban skies. Guillen's works were part of a movement in Cuban literary and art history of siboneyism, or the elevating of the vanished Amerindian past to a prominent role in Cuban cultural identity.¹³

Fernando Ortiz, a Cuban sociologist known as Mr. Cuba, began to change some of the attitudes towards African influence. Through his works, such as *Los instrumententos de la musica Afrocubana* (1952-1955) and *La Africa de la folklorica de Cuba* (1950), he demonstrated African influences on the arts, culture and history. However, Ortiz saw the Afro-Cuban arts as folkloric to be preserved for the future, not really a part of high Cuban culture. Afro-Cuban leaders such as Jose Marti began to be recognized for their contributions to literature and to history. The Castro regime used Afro-Cuban history, literature and culture in order to gain the support of the Afro-Cuban population. In doing so, it democratized Cuban identity.

¹³ Firmat, Gustavo Perez. *The Cuban Condition: Translation and Identity in Modern Cuban Literature*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 75-76.

SLAVERY IN CUBA DURING COLONIAL TIMES

In October of 1492, Columbus claimed the island of Cuba for The Spains (a term used to describe Spain prior to the re-conquering of the Iberian Peninsula by Ferdinand and Isabella). Cuba was one of the first Spanish colonies in the New World and was one of the last remaining colonies after wars with other European nations led to the loss of some colonies and wars of independence won by others. Cuba remained under Spanish rule until 1898 when she came under the United States' control following the Spanish-American War, and was given independence in 1902.

During Cuba's four hundred years under colonial rule, Cuba went through several years of depopulation, not all that surprising actually, and then limited growth.¹⁴ Cuban colonist and conquistadors left the island seeking adventure and wealth in other newly discovered lands. Hernando Cortes summed up the sentiment, "I came here to get rich, not to till the soil like a peasant."¹⁵ In the early years, the island's population was majority male. This trend would continue until the island colony became a nation, due to the large number of male slaves and Chinese laborers. The majority of the slaves imported to the island were young adult males. In the census of 1775, 1827 and 1841 there were two times the number of males compared to females, which was not all that unusual in early settler colonies.¹⁶

Over the centuries, events in other parts of the Spanish empire led to immigration to Cuba. In 1655, the British victory in Jamaica brought approximately 1500 Spanish settlers to the

¹⁴ Kamen, Henry, *Empire: How Spain Became a World Power 1492 – 1763* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004) p. 121.

¹⁵ Kamen, *Empire*, p. 83.

¹⁶ Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, "Bourde, Guy: Fuentes y métodos de la historia demográfica en Cuba (siglos XVIII y XIX)" (Revista de la Biblioteca Nacional José Martí 16, no. 1, 1974) p. 57.

island and about the same number of slaves.¹⁷ Again, after a British victory against the Spanish in 1736, the British became the rulers of Florida. Spanish settlers immigrated to the island to escape British rule. John Holm writes, “Most of Florida’s Black population went to Cuba along with departing Spanish, who could no longer protect new runaways.”¹⁸ In 1762, Spain established a permanent garrison in Cuba, which drew in more immigrants.¹⁹

However, dramatic growth did not really occur until 1791 after the successful slave revolt in the French colony of Saint Domingue, known today as Haiti. The Haitian plantation owners fled to Santiago de Cuba and brought their slaves with them. In fact, the estimated French-Creole speaking population in Cuba in 1803 was 27,000.²⁰ For its first 150 years, Cuba had a homestead society: landowners lived on and worked the land alongside any slaves they may have had.²¹ This was in contrast to Saint Domingue where absentee landowners managed their plantations from France, leaving day-to-day management of the land and slaves to overseers.

After the Saint Domingue revolution, Cuba became a major exporter of sugar. It managed to take over the markets once dominated by the French. From 1791 until the abolition of slavery in 1886, Cuba experienced a steady increase in the number of slaves imported to the island and would become the fourth largest importer of slaves in the Americas.²² Only the United States, the British Caribbean and Brazil would import more slaves than Cuba.²³ Cuba had one of the longest histories of importing slaves of Africa. The last slave ship sailed into Cuba in 1866. The

¹⁷ Holm, John, *Pidgins and Creoles Vol. II: Reference Survey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p. 470.

¹⁸ Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, “Bourde, Guy,” p. 485.

¹⁹ Wright, *Cuba*, p. 89.

²⁰ Choy López, Luis Roberto, “Periodización y orígenes en la historia del español de Cuba” (Ph.D. Diss., Universitat de Valencia, 1997) p. 60.

²¹ Mufwene, Salikoko S., *The Ecology of Language Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p. 37.

²² Holm, *Pidgins and Creoles. Vol. II*, p. 307.

²³ Drescher, Seymour, “Fragmentation of Atlantic Slavery and British Intercolonial Slave Trade,” *The Chattie Principal: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas*, Edited by Walter Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) pp. 235-236.

longevity of the slave trade to Cuba was surpassed only by Brazil. This longevity kept Cuba ethnically diverse.²⁴

The conquistador and colonial settlers of Cuba were a diverse group. However, the nobility of Spain were not amongst the long-term Cuban settlers. The Spanish nobility largely did not immigrate to any of the newly discovered lands, for the most part, the colonizers were the middling classes – merchants, adventurers, second sons, etc. The European population of the island was made up of servants, artisans, merchants, clergy, sailors and traders, and included Flemish, German, Italian [Genoese], Portuguese and peoples of various regions of the Spanish territories.²⁵ During the early years of the Spanish colonies, Spain had not yet been united under one crown. Linguist Salikoko Mufwene and Robert Chaudenson describe the Spanish colonists as “undoubtedly of diverse regional backgrounds: Andalusian, Catalan, Basque and Galician.”²⁶ By 1757 there were 20 different European nationalities represented in Cuba’s population.²⁷

Due to the amount of labor involved in planting and processing sugarcane, Cuban plantation owners began demanding large numbers of slaves to be imported from Africa. This demand would dramatically change Cuban society. It was between 1790 and 1820 that Cuba became a plantation society with a predominately black population. More than 430,000 slaves from Africa were brought to Cuba to meet the need for labour and by 1862 more than 80 percent of the population was black.²⁸

Slavery became an important part of Cuban society. The native settlers were the Guanajatabeys. They were followed by Siboney, of Arawak origin, who immigrated to the island

²⁴ Johnson, Walter, “Introduction,” *The Chattle Principal: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas*, Edited by Walter Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 12.

²⁵ Johnson, *The Chattle Principal*, p. 111.

²⁶ Chaudenson, Robert and Salikoko S. Mufwene, *Creolization of Language and Culture*. (Padstow, Cornwall: TJ International LTD, 2001) p. 129.

²⁷ Choy López, “Periodización y orígenes en la historia del español de Cuba,” p. 48.

²⁸ Chaudenson and Mufwene, *Creolization of Language and Culture*, p. 131.

from what are present day Venezuela and Colombia. The last group of natives to immigrate to the island was the Taíno, of Caribe origin. The Taíno enslaved the Siboney. The population of the island when Columbus arrived was estimated between 50,000 and 300,000 people.²⁹

According to Juan Perez de la Riva, the population at the beginning of the fifteenth century before the conquest was estimated by archeologists as being a little more than 100,000.³⁰ Several Taíno words are still used in Cuba today, including the word Cuba, which was the Taíno name for the island. Many of the regions and cities in Cuba still bear the Taíno name, places such as Guacanayabo, Bayamo and Macanau.³¹ Other Taíno words still in use today are canoe, tobacco and hammock, yucca and Cacique.³²

When the first Spaniards arrived and needed a work force to act as guides, to mine the minerals on the island and to produce food supplies, it was the native population they enslaved. As Franklin Knight argues, “[T]he first large-scale attempts at slavery in the New World involved the indigenous Indians.”³³ However, this was not “an adequate solution to the problem of labor recruitment” partly because the Taínos, Siboneyes and Guanajatabeyes succumbed to European diseases to which they had no immunity.³⁴ Harsh work environments and violence led to an almost wholesale genocide. Cuba’s first governor, Diego Velazquez, led a campaign against the native population which included murdering one of the Taíno chiefs, Hatuey.³⁵ The native population was quickly decimated. As the Amerindians were depleted, the conquistadors began bringing natives from other islands to work. Yaqui Indians were sold and imported into

²⁹ Staten, Clifford L, *The History of Cuba* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003) p. 3.

³⁰ Choy López, “Periodización y orígenes en la historia del español de Cuba,” p. 111.

³¹ Blanco, Nilda, “Algunas características del español antes y después de 1959” (Habana: Universidad de la Habana, 2001) p. 18.

³² Johnson, Willis Fletcher, *The History of Cuba, Volume 5* (New York: B. F. Buck and Company, Inc., 1920) p. 14.

³³ Knight, Franklin W, *Slave Society in Cuba during the Nineteenth Century* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1970) p. 187.

³⁴ Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba during the Nineteenth Century*, p. 187.

³⁵ Kamen, *Empire*, p. 83.

Cuba as late as the 1890s.³⁶ However, this arrangement did not last. The new Amerindian slaves ran away or succumbed to the same illnesses as their predecessors. However, eighteenth-century parish records show that their decimation was overestimated and some still lived in Cuban communities.³⁷

Spanish priest and colonist de Las Casas recommended importing slaves from Africa to ease the burden on the native population, which he described as “simple and gentle.”³⁸ Around 1513, the settlers of Cuba began demanding slaves be sent to Cuba from across the Atlantic. Slaves were sent from pre-existing slave supplies in Spain, from the Barbary Coast of Morocco and the islands of Mallorca, Sardinia and Menorca. In 1543, the Spanish ordered the expulsion of all slaves from North Africa.³⁹ So slaves were imported from West Africa, and Senegal in the north to Angola in the south to Mozambique in the southeast.⁴⁰

From 1513, when the importation of slaves from Africa began, to 1886, when slavery was abolished in Cuba, approximately 800,000 slaves were imported from Africa. It has been estimated that 12,000 slaves were imported into Cuba by the end of the Sixteenth century.⁴¹ The majority of the slaves (around 85 percent) were imported during the Nineteenth century after the sugar revolution began.

Historians have tried to identify the ethnicity of the slaves imported into Cuba. One of these methods was to study cabildos. Under Spanish rule, urban slaves and free blacks in Cuba could join societies or cabildos (nations) whose memberships were made up of people of the same ethnicity. Cabildos were modeled after *cofradías*, or fraternities, in Spain. The first known

³⁶ Graham, Richard, “Another Middle Passage,” *The Chattle Principal: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) p. 316n3.

³⁷ Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, “Bourde, Guy,” p. 44.

³⁸ Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, “Bourde, Guy,” p. 83.

³⁹ Gott, *Cuba*, p. 25.

⁴⁰ Gott, *Cuba*, p.6.

⁴¹ Gott, *Cuba*, p.25.

cabildo in Cuba was formed in 1598.⁴² Miguel Ramos, writing about the cabildos, believed they “were organized by slaves or manumitted Africans belonging to the same ethnic affiliation.”⁴³

Gwendolyn Hall suggests that they were organized and named in accordance with the broad regional designations given to them by their masters and Cuban colonial authorities.⁴⁴ She argues that they were usually designated by the largest or best-known ethnicity in the cabildo, but may include a diverse membership of distinct peoples.⁴⁵

Cuba’s cabildos kept traditions of each ethnicity alive as well as provided social services and education, although they were most likely mergers between many ethnic traditions with additional influences from the Spanish and native cultures. The cabildos helped to make the transition from Africa less brutal. The cabildos also kept alive religious practices from Africa. Because of membership in cabildos, Cuba’s black population always knew from which part of Africa they came.⁴⁶

By the time slavery ended in Cuba, cabildos had been outlawed. Government officials feared their existence would fuel revolutionary movements. However, new societies developed to replace them. These societies were often times former cabildos. Some were new groups. By 1887, there were 67 active societies. They too provided social services and education opportunities for their members and kept traditions from their homelands alive as the cabildos before had done.⁴⁷ The societies and cabildos were often given names by their members, which

⁴² Ramos, Miguel “Willie,” “The Cabildo Processions of Regla: Orishas on Parade,” (eleda.org. 2000, <http://ilarioba.tripod.com/cabildos.htm>, (Accessed March 7, 2009) p.1.

⁴³ Ramos, “The Cabildo Processions of Regla,” p.1.

⁴⁴ Hall, Gwendolyn Midlo, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Link*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005) p. 35.

⁴⁵ Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas*, p. 35.

⁴⁶ Gott, *Cuba*, p. 47.

⁴⁷ Montejo Arrechea, Carmen V, *Sociedades Negras en Cuba 1878-1960* (Habana, Cuba: Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Cultura Cubana Juan Marinello, 2004) p. 63.

represented their social desires; for example, *Igualdad* (Equality) and *La Armonia* (The Harmony).⁴⁸

Religious practices were creolized in Cuba, but can still help trace ethnic origins back to certain African nations. For instance, the Bantu influence on religion in Cuba was direct and unadulterated. In fact, the influence of a traditional Congo religion, Palo Mayombe, has influenced many Cubans. There is evidence of the powerful influence in folklore and religion from the Congo.⁴⁹

In addition to the Congolese influence, there were elements of the Yoruba gods and Santeria in Cuba.⁵⁰ The Yoruba influence has been emphasized over all other African religions. This is due to the relatively late arrivals of Yoruba speakers to the Cuban slave trade. The Santeria orishas, or gods, have corresponding Catholic saints, which made it easier for African slaves to assimilate into western religions. Santeria parables and proverbs are often used in Cuban literature. The orishas and their corresponding saints are inspiration for many Cuban artists and are seen in their works. Also, Our Lady of Caridad del Cobre is the Santeria orisha, Ochun, and the patron saint of Cuba.

When Carabalí were introduced to Cuba in the Nineteenth century, they brought their religious beliefs and practices from the Bight of Biafra with them. These beliefs and practices would also be incorporated into Cuban culture.⁵¹ These beliefs, known as Abakua, influenced Cuban music and dance. It is from Abakua that the Rumba was created.

⁴⁸ Montejo Arrechea, *Sociedades Negras en Cuba 1878-1960*, p. 63.

⁴⁹ Palo Monte Mayombe has been described as the dark side of Santeria. It is said to use "dark forces." Its focus is on controlling the spirits of the dead. They use charms and spells. It is most carefully preserved and is respected and feared. It was brought to Cuba by Bantu speakers.

⁵⁰ Santeria is the most wide-spread of the African influenced religions. It was brought to Cuba by Yoruba speakers. It does not polarize good and evil.

⁵¹ Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas*, p. 170.

Official church documents are a rich source of information of race and ethnicities. These documents included baptismal records, wedding certificates and death certificates. The church records were quite detailed. They often listed if a person was free or enslaved, or they were White, Indian, mixed, or Moreno (runaway slave).⁵² Baptismal records in some parishes listed dates of baptism and birth, whether the person was of legitimate or illegitimate birth, names of both parents and each parents' place of origin. Other parishes, such as Santa Maria del Rosario, listed ten items of interest in their records. These items were: date of baptismal, date of birth, gender, legitimacy, social status, name, ethnic origin, parents' names and owner's name, if a slave.⁵³ Adult baptismal records of blacks, free, slave and runaways list their ethnic origins: Mina, Congo, Bambara, Mandinga, Carabalí, etc.⁵⁴

Records from Cuban custom houses and British and Spanish records from captured illegal slave ships provided information on the ethnicities of the slaves imported to Cuba. Another method for determining the ethnicity of slaves was through prison records. These records were obtained from Havana, Matanzas, Cardenas and other Cuban cities. In them, nine ethnic groups were identified: Congo, Gangá, Carabalí, Afro-Criollo, Lucumí, Mandinga, Macuá, Mina and Arara.⁵⁵ The distinctiveness in records corresponds to the era in which slaves were imported, prejudices related to certain ethnic groups and beliefs that certain ethnicities performed certain labours better than others.

However, these records are not useful in identifying with accuracy, where the slave was born. They are often based on similar linguistic characteristics or on where the slaves were purchased, as opposed to where they were originally captured. Diverse ethnicities were

⁵² Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, "Bourde, Guy," p. 35.

⁵³ Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, "Bourde, Guy," p. 47.

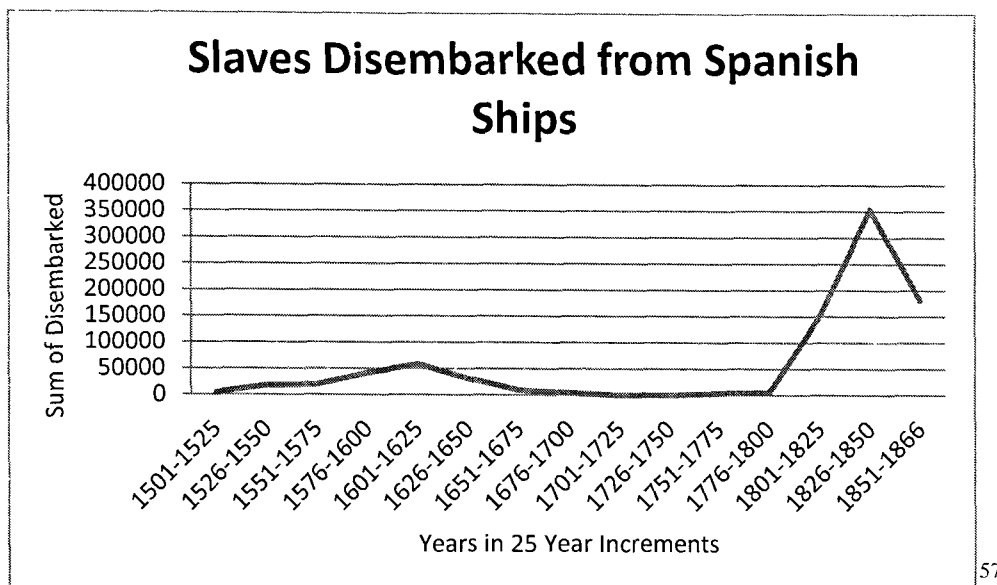
⁵⁴ Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, "Bourde, Guy," p. 48.

⁵⁵ Howard, Philip A, *Changing History: Afro-Cuban Cabildos and Societies of Color in the Nineteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998) pp.15-16.

categorized together by their European masters. The only common denominator, according to Europeans, was their so-called race. While these ethnicities did not coincide with the ethnic names they used to identify themselves in their homelands, a new sense of identity began to emerge after the slaves were captured in their homelands. These new identities developed as the slaves were transported from the interior to the coastal port where they were sold. There were only twelve main coastal ports. So, many smaller ethnic groups were merged into twelve larger ones. These ethnic groups further developed during the trip across the Atlantic. Once in Cuba, the slaves on the ships were given “nationalities” based on the ports or regions of embarkation, which was cemented after contact with similar groups in Cuba.⁵⁶

The majority of slaves imported to Cuba were on Spanish ships. The table below is imported from the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database and shows the number of slaves which disembarked in Cuba from Spanish ships between 1525 and 1866. The table is in 25 year increments and shows that the number of slaves disembarking from Spanish ships was greatest between the years 1801 and 1866. Due to a rise in the number of sugar plantations in Cuba, the years between 1801 and 1825 were the first time the number of slaves disembarked on the island was six figures. The largest number of slaves in a 25 year period imported before 1801 was 58,445 between 1601 and 1650.

⁵⁶ Grandio Moraguez, “The African Origins of Slaves arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865,” *Extending the Frontiers*. Eltis, David and David Richardson eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008) p. 181.



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The imported slaves were Malinkes and Gangas from Sierra Leone, Akans from the Gold Coast, Yoruba from the Bight of Benin, Ibos and Efiks from the Bight of Biafra, Makaws of Mozambique and Congos from Angola. The names of the various ethnic groups were transformed into Spanish sounding names such as Mandingos, Gangá, Minas, Lucumí, Carabalí, Macuá and Congo respectively.⁵⁸ According to Richard Gott, “Slaves were differentiated by their white owners according to their places of origin, with a variety of different names that identified distinct ethnicities from along the African coast. Gott suggests “[t]hese were usually corruptions of the original African tribal names” that were usually adopted by the slaves.⁵⁹

However, these ethnic identities were based on regions where the slaves were captured and on similar languages. Nevertheless, they were broad terms, “slaves in sales documents in Cuba were listed under broad regional categories regardless of their ethnicities,” a phenomenon

⁵⁷ “Transatlantic Slave Trade Database.” Emory University. 2008, 2009 Accessed April 13, 2009.

www.slavevoyages.org.

⁵⁸ Gott, *Cuba*, pp. 47-48.

⁵⁹ Gott, *Cuba*, p. 49.

not common in other areas of the Caribbean.⁶⁰ Once in Cuba, the slaves were given hybrid ethnicities that did not exist in Africa. For example, the Lucumí included people sold in Yorubaland but were not all Yoruba speakers. Hausa and Fon speakers were included as Lucumí.⁶¹ The Carabalí were made up of both Ibo and Efiks. There were four major languages, some minor languages and several dialects that fell under the Carabalí ethnicity. In fact Ibo may not have been recognized by some of the individuals in their homelands who were designated as Carabalí in Cuba.⁶² Frank W. Knight argues that “Most slaves of the New World originally came from the west coast of Africa,” in an area “stretching from the mouth of the Senegal River to the territory which today (1970) roughly corresponds to the Portuguese colony of Angola.” Most slaves captured in the nineteenth century “came from the Bight of Benin to the Bight of Biafra.”⁶³

Grandio Moraguez suggests that “Some connections between ethnicity and port are possible.”⁶⁴ He writes that slaves left from ports closest to where their ethnic and language groups hailed. For instance, Yoruba speakers left from Lagos, and Ibo and Ibibio left from Bonny in the Bight of Biafra. Kikongo and similar language groups left from the Congo River region. In upper Guinea, including Senegambia, Sierra Leone and the Windward Coast, there were two apparent patterns. Prior to 1805, slaves came from Gambia, Sierra Leone, Iles de Los, Senegal and Goree. After 1806, they were captured primarily from Rio Pongo and Gallinas.⁶⁵ In Sierra Leone, the slaves that were captured then purchased were a diverse lot. Most of the slaves coming from Sierra Leone were put in one of two language groups, Mande and Mel. In the first

⁶⁰ Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas*, pp. 34-35.

⁶¹ Grandio Moraguez, “The African Origins of Slaves arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865,” p. 182.

⁶² Grandio Moraguez, “The African Origins of Slaves arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865,” p. 181.

⁶³ Wright, *Cuba*, p.48.

⁶⁴ Grandio Moraguez, “The African Origins of Slaves arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865,” p. 189.

⁶⁵ Grandio Moraguez, “The African Origins of Slaves arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865,” p. 189.

quarter of the eighteenth century, most of the slaves exported from Ouidah were captured in Dahomey between Ewe-Fon and Aja. In the nineteenth-century, most of the slaves were Yoruba speakers, as opposed to Fon. The slaves for export from Ouidah and Lagos were captives of the Yoruba Wars that led to the destruction of the Oyo Empire. These captives were Abeokuta, Ibadan, Ilorin, Ijebu, Ode, Ife, Ketun and to a lesser degree, Hausa speakers from the Savanna to the north.⁶⁶

Information from the slave trade database coincides with the information given by Historian Richard Gott. It indicates that slaves brought into Cuba came from a variety of areas in Africa. Records from the database show the places of purchase as Windward Coast, Bight of Benin, Bight of Biafra, Gulf of Guinea Islands, Gold Coast, Senegambia, the off shore Atlantic islands, Sierra Leone, Southeast Africa, Indian Ocean Islands, West Central Africa, St. Helena and other locations. It was not until 1526 that Cuba became a principle port of disembarkation. Importations prior to this point were listed as the Spanish colonies. The last date for importation was 1865, with the principle place of purchase as West Central Africa and St. Helena.

Moraguez argues that in the nineteenth-century, "Cuba received the greatest mix of African peoples at the same time."⁶⁷ Slaves arrived from many parts of Africa and none of the parts provided more than 28% of the arrivals.⁶⁸ Only the Gold Coast is exempt, providing an insignificant number of captive Africans. Between 1790 and 1867, most captive slaves came from West Central Africa, followed by the Bight of Biafra, Sao Tome, Principe Island, Cameroon, and Gabon. The Gold Coast was only important to the Cuban slave imports before 1806. Until 1807, the highest volume of slaves going to Cuba came from Bonny, Congo River and New Calabar. After 1807, Cuban slave imports were supplied from regions out of the sight

⁶⁶ Grandio Moraguez, "The African Origins of Slaves arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865," p. 191.

⁶⁷ Grandio Moraguez, "The African Origins of Slaves arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865," p. 183.

⁶⁸ Grandio Moraguez, "The African Origins of Slaves arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865," p. 183.

of the British Navy. Luanda became important at this point. Eventually, Bonny would regain its importance to the trade. Loanda, which was a Portuguese held port, also gained importance. The British outlawed the slave trade in 1808, and took it upon themselves to police the Atlantic. However, Cuban ships continued to go to Africa for slaves. Slaves were brought to Cuba by ships flying foreign flags. Also, they began to get slaves from south of the equator; first from Angola, then from Brazil.⁶⁹ Ports such as Sierra Leone then expanded their trade to Cuba.

In the years between 1821 and 1840 the trade from West Central Africa falters. Two out of every five slaves came from the Bight of Biafra, and fifteen percent of the slave imports to Cuba came from Sierra Leone, specifically Gallinas and Rio Pongo. One in ten came from Southeastern Africa.⁷⁰ This showed the emergence of Gallinas and ports along the Mozambican coast into the Cuban market. The persistence of the Bights (Biafra and Benin) and Sierra Leone demonstrates the ineffectiveness of the British in these areas.⁷¹

The Congo River was the main supplier of slaves to Cuba in the years from 1841 to 1865. Due to the lack of European authorities, half of all slaves from Africa to Cuba were from the Congo. The Congo River region was reinforced by Ambriz, Cabinda, Kilongo and Loango. Mozambique would retain its position of importance and Ouidah would reemerge in the slave trade to Cuba. The final region of slave trade activity was Benguela.⁷²

Prior to the 1830s, very few slave ships were captured by the British and American military anti-slaving ships. This was because of several factors: first, fifteen hundred ships of all types entered Cuban ports, which made policing the ships difficult. Second, as an island, Cuba has many coasts that were hard to monitor. In addition, smaller adjacent islands allowed for

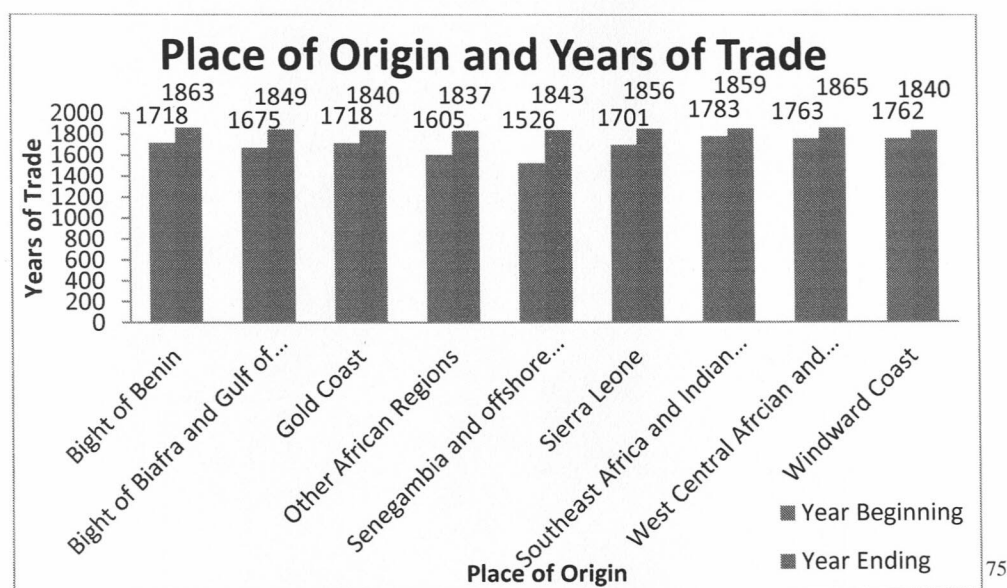
⁶⁹ Wright, *Cuba*, p.51.

⁷⁰ Grandio Moraguez, "The African Origins of Slaves Arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865," p. 186.

⁷¹ Grandio Moraguez, "The African Origins of Slaves Arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865," p. 186.

⁷² Grandio Moraguez, "The African Origins of Slaves Arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865," p. 189.

easier smuggling. Finally, the inter-island slave trade was legal.⁷³ In 1830, authorities in Madrid declared that any smugglers participating in the slave trade would face heavy fines. For the most part, this decree was ignored by both Spanish and Cuban officials. A blockade between 1840 and 1850 reduced the number of importations from the Bight of Biafra and Sierra Leone, and by the 1860s, importations from these regions would completely disappear.⁷⁴ The following graph derived from the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database shows the time periods for each region discussed:



The dates from the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database for slave exportations indicate that no ships arrived in Cuba from the Bight of Biafra after 1849 or from Sierra Leone after 1856. This corresponds with Moraguez's analysis of the database dates. The database also shows that while the British abolishment of the transatlantic slave trade and the subsequent blockades

⁷³ Grandio Moraguez, "The African Origins of Slaves Arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865," p. 186.

⁷⁴ Grandio Moraguez, "The African Origins of Slaves Arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865," p. 187.

⁷⁵ "Transatlantic Slave Trade Database."

may have reduced the number of ships leaving from other ports along the African coast, it did not completely eliminate them.⁷⁶

With the disappearance of the Bight of Biafra and Sierra Leone from the slave trade, West Central Africa and Southeast Africa were the only regions left in Africa to provide slaves, and three out of every five slaves came from West Central Africa. The Bight of Benin provided 20.1% of the slaves and Southeast Africa supplied 11.6%.⁷⁷ By the end of the slave trade, from the late eighteenth century to 1865, three out of five slaves left from six ports: Congo River, Mozambique, Gallinas, Bonny, Ouidah and Lagos.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ "Transatlantic Slave Trade Database."

⁷⁷ Grandio Moraguez, "The African Origins of Slaves Arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865," p. 188.

⁷⁸ Grandio Moraguez, "The African Origins of Slaves Arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865," p.188-189.

unsure whether to reply Bantu, Yoruba or Carabalí. The Soviets were not clear why he did not know because “white Cubans” simply said “Cuban.”⁸⁰

The perception has been that the majority of Afro-Cubans came from Yoruba speaking areas. In the 1920s, Fernando Ortiz wrote an impressive and voluminous study. He stated there were ten African ethnic denominations that still exist in Cuba. In it he repeated the belief that Lucumí came to Cuba in larger numbers and brought with them a civilization and religious system that was superior to the other African ethnicities.⁸¹ This perception is probably due to the fact that Lucumí began arriving relatively late in the slave trade to Cuba. “Although the Yoruba/Lucumí were important in nineteenth century Cuba, they arrived in large numbers late” and the possibility exists that “their presence and influence in Cuba has been over-stated.” This exaggerated importance and influence maybe at the expense of other ethnicities, in particular the [C]ongo.⁸² However, with the completion of the slave trade database, it appears that the largest number of slaves imported into Cuba actually came from Bantu speaking areas. These slaves were called Congo by Cuban slave owners.⁸³

Many stereotypes emerged about each ethnic group. In 1910, anthropologist, Henri Dumont wrote that Lucumí were obedient but “marked by certain inclination to suicide” and Congo were “strong but timid and extravagant,” They also “had a strong inclination to rest in excess and insubordination.” Like Dumont, Esteban Pachardo wrote that Congo were seen as loyal but lazy, Lucumí were “appreciated for being hard workers,” although they had “a tendency to commit suicide.” Carabalí were rebellious but were “good workers.” Arara were

⁸⁰ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, pp. 54-55.

⁸¹ Grandio Moraguez, “The African Origins of Slaves arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865,” p. 179.

⁸² Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas*, p. 165.

⁸³ “Transatlantic Slave Trade Database.”

“easy to identify because all have more facial scarifications than the rest of the Africans.”⁸⁴ In his study, he linked these ethnic groups to precise geographical locations in Africa. Dumont wrote that the purchase of slaves was influenced by their ethnic origin. He described the Lucumí as the more intelligent and easier to civilize, while the Congo were inferior.⁸⁵

Later studies identified more ethnic groups. A study done by Alejandro de la Fuentes in 1986 identified forty-two ethnic groups. He analyzed them among the African captives brought to Cuba in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries. De La Fuentes’ research came from the Cuban National Archives and Havana’s cathedral archives. His study demonstrated that up to the seventeenth century, the majority of captives were Angolan, Arara and Congo.⁸⁶ Nery Gomez Abreu and Manuel Martinez Casanova studied African baptismal records from 1817 to 1886 in Placetas (central Cuba). These records showed that Congo made up 32.4% of the slaves. The other ethnicities were significantly lower. The Gangá were the next largest ethnic group represented with 10.7% of the slave population. Also represented in Placetas were the Mandinga (6.8%), Lucumí (3.8%), Ibo (3.4%), Guinea (3.04%), Carabalí (2.43%) and Mina (1.4%).⁸⁷ Jesus Guanche Perez’s 1995 study of Rio del Pinar and Sancti Spiritus parish records from 1851 to 1860 showed there were nine principle ethnic denominations, Congo being the largest of them and representing 34.81% of those of African origins.⁸⁸ The Lucumí were the second largest group comprising 22.83% of the population. These two groups were followed by the Gangá, Carabalí, Macuá, Mandinga, Mina, Arara and others respectively.⁸⁹ He concluded that the Congo may have comprised the largest percentage of the population in Rio del Pinar and Sancti Spiritus,

⁸⁴ Grandio Moraguez, “The African Origins of Slaves arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865,” p. 178.

⁸⁵ Grandio Moraguez, “The African Origins of Slaves arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865,” p. 178.

⁸⁶ Grandio Moraguez, “The African Origins of Slaves arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865,” p. 180.

⁸⁷ Grandio Moraguez, “The African Origins of Slaves arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865,” p. 180.

⁸⁸ Grandio Moraguez, “The African Origins of Slaves arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865,” p.180.

⁸⁹ Grandio Moraguez, “The African Origins of Slaves arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865,” p.180.

but the Lucumí had the largest influence among Cuban slaves due to higher socio-cultural development.⁹⁰

After the slave trade was abolished and nations began to end the practice of slavery, Chinese laborers were brought to Cuba to replace the African slaves around the middle of the nineteenth-century. It is estimated that 140,000 Chinese men were brought to Cuba as laborers.⁹¹ The Chinese bridged the gap between blacks and whites. They were usually semi-skilled laborers. In nineteenth-century Cuban society they were classified as white; however, they worked in conditions nearly identical to slaves.⁹² Parish records for the Chinese were more complete and accurate than slave records.

Cuban colonial society was broken into castes and classes. Castes corresponded to heredity and were defined by law. The castes were white, free people of colour and slaves. Whites were the highest caste and considered naturally free. Free people of colour and slaves were considered inferior and subordinate.⁹³ This caste system was created simultaneously with the enslavement of both the native population and Africans.⁹⁴ Proponents for the abolition of slavery on the island argued that the ending of slavery would prevent the Africanization of Cuba, a fear of many white Cubans.⁹⁵

Classes stratified each caste. For slaves, the classes were identified by where a slave lived and what kind of labor they performed. Urban and domestic laborers were seen as a higher class than rural field hand, though they were considered the same caste.⁹⁶ It generally took two

⁹⁰ Grandio Moraguez, "The African Origins of Slaves arriving in Cuba, 1789-1865," p.181.

⁹¹ Choy López, "Periodización y orígenes en la historia del español de Cuba," p.62.

⁹² Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba during the Nineteenth Century*, p.71.

⁹³ Hernández, Sandoica, Elena. "La historia de Cuba vista desde España a estudios sobre 'política' 'raza' y 'sociedad.'" (Revista de Indias 58, no. 212, 1998) p. 8.

⁹⁴ Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba during the Nineteenth Century*, p. 187.

⁹⁵ Drescher, Seymour, *The Chattle Principal: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) p. 249.

⁹⁶ Wright, *Cuba*, p.59.

generations for slaves to attain strong enough fluency in the Spanish language and the needed skills to move from a plantation slave to an urban setting.⁹⁷

Blacks in Cuba were also classified by where they were born and whether they were free or slaves. Bozales were foreign born non-Spanish speakers. Ladinós were also foreign born but spoke Spanish. The last group was Criollos who were blacks who were born in Cuba.⁹⁸ The term Criollos was also used to describe people who were born in Cuba and were of mixed ancestry, such as white and Amerindian or white and black. Criollos were considered a lower class than Peninsulares who were of pure Spanish birth. While Criollos were tied to the land, the Peninsulares held government offices and were leaders of commerce.⁹⁹

All immigrants to Cuba, whether free or slave, brought with them their identities from their homelands. For generations, it was these identities that determined a person's status in the island society. These identities were based on ethnicity and would play an important role in Cuban history and culture. However, determining the ethnicities of the slaves imported has been much more difficult than determining the ethnicities of the European immigrants. European immigrants could trace back their ethnicity to a specific region, while imported slaves' ethnicities were created by others. Past efforts have focused on the available linguistic and religious information, cabildos, church, criminal and custom house records. With the completion of the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, more information became available to determine slave ethnicities. The database records corresponded with information of ethnic origin gained from the studies of cabildos and other social groups, as well as information found in the historical Church documents, prison records, religious practices and custom house data.

⁹⁷ Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba during the Nineteenth Century*, p. 191.

⁹⁸ Wright, *Cuba*, p. 63.

⁹⁹ Wright, *Cuba*, p. 63.

RACE AND ETHNICITY IN CUBA

There is little agreement on the ethnic make-up of Cuba today vary. In 1981, the Cuban census included a racial variable for the first time since 1953. They listed four categories: white, black, mestizo and Asian. In the 1953 Cuban census, mestizos made up 14.5% of the population. In the 1981 Cuban census, that percentage rose to 22%.¹⁰⁰ In 2011, some estimated the black population at 12.5%.¹⁰¹ Cuba has 11.2 million people. According to the United States State Department, 51% are of mixed decent, 37% are white. Eleven percent are black and one percent of the people are Chinese.¹⁰² The CIA's numbers are different and are based on the 2002 census: 65.1% white, 24.8% Mestizo and mulatto, 10.1% black.¹⁰³ According to Alejandro de la Fuente, the increase in mestizos could be due to an increase in interracial marriage, a broader notion of a mixed Cuba or a process of upward mobility, which is still identified with 'whitening.'¹⁰⁴ He writes, "Since 'race' is determined by a number of social and cultural factors, in addition to phenotype features, the growing proportion of mulattos in the population is probably a reflection of the education and occupational mobility experienced by the younger generations of Afro-Cubans."¹⁰⁵

Cuba has a complex, multi-tiered racial society and racial categorization system. Most of Cuba's population is of African or Spanish descent. But racial designation is fluid. As Mark Sawyer puts it, race is "very salient" and "highly correlated with skin colour" and

¹⁰⁰ De la Fuente, Alejandro. *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in 20th Century Cuba*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001) p. 308.

¹⁰¹ Brenner, Philip et al., *A Contemporary Cuba Reader: Reinventing the Revolution*, (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008)

¹⁰² "Background Notes: Cuba," U.S. Department of State. Modified November 7, 2011. Accessed December 21, 2011 www.state.gov.

¹⁰³ "World Factbook: Cuba," Central Intelligence Agency. Modified March 21, 2012. Accessed April 17, 2012. www.CIA.gov.

¹⁰⁴ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, p. 308.

¹⁰⁵ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, pp. 308-309.

pigmentation.¹⁰⁶ In today's Cuba, often times race is determined by the observer. It may also be determined by the socio-economic class of the individual as well. A person who is a mixed-race may be classified as a black if their skin is dark or white if their skin is quite light. According to Cuban Novelist Marta Rojas, "if the enumerator looks and says 'white' and he writes 'white,' that's enough."¹⁰⁷ Rojas argues that identity is primarily about appearance. People will "look at your features and straight hair," and decide your ethnicity"¹⁰⁸

While there are three basic categories for racial designation, other descriptions are also used to designate degree of racial categorization. A person may be categorized as a Mulato/a adelantado/a or advanced mulatto meaning a light-skinned mulatto. They may be a mulato/a atrasado/a or backward mulatto meaning a mulatto who is dark-skinned or who had African features. Someone may be a mulato/a blanconzo/a which means they could pass for white. They may be Jaba, who is a person with light-skin, hair and eyes but who clearly has African features. A mulato/a achinado/a is someone who is a mulatto who has Asian features and straight hair resulting from a black/Chinese union or a mulatto and Chinese union. Someone who is Chino/a Indio/a or muro is Chinese and white. If someone has wheat or olive-coloured skin tone and straight or wavy hair, they are a trigueno/a. Someone who is very dark-skinned and has very strong African features is a negro/a azul or a prieto/a and a blanco/a Cubano/a is someone who behind apparent whiteness has some African mixing.¹⁰⁹

Work habits in slaves were associated with origin as is appearance or physical features. Someone who was taller may have been from one African nation while someone who was

¹⁰⁶ Sawyer, Mark Q. *Racial Politics in Post Revolutionary Cuba* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) p. 177.

¹⁰⁷ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 85

¹⁰⁸ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 85

¹⁰⁹ Fernandez, Nadine T. *Revolutionizing Romance: Interracial Couples in Contemporary Cuba*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010) pp.20-21.

shorter was associated with a different region. Even in contemporary Cuba, when someone is described, features which appear to be of African descent have negative names. Features of European lineage are given more positive names. Pelo bueno is good or straight hair. Hair which is kinky is called pelo malo. If someone's hair is described as pasas, it means they have bad or wooly hair. Pasas translates as raisins in English. Lips which are full are called *bemba*.

In the late nineteenth-century, contract labourers began to arrive from the south of China. Eventually they would make up three-percent of Cuba's population. Their presence would change Cuba significantly. These Chinese labourers would meet and marry people already living on the island creating a new racial category would be created: the mulato chino.

Racial mixing has been part of Cuba's culture from the beginning. Spain legalized interracial marriage between white and native and white and black early in its colonial rule. In Cuba, the patron saint is Our Lady of Charity of Cobre. She became the patron saint in 1916 and is a mulatta virgin. She is usually depicted as a light-skinned brunette with European features. She is also Ochun in Santeria. Ochun is the Yoruban pantheon of fresh water and fertility. She is Atabey, the Taino mother of water and childbirth. She is a mixture of the pure, virginal mother of Christ and of sensual love, pleasure and fertility, and she is the product of an interracial union. Cuban identity is based heavily on, anthropologist Fernando Ortiz's, concept of *ajiaco* (a traditional Cuban stew), or Cuban mixing, and *Mestizaje* is central to Cubanidad or Cubaness. However, it is the ideal and not reality.

Ortiz's concept of Cuba being like *ajiaco* is essential to Cubanidad. The stew is made up of bacon, meats and spices from Spain, root vegetables from Africa and corn, tomatoes and malanga from the island. His research into the African influence in Cuba demonstrated the

cultural integration there. He called the Cuban culture “a work in progress.”¹¹⁰ Cuba combined a variety of ethnicities. Like ajiaco, Cuban culture is a combination of African, Amerindian and Spanish. Each of the ethnicities formed part of the new culture, but still maintained some of their original identity. Ortiz believed that Cuban culture was “indefinitely replenishable” because as the old was used, new was added.¹¹¹ The ethnic make-up of the island was Amerindian, Arawak, Taino and Siboney; Spanish, Andalucian, Castile, Canary Islanders; and African, Guineans, Sudanese and Bantu.¹¹² So the island, like the stew, is a mixture. This mixture is important to how Cubans see themselves and how Cubans are seen by others. In the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century, interracial coupling was an integral part to ‘whitening’ and nation-building.¹¹³ It was seen as essential if the nation was to progress.¹¹⁴

In 1899, after the Spanish American War, an American observer of Cuba stated, “The existence of blacks must be reckoned with in every phase of the reconstruction of the island.”¹¹⁵ Racial prejudices never seen in Cuba were imported in large part from the Americans who came to dominate Cuba’s political and social existence during the republican period from 1902 to 1959. Segregation of beaches, social areas, neighborhoods and schools came after the 1898 Treaty of Paris which ended the Spanish American War. This would be true until the Castro regime ended segregation in 1960.

Prejudice was always a part of Cuban life to some degree. In Cuba, particularly after 1898, there existed a “whitening” movement. Interracial mixing was encouraged in order to

¹¹⁰ Firmat, *The Cuban Condition*, p.52.

¹¹¹ Firmat, *The Cuban Condition*, p. 24.

¹¹² Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 155.

¹¹³ Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, p. 70.

¹¹⁴ Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ Brenner, et al., eds. *A Contemporary Cuban Reader*, p. 325.

whiten the population and make it more European-like. Much of the whitening beliefs were derived from social evolutionist theories of the inferiority of non-whites.

Social evolution or Social Darwinism promoted the belief that white Europeans and whites of European descent were superior to all other people. In Cuba, interracial coupling was seen as crucial to the eventual elimination of Afro-Cubans on the island. However, this theory was different from that of the United States and Western Europe, where racial mixing was believed to lead to the de-evolution or the creation of inferior people who were morally, physically and intellectually inferior to whites.

However, being designated as white was important in Cuba. In fact, such importance was given to being white that racial designation could be purchased for a son from the Spanish crown. A child borne to an African or Amerindian mother and a Spanish father could “become” white if the father had the money to pay the crown for his whiteness. In 1795, Carlos IV decreed that through the *Gracias al Sacar*, a mulatto child’s whiteness could be purchased in order for that child to be able to inherit family lands and titles and have the ability to hold certain professions.¹¹⁶ Even the titles given to the children of a mixed relationship indicated their rank in the class system. A *pardo* was a mulatto of lineage while a mulatto was a child from whose parents were poor white and poor black.¹¹⁷ Being a *pardo* did not allow one to hold certain professions, but if the father was willing to purchase a *Gracias al Sacar*, the child was then white and chose to be anything he ascribed to be. In her essay “Race Mixing in the Historical Novel,” Marta Rojas describes an Afro-Cuban painter Vicente Escobar who was born black and died white. She wrote that he was such a brilliant painter that noblemen wanted him to paint their

¹¹⁶ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, pp. 83-84.

¹¹⁷ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 84.

portraits. However, in colonial times, a black could not paint a nobleman. Thus, one wealthy nobleman bought Escobar his Gracias al Sacar and he became white.¹¹⁸

In the 1920s, Ortiz, described Cuba as a mestizo nation. He had a constructionist view of race. He wrote that black culture was “backward and primitive” and was a source of marginalization. He saw blacks assimilating and becoming “culturally more like whites” and that would eliminate inequality.¹¹⁹ Ortiz believed that African folklore in Cuba needed to be preserved because it would eventually become extinct though whitening. Rogelio Martinez Fure advised, “Don Fernando always said that it should not thought that the African was grafted on a preexistent Cuban culture but rather on the contrary, the Cuban came from the fusion of the African and Spanish, plus other elements.”¹²⁰

Today, there are more interracial couples in Cuba than ever before.¹²¹ This is due to several factors. The first is the desegregation of the schools and workplaces. The second is the government’s egalitarian promotion of equality. “...[T]he revolution’s ideological insistence on ‘racelessness’ and egalitarianism across racial and class lines provided a sociocultural and ideological space for interracial couples,” relates Fernandez.¹²²

However, changes have not come easily in households of the mixed couples or with the couples’ friend. Racial prejudices remain. Anthropologist Nadine Fernandez argues that racism is present in media representations, structural patterns of housing, and popular discourse, and it is also found within families.¹²³ Fernandez believes that this terminology, sayings, jokes and visual

¹¹⁸ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 84.

¹¹⁹ Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, p.135.

¹²⁰ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 156.

¹²¹ Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, p. 135.

¹²² Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, p. 68.

¹²³ Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, p. 150.

images based on race “contributed to molding and sustaining racist culture and the racial hierarchy.”¹²⁴

In her study *Revolutionizing Romance: Interracial Couples in Contemporary Cuba*, Ms. Fernandez studies several interracial couples. She found in her studies that these couples all still experienced some form of prejudice from friends and family. Fernandez observed when race mixing is accepted a families, it is “never a nonissue,” and Cuban youth learn early on that “their social identity relies in a fundamental way on their racial identity.”¹²⁵

Some believe that those in interracial relationships are trying to improve their status. As Nadine Fernandez describes it, they are “relations with some ulterior motive.”¹²⁶ That motive maybe sex, status, whitening or economic. Cuban interracial dating patterns have naming descriptors for the type of exclusive interracial relationship. For instance, *negra, negra buena para pasar el tiempo* is used when a white or mulatto male only dates white women. Literally translated it means black woman, black women for a good time.¹²⁷ In this scenario, the male sees women of color as good for sex only, while a white woman is of a higher social or moral standing. The terms used do not invoke the national ideal of mixing, but instead they conjure up images of sexuality.

The Cuban Media celebrates the Hispano-Cuban historical and cultural heritage while ignoring or degrading Afro-Cuban cultural heritage. Popular media has spread rumors of Afro-Cuban brujos sacrificing white girls.¹²⁸ Also Afro-Cubans have been excluded from television and other forms of media, except in cases where they are the buffoon or playing a historical role as a slave.

Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, p. 121.

¹²⁵ Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, pp. 173-174.

¹²⁶ Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, p. 123.

¹²⁷ Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, pp. 123-124.

¹²⁸ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, pp. 7-8.

Race on the island has always been part of the class and caste system. And as Sarduy notes, “It is true that for... Afro-Cubans, the dominant experience has been one of oppression, exclusion, and inferiorization.”¹²⁹ Oddly, Cuban tradition holds that the nation was less prejudiced than others in the Caribbean and in the United States, despite the resilience of slavery. They saw the Iberian form of slavery as a more benign form of slavery. Afro-Cubans were allowed to join *Cabildos*, or societies, based on African ethnicity. They could buy their freedom, and interracial relationships and marriages were permissible.

However, some of the socially acceptable behaviours of the colonial period lost favour during the Republican years. Influence from the United States and from eugenics studies out of the North Atlantic brought new forms of racial prejudice and racial discrimination not seen before on the island. As one American observer put it in 1899, “The existence of black must be reckoned with in every phase of the reconstruction of the island.”¹³⁰ Segregated private clubs and beaches became the norm.¹³¹ One white intellectual in 1929 summed it up by stating that “The black problem exists only when it is talked about and that is to play with fire.”¹³²

However, the Cuba constitution, since gaining independence, recognized the rights of Afro-Cubans, including the right to vote to Afro-Cubans. They have held this right since 1902. During elections in the Republican years, the Afro-Cuban vote was courted by candidates and held some value. Part of the reason is that it represented one-third of the electorate. Candidates reached out to the Afro-Cuban voters. The Afro-Cuban vote was so important that black and mulatto war heroes were sought out to stump for candidates. A candidate without the Afro-Cuban vote was a candidate without a chance of victory. From 1902 to 1959, it was common for

¹²⁹ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 17.

¹³⁰ Brenner et al., *A Contemporary Cuba Reader: Reinventing the Revolution*, p. 325.

¹³¹ Brenner et al., *A Contemporary Cuba Reader: Reinventing the Revolution*, p. 40.

¹³² Brenner et al., *A Contemporary Cuba Reader: Reinventing the Revolution*, p. 3.

candidates to claim they had the support of the Afro-Cuban populace, and they accuse their opponents of racism. For instance, Cuban President, General Gerardo Machado declared mulatto General Juan Antonio Maceo's date of death a national holiday. Americans came to Cuba with the idea that they were superior because surely there was a "decided Negro strain in many of the whites of Cuba."¹³³ To the Americans, Cuba's high miscegenation was seen as its greatest weakness.¹³⁴

¹³³ Brenner et al., *A Contemporary Cuba Reader: Reinventing the Revolution*, p. 40.

¹³⁴ Brenner et al., *A Contemporary Cuba Reader: Reinventing the Revolution*, p.40.

THE CUBAN REVOLUTION AND AFRO-CUBANS

During the 1959 Revolution, the Batista Regime repeatedly claimed it had cared for the Afro-Cubans and that the Afro-Cubans stood behind and supported Batista. Meanwhile, Castro supporters claimed that it was them who had the support of the black and mulatto population. Castro used images of folk heroes Jose Marti and Antonio Maceo to give historical and political legitimacy to the revolution. Castro also “used racial symbolism centered on a reconstructed image of non-white Cubans as integral participants.”¹³⁵ Alejandro de la Fuentes argues that race has been at the center of “every major crisis in Cuba’s modern history” and that “constructs similar to those currently used have been used before.”¹³⁶

Castro’s support in Angola incorporated blacks into Cuban culture.¹³⁷ It has demonstrated his regime’s commitment to black power struggles throughout the world. Africa has been a central concern in Castro’s foreign policy.¹³⁸ The Cuban government’s support of the Black Power movements in the United States also symbolically lent support to incorporating Afro-Cubans into Cuban society. Many Black Power leaders immigrated to Cuba. Cuba provided them exile and some were given military training. “In the long term, however, Cuba’s support for the African American struggle and the anti-colonial struggle in Africa contributed significantly to the government’s project of national integration,” writes de la Fuente.¹³⁹

The Castro administration claimed to have eliminated racism on the island, and yet they were afraid of the influence the exiled Black Americans would have on Afro-Cubans. The Castro

¹³⁵ Adams, Henley C. *Global Multiculturalism: Comparative Perspectives on Ethnicity, Race and Nation*. Edited by Cornwell and Eve Walsh Stoddard. (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001) p. 194.

¹³⁶ Brenner et al., *A Contemporary Cuba Reader: Reinventing the Revolution*, p. 316.

¹³⁷ Sawyer, *Racial politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba*, pp. 176.

¹³⁸ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, p. 300.

¹³⁹ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, p. 302.

regime feared that the Black separatist movement would lead to Afro-Cubans creating their own separatist movement. The regime quickly sent many of the exiles to Africa or imprisoned them.¹⁴⁰ One newspaper article stated that Eldridge Cleaver was on virtual house arrest while living in Cuba from 1968 to 1973.¹⁴¹

Today, the return of racism to the island is a popular tool in propaganda. The Castro regime has consistently propagandized the Miami exiles as racist. Castro has used the Cuban American political lobby actions along with pre-1970s segregation policies and the Black Power Movement to help create an image of a racially harmonious, discrimination free Cuba and a counter image of a racist United States.

De la Fuente believes that “blacks are Fidel Castro’s ‘secret weapon,’” there is “evidence that race discrimination is a reality that blacks already face in Cuba.”¹⁴² Castro’s “secret weapon” is identical to Machado’s “army of Negroes” and mulatto Batista’s, “vision that blacks should expect nothing from the white revolutionaries.”¹⁴³ However, as Nadine Fernandez puts it, “Today, the revolutionary government promotes socialist equality and nationalist unity, in part, as an extension of the nation’s deep tradition or *mestizaje*.”¹⁴⁴

The Castro regime’s claim to have abolished racial discrimination began as early as 1962, just three years into the new revolutionary government. There is a great deal of scholarship that supports this claim. Sarduy writes, “The Revolutionary government moved swiftly in its early years to pass legislation designed to end racial discrimination.”¹⁴⁵ However, race and racism were not issues because Castro was personally invested in the issue, it was made an issue

¹⁴⁰ “Cleaver Is Reported Restricted in Havana Luxury Apartment.” *The New York Times*. ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 – 2006). June 1, 1969. P. 50.

¹⁴¹ Pringle, James. “Cleaver Is Found in Havana Working on a Book.” *The New York Times*. ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 – 2006). May 25, 1969. P.1.

¹⁴² De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, p. 324.

¹⁴³ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, pp.324-325.

¹⁴⁴ Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁵ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. xii.

because other political and social actors saw the revolution as an opportunity to address past inequalities. The Communist party sought to eliminate inequalities caused by discrimination for both Afro-Cubans and women. The Cuban labour movement called for “real equality in November of 1958” and the Revolutionary Labour Federation officially published their program for equality in January of 1959.¹⁴⁶ The program included a “strong” statement against “odious racial discrimination.”¹⁴⁷ The January 6th *Noticias de Hoy* of the Communist party presented an official anti-discrimination policy and concrete steps to guarantee Afro-Cubans access to all jobs, the armed forces and state institutions including diplomatic service. Discrimination ended on many levels. Nonetheless, Afro-Cubans failed to be represented in the highest levels of both the party and the government.

Lawyer and Castro supporter, Juan Renee Betancourt countered the Batista Regime’s claims that Castro was anti-black. He called on leaders of the 1959 Revolution not to make the same mistakes made in 1895. Blacks needed to be recognized and treated as equals. He stated that racial issues will not be solved by revolution alone and that blacks needed to organize. The 1959 Revolution would not be a real revolution if the question of racial inequality was not addressed or was silenced. Where Castro would use history to legitimize his regime, Betancourt did so to demand effective equality for Afro-Cubans.¹⁴⁸

By March of 1959, Castro had begun to address the race issue. He identified two forms of discrimination in Cuba: denial of employment opportunities and barred access to cultural centers. Popular pressure and Castro’s declaration combined “set the stage for an unprecedented assault on racism.”¹⁴⁹ On March 23, 1959, Castro presented “four great battles for the well-being of the

¹⁴⁶ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, pp. 261-262.

¹⁴⁷ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, p. 262.

¹⁴⁸ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, p. 262.

¹⁴⁹ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, p. 263.

people.”¹⁵⁰ These battles were to address unemployment, reduce the cost of living, raise salaries and finally end racial discrimination in the workplace.¹⁵¹ He pledged that his government planned to address discrimination not only in the workplace, but also in recreational and cultural centers. By acknowledging discrimination and condemning it in the public sphere, Castro legitimized racism and racial discrimination as issues and turned them into a central principal of the revolution’s program.

While it was not the first time in Cuban history that race relations had been addressed publicly, it was the first time that legitimacy was given to personal issues as political. Castro criticized those who claimed to be Christian, educated or revolutionary, but who were also racist. To be a racist was to be counter- revolutionary. He stated racial discrimination was morally and socially wrong. In Castro’s Cuba, racism was not only “anti-Communist or counter revolutionary, it was also anti-national and a perilous sign of ideological ‘backwardness.’”¹⁵²

Castro placed emphasis on the economy and jobs. Afro-Cubans benefitted a great deal from Castro’s employment initiatives. According to Elipido de le Trinidad Molina, today, 52% of professors in Cuba are black.¹⁵³ However, Castro’s statements made many in the wealthy and middle-class uncomfortable and some even horrified. They were not afraid of job losses, but saw his attack on private spaces as an assault on family, decency and religion. Most of the opposition to his anti-discrimination policies came from the social sectors, such as private clubs, private schools, business owners and the Church. In order to curb the fears of the white population, Castro advised in a second speech that social spaces would be respected and that change would come through education and persuasion. The Revolutionary government used a gradual

¹⁵⁰ Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, p. 55.

¹⁵¹ Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, pp. 54-55.

¹⁵² De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, p. 278.

¹⁵³ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs, *Afro-Cuban Voices*, pp.53-54.

approach, though education and persuasion, to avoid a volatile response. Fernandez argues that “From this perspective, the Cuban government argued that, without a structural base, residual individual discrimination in Cuba would simply disappear over time. As the elder generations passed away, racist ideas and attitudes would be buried along with them – so the thinking went.”¹⁵⁴ The predominately white upper class and the most affluent of the middle class left for Miami. Some whites who remained were resentful of what they saw as official bias towards blacks. They found it difficult to adjust to integrated schools, social clubs, recreational facilities and mass organizations.

Castro called on Afro-Cubans to be patient. He again told Afro-Cubans that attitudes will be changed through education and persuasion, not through force. Blacks were told that “misbehaviour” was indicative that blacks were not ready for integration. In 1959 and 1960, Castro remained hesitant in using legislation to fight discrimination and racism. The Revolutionary government called on writers, journalists and intellectuals to debate race issues, educate the public and demonstrate scientifically that racism and prejudice were absurd.

The Revolutionary Government’s initial efforts towards integration were slow. The efforts began in 1959 when racial barriers in recreational facilities and jobs were eliminated. However, the Castro regime took the gradual approach due to the explosive nature of the racial issue. The government first desegregated beaches. Most of the beaches had been privatized and openly discriminatory. On March 22, all beaches were declared opened to the public, but buildings and pools remained segregated. Elipido De la Trinidad Molina advised “Today we can go to all the beaches the magnates would go to, from one end of the island to the other, without discrimination.”¹⁵⁵ Parks were slowly desegregated as well. With parks, the government opted to

¹⁵⁴ Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, pp. 43-44.

¹⁵⁵ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, p. 52.

close the parks and remodel them, changing their layouts in the process. Nationalization of private clubs took place in 1960. The Havana was the first to be nationalized because it was U.S. owned. It was part of growing confrontations with the United States and an affirmation of Cubanidad, or Cuban identity.

In 1960, the Revolutionary government was hesitant to legislate anti-discrimination measures. However government intervention became necessary in eliminating discrimination in the workplace. According to de la Fuente argued that “[T]o alter significantly the racial composition of the occupational structure, it was necessary to confront embedded interests, habits and hiring practices that had contributed to maintaining colour lines in jobs. State action was required.”¹⁵⁶ This actually was not a new idea. The principle of anti-discrimination had been included in the previous Cuban constitution and had been upheld under both Prio and Batista’s regimes with little practical impact. However, under the new Revolutionary government, a national registry of job seekers was created. Blacks made up the largest group of unemployed workers and thus, they tended to benefit the most from the registry.

As the government nationalized more and more private and foreign held companies and industries, the government payroll increased. By 1963, the Cuban government was Cuba’s largest employer. Seventy percent of all agriculture was under state control, 95% of all industry and transportation, 75% of all retail trade and 100% of all banking.¹⁵⁷ Elipido de la Trinidad stated that because of the revolution “I’m happy to see there are as many blacks in science and engineering as there are in medicine,” and that “There is no discrimination, either by gender or race.” He states, “Fifty-two percent of professions are black.”¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, p. 274.

¹⁵⁷ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, p. 275.

¹⁵⁸ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs, *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 52.

The government nationalized all private schools in July 1961 and began a literacy program that same year. By doing so they ended segregation in the education system and began the process of equalizing education for all Cubans. Illiteracy rates in Cuba dropped from 23.6% to 3.9%.¹⁵⁹ The integrated Cuban school system gave blacks opportunities they did not have prior to 1959. The schools brought together youth from all backgrounds. Fernandez points out that “The state had targeted education - particularly boarding schools, where the youth would be away from family influence and supervision – to make race disappear as a variable for future generations.”¹⁶⁰ Today 99.8% of Cubans are literate.¹⁶¹

All of these measures, including social programs such as nationalized health care led to claims that racism had been eliminated in Cuba. “As early as 1962, they [the Revolutionary government] began claiming that Cuba had eliminated racial discrimination.”¹⁶² Castro summarized this belief by arguing that “discrimination in Cuba disappeared along with class privileges, and that it had ‘not cost the revolution much effort to resolve that problem.’”¹⁶³

Racial inequalities in many areas were improved by the Revolutionary government. Health care, education and employment saw vast improvements towards equality. For instance, in 1981 the life expectancy gap in Cuba for whites versus non-whites was only one year. In the U.S. that gap was 6.3 years.¹⁶⁴ Infant mortality declined and education rates increased. Infant mortality rates in Cuba are “comparable to advanced countries.”¹⁶⁵ Graduation rates for Cuban whites and non-whites in 1981 were nearly identical to each other.¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁹ Brenner et al., *A Contemporary Cuba Reader*, p. 9

¹⁶⁰ Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, p. 68.

¹⁶¹ “World Factbook: Cuba.”

¹⁶² De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, p.279.

¹⁶³ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, p. 279.

¹⁶⁴ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, p. 316.

¹⁶⁵ Brenner et al., *A Contemporary Cuba Reader: Reinventing the Revolution*, p. 1

¹⁶⁶ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, pp. 316-317.

The number of professional blacks is almost identical to the number of white professionals. This too is due to the changes in education policies and literacy campaigns. As Cuban author Nancy Morejon states, “I can safely say I think never as much as now has there been such visibly strong black and mulatto presence in middle positions that are more important than those at the top, because they are closer to reality.”¹⁶⁷ All these improvements were directly tied to government involvement.

Despite the remarkable progress, foreign policy issues diverted the Cuban regime’s attention from domestic race issues. Post- Bay of Pigs, discussions of racism and racial discrimination became non-issues for the Cuban government. “The initial campaign against discrimination waned after 1962, leading to Public Silence on the issue - except to note Cuba’s success on this issue”¹⁶⁸ Any discussion regarding them was seen as anti-revolutionary and anti-Cuban. De la Fuente argues that “If openly racist acts were deemed to be counter-revolutionary, attempts to debate publicly the limitations of Cuba’s integration were likewise considered to be the enemy’s work,” and that just as before “the ideal of racial brotherhood worked in complex, often contradictory ways.”¹⁶⁹ Anthropologist Nadine Fernandez says that “Today, the revolutionary government promotes socialist equality and national unity, in part, as an extension of the nation’s deep tradition or *mestizaje* [mixing].”¹⁷⁰

So was racism and racial discrimination eliminated in Cuba? Novelist Marta Rojas states, “Today that [*gracias al sacar*] no longer exists. On the contrary, today institutionally we have what is laid out in the constitution, equality among human beings and eradication of racism,

¹⁶⁷ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 168.

¹⁶⁸ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, p. 279.

¹⁶⁹ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, p. 279.

¹⁷⁰ Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, p. 3.

racial discrimination and everyone has the same institutionalized rights.”¹⁷¹ Black Cuban actor Alden Knight answers this question by stating, “In our magna carta, racial discrimination is proscribed. But can discrimination against women be eliminated by decree? Can discrimination against blacks be eliminated by decree? Can discrimination against homosexuals be eliminated by decree? No it can’t, it has to be through awareness and first it has to be recognized that there is discrimination.”¹⁷² Fernandez writes regarding interracial couples, “Although mixing is central to national identity, racial discrimination continues and race is a key feature in Cuban culture, history and daily interactions.”¹⁷³ Nancy Morejon calls the Castro regime’s racial policies “complex and contradictory.”¹⁷⁴

Part of the issue in Cuba with racism is that after Castro declared Cuba free of it, it was not to be discussed openly again without being considered as counterrevolutionary. Fernandez states that “The ideologues of whitening and the racial hierarchy lurked behind the official silence, many [interracial couples] continued to face racism in a myriad of ways.”¹⁷⁵ As Knight goes on to say, “There has to be an awareness that the problem [in media] exists, it has to be said and confronted, because in Cuba you’re told there isn’t. ‘Yes, there is!’”¹⁷⁶ Black Poet Georgina Herrera says about the aftermath of the Revolution, “The blacks stayed... Blacks are still the most marginalized, despite all the possibilities they have had.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷¹ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 86.

¹⁷² Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 111.

¹⁷³ Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, p. 3.

¹⁷⁴ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 3.

¹⁷⁵ Fernandez, *Revolutionizing Romance*, p. 69.

¹⁷⁶ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 111.

¹⁷⁷ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 123.

CUBA AND RACE DURING THE SPECIAL PERIOD (1989 – THE PRESENT)

In 1989, The Soviet Bloc fell and Eastern Europe became a free market system. The fall of the Soviet camp left only four Communist nations in the world, Cuba being one of the four. This along with a long-time United States embargo created an economic downturn like Cuba had never before seen. Castro called on Cubans to be strong and patient during this Special Period. He had to concede to some changes in the Cuban economy. These changes brought some free market opportunities back to Cubans, which Castro referred to as necessary evils. Amongst these innovations were foreign investment, tourism, remittances and self-employment. With the re-introduction of some capitalism, racism surfaced stronger than before. However, the reality was that the racism that was uncovered had always been there, hidden under the surface.

Cuba developed two economies, one driven by the dollar and the other by the peso. “Dollar stores” were created for people to shop in if they were tourist or had access to the new dollar economy. For the most part the only Cubans with access to the dollar economy were white. Foreign investors have been more likely to hire white employees and the majority of exiles are white. Also, according to black feminist poet, Georgina Herrera, “People in power in government placed their people to work in shoppings (USD only stores). All whites and almost no black women and so black women were the first to go into jineterismo [prostitution].”¹⁷⁸

The Special Period in Cuba brought the realization that racism had not been effectively eliminated in Cuba. Black Cuban television actor Alden Knight argues that the “policies instituted to ride out the 1990’s crisis have had racial implications.”¹⁷⁹ He also states, “In the new

¹⁷⁸ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices* p. 123.

¹⁷⁹ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p.xii.

social structure, we have had to adapt. There is much more discrimination against blacks.”¹⁸⁰

While laws benefit whites in landownership, a malaise has hit many Afro-Cubans and the desire

“to die in African countries because they are black.”¹⁸¹ Author Nancy Morejon states,

“Whenever there’s a chicken thief, or a negative social behavior, the associated image is

immediately black or at least mulatto. I think there is a whole stereotype that remains within us

that has not been wiped out.”¹⁸² As de la Fuente writes, “As in previous transitions, - late 1890s,

1930s, 1959 - the current crisis is fraught with racial tensions, social dislocation and competing

notions of what la Patria should be.”¹⁸³

In 1994, in response to Cuban and US migration policies and the economic hard times of the “Special Period,” Cubans rioted on the Malecón in Havana. The 1994 riots surprised the Cuban government, not so much because they occurred since they happened at the height of the Special Period economic downturn, but because the large majority of participants were black youths. Knight believes that, “The revolution gained through the social clamour of black suffering and when the revolution gave blacks what should have been theirs, blacks supported the revolution.”¹⁸⁴

Culturally, the Revolution did not eliminate racism. In fact the Cuban media presents a very white image. Herrera says...”Cuban TV looks totally Scandinavian.”¹⁸⁵ There are very few black actors on Cuban television or in Cuban movies. The few roles that are given to black actors portray them either in a historical manner as slaves, as criminals or as buffoons who speak improper Spanish. According to Knight the myth of a race-free Cuba exposed in the Cuban

¹⁸⁰ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p.113.

¹⁸¹ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p.123.

¹⁸² Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 156.

¹⁸³ Brenner et al., *A Contemporary Cuba Reader*, p. 325.

¹⁸⁴ Brenner et al., *A Contemporary Cuba Reader*, p. 114.

¹⁸⁵ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 122.

media, “That’s where we fall down, and in recent years there has been less work for the black actors in Cuban TV.”¹⁸⁶ In the same interview, he adds that, “There are no black TV directors. There are black producers, but they don’t decide, there are no black presenters, there’s no black collection of black actors in current programming and so Cuban TV is white.”¹⁸⁷

Morejon puts it very plainly, “I think the stereotypes have prevailed.”¹⁸⁸ She goes on to say that the racism is not part of a collective conscience that has been perpetuated, it has actually been created by the Cuban media and propaganda.¹⁸⁹ Black doctor Naria Perez Sesma states, “You reach the conclusion that there is discrimination, because you watch television and you ask yourself why are there no blacks?... Why is there no black mother in a decent role?... They are all white.”¹⁹⁰ When blacks are portrayed in Cuban television or films, they are portrayed in a negative light or they play a supporting role, virtually never in a lead.

Afro-Cuban actress Elvira Cervera began her own black only theater. She received no help from the Cuban government. The government’s lack of support came from their ardent belief that it would be reverse discrimination. However, Ms. Cervera’s theater project was an attempt at giving equal stage to the talents of Afro-Cuban performers. She described her theater project as, “...an all black drama project designed ‘to break the apartheid that prevents the black actor from taking on roles of the world theater.’”¹⁹¹

Black cultural contributions are not given equal importance with white cultural contributions. The Cuban government has relegated them to folklore. According to screenwriter Eliseo Altunaga, “Even after the revolution black religion and cultural forms were repressed, not

¹⁸⁶ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 110.

¹⁸⁷ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 110.

¹⁸⁸ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 156.

¹⁸⁹ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 156.

¹⁹⁰ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 70.

¹⁹¹ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 97.

only the more sophisticated forms, such as religious ones, but also the musical forms – guaguanco, rumba and son were considered immoral.”¹⁹² The Special Period has created a space for Santeria, but it has been as a fad rather than as tradition. Altunaga refers to it as “popular patrimony.”¹⁹³ As Fure put it, “You invent a psuedifolklore that, instead of exalting the positive values of popular traditions, simply presents the most superficial, the most deformed and of the negative attitude to our cultural heritage leads many people, who were already prejudiced where popular culture is concerned to reaffirm and strengthen their rejection of popular culture.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 90.

¹⁹³ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 156.

¹⁹⁴ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 156.

CUBAN MUSIC

The official dance of Cuba is the Rumba. It combines Spanish and African roots of the country and incorporates other art forms. According to Yvonne Daniel, “Rumberos (Rumba dancers) represent not only Afro-Cubans but also fellow Cuban artists in the developments of creativity and artistic freedom.”¹⁹⁵ Daniel writes that “few Cubans dance the rumba well and those who do are black or dark-skinned Cubans,…”¹⁹⁶

However, some believe that the Cuban government’s attempts to include African roots in music and dance have made the Rumba appear part of folklore rather than high art. Margarite Fernandez and Lizbeth Paravisini argue that “African based religious rites... were gradually embraced as examples of Cuban popular and folk culture and included in artist venues, overlooking their religious context.”¹⁹⁷ The Castro regime failed to be willing to give official recognition to Afro-Cuban culture and typically favours Hispano-Cuban culture. Guillermina Ramos Cruz states that “Official recognition implied backing to organize and take part in national and international events. In those years, (1980s) there was a certain silent opposition to Afro-Cuban themes.”¹⁹⁸ However, as Ortiz noted, there is a strong influence from Africa on Cuban culture. Antonio Benitez Rojo points out that “... we see that Cuban religious beliefs, music, dance, painting, literature and folklore show an African influence unequalled in any other Antillean nation except Haiti.”¹⁹⁹ When asked about the government’s support of black

¹⁹⁵ Torres, Arlene and Norman E. Whitten, Jr., eds. *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean: Social Dynamics and Cultural Transformations, Vol. 2 Eastern South America and the Caribbean*. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998) p. 486.

¹⁹⁶ Torres, and Whitten, Jr., eds. *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 485.

¹⁹⁷ Fernandez Olmos, Margarite and Lizbeth Paravisini. *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santeria to Obeah and Espiritismo*. (New York: New York University Press, 2003), pp 73-74.

¹⁹⁸ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 149.

¹⁹⁹ Benitez Rojo, Antonio. *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992) p. 68.

performance group, Grupo Antillano, Cruz advised, “They argued that the roots with which we could be identified were spent. We could be from the Hispanic root or an identity or from the peasant world, but we were clearly identified from the African root,” states Cruz when asked about the government support of Grupo Antillano, a black performance group.²⁰⁰

The government has recently begun sponsoring Cuban rap in an attempt to garnish support of black Cuban youth. “[T]he Cuban state has harnessed the oppositional force of rap music to maintain its hegemony in the face of growing racial and economic disparities during a period of Crisis,” says Suyatha Fernandez.²⁰¹ The government sponsors a concert series every year and has allowed several groups to sign international contracts to record and perform outside of Cuba.

Cuban rap began developing during the “Special Period.” There are two types of Cuban rap: underground or conscious rap and commercial rap. The underground rap or conscious rap attacks the social injustice faced by Afro-Cuban youths and portrays Cuba as a black nation struggling for justice. Underground rappers demand the inclusion of people marginalized in the economic and political arenas of Cuba. These rappers also advocate hustling and consumerism as viable alternatives to shrinking the growing gap between those who have access to the dollar economy and those who do not. Underground rappers seek to negotiate with the Castro government. They have demanded that the state fulfill its egalitarian socialist ideals.²⁰² As Margot Olavarría argues, “Whilst not all rap is politically charged, a number of groups have begun an important movement for cultural and social change, using rap as a vehicle to speak

²⁰⁰ Fernandez, Sujatha. “Fear of a Black Nation: Local Rappers, Transnational Crossings and State Power in Contemporary Cuba.” *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 76, No 4. Fall 2003, George Washington University Institute for Ethnographic Studies. www.Project Muse.org. p. 577

²⁰¹ Fernandez, “Fear of a Black Nation: Local Rappers, Transnational Crossings and State Power in Contemporary Cuba,” p.576.

²⁰² Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 69

about racism, prostitution, police harassment, growing class differences, the difficulties of daily survival and other social problems of contemporary Cuba.”²⁰³

These rappers were influenced by African-American rappers and Black Nationalist politics in the Black Power movement. Fernandez advises, “In a period of increasing racial tensions and racial inequalities, Afro-Cubans find themselves deprived of a political voice.”²⁰⁴ Rap has given Afro-Cuban youth a voice in a society where there is an absence of any organized political movements or forms of expression.²⁰⁵ Many of Cuba’s older blacks cannot relate to the militant stance of the rappers. They saw and experienced many of the changes the Castro regime implemented. However, the younger generation only knows the trials of the Special Period. Altunaga believes that blacks of the older generation, “one way or another used to see, or still see, the revolution as an important leap forward.” However, the younger generation “grew up during the revolution and feel a gratitude,” and “perceive a link of equality and yet don’t feel equal.”²⁰⁶

Cuban popular music is heavily influenced by African culture. The Son, Samba, Conga and other types of Cuban music all have rhythms made by African drums and beats. African drums and drum beats also play an important role in the Afro-Cuban religions. However, these religions were banned in previous years as all religions were. As Santeria drum maker Juan Benkomo claims ten to twenty years ago it was a crime to be religious, but it was a “double

²⁰³ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 369.

²⁰⁴ Fernandez, “Fear of a Black Nation: Local Rappers, Transnational Crossings and State Power in Contemporary Cuba,” p. 579.

²⁰⁵ Fernandez, “Fear of a Black Nation: Local Rappers, Transnational Crossings and State Power in Contemporary Cuba,” p. 577.

²⁰⁶ Fernandez, “Fear of a Black Nation: Local Rappers, Transnational Crossings and State Power in Contemporary Cuba,” pp. 94-95.

crime” to be black and religious.”²⁰⁷ Today there are kids in his neighborhood who cannot buy a Bantu drum because it was made in factories and sells for dollars.²⁰⁸

The Cuban government’s response to Afro-Cuban religions has been somewhat contradictory. While it was a “double crime” to be black and religious, “the lack of institutional or structural base” meant they were not seen as a threat to the Revolution. Since they were not considered a threat, they were “tolerated and on occasion even courted” by the Cuban government for their support.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 142.

²⁰⁸ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, 143.

²⁰⁹ Fernandez Olmos and Paravisini. *Creole Religions of the Caribbean*, p.74.

POST-REVOLUTIONARY CUBA AND ITS PORTRAIT IN CONTEMPORARY LATIN-AMERICAN LITERATURE

Cuban literature also portrays Afro-Cubans negatively. Stereotypes of blacks are reinforced in contemporary Cuban literature. Similar to their role in the Cuban media, authors give black characters secondary or antagonist roles in their novels. Afro-Cuban movie director Rigoberto Lopez Pego observes that, “I can’t remember a single novel in the last 20 years where there is a black protagonist with all the conflicts.”²¹⁰ Cuban literature has been described as being obsessed with the European. Altunaga states, “One of the obsessions has always been to seek a purity of Spanish influence in Cuba, a cleansing of the European elements in Cuban culture. But it is not like that. The black is ever present though marginalized and hidden.”²¹¹

In his 2005 novel about prostitution, *Tropical Animal*, author Pedro Juan Gutierrez portrays Afro-Cubans as very sexual and erotic, while whites are portrayed as dull sexually or as looking for an erotic sexual experience from Afro-Cubans and Mulattos. All the prostitutes he describes in the book are black or mulatto. He describes an incident in which the lead character Pedro Juan has with a German publicist named Kurt. Kurt is a paraplegic who hires two jineteros [prostitutes]. They end up taking advantage of his disability. They drug, sodomize and rob him and then leave him unconscious in the bathroom. He describes them to Pedro Juan as a black male and a mulatto female.²¹² So not only are they prostitutes, they are also thieves. He writes of an Argentine tourist who comes to visit Cuba and ends up in a sexual relationship with a black taxi driver. However, she tells Pedro Juan that after several days his “disproportionate” organ

²¹⁰ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 74.

²¹¹ Perez Sarduy, and Stubbs eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices*, p. 92.

²¹² Gutierrez, Pedro Juan. *Tropical Animal*. (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2005) pp. 43-44.

and his constant desire were hurting her. She said she then switched to a much duller, white, “effeminate” European diplomat who had more to offer financially.²¹³

Pedro Juan himself gets the opportunity to spend a year in Sweden. He lives with a white Swedish woman during his visit. At first she was sexually timid and inexperienced. After Pedro Juan had spent several weeks there she began to come out of some of her shyness. However, Pedro Juan was unhappy in Sweden and wanted to return to Cuba and to Gloria, his mulatto lover before the year was completed.

While Gutierrez’s novel depicts the grim poverty of Havana, it demonstrates the negative light in which Afro-Cubans are portrayed. They are erotically sexual. They are rapists and thieves. His description of them fits the title of his novel, *Tropical Animal*.

In his novel, *Sea of Lentils*, Antonio Benitez Rojo’s King Philip tells the reader he could not have the criollos rule the colonies. Rojo’s King Philip felt he had given too much time defending his colonies to have a “population who had mixed with Negroes and with Indians” have a position “from which they might help others to start running contraband....”²¹⁴ Benitez Rojo depicts a king who is obsessed with the inferiority of the mixed peoples living in the new world.

Cuban author Leonardo Padura is one of Cuba’s contemporary writers, who has an international following. He has written a series of mystery novels during the Special Period. The series’ protagonist is a detective named Mario Conde, who is also sometimes referred to as Count. There are four novels, each one taking place in a different season in Havana. In the first novel of the series, *Havana Red*, he describes an old high school classmate of Detective Mario Conde, the lead character in the series, whose family immigrated from the Canary Islands to Cuba. One of the detective’s friends was referred to as Black Felicio. There is a scene in the

²¹³ Gutierrez, *Tropical Animal*, pp. 63-65.

²¹⁴ Benítez Rojo, Antonio. *Sea of Lentils*. (Amherst.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991) pp. 156-157.

book where the Detective sees Black Felicio's son Rueben. He describes the child as being as black [as his father] and with the same "abrasive, acrid smell of sweat."²¹⁵ Later, in another scene, he depicts his would be attackers as a black and a mulatto, in other words, bad guys.²¹⁶

In another scene in *Havana Red*, Conde has to go and tell the mother of the murder victim the fate of her son. Padura's description of the scene has a black maid in it. He writes a description of the maid's attentiveness to her boss and then her answers to the detective. He then adds a description which tells the reader that, "...woman, in the year 1989, still harboured the atavistic instinct of deference: she was a servant and, what was worse, thought like a servant, wrapped perhaps in the invisible but tightly clinging veils of genetics moulded by numerous enslaved, repressed, generations."²¹⁷ Conde's description of the maid gives the impression that he is saddened by her inability to transcend her ancestry.

The second novel in the series is *Havana Gold*. In it Padura describes a recurring character, Red Candito, a mulatto. Red is given his name because of his red curly hair that he kept styled in an afro. Red grew up in Santos Suarez in a "rundown, promiscuous rooming house... walls falling apart, electric cables dangling from the eaves like poisonous tentacles."²¹⁸ His description of Red, who lives and earns a wage on the edge of illegality, is as having his "own morality: nobody ever saw him abuse anyone smaller or weaker than himself...."²¹⁹

Red is a follower of Santeria. However, in this novel he begins attending Catholic and Jehovah Witness services. Padura describes it as, "Contrary to what happened in his usual circles, where African religions ruled firm, promising pragmatically and comprehensively all kinds of protection and help in the material world (as well as in questions of love and justice,

²¹⁵ Benítez Rojo, *Sea of Lentils*, p. 4.

²¹⁶ Benítez Rojo, *Sea of Lentils*, pp. 12-13.

²¹⁷ Padura, Leonardo. *Havana Red*. (London: Bitter Lemon Press) p 28.

²¹⁸ Padura, Leonadro. *Havana Gold* (London: Bitter Lemon Press) p. 74.

²¹⁹ Padura, *Havana Gold*, p. 75.

hatred and revenge), Red had begun towards the Catholic Church, where, so he claimed, he was searching for a peace denied him by the hostile, aggressive outside world.”²²⁰ Padura describes Santeria as composed of odd ritual and without any real spirituality like the Christian faiths. In other words, Santeria is barbaric, like Afro-Cubans.

In another novel, *Havana Blue*, there are several passages which have subtle racial inferences where whites were better and blacks were inferior. In the book, he has several flashbacks to younger days. In one, he describes the first day of secondary school and the classmates who came to school from different towns and barrios. The kids from the wealthy and middle class white areas, such as Santos Suarez, “seemed more elegant, blonder, more studious, altogether cleaner and better ironed, I reckon: they looked as if they were in the revolutionary vanguard and had powerful mums and dads.”²²¹

In another passage Padura writes of a baseball game between Conde’s high school team and a team from Havana. Conde relates his team’s pre-game huddle “... [T]he Habana high school team ran onto the field, enormous blacks about to slay us alive as they had already done to other teams, but we were cocksure and shouted at the pre-game huddle, we’re going to beat the skinny liquorice sticks....”²²² Later he describes their pitcher as “striking out the Habana darkies.”²²³ Later Conde reflects back on the game with his best friend, Skinny, while discussing embarrassing moments. He tells him, “That’s why you and I almost beat the lanky coal-merchants from the high school in Habana, you remember that (Padura, p. 198)?”²²⁴ In another flashback, Conde reminisces of the day when he and Skinny were cutting cane at camp and a

²²⁰ Padura, *Havana Gold*, p. 75.

²²¹ Padura, Leonardo. *Havana Blue*. (London: Bitter Lemon Press) pp. 8-9.

²²² Padura, *Havana Blue*, p. 136.

²²³ Padura, *Havana Blue*, p. 138.

²²⁴ Padura, *Havana Blue*, p. 198.

black man named Samson stole his tin of condensed milk. He reflects that he played dumb so he would not have to fight the large black male.²²⁵

In another part of the book, Conde was working on the case and he was in a section of the city where tourists frequented. He was looking for a young jinetera, or prostitute. While there he spots “a peaceful mulatto, leaning against a streetlamp, looking like a lethargic Rastafarian, his perfect dreadlocks tucked under his black beret, perhaps waiting for the first foreigner to step up so he could suggest five pesos for one dollar, seven for one bro’ and I’ve got grass, anything to get through the doors to the forbidden world of abundance armed with a passport.”²²⁶ The man he describes is that of a young non-white male attempting to gain dollars to use in the dual economy that has developed during the Special Period. The young man is doing so through illegal activities and the black market. Dollar stores which opened during the Special Period in Cuba could only be accessed by tourists and White Cubans who received remittances or had jobs in the tourist industry. Many Cubans of mixed-race or who are Afro-Cuban did not have access to dollars and therefore no access to the stores unless they resorted to illegal activities.

Cristina Garcia is a Cuban-born American author whose novels relate the diversity of the Cuban exile experience. Her 1992 novel, *Dreaming in Cuban*, also plays on racial stereotypes of Afro-Cubans. The novel follows the lives of three generations of Cuban women. Garcia incorporates Cuban historical movements into her novel as she develops each character’s personalities. Garcia’s novel portrays its mulatto and black characters in a less than positive role. Those who have dark kinky hair actively seek solace and advice of Santeria. Pilar’s mother is convinced this is why she is crazy. Garcia’s character Felicia was described with Afro-Cuban features. Felicia also was the least stable of the female characters in the novel. She rejected

²²⁵ Padura, *Havana Blue*, p. 167.

²²⁶ Padura, *Havana Blue*, p 213.

Catholicism which bothered her father who was living in New York. She sought answers to problems through Santeria. Felicia married a black merchant marine who beat her and gave her syphilis. She bore three children by him. The twin girls referred to her not-mama. The youngest, her son was overly attached to her. The girls looked just like her only darker.

Even through Garcia's description of Afro-Cubans in *Dreaming in Cuban* is not flattering, she acknowledges in an interview the importance of Santeria on virtually every aspect of Cuban life and culture. Garcia argues that "Every artistic realm—music, theater, literature, etc.—owes a huge debt to Santeria and the slaves who practiced it and passed it on."²²⁷ Garcia's characters and interview demonstrate the difficulty in balancing the race issue in Cuba.

Garcia also edited a book called *Cubanísimo!*, which is a book of contemporary Cuban literature. In *Cubanísimo!*, Garcia includes a short story by Lydia Cabrera. Cabrera was a wealthy white Cuban anthropologist and poet who had been taught Afro-Cuban folklore as a child by the servants in her parents' home. Her work focused on Afro-Cuban religions. Her works brought attention to marginalized Afro-Cubans and attempted to give them respectability.

Cabrera's short story "Hill Named Mambiala" is about El Negro Serapio Trebejos. El Negro was described as a lazy beggar who "would do anything except work for a living." His family was described as "two pot-bellied black girls with kinky hair tangled and full of lice – dirty, shiftless, forever sprawled out on a wobbly cot, already at an age to be earning their keep: and two long-legged black boys, ragged trouble makers without work, without good intentions."²²⁸ Hard times came to the village where they lived and the villagers were no longer willing to give El Negro and his family food. He begins to pray to the Christian god and

²²⁷ Garcia, Cristina. *Dreaming in Cuban: A Novel*. (New York: Ransom House, 2004) p. 255

²²⁸ Garcia, Cristina, ed. *!Cubanismo! The Vintage Book of Contemporary Cuban Literature*. (New York: Vintage Books Random House, 2003) p. 54.

Mambiala. Mambiala answers him. He is answered on three separate occasions. The end of the story has him punished for his short-comings.

This particular short story by Cabrera is full of Afro-Cuban religious symbolism. However, her main character is not given any redemption for his short comings, only punished. The story does not paint a flattering picture of the Afro-Cuban or of Afro-Cuban religion.

CONCLUSION

Class, caste, race and ethnicity have always played a role in the Cuban identity. They have all had fluid definitions and boundaries. At one point in Cuban history, a person's race could be purchased for him. Today that same person's race or ethnicity can be determined based solely on appearances.

Race has been fluid based on *Gracias al sacar* or ascetics. Ethnicity has been fluid as well. Most European immigrants to Cuba can tell you from where their ancestors came. However, most Afro-Cubans cannot. They may have an idea of their ethnicity based upon *cabildo* society memberships and the Transatlantic Slave Trade Database, but they are less likely than their white counterparts to be able to give a definitive answer.

Both the European immigration and the Afro-Cuban immigration have played an important role in creating a Cuban national identity described by Fernando Ortiz as *Ajiaco* or a Cuban stew. He includes in the stew the *Siboney* as well. All have influenced Cuban culture and Cuban identity. Castro used this concept and built upon it to successfully garner support for his revolution and then his regime. It was from this support that he was able to pass legislation to end discriminatory practices in the public and private sectors.

In conclusion, Castro made great strides in a short period of time to eliminate racism from Cuba's economy, but not from Cuba's culture. Albeit he did so not through idealism, but through strong government programs designed to eliminate inequalities in illiteracy and education, unemployment and health care short falls. Afro-Cubans were the primary benefactors of these government programs, but only because they were Cuba's poorest residents.

The Castro regime chose to dismiss the racial problem by declaring it eliminated in 1962. This silenced any debate or discussions on the subject of racial discrimination because to do so was to be counterrevolutionary and anti-Castro. Castro's government did well with education reforms. Many blacks went from having no hope of being able to read or write and therefore were unemployable, to being professionals. The health care reforms raised life expectancy and reduced infant mortality rates. Cuba's rates in these two categories rival their industrial world neighbors and in some cases are better when they are looked at based upon race. While they were successful in education, employment and health care, the Castro government has failed to address housing shortages adequately, leaving Afro-Cubans living in the worst housing conditions. These conditions led to riots in 1994, in which it was not surprising that the majority of the participants were Afro-Cuban youths.

Another positive change was an increase in interracial relationships. The number of interracial relationships increased because of the desegregation of schools and the inequalities in the professions being eliminated. However, racial beliefs, comments and jokes are still alive and told within families, neighborhoods and workspaces. Because Castro's government failed to adequately address the housing shortage, neighborhoods have remained segregated and personal spaces are tight. These factors have perpetuated some of the stereotypes of blacks having low culture, meaning they speak poor Spanish, are lazy, and have a very sexual nature.

After the fall of the Soviet Bloc in 1989, Cuba's economy took a major downturn. Unable to pay back foreign debt and having little trade opportunities remaining, the Cuban government had to consider new options for the country's economy. Castro asked that Cubans be understanding in "This Special Period in times of peace." Amongst the regimes decisions were to re-open Cuba to foreign investment and to tourism. Castro would advise the Cubans that these

were necessary evils which needed to take place in order for Cuba to survive. However, these changes in the economy also brought light to the glaring holes in the housing sector and other areas not addressed because of the administration's blind eye and silent discourse on racism and racial discrimination in on the island.

Also government owned and operated television stations, movie studios and radio stations are still lily white. There exist virtually no black actors on stage and screen in Cuba and when there are, they are given nominal roles such as buffoons, villains or historical roles such as slaves. They are never given leading roles, only supporting roles, unless it is a historical story-line.

The Afro-Cuban is portrayed negatively in literature as well. They are described often as stupid, lazy or very sexual. Afro-Cuban religious practices are described negatively as well. These character flaws are found in novels written by both exiles and islanders.

While all religious organizations were banned and harassed, Afro-Cuban religions faced more. The wearing of Santeria beads could get you fired from your job. When Pope John Paul II came to Cuba in 1991, he immediately addressed the issue of religion. After his visit, church membership grew in all faiths. However, for Santeria and other Afro-Cuban faiths, their growth during this Special Period was seen more for folkloric value, tourism and dollars.

Fernando Ortiz advocated the protection of Afro-Cuban art and music more for its folkloric value to the Cuban Culture than for its own intrinsic worth. Today, this opinion is still shared by many in Cuba. The Cuban government's efforts to display Afro-Cuban dance, music, literature and art have been more for its folkloric contributions than for its own value. It is not viewed as having high value or worth.

Afro-Cuban youth drew inspiration from their northern neighbors and began a rap movement. Initially this movement, which has two forms - - commercial and underground, was frowned upon by government authorities. However, authorities began to sponsor rap concerts in order to reign in some of its power and monetary worth. Commercial rap has brought much needed dollars into the struggling Cuban economy.

Many older Cubans do not like the militant style of the rappers. They cannot relate to the anger towards the revolution which they believe has given them so much. On the other hand, the young rappers feel they have no political voice and in the new economy where the Castro government has cut back on jobs and programs, it is they who are struggling to survive. They do not feel as though they have something for which to be grateful.

The Special Period has brought a great deal of difficulty for the Afro-Cuban youths. Many have turned to *jinerismo* in order to have access to the new dollarized economy. Many of the rappers' lyrics advocate such illegal activities as prostitution and scamming in order to survive and participate in the new economy.

The Special Period has brought with it a new awareness of race and racism in Cuba. The new dollarized economy has shut-out many of Cuba's blacks. Former successful black professionals have lost their jobs and have had difficulties finding new ones in foreign owned-companies and in the tourism trade. The Cuban and American governments opened up the ability to send and receive remittances from Cuban exiles. However, the majority of these exiles were from the upper class of Cuba and are white, thus, leaving remittances out of the realm of possibility for many black youths. This has led to restlessness not seen since the race riots of 1912.

Thus, Castro failed to eliminate racism in Cuba, but his successes in minimizing it in education, healthcare and employment are impressive. Also, the impact of 50 years of propaganda stating all Cubans are equal and deserve full access to all sectors of Cuban national culture and life, should not be taken for granted. With that being said, the Special Period brought about more than just economic challenges. It reintroduced in more blatant terms that racism and racial discrimination remain issues on the island and need to be addressed by the government in order to be eliminated completely. Racism was kept alive in families and other social structures, by the media and by literature and other forms of art. Forty plus years of silence and government programs did not make racism and racial discrimination disappear.

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