

Cuba: The Racism We Have Within

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I keep reading and re-reading the speech titled *Cuba, la que llevo dentro* [The Cuba I have within], given by Monsignor Carlos Manuel de Céspedes in the Fray Bartolomé de las Casas room of the San Juan de Letrán Convent, on November 25th, 2004, and I am absolutely alarmed. I am alarmed, even after overcoming the strange and rebellious effect it had on me after first reading it.

My subsequent rebelliousness and alarm have more to do with the rapidity of the manner in which the talk communicates its ideas, rather than with my own mental quickness or slowness. I mentioned this talk to my friends, and they invited me to write a reply. I consider the matter so urgent that I accepted their suggestion, believing that the cultural and political connotation of the issue demands it.

What is it we bear inside? Psychology and psychoanalysis, the history of mentalities and talk shows are great at revealing what it is we hide inside, at times like a treasure embodied deep within. Today, the scientific and technical progress of the modern age has made us freer and better in the sense that it liberates us from our personal trappings and hiding places. The least twisted versions of psychology and mentality are those in which what we bear inside is almost always accessible from the outside. Although it is not always possible, clearly the mental climate of these cultures is enviable.

Ours is not exactly one of those cultures. What we bear inside is always known and does not constantly coincide with what we try to demonstrate on the outside. On many occasions, we manage to mask it with an attitude psychologists call 'projection'; that is, the rejection of our own defects through oth-



ers, or the high sounding and blatant declaration that we are possessed with precisely what we lack.

In Cuba—and this is a scientific fact—it is difficult to know what is really going on in the inner minds of Cubans. This has three powerful effects: a constant repression of feelings, a constant and rapid reproduction of prejudices, and the surprising discovery of new traits in the personality of others.

In *Cuba, la que llevo dentro*, this emerges from the subtleties of a very well written text by an admirable person; and although it is written in the first person, I am less interested in who wrote it than the intellectual underpinnings and opinions it might reflect. I care a great deal about the applause it might have garnered upon its delivery. If *Cuba, la que llevo dentro* is a constellation of individual ideas, I would rest easier even if

my response were interpreted as a personal attack, which it is not. From that I would like to be able to think that Monsignor de Céspedes's talk constitutes reminiscences of a man of many talents about the old and arthritic Catholicism. Nevertheless, in this and all instances, I would prefer to dialog with the greatest of these talents, to paraphrase the rhetoricians.

The structure of Monsignor de Céspedes's text is simple: its initial, seductively unfolding erudition puts the reader at empathic ease with the vernacular.

The symmetry between our nature and character makes one recall the Argentine president Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, author of *Facundo*, a classic book, which connected climate and character describing the excitability and shifting nature of the inhabitants of the Pampa. Our way of being probably has as little to do with our natural environment, as our egocentric and messianic ambitions appear not to be intricately linked with the geographic density and dimensions of the Island. It is, however, stimulating to the imagination that *caimito* and *yagruma* (two species of our natural flora) have a direct relationship with our temperamental moods and caprices.

It is not for my benefit or for naught that Cuba is a country of poets, but any relationship this implies is of course, not scientifically provable relative to the Cuban persona. The time during which nature and individuals intermingle can be measured in millennia, so long as technology doesn't intervene. Seen this way, at this moment, Cubans cannot display the richness of the Aztecs of Mexico or the Topekas of the United States' Dakotas. I fear that the floral metaphor is as powerful as it is deceiving.

Thus, we move on from nature to culture. The issue here gets complicated in two

ways: on the one hand, the internal logic of Monsignor de Céspedes's text is construed from the following fallacy—post hoc, ergo, propter hoc (after this, therefore because of this), which translated into Spanish comes to mean something like “aguellas aguas, trajeron estos lodos” [muddy waters run deep]. Upon reading his text, one should have learned that the low, deficient morality we Cubans display is linked to certain African cultural practices that through their misinterpretation or our contact with them, due to a limited understanding of them or deficiencies in our governing elite, the soundness of our national identity is threatened by weakening its core: this is an underlying tenet of de Céspedes's paper.

What is that core? Here is the second complication. Our core is indisputably Spanish, the article says, which is certainly true if one can also affirm that our core is undeniably African. How would one defend his thesis? A scant aboriginal population; a large Spanish population, with its concomitant cultural apparatus and religious faith shaped by the peculiar Catholic Christianity of the Iberian peninsula; the Spanish language, of course; the Renaissance and Enlightenment as transported by the Spanish navy, which is, of course, the subject of a different conversation.

Add to this core the pluriform graft of Africanness; and let us take notice of the disproportion and manipulation of his rhetorical technique. A Spanish core is a concise, closed, compact, majestic and unitary concept. It appears to be an essential truth. A pluriform graft, to the contrary, is more lax, open, indefinite and ungraspable. It really looks like something that can be stuffed and blended.

It is very likely that pluriformity is more demonstrable in the Spanish people who

populated the Island than in the actual Africans. One cannot really speak of a Spanish matrix, not even in Spain. The underpinnings of the Spanish character are rich and varied, influenced, as they are, by the Moors, i.e., the Africans, so much so, that to project it as singular, like the root of another nationality, is like trying to originate one Utopia from another one that began to form after the Reconquest, the Counter Reformation and the conquest of America, itself—a purely intellectual exercise. If during the fifteenth, sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Spanishness was being created as a top-down project, how is it possible for something that is not the framework of another nationality to assimilate other components? Hispania is a toponym, a name given to the peninsula by the ancient Romans, and it applied to and united diverse cultures without destroying them in the process.

This unification of peninsular diversity in Spanishness is what distinguishes it from the pluriform African culture. But the identity of the cultures of conquest have less to do with unifying processes and more to do with specific interactions. Spanishness in Cuba can be reduced to language, Catholicism, the Baroque and Scholasticism, law, administration and politics, the permanent exercise of intolerance and violence, in addition to the intellectual dissidence initiated by Fray Bartolomé de las Casas. Without a doubt, all of this will have a powerful effect on nationality, but without the hegemonic force required to be the unique framework of our identity. Regarding its effect, it is more appropriate to speak of Galicians, Asturians, Basques, Andalusians, Canary Islanders, Catalans, etc., with all the richness this variety offers, and of Africans from the different ethnic groups that were brought to Cuba;

this referring only to the most relevant frameworks. Frameworks are concepts that surely do not capture the basic elements of identity in the cultures that were forged by conquest.

However, when one speaks of a pluri-form African graft, we don't know what defines what is African. While the framework is described by the influences evident in it, we do not know positively how the graft exerts any influence. Light and shadow are rhetorical devices that obscure what is seen as both a problem and a conflict at the same time.

Need we say more? No mention is even made of cultural artifacts. Fundamentally lost from view are three basic dimensions of any identity: mentality, behavior and method of coexistence. That is why we French, Italians, Spanish and Cubans are different, despite our common Latin framework.

What anthropological concepts are being manipulated in this text? Framework, root, national identity, matrices, graft, evolution, miscegenation, and irrational primitivism are the most recurrent ones and they represent the article, its conception and relevant conclusions. Those concepts having to do with matrices, frameworks, roots and grafts are the most pronounced ones. In addition, let us just say that they are the most productive ones, too.

Yet, there are two reasons why no serious anthropology utilizes or combines these concepts to capture, analyze and describe a culture's identity: these concepts are neither fluid nor interactive. Clearly, if one grafts a lemon branch onto the trunk of an orange tree the resulting fruit will certainly be an unvarying orange-lemon with a predominantly orange-like shape and flavor, with a touch of sourness—nothing more, nothing less. The function of the lemon here is almost like that of a seasoning in succulent and

well-prepared food. So, if this is how Cuban identity is, then it simply doesn't exist. Spaniards, Africans and some other fragments would be trying to coexist on the Island within a framework that resists being restructured. By extension, my point here is that the metaphoric use of those concepts is extremely dangerous.

Framework: the key concept that open the doors to the cultural structure of *Cuba, la que llevo dentro*. In effect, constructing frameworks is the *modus operandi* of the governing classes in the invention of Cuba. Both the pragmatic and romantic elites tried to invent Cuba but were unsuccessful. What they weren't and never will be able to do is invent the concatenated sequence 'nationality-identity-culture.' Notwithstanding, the problem was and always has been that they also attempted to invent this concatenation but never came upon the key to it. Yet, they have been obstinate. Their obstinacy bears the mark of old Catholicism and projects a period-specific, Catholic identity and mentality, as the framework within which the national identity should be constructed. And, I should clarify here, that Catholic identity and mentality are not the same thing: it sometimes includes people who have even been enemies, or have perceived each other as such, despite their shared mental framing.

That is why, in one sense, *Cuba, la que llevo dentro* is correct: the identity of the powerful elite in Cuba, its soul, have always been 'Spanish' (in an expanded sense of the term that applies to the Americas, with the conquest): white, Catholic—by identity or mentality, male chauvinistic, intolerant and racist, without the flexibility of the other elite—the Wasp (white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant)—that dominated and modeled the United States. These elites who have dom-



inated throughout all of Cuban history, since the colonial period, when Cuba was a mere province of Spain, till now, when our continuity as a political nation is threatened, have conceptualized Cuba in the following manner:

In political terms, [they have conceptualized Cuba] as a first rank republic made up of civilized, Catholic, educated and property-owning citizens connected to the dynamics of two advanced cultures: Europe—via Spain, for some, and at its margin for others—the United States. After 1959, one would only have to replace Catholic with communist and, actually, property-owners with proletariats. Once those two substitutions are made, the logic is still the same. The speed and referent required by a republican project such as this, which has not and will never get off the ground because it does not understand the cultural roots of Cuban iden-

tity and nationality, does not properly include blacks.

In terms of culture, and consequently identity, this republican project is a space that should be shaped by a prohibitive, rigid, paternalistic morality that has a strong sense of guilt, and quarrels with and is unaccepting of the diversity represented by others. For the elite, Cuba's identity is not founded upon aesthetic elements and mentalities. Cuba's identity is an ethical proposition that therefore will always remain at the project stage until Cubans are not shaped by Christian ethics. In their Catholic or revolutionary versions, the powerful image of the morality of Christ and Che are in counterpoint as it relates to their origins, challenges, content and consequences—but not in their structure or roots. These images, which have all my respect, have little to do with the depths of Cuba, although they are certainly more visible on its surface. If the Cuban nation is incomplete, it is the elites who believe so because the ethical proposition they have proposed does not include each and every one of her citizens. Again, the project does not make room for blacks, unless they are evangelized by the Catholic Church or by the indefinable and very new Battle of Ideas—and even this condition is not enough.

All of this requires a shaping or construction, reshaping or reconstruction of Cuban identity through a political or cultural mechanism that is, for the most part, mere political or cultural artifice, with the result having little or no relation to its real elements.

If this project is to prevail, we must care for and protect the framework morally, politically and intellectually. The matrix can also be protected in the manner that *Cuba, la que llevo dentro* proposes, or in the manner it

criticizes, however contradictory this may seem. In either case blacks are seen as those familiar strangers who must be cleaned up and domesticated, or who must be manipulated, if their cultural resistance is as strong as it appears.

The most predominant aspect of our republican history's moral and political project—a project that has been taking shape since the colonial era—is just that racist, to this day. Furthermore, the truth is that I had never read a Catholic-Christian defense of said project until I encountered Monsignor de Céspedes's text.

Did I say racist? Yes, but with a peculiar kind of racism, one that has been marked by the mortification of Indian, black and mulatto flesh. Treacherous libido unbridled all Spanish racism.

The Spanish detested anything indigenous and African: their religiosity, their moldable mentality, their ignorance about the Only God, their polytheism—everything but the spirited and shapely bodies of the Indian women and black males and females from Africa. Thus, Cuban identity begins with the interchange that results from corporal violence against bodies that are different: it physically and symbolically starts at that moment: with or without a birth, with or without a miscarriage, and with that first male or female mestizo that is born of the white-Indian-black relationship and the creation of his or her subsequent world, the world of the 'other,' all of which signifies a natural breakdown of the barriers between peoples of diverse roots.

This is how identities conceived within cultures forged by conquest are born, from the flow between different worlds and the resistance of the dominated and conquered. As all serious anthropologists know, resistance in cultural matters—always a lengthy

process—has more long-term effects in the formation of identities than models introduced and imposed by the elite. I will give just one simple reason from individual and collective psychology for this: imposition blocks deep mechanisms of mental assimilation and constructs false although very subtle images of belonging, which have always been a headache for anthropologists and sociologists. This reinforces more than destroys the cultural traits that groups reproduce.

Almost fifty years of imposed Marxism did not manage to convert Cubans to that political religion. Today, Christmases that were suppressed for nearly as many years are celebrated by generations that were born after the 1960s. It has always been an intellectual, cultural, and political mistake on the part of the extremely rigid Cuban elites to confuse a culture of domination with culture identity, which is why they have been unable to shape our identity.

In regard to identity, Cuba shatters all frameworks. The proliferation of diversity is our specialty. To offer one example, from the world of religion, the diversity that Protestantism represented, in the late nineteenth century, burst into just such as scene, recreating the whole landscape in a way that was infinitely important in the formation of all Western peoples.

As a Western nation, Cuba is shaped as such, a platitude and undeniable common fallacy that I dare to reproduce in order to distinguish "Spanishness" from "Westernness". How does one distinguish them in the case of Cuba? Many ways. It is important to note, regarding this issue, that Hispanism has never achieved complete sociological hegemony here, because Cuba was born from the multiple tensions present in the cultural formation of the West. I am not saying—lest I be misunderstood—that our

country is at the center of Western modernity, but rather that it is born from its contradictions.

Is it a sin to exploit Indians? Well, bring blacks. Too many blacks now? Well, bring more whites. Not enough laborers? Well, import Haitians, Jamaicans and Chinese coolies. This all happened with too much historical speed for a single unique worldview linked to Catholicism to have time to shape an identity. In the long term, there was too much cultural diversity for the combination of elite culture and domination to manage to impose its model. I declare unreservedly that cultural and religious pluralism is our identity.

Who shapes whom in this quick and varied process? And, who shapes identity? If identity is in universities and schools, in well-to-do places and in the never-ending discourse of the elite, then there is hardly anything to say: our pattern is predominantly Spanish: its personnel, white and whitened—the ecclesiastical bases of its cultural and pedagogical projection prove as much. We know very well that the presence of blacks in Cuban centers of high culture leaves a lot to be desired. Even today, according to some statistics I should confirm, ninety-two percent of university students in Cuba are what we call 'white'. I imagine that the percentage is ever higher at Catholic schools, which is not good news.

Now, if identity is in the community, a wooden shack or the *barrio*, where even our Spanish descendants live and go, the framework can be found in problems—very grave ones—as most serious Cuban anthropologists know. Even Monsignor de Céspedes, who is not an anthropologist, knows this. But where he sees regression or involution, the others see a manifestation of the model of our identity: the permanent hustle and bus-

tle, the way of expressing our values, elements, gestures and manners that make up Cuban culture. The moralization of our identity is a bad road to take in an effort to understand what is happening in Cuba and who we are as Cubans.

This takes me to my main point. The Cuban nation is not a political prolongation of an ethnic nation. It is not a gathering of Germanic ethnic groups in a political entity called Germany, nor does it express continuity with the Japanese. This is no great discovery—by the way. But it is also not even born from the peaceful or forced confluence of diversity, as is the case with Spain. Catholicism elaborated the diversity of Spain for centuries, and it had and continues to face the obstacle and richness of the fact that said diversity, also created over centuries, has a territorial expression: Euskadi (the Basque Country), Catalunya (Catalonia), Galixia (Galicia), etc. Of secondary importance is the fact that Catholicism facilitated unity over diversity. All of this permitted the birth of Spanishness. In the long run, Spain is born from unity of mind and faith. Nevertheless, there was an agreement made by which the political nation, which was not identified solely with faith, would assume the diverse ethnic nations expressed in its culture.

As far as nationality first, and later the nation, the birth of Cuba was nothing more than political. When our effort to give ourselves a nation collides with identity issues, there is not a problem of politics but rather of culture, of how to open the doors of access to national diversity and not how to make ethnic diversity national. By this time national identity has jelled during afternoons and evenings in the slave quarters, in multiple religious practices, in the silent penetration of the absent Indian, in pragmatism



as a life philosophy, in adaptability when facing references that are historically adverse to our individual and collective realization, and in many more things about which everyone knows and, above all, experiences.

If with an extravagant hypothesis one concedes that Spanishness expresses some sort of ethnic continuity, this would apply to Cuba only because the metropolis constructed its vast empire, for which we were a mere province. Catholicism, in its multiple manifestations, has a powerful meaning within this effort of pro-universal Hispanism, which is backed by the idea of a universal Catholic Church. But when Cuba becomes a nation, all manner of Hispanism was sabotaged by the Indigenous and African elements. Cuba

simply could not come into being from ethnic incest. The centripetal force of the framework, of all frameworks disappears. What is Spanish, and its morality, which guaranteed an island ever faithful to Spain, created one more, no doubt important space within the stain-glassed window that Cuba represents.

Although it has not been discussed or theorized much, I for one, believe that the integrating mold for Cubans does and could not come from cultural identities but rather from the political environment of republicanism, which had a powerful and historically perverse effect on revolution worship. Cultural plurality does achieve some measure of integration, above all aesthetically, and irresolvable religious disencounters, with

more or less confusing superimposition in this sphere. In Cuba, people have always celebrated diverse rituals and religions from almost all over the world, in communities of worship of diverse origins and multiple interpretable Christianities, sometimes all rolled into one. There also are or were many atheists.

What does all this have to do with a Spanish framework?

Only one thing could result from all of this: on the one hand, a mutual penetration of cultures and on the other, their mutual neutralization. The political environment was and is the only one that could offer a certain degree of unification of diversity, by dissolving its *de facto* relationship with any model for control and domination of that indomitable diversity. The Cuban Spanish elite needed and continues to need the kind of flexibility that allowed the Wasp elite to better integrate its black minority at the social and civic level—because it did not try to make it Puritan. Of course, this flexibility seems impossible.

What connected and connects our diversity or cultural fragmentation? An Anti-Spanish cement to which many in Cuba do not wish to admit as a fundamental trait of Cuban identity: a combination of practicalism and pragmatism.

Despite our resistance, we know that *Usos del Espíritu* [Use of the Spirit] is a book owed to Cuban culture because in a general sense, Cubans are not at the service of the Spirit but rather place all their spirits in charge of the hereafter, of better managing their personal, family and collective lives. This can be read as their lives being divorced from the Spanish framework, which had and will have fundamental consequences as we ponder our nation-building project. Yet, blacks do not fit into the basic premises of

the nation-building project in the way it has thus far been defined. The problem of these premises is that this is not the case in the real country, the one that exists and forged its identity however it could. And, reality always introduces elements that create multiple foci.

One sector of the elite unconcerned by historical and cultural issues thinks that blacks should stay in their place; which is one without integration and for which there should be an intellectual, economic and political effort to legitimate *de facto* supremacy in the society. A focus lacking intellectuals with enough courage to take up a necessary public challenge, and that till now, has expressed itself through gestures of self-affirmation and disdain toward blacks.

Another sector of the elite, with a minimal cultural and historical sensitivity, and that is drawn to miscegenation, believes that blacks should occupy a place that makes them feel like integrated participants, which requires that they be literally and figuratively cleansed. Yet, this should be accomplished while still avoiding their permanent admission into the elite's inner circle, to avoid any possible contamination that could weaken the culturally and forcefully right to dominate that which was inherited from the "founding fathers." For this sector, the presence of blacks at the periphery of that inner circle is proof enough of the success of their project and illustrates the value, functionality and modernism of their pedagogical work. Of course, there are blacks—the majority—that are outside of that circle's periphery. Allowing them to symbolically reproduce in their ritual ghettos and filter their culture folklorically and aesthetically for the purposes of the power elite is a good, long distance control measure that guarantees the elite a peaceful project, a clean conscience with regard to the inevitable inferior-

ity of blacks, and a modernity necessary for its public image. And, many blacks and mulattoes are more than happy with their symbolic and instrumental quality.

Finally, a third sector of the elite, with a maximum degree of cultural and historic sensibility, believes that blacks should take their place in a space that does not distort the course of Cuban cultural paradigms. It knows that the place of blacks in Cuba is Cuba, which, thus, should assume Africanness. How to do it? Taking on a strange blame for what its ancestors did, the elite taking on a responsibility for the slave trade and slavery. It begs the nation forgiveness for this historical error and from this retrospective position seeks to now correct this travesty of justice. For this purpose, it proposes the following transaction to blacks: I'll assume the aesthetic richness of your culture, the grace and agility of your movements in exchange for you abandoning certain primitive, bad and savage practices and ideas that have nothing to do with our national framework; the project founded and bequeathed by moral, magnificent and visionary men.

Upon bringing you here, these men enriched themselves and had the time and disposition necessary to imagine a nation. But they did not realize that they were undermining their own project with your arrival. Now, after so many failed attempts, our project is failing from corrosion and it is necessary for you to accept that Cuban culture has assumed you through your worth, your contributions—we have Africa within us. Yet, lest it cease existing, it does not have the capacity or possibility to accept all those atavisms that weaken its core and framework.

This is how the most culturally sensitive sector projects itself. That is why from time to time it allows itself to be seen with

black men and women; dialoging with others via the miscegenation it can assimilate: about certain music, certain paintings and Caucasian looking mulattoes.

One cannot lose sight of the fact that this third sector is very concerned with the social confusion and disorder in our communities, with the moral and ethical weakening of our society, and with their basically ever-increasing criminal consequences on our streets, which are much talked about with regard to the ecological peace of our coexistence. That is the root of the malaise that the third sector is experiencing regarding the negligence of a second sector that permits the reproduction of social excrement behind the reproduction of ritual primitivism; the aestheticization and exaltation of that cultural graft.

While Monsignor de Céspedes's text does not intellectually represent the third sector, it does reflect its concerns. At the level of ideas, his dilemma expresses very well the contradiction in those Spaniards who in their daily lives simultaneously loved the body but hated the mind of the 'other.' It was racism towards mixing that founded Cubanness as a permanent discomfort with what we truly are.

Furthermore, this racism towards mixing is shocked by what we personify, for example, Jorge Mañach's concern regarding Cuban *choteo* (representing high culture's puzzlement with the real Cuba). The Roman, French or United States' ideas of republicanism that served as a referent for the Cuban elite were constantly deflated by sarcasm, mockery and indifference of others.

Mañach, with Fernando Ortiz, Enrique José Varona and others, was very serious. But he made an error in judgment upon thinking that the elite to which he belonged was also serious. He was not able to understand that

choteo was part of its identity because it was an accumulated response, across generations of Cubans, since the colonial period, to the exaggerated conceit of those elites who demanded of others the moral gravity they, themselves lacked. Who was it that came up with the notion that ‘the law should respected but not enforced’? Well, *choteo* is the impotent response born from cultural resistance against the serious *choteo* of the Cuban elites towards their own project. As such, it is an accumulated response, transmitted over generations, that becomes an identity. It is true—Cubans love mocking. At the core of this issue is the fact that up till now those who have been in charge have never merited being taken seriously. Moreover, Father Félix Varela knew this ahead of time.

From *choteo* to delinquency and crime, the elites blame others for the failure of the nation-building project. And, since they are consciously or subconsciously racist, they criminalize culture.

There is nothing new about this. The Abakuas (a fraternal organization of African origin) were forever stigmatized as sacrificers of children. Their dignity, which they believe themselves to have and that establishes them, suffered cultural rejection even from those who acknowledged their active role in Cuban History.

They are also folklorized in the name of political correctness. That is why this sector of the elite came up with the idea that miscegenation could fit within a flexible framework, as a proposal for their nation-building project and a way to better protect their own origins. Of course, physical miscegenation is not cultural miscegenation, thus resorting to it was a sort of racism that allowed multiple shades of whiteness for the nation’s complexion, thinking this would lead to hegemony of Spanishness. This implied failure for the



project because miscegenation happens not in the minds of those who want to lead the nation but rather as a result of the unstoppable passion between those who are different. In many cases, mulattoes are the result of that racist project—in which both blacks and white participate—whose goal is second or third-rate whitening, depending on the specific combination of color. Yet this does not achieve a change in Cuban behavior. The result is and has been that our identity continues at the margin of the nation-building project’s ethnic-ethical experiments we have inherited.

It is in the face of this failure that the esteemed and prestigious Monsignor de Céspedes protests. For him, living with miscegenation is a burden. Africa is within him and the consequences of this bedeviled mix make him experience a deep, profound discomfort. The only solution he can think of is to go back to the archaic invention and pretensions that have nothing to do with Cuba: a moral reconstruction of the nation based on a Spanish framework, no matter that the realization of that absurdity implies ignoring the fact that numbers and presence can be as deceiving as floral metaphors in identity formation—Cuba has as much indigenous

influence as the United States, despite the fact their respective population among us is so small.

How to achieve this purpose? For an intellectual, ideas and culture are first, thus that would mean reinitiating a path I would call Lombrosian. It is well known that Cesare Lombroso was a famous Italian anthropologist and criminalist who came up with the theory that there is a relationship between crime and types of human beings. To my knowledge, de Céspedes's is the first text in Cuba that dares to establish a relationship between what is defined as irrational primitivism and the penal and social marginalization that blacks endure on the Island; as well as between the least felicitous of our ways of being and their pluriform African contribution. I admire and am grateful for his honesty, his personal and intellectual courage.

Yet, this is a serious matter: the criminalization and demoralization of a basic part of our identity is a first step towards a future legitimation of a racist nation-building project that is already under way in some provincial capitals and many cities, including Havana, and for the validation of the penal and police discrimination that blacks endure in Cuba today.

It is also serious that in a country where the majority of the population is ineptly described as Afro-Latin, according to data from the Inter-American Development Bank, a return to an intellectual framework such as this could be dangerous.

Cuba is plural: her identity is plural. Her framework and imagination are plural. What makes us Cuban and the substance of what made it possible to be a nation was the virtuous and defective combination of our diverse origins. Truly, the shaping of cultures and nations, and what is particular about them, has more to do with mentality, behav-

ior and coexistence than with what they aspire to be. It is good to aspire to something. Our own virtue will depend on not wanting the arrogance of the conquest and evangelization processes to forge nations. Blacks are also part of the framework of Cuba, despite having come in through the back door.

Like others in Cuba, I admit that as a nation we are in bad shape precisely because certain elites say that we are fine. This is just one example of the fact that these irresponsible people like to continue being wrong relative to the country they inhabit and where governance is concerned.

I think we should fight for a better Cuba. In fact, many of us do. But this can never be achieved with the influence of the minor racism found in a framework that has also been seen with contempt by other, greater racisms. Integration, which is not miscegenation, demands only respect for others with whom a specific worldview that includes animal sacrifice is not shared.

Fortunately, I know many elite and non-elite Cuban Catholics, in and outside of Cuba, who share a more positive, rich and subtle view of these [cultural] grafts, and spread the blame for the country's terrible burden and defects among all the races. Spanish Cubans are also children of the Devil, even if they consume wine and host!

Cuba, la que llevo dentro is a S-O-S for national integration from what I think is the only angle that will work: that is, a lay republicanism that allows space for all worldviews; God or Gods; and all races equally; that efficiently gets the State away from an inherited cultural model that has caused much too much fragmentation in our country.

One thing seems clear to me after reading this speech: the failure of our nation-

building project can be explained by the hegemonic pretensions of the old, national-Catholic Spanishness that survived in Cuba upon the creation of the republic and has had predictable continuity with Cuban communism since the second half of the 20th century till now.

At this time, they both seem to be coming together via a tacit pact to revive the nation-building project through a return to its origins. This is not strange in the sense that in the symbolic struggle amongst all the

intellectual elites for control of this new interpretation of the past, they intentionally or unintentionally reproduce their racist logic.

Working from our differences and our common Cuban framework, the challenge for blacks, whites and mestizos will be to define a lay modernization of Cuba disconnected from the grand narratives of our cultural and political failings: old Catholicism and Communism in all their ages and iterations.