

# CUBA.

## A Wound that does not Heal

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Last December 24th, after a last look at the slate of candidates for seats in the Cuban National Assembly of the People's Power, General Raúl Castro told a group of voters from Eastern Cuba that racial representation (he actually said 'ethnic,' but I think I know what he meant) was a factor in designing the slate. One can only assume that he said this while in campaign mode, certain that he was sharing good news with this public, since it was primarily black and mestizo. Yet, on that occasion his simple remark turned out to be irrelevant, not because it wasn't interesting or something for which the population had been calling, but because the need for racial balance at the highest levels of leadership, in the police force and in all other basic governmental activities is so clearly evident. Notwithstanding, if a regime that has governed for more than 49 years and guarantees it has always embraced José Martí's anti-racist and unifying vision<sup>1</sup> has to resort to a sudden strategy to remediate the inexplicable minority of blacks in its upper echelons and, in addition, needs to call attention to this action by presenting it as an attempt to update political practice, this is at the very least indicative of a certain degree of con-

tradition between official discourse and the actual results of its implementation.

The reader must take into account that I am not talking about a contemporary system of power. Instead, it is a regime whose structure has never changed, that has never had any political or legal opposition, and has governed uninterruptedly, with an aura of internal peace and concord, while maintaining absolute control of the country's economic life and socio-cultural potential.

Neither is it the case that Cuban slave descendents have not made considerable advances (some essential and others more relative) in the area of social progress. Notwithstanding, it is a bit disconcerting to compare today's results with the great progress that such a long-term, exceptionally powerful, stable and unchanging administration might have proffered. This is an inference the island's government strives to dismiss and for which the press and even official history seem more interested in finding ambiguous explanations rather than conclusive reasons. But reality tends to be persistent, so much so that efforts to idealize it only serve to bring about a natural clash between it and its less ostensible contours.

We are now assured that there are a total of 207 black and mestizo delegates



*Typical housing of Afro-Cubans*

among the recently elected 614 members of the National Assembly of the People's Power (35.67%). The authorities are enthusiastically announcing that this given composition is in keeping with the population's expectations. They base their argument on the last Census (from September 2002), according to which 7,271,926 (65%) of the island's 11,177,743 inhabitants are white, 1,126,894 (10%) are black, and 2,778,923 (24.9%) are mulattoes and mestizos. However, one must note that this 2002 census is still often the object of ridicule among Cubans, both inside and outside of Cuba, because its significantly low number of blacks, mulattoes and mestizos is easily contradicted by just looking at any island neighborhood, street, corner or home. Nevertheless, even if one overlooks this contradiction, since there are no impartial sources (none are permitted) to support any final counterargument, it would be useful to question not only the raw numbers but also what the government's incentive has been (after 49 years of offering generally lukewarm solutions to the problems of the black population) for its sudden turnabout and action regarding the racial composition of its functionaries, at precisely this, its most critical, least equitable or stable moment in its ability to maintain control. Can it be that once again the politicians need to assure for themselves (to various degrees) the unconditional support and safeguard they will have from the descendants of slaves, as has always been the case in our history? Might the government fear that the poverty of its response to the economic and social demands of this sector has become more obvious, thus creating major discontent in the midst of its already existing current crisis? Might it not be the case that in giving so much last-minute attention to a

historical demand of blacks it is implicitly admitting that they are the majority of the population in the country (or at least many more in number than the official data claim), thus refuting its own 2002 census results?

It is with questions, and not rapid responses, that I can quickly respond to these and many other questions that the island's current reality poses. Yet, one thing is absolutely certain because it is demonstrable and even palpable during the last 49 years of revolutionary government, the regime hardly did all it could have to bring about progress for the descendants of Cuban slaves. This may not have been for lack of conviction or even ambiguously defined purpose on its part. It would be risky to suggest that there was any racism—at least institutional racism—behind those insufficiencies. Simply stated (and independent of other considerations that in due time historians will have to offer), the Cuban state did not deal directly with the black issue because it has always lacked a methodology; an organic and consistent, practical program designed for a short, mid and long-term process. Also, the case is that the government put its political tactics and strategies (and often, its improvised decisions) above and beyond the citizenry's most urgent interests, just as it has with other highly sensitive and determining issues for Cuba's development. Even during its period of greatest economic stability and solidity as a system, that is, throughout those thirty years during which all its projects were totally subsidized by the U.S.S.R. and the CAME (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance),<sup>2</sup> this government missed and wasted unusually privileged opportunities to guarantee the country's autonomy and economic development due to a clear lack of

perspective and the inefficiency of its administration. These same problems caused it to miss its grand opportunity to promote the progress of Cuban slave descendants to unprecedented levels. Then, to make matters worse, whatever was not done during those years of bonanza remained undone because the government has never allowed blacks to find solutions to their problems, which everyone knows are special and specific, in more than one way. The result of this is that the situation of blacks is currently getting worse in two ways—one general, one specific. They have problems as poor Cubans and as blacks. Yet, the only aspect of this problem they can address is the more general one. This means legislation and action only for Cubans, stemming from an erroneous (or convenient) reading of the premises of Martí.<sup>3</sup> No legislation or action happens for blacks as Cubans with a particular history that has generated markedly intrinsic conflicts and that in many ways has required and continues to demand timely measures.

Now the government is in a hurry to increase the degree of racial representation among the members of the National Assembly. This is not the time (nor is there enough space here) to conduct a detailed analysis of the degree to which the selection and norms regarding skin color, rich cultural baggage and the necessary intellectual rigor to guarantee the competitiveness of the representatives in this sort of institution coincide. Besides, if this is about representatives chosen to represent blacks in the Assembly, why is it the government—and not the black citizenry—that chooses them? Regardless, what is most notable about this emphasis on raising racial percentages in the Assembly is the precise historical moment in which it is happening. These

changes are taking place during a possible final phase for a government that for half a century barely noticed only some of the problematic circumstances of blacks, hardly deepened its knowledge of them and did little to seek a way to heal the wounds produced by the shackles of slavery—a wound that can be seen today, as yesterday, in a persistent economic disadvantage and lack of mobility, both measures of social progress.

### *The Wound*

Much less than a half century went by between the end of slavery on our island (1886) and the summer of 1912, when thousands of members and sympathizers of the Independent Party of Color, desperate on account of their inability to exercise their full rights as founders of the Cuban nationality and fighters against colonialism, were driven to try to gain through armed conflict that which was denied them not only by law but even more so voluntarily or spontaneously. Cuba was a young and (more or less) independent republic then. Its development was entirely contingent upon United States meddling on the one hand, and on the expansion of a large-estate sugar industry, on the other, as well as on its own harmful, internal political rumblings and frequently changing governments—each subsequent one being much more interested in appearances than in real accomplishments, and attentive only, generally, solely to the interests of elite groups. One can see why in the midst of all that blacks were not able to calmly and humbly keep waiting for something to which they were supremely entitled. Today, of course, a reaction like that of the Independent Party of Color is inconceivable. Just as Cuban national history has shown, even that moment, with it jus-

tifiable immediateness, was the wrong time for blacks to carry out actions that were seen as leading not only to military defeat but to the most misconstrued and evil interpretations.<sup>4</sup> Because time and different historical episodes do, in fact, mean something, analogies between these two distant and different moments and circumstances may seem odd, particularly if they are seen within a rigid framework. Seen in a contemporary context, the situation of black Cubans at the beginning of the twenty-first century is extremely distant from that dead end street that exasperated the Independents of Color in 1912. The scene and the protagonists are also different. Besides, fortunately, the current tone of things does not favor or promote a violent solution. Neither does it approve one, no matter how valid its bases. Yet, there are still analogies. One would not have to dig too much into facts and statistics—they are there for anyone who is willing to do even just a cursory review of them.

Even if one lacks the will, the possibility or even a practical need to research the topic, since Cuban historiography has thoroughly studied the events and implications of that Independents of Color uprising of 1912, particularly in recent years, one must establish a relationship between at least some of their basic demands—those that also give testimony to the awful hardships the Cuban slave descendants endured in the early years of the Republic. Perhaps even a slight reference to these hardships, which ended up provoking what is commonly called the “race war” (a name questioned by many historians), would suffice to establish a group of essential analogies between that and the current situation.

One would have to start with the one thing that detonated the whole situation.

All historians agree that the Morúa Amendment of February 1910 was responsible for making illegal the Independent Party of Color (PIC), two years after it was organized and two years before it declared its plan for armed conflict. The Amendment was added to Article 17 of the Electoral Law, which brought about an absolute prohibition, it said, of parties comprised of members of only one race or social class.<sup>5</sup> The dilemma for blacks was that the PIC was the only party at that time whose platform foresaw a definite and radically committed program for a struggle against racial discrimination. Thus, we see that by that time, and even earlier, Martí’s proclamation (“a Cuban is more than black, more than white, more than mulatto...”),<sup>6</sup> which had been so useful a mantra when unity among white and black patriots was needed for the struggle for the island’s independence, was being undermined by political and even racist trickery. In her book *Una vuelta necesaria a mayo de 1912* [A Necessary Return to May 1912], Cuban historian María de los Ángeles Meriño Fuentes argues:

“And this was happening because the nationalist discourse proclaimed that there were not blacks or whites but rather Cubans, except that one part of those Cubans, precisely those with dark skin, perceived that their rights were not taken into account and that there was also a profound difference between the discourse of inclusion and the real exclusion to which they were being subjected in the area of politics and the administration of the state of which they were supposed to be a part.”<sup>7</sup>

Such affirmations, exact and irrefutable in their context as they are, also symptomatically fit to describe the contemporary

situation in Cuba, even in the foreseeable case that the book's author does not agree with my extrapolation. It is not even necessary. As was explained earlier, my analogy is based on essentials, and the basic contours of the national panorama at this very moment have also been seen, in general terms, in an earlier moment in time. I will return to this matter with other details and considerations a bit later.

Basically, among the PIC's essential demands (which upon being declared illegal was sure to be in danger of being stopped dead in its tracks) were the ability for blacks to elect their own candidates to high government positions, as well a series of social and economic reforms such as access to specific jobs that were heretofore off limits to members of the black race: improvements in the standard of living of black families; guarantees of fairness in the administration of justice (another area in which they suffered); free mandatory schooling with a right to pursue higher education; and, in summary (but without exhausting the list), the elimination of permanent expressions of racism and prejudices that prevented blacks from exercising their full rights as Cubans.

Seen in their entirety, the whole of the demands of the Independents of Color can easily and without the slightest modification, serve my parallel between the primary problems of the Cuban slave descendants of 1912 and 2008.

The situation regarding the limited access of blacks to specific jobs requires no further explanation. It is one of the subjects that most often come up in discussions about the current situation of blacks in Cuba, particularly in very recent years. It is a recurring theme both at a popular level around the country or in articles that journalists and analysts (who are denied legal

status) publish outside of Cuba. So, anyone interested in Cuban affairs already knows that Cuban slave descendants have had to accept the worst of more or less well paid jobs with minimal prospects for social mobility. Two reasons are often cited in explanation of this phenomenon: a lack of education and subjective attitudes (not free of racist overtones) on the part of employers who tend to uphold the strictest of criteria—shall we say—when they have to select appropriate personnel for certain positions. It would be illustrative to add that the government is currently in as much of a hurry to increase racial representation within the context of employment as it is in high government positions. This is particularly noticeable on the nation's television screens (given the media's function and its role in propaganda), where dark faces in principal roles were a rare site, indeed, until very recently. The question is, of course, the same as in the case of the National Assembly 'why now,' after it had half a century in which to do it in a more effective and organic manner? Yet, just as with the other case, the question is not the worst thing of all. It is disquieting, irksome and painful that these measures towards racial representation seem to be not a serious and well-reasoned program, but a series of hastily designed, crisis managing political strategies in which improvisation and inconsistency prevail, as one might expect. Let us say that blacks are represented, but generally not by their best representatives, and not due to a dearth of candidates: on the contrary, but because of a lack of a totally just, transparent and solidarily conscience selection.

Upon describing the political environment that reigned on the island exactly during the time of the Independent of Color's



uprising, well known historian Julio le Riverend notes:

“...it has also become evident that contemporary political practice has used certain elements of black politics to give a democratic appearance to its programs and activities without this really reflecting any substantial policy of equality in all the country’s activities.”<sup>8</sup>

Another demand of the Independents of Color, regarding the impartial administration of justice, obviously parallels the current situation as well. One hardly need recall that more than one government spokesperson has already admitted the outstanding and proverbial (and embarrassing, for a country that calls itself ‘socialist’) fact that the island’s police force assaults blacks simply (and a priori) because of their skin color. Of course, it is well known that during the days of the aptly or badly named “race war” of the Independents of Color, the police also arrested blacks for no other reason than being black.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the lack of statistics, or the fact that they’ve never been published, it seems obvious that the descendants of Cuban slaves are overrepresented on the list of those who must suffer on account of Cuba’s Law of Social Danger, which, as is common knowledge, grants the authorities legal impunity with which to arrest and condemn (without proof) to several years of prison anyone who for whatever more or less subjective reason they consider dangerous. To this one might add prison statistics, where blacks and mestizos make up 80 percent of the population. Another curious detail about the prison population is that several hundred of the inmates currently in Cuban prisons are so-called “prisoners of

conscience,” that is, they are in prison for none other than political reasons. It would be interesting and very revealing if statistics on racial representation in this area were published, even more so if those statistics accounted for those who have not yet been arrested or those who have already served sentences for militant and open opposition to the government.

With regard to statistics, there is yet another—let us say—‘colorful’ fact. A government that in 49 years has always been characterized by excessive publicity of its summaries, numbers, percentages, official charts..., or the publication of those produced by international institutions that unquestioningly employ the data Cuba supplies them, rarely published anything at all particularly related to those real descendants of Cuban slaves. State functionaries have recently declared that there are new statistics on the subject, but the real truth is that these data had not seen the light until now, they have been eclipsed—if they truly exist at all—by the shadow of what by edict we here call ‘colorblindness’. A Cuban is more than black, especially when it is convenient. It is even the case that if someone today tried to deny the obvious, that is, the fact that blacks as a population with specific demands have always been the losers all throughout the scope of the Revolution’s priorities, my effort to defend the truth of their situation would have meager results precisely because I lack much written or numerical evidence.

It is well known that free mandatory education, with a right to pursue higher education, which was another of the PIC’s demands back in 1912 is, in fact, one of the few, basic black victories under the revolutionary government. It is common knowledge that when the revolutionary govern-



ment ended private school education it eliminated racial discrimination in the national school system at all levels, by decree. Yet, where is the convincing evidence that just this measure alone was able to accomplish the goal that no prior government had ever entertained, even lightly—to educate blacks (not individuals but the whole population), to illuminate them as to the full importance of these concepts? How does one prove today that free access to schools, with no concerted attention to the eradication of historical, four hundred year old obstacles such as an economic disadvantage and a persistent lack of opportunities, family traditions, problematic customs, prejudices... was sufficient enough a response to the right and demands of Cuban slave descendants to have a complete education? The only thing one can discern for certain, because it is so blatantly obvious, is that poor Cuban blacks (and the adjective 'poor' is practically redundant) remain as they have always been—on the bottom rung with regard to levels of education and social progress. What successes there are among them occur at the level of the individual, which clearly makes it impossible to generalize them to the general population. It would not seem then, that providing free access to education accomplished all that was hoped, as can be confirmed, even flip-pantly, when blacks still face economic, social and political barriers that must be removed. Just as democracy alone cannot eliminate the repression and backwardness of the poor, neither has the revolution or socialism been able to erase inequality and hardship by the stroke of a pen. Neighborhoods deep in the heart of Havana and even beyond, our towns and cities outside the capital give testimony to that.

There is yet another area in which one can establish a basic parallel between the sort of racism that existed at the time of the Independent Party of Color and the racism that continues in our day. Examples of this are also well known, since they've been amply described from the base and vulgar racism that holds blacks back on the employment roles for positions in companies funded by foreign or mixed capital, to the deceitful and opportunistic use of blacks as a sort of tourist attraction, or even the Manichean strategy of presenting (or selling) to foreign visitors just one or two little glimpses of their rich contributions to the nation's cultural heritage, thereby limiting their impact by stereotyping them. Still, scenarios such as these are well known, as I said earlier, so there is no point in elaborating any further. It would probably be more useful to review the facts of a very recent occurrence, a simple anecdote whose meaning is nonetheless illustrative and instructive. During the last four months of 2007, when the current school term began, there were a series of events at the Lenin School (the Vladimir I. Lenin Pre-University Vocational School for the Hard Sciences), in Havana, about which the general public never heard because the authorities quickly nipped news of them in the bud and made sure the stories never got out. It might be useful to clarify that this institution has always been known to be an elitist one; it was created for outstandingly intelligent and diligent students, with a view to turning them into high-ranking professionals in diverse fields of knowledge and research. Yet, as with other examples, it is the case that all that glittered was not gold. Together with those truly gifted students who gained entrance into the Lenin School by virtue of their own talents, there

are also so-called “hijos de papá” [silver spoon kids] who get in via the actions of some connected relative or by some other dubiously legitimate manner. One need not consult statistics on racial representation at that school to know blacks have always been a small minority at that elite bastion, which makes it easier to understand what happened at the beginning of the present school term.

By order of the Ministry of Education (and in curious coincidence with the rush to diversify the nation’s TV screens and National Assembly), the Lenin School had to admit a group of future Emerging Teachers. These students are nothing like those who typically attend the school. They are not specially trained (it is uncommon for a Cuban student with other options to aspire to be an Emerging Teacher), nor do they have anything but ordinary records, which clearly does not qualify them to be amongst the brightest students. In a word, they are from the poorest levels of the island’s population, with historical disadvantages. They are mostly the descendants of slaves, which is why they were chosen to be the ‘flies in the ointment’ at that elite center of learning. What followed was to be expected; a highly racialized confrontation based on class differences, first among the students themselves, and then including their parents, who quickly joined the struggle. The new students were overwhelmingly rejected. There were even scenes of violence in the student body; all the while the teachers and other authorities struggled in vain to calm the parents (many of them members of the state administration, mostly militant members of the Communist Party) who, of course, offered unconditional support to their own offspring. Finally, the authorities imposed their will, as always happens, but

not without having to make concessions to the select group of elite parents. So, the Emerging Teacher candidates are still at the Lenin School but they are segregated. The students are at the same school but they are not totally mixed in with the other population. In any event, the example remains, as a lesson and warning.

Discrimination cannot be done away with by decree. Sudden measures, paternalistic programs, and deceitful manipulative arrangements are also not the right answer. Racism is the product of an educational (and psychological) deficiency on the part of the discriminator. It also leaves extremely deep and difficult to heal wounds on the consciousness (and even the inner being) of the victim. History has repeatedly proved this, both in the events of the summer of 1912 and in Cuba’s contemporary situation. The lesson is the same in both cases; whatever a human being thinks about him or herself tends to deeply determine his or her destiny, no matter how much or little the value of what he or she is taught, or even what he or she is forced to think he or she believes.

### *It Does Not Heal*

When the leaders of the Independent Party of Color were founding the organization, they didn’t just proclaim the right of the descendants of Cuban slaves to play a role in the country’s government.<sup>10</sup> They also made it clear that this aspiration was not just on account of a simple desire to occupy high positions or to have rank over others (which would have been natural and valid) but rather due to a need to make the system of government more just and competent. This detail would seem to debunk the virulently racist accusations that those men were

forced to face. Be that as it may, in establishing an analogy between that situation and the current one in Cuba, what is revealed is that those men had a better defined strategy and were more realistic in their focus on the role of blacks as Cubans with a special history and specific needs.

Today, everything regarding this subject is reduced to José Martí's ideals on the Cuban national identity. The discussion, with its multiple manifestations, intentions, definitions, interpretations..., is so trite and clichéd, that it has gone from being a simple circumstantial and extemporaneous allegation to becoming an omnipresent dogma (one more) that is quite beneficial to the government. This is what has brought about what we have come to call 'colorblindness by decree.' There is no room for color difference within the whole bunch of us; we are all Cubans and we should all revere uniformity at all cost, despite the fact that reality squashes us, like a ton of bricks, on a daily basis, and the fact that everyone knows all too well that there are more than two ways in which no matter how equal they say we are, there are those who are more equal than others.

Of course, not everyone (perhaps not even a majority) who doggedly adheres to this reductive view does so in bad faith. There are many who are honestly convinced of the edict they defend because they accept its arguments as doctrine. They don't take the long view or try to take it apart, because they were not taught how to do so—it was never something they should do. There are those who may or do accept this because it is easy to do: or out of fear, but they may not be the majority, particularly if one is talking about black Cubans with some modicum of popular power, who even from without or within the political sphere practice this

colorblindness to the extreme. They have been convinced to not see the fact that they are Cubans with a special history: it is their only choice as patriots and also their only chance for survival.

This tendency is particularly troublesome among those dedicated to the study and propagation of history and the social sciences, in general. It might be useful to provide an example, one from among many, the book *La familia cubana en la segunda mitad del siglo XX* [The Cuban Family in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century],<sup>11</sup> by María Elena Benítez, a Ph.D. from the University of Havana in Economics (with a specialty in demographics) and an assistant professor at the Center for Demographic Studies. It contains not one chapter, or paragraph, or line, or fact, or number, or chart, or table, or allusion... to the African heritage in our nationality. Despite this, the back cover shamelessly announces that:

“above all, this study of the Cuban family —of the ways it has changed and adjusted— offers results, up-to-date information. The book's objectives, from a characterization of the socio-demographic situation of the Cuban population, to an analysis of the typology of the family— the social unit most immediately representative of demographic behavior —are exceeded only by the book's length and the amount of information contained within it. The family, in its movement and complexity, is the basis, the point of departure and nucleus for an investigation that centers its attention on the second half of the twentieth century, which when compared to knowledge of the past, highlights the current Cuban family's requirements, needs and contributions in facing a challenging future.”

As for the rest of it, this colorblindness by decree has among its pillars an element of perverse politics that it would be dishonest not to mention. Its unwritten but explicit and overwhelming theory goes more or less like this—the revolutionary state has done more for blacks than any other prior government. Before they can criticize or oppose it, Cuban slave descendants should show eternal gratitude to it and be ever ready to defend what it proclaims as its official victories, even when the victory (as we have seen) is not without defect. This may explain why those in charge, with their manipulation and power, are trying to turn blacks into an amorphous mass within a presumptively filial conglomerate sharing just one history and one sole profile that extends, they say, to all the island's inhabitants. Let us not forget that this is a politically perverse idea not only for all its own perversion but also because it takes advantage of the Martí legacy and of the passionate defense of the benefits of Cuban multiculturalism that other illustrious Cuban thinkers have professed at different moments in history.

Nevertheless, this like all the other sandcastles the dogmatic thinkers have erected is easily destroyed before the drawing of the first destructive breath. Similarly, as in other instances as well, the first one to draw that destructive breath is the sandcastle's very architect. The sin gives shape to its own punishment. We see that blacks today in Cuba are considered and treated as equals (at least theoretically), but only when they are willing to put up and shut up, and keep agreeing with the colorblindness line and any other government imposition or pre-supposition. Anyone who doesn't agree is ipso facto separated from the filial conglomerate—and not only blacks. For a Cuban to cease being considered as such, for

his or her elemental rights as a human being to be denied, all he or she needs to do is openly oppose the government's policies, even peacefully. The limitless number of examples is overwhelming. Yet, it might be useful to recall the recent sad case of the two great champions of Cuban boxing who were sentenced to no longer actively practice their sport, the fruit of their enormous talents and lifelong efforts, solely because they unsuccessfully attempted to exile themselves in Brazil without the government's permission. The very famous black singer, Celia Cruz (who was Cuban but also universal) was not able to say her last goodbye to her mother because the government did not give her permission to enter Cuba, her very own country, if only to visit her mother's deathbed. This sort of example has been repeated an infinity of times. If a Cuban decides to search for other opportunities and leave on his own account, fully aware of the risk, the authorities rob him of his Cubanness; he loses his ID card, his housing, he loses all his rights as a citizen. He will even be prohibited from returning for a visit, much less permanently, except in the most exceptional cases, and after a most trying procedure at the hands of the tough officials who wield the power to forgive or deny. Last January 28th, on the anniversary of Martí's birth, many members of the peaceful opposition were arrested by the police and/or beaten by government-organized mobs at the very same moment flowers were being laid at statues of Martí. The same thing has happened to others, even more recently, for distributing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on the street. Anyone here who protests has his or her mouth gagged; anyone who dissents is destroyed. Since we have been examining historically extemporaneous events, it

would be interesting to imagine what the reaction of José Martí or the Independents of Color might have been upon seeing how things really are in Cuba right now.

Precisely upon considering the facts in the PIC's uprising, María de los Ángeles Meriño Fuentes asserts in the first chapter of her aforementioned book, *Una vuelta necesaria a mayo de 1912*, that:

“[the] absence of a debate about the subject, be it social, cultural or political, creates the strange sensation that nothing has happened with regard to it. Thus, when one person or a group of people take the initiative and start a campaign, the primary risk they run is to be condemned by the rest of the social actors, that the dialog be cut short and, perhaps, that a cathartic explosion take place. But the problem still persists and its solution is put off.”<sup>12</sup>

Thus, we have seen that there are not only a few casual parallels that bridge the two distinct eras, the events and even the historical imperatives; it is not difficult to connect that distant scene in 1912 to our days. Moreover, one finds the so-called Commission for the commemoration of the centennial of the founding of the Independent Party of Color among the many hasty measures the government has fashioned in recent months (maybe following a corrective although late policy, and not just a self-help policy). We would be safe

in assuming that the first order of business for said commission should have been to reveal to Cubans, and particularly to blacks, a history that almost no one knows, since for almost fifty years its specifics were never emphasized. Its second responsibility would be somewhat harder; it should be attempting to convince black Cubans about why they were not and are still not allowed (by law or violence) to have their own party, not to impose themselves on the rest of their compatriots, as the Independents of Color said, but rather to make the system of power fairer and more coherent. To what less could they aspire, given the actual circumstances? Someone from among our scholars and the enthusiastic defenders of extemporaneity, while evoking not only Martí's ideals in his article “Mi raza” [My Race] but also our Bronze Titan, Antonio Maceo (no less), has actually recommended to blacks that they never ask for anything as blacks but as Cubans. There is no reason to doubt his good intentions but it is quite obvious that he is very confused. Worse yet is that his confusion tends to cause even more confusion. Essentially, today's Cuban blacks don't have to ask for anything because they have the right to make demands, as Cubans and as blacks. Not only do they have the right, they have an absolute right to do so without shame, without feeling like debtors when in fact it is they who are the creditors.

## NOTES

- 1- See: Martí, José. "Mi Raza". Obras completas 2 (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales del Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1975).
- 2- CAME, Acronym for the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, an intergovernmental organization with its headquarters in Moscow. It as founded in January 1949 to help and coordinate economic development in its member states, those in the Soviet bloc. The Investigación sobre desarrollo humano y equidad en Cuba, 1999 [Investigation of Human Development and Equity in Cuba, 1999], directed by the Center for Research on the Global Economy, and with support from the Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo (Havana: Edición Caguayo, S.A., 2000) [United Nations Program for Development], both state, as far as Cuba's relationship to CAME is concerned, "that there were guarantees on a stable market and preferential prices, as well as on an oil supply (which reached about 13 million tons per year), access to financial credit and, most importantly, specialized productivity and foreign commerce in accordance with the socialist system of integration, in an international scene where there was a tendency to create regional blocs.
- 3- See: Martí, José. "Mi Raza". Obras completas 2 (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales del Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1975): 298.
- 4- See: Castro Fernández, Silvio. La masacre de los Independientes de color en 1912 (La Habana, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2002).
- 5- See: Portuondo Linares, Serafín. Los independientes de color. Historia del Partido Independiente de Color (La Habana, Editorial Caminos, 2002).
- 6- Martí, José. "Mi Raza". Obras completas 2 (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales del Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1975): 299.
- 7- Meriño Fuentes, María de los Ángeles. Una vuelta necesaria a mayo de 1912 (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2006): 22.
- 8- Le Riverend, Julio. La República (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1971): 125.
- 9- Meriño Fuentes, María de los Ángeles. Una vuelta necesaria a mayo de 1912 (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2006): 31.
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