

We Stayed in Cuba

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It is not so easy to judge an election that some prefer to see as controversial, while others, who consider it a much more orthodox affair, choose to slander it with terrible epithets. What I am making reference to here is the nearly total departure for life in exile of the emblematic Group of 75, as a result of the three-part agreement between the Catholic Church and the Cuban government, on the one hand, and Spain's government, represented by Chancellor Miguel Ángel Moratinos, on the other.

One must fine tune and sharpen one's interpretative skills when attempting to analyze a context so burdened by complex specificities. In addition, it goes without saying that another factor to consider is the subjectivity there is behind any definition, regardless the informed nature, intellectual capacity, and other characteristics of those who try to decipher what motivated the nearly total departure of dozens of prisoners of conscience for Spain, the United States, and Chile. One should also take into account the incredible impunity of the totalitarian regime concerning its use of force against its enemies, which tends to further complicate the drama of not

only the prisoners, but also their family members. It is like pitting human free will against robots. Responses to this particular scenario are irrevocably linked to a series of psychological and circumstantial factors that might be able to change how people formulate their priorities, but not their convictions.

Anyone who hasn't actually lived within the confines of a country dominated by a political elite that possesses all the resources and immunity to be able to subjugate its opponents, can only imagine the real and possible vicissitudes one must endure for expressing any attitude contradictory to the status quo. As such, it would not be fair to make a determination about this situation according to others' sharp comments that could possibly cast a shadow on a deed that deserves a just evaluation free of insults, partiality, and corrosive ingratitude. Ever since time immemorial, exile has been and still is a barometer with which to measure a nation's health. In our case, its vital signs can be seen as those of a terminally ill organism. What else could one conclude about a country that persists in its use of exile as a way to punish people for exercising their fundamental rights—even in the

twenty-first century? Any non-violent effort to claim a civil, social, economic, cultural or political right deserves acknowledgment, and something more than feeling the need to temporarily abandon the place of struggle, due to the confluence of severe pressures, illnesses, and other reasons that only exiles, themselves, could explain.

While it is not my intention to question anyone who accepted going into exile instead of continuing to serve long sentences in sub-human conditions, it is important to recognize that 16 of the Group of 75 rejected that option. A review of the race to which those who did not accept the proposal to leave the country belong reveals that six are black or *mestizo*. As was the case during our nation's independence wars against Spanish colonialism during the nineteenth century, people from that segment of the population are once again demonstrating their bent for increasingly making personal sacrifices towards bringing about a change that can restore all that has been lost. In the present case, and without sacrificing their free will, they seek the methodical replacement of populist policies in Cuba and the lifting of police control as methods the government employs to achieve the quotas necessary for effective governability.

At a time when classist devaluations and slight of hand are writing the history of this moment, it is important to put it in its proper perspective. In the past, many black accomplishments, like their efforts in our independence struggles or elsewhere, have been relegated to anonymity. Despite the modest, urgent rescue of their legacy that we now read

about in a few books, there is still a long way to go.

Not giving up in our attempt to get laws passed that legitimate our exercise of inalienable rights without crossing the Atlantic to other places—and at a very high price—is very useful for shattering the concepts that have insistently been used to call inferior a race through generalizations that have been passed on from generation to generation. A willingness to return to prison, were it necessary, or to be crushed on the street by para-police brigades the government employs to teach its adversaries lessons, establishes a precedent among the people who are fighting for turning the tide on the events that have been imposed since 1959.

Among the 16 from the Group of 75 who remain in Cuba are Iván Hernández Carrillo, Arnaldo Ramos Lauzerique, Oscar E. Biscet, Ángel Moya, and Pedro Argüelles. They are black and are struggling for the establishment of a society free of discriminatory stigma of any sort. The sixth man who refused the offer to leave is the author of these lines.

I am a 49 year-old *mestizo* from Old Havana who is committed to the freedom of all Cubans above and beyond ideological preferences and differing opinions. I want to get public recognition for my aforementioned colleagues who spent more than eight years behind bars. I spent only 20 months and 18 days in those terrible conditions. I want to reiterate the respect I have for those who opted to leave for other lands. We are struggling so that they may return. Cuba belongs to them, too.