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ell into the 21st Century, the ideology of racism and all its baggage of prejudice and racial stereotype are still bent on segregating, discriminating and depriving descendants of Africans in our countries from their most basic rights. Cuba is not an exception. Rather, historical, political and social conditions are produced there which lend it an important peculiarity.



Until late in my youth I lived without thinking of this problem. The social environment which surrounded me, in the midst of a white family, did not make me think that in the land where I had been born there could be men and women who were deprived of their rights for the simple reason of having a darker skin color. Maybe many Cubans have lived through that experience, subjected besides to an official politics that has always tried to minimize the matter.

However, the remarks were frequent, very often subtle, but disapproving of the life, the behavior, the customs and even the religious beliefs of the descendants of Africans. Something told me that the reality was different from that which was being shown to me.

In time I started to delve in a deeper way into the knowledge of Cuban history. That was how the problem started to reveal itself to me in all its crudeness. By that time it had been several years since the revolution of 1959 had won and the racial problem was not alluded even indirectly. I never heard any of my history, sociology or philosophy professors mention the subject. It was all reduced to the hair-raising stories about slavery and the social differences that prevailed in the Republic instituted in 1902. Nothing about contemporary Cuba.

In the same measure in which I increased my knowledge of Cuban society and the complex of social relations within it, I could verify not only that the problem was alive and active, but also that a long history also existed of battles for the vindications of the black population. The words that preside this issue, spoken by Juan Gualberto Gómez, one of the most outstanding anti-racial fighters early in the 20th Century, are an example of it. What went on then in Cuba? How could all that history of segregation, discrimination

and deprivation of rights have been erased with one swipe? Why was a reality being concealed which was before the eyes of all?

Little by little, the picture turned clearer. With the victory of the revolution, a project of economic and social transformations had been started which benefitted the lowest social strata of the Cuba population, in the most diverse aspects of the labor, social, educational and cultural life in general. Among them was a great majority of the black and mulatto population of the country. In the warmth of this campaign the matters related to discrimination and the disadvantageous position of the non-white population started to occupy spaces on the political discourse of the main leaders of the revolution and the communication media. But that did not last too long. Overnight, the problem was considered solved and its reference became taboo. By mentioning this, could affect the monolithic unity that the revolution intended to present before the world. That is, silence had been imposed from above.

The deep economic crisis which affects the country since the early 1990's would be the detonator which would show the opposite. The social sequels which derived from it have, not only placed the problem again on the table, but also made clear that Cuba is far from having reached an equalitarian society and even less having managed to erase the specter of racism. The economic reforms to alleviate the consequences of the crisis, among them the legalization of the United States dollar, created new situations of inequality, which limit access by the black and mulatto population to the enjoyment of all social benefits, in the midst forever more competitive conditions, especially in the labor field.

Another thing of which I rapidly became aware was that racism was not a problem particular to Cuba. During my trip to Africa in the mid-80's and on my visits to the United States and later Canada, I could confirm with my own eyes that it was present with very diverse manifestations in every multi-racial society.

What is, then, what distinguishes the Cuban case? Perhaps the most characteristic element may be the silence around the problem. The fear that the reality may bare itself in the light of day. This silence and the lack of information about it allowed the problem to go on developing in a, let's say, rather concealed way, underground, so as not to come into a contradiction with a political discourse which from the early '60's presented the solution to the problem, the

monolithic popular unity and the practice of equality as paradigmatic accomplishments of the revolution.

Of course, the ignorance of the problem by the Cubans spills beyond the borders of the Island and reaches the Cuban-American political and social circles in the United States. My residence in Miami in the last few years has allowed me to confirm that in the majority if not in all the most important political programs that center on the future of Cuba, the racial subject is virtually absent. That is the continuity of one of the political tendencies that have prevailed in Cuba since the instauration of the Republic in 1902. Why talk about something that does not exist? It would only serve to fan the flame. This does not mean that we should try to place racism and racial discriminations as the most urgent realities of present Cuba. It is only a matter of granting it the place which corresponds to it in the agenda of the debate for a better Cuba.

In today's Cuba, although the racial subject has started to reach a certain relevancy and everyday there are more who face reality, it still does not form a part of the wider social debate, in which those who receive the heavy brunt of the discrimination could express their ideas, their aspirations and of course, their frustrations. That is to say, having a protagonistic role in the solution to their own problems. The racial problem is still submerged in what it has been taken to be generically called the "people", which does nothing more than dilute the question and postpone its solution. Such a focusing prevents the creation of a body of affirmative laws which may apply a brake to discriminatory practices, which apparently become more and more common in Cuban society.

That is the great space that "Islas" intends to fill. For us it is clear that the publication of a magazine of this type constitutes not only a necessity, but also a challenge for its promoters. The necessity cannot be argued by anybody. The challenge because it is a highly polemic and controversial subject. A social ailment about which it is difficult to find a consensus. This is a subject on which personal motivations and experiences, frankly racist attitudes and multiple political interests and tendencies converge, which far from opening the road for its solution, highly complicate it. The history of Cuba is plagued with examples which prove it. Facing the challenge is our purpose.

It is a matter of breaking the shell which has for such a long time helped to conceal the problem. If the truth, bitter though as it may be, does not come out into the light with all its crudeness, it is impossible to find means of solution. A truly democratic society should create the social situations for it.

It is time for the black and mulatto population not only to take conscience of which are its civil rights, but also to value in all its magnitude the place it occupies in society, its economic, political and social potentials and the important contributions made to the Cuban nation. Only then will it be possible to start the fight on its way to uproot the hateful cover which has throughout all our history tried to hide the true reality and show, not only the world, but also the Cubans themselves, a nation in which there are no racial conflicts.

Our magazine is an open page for social activists, writers, journalists and professionals in general interested in the subject, but above all it is a space at the disposal of every man and woman who have suffered in his own flesh the alienating effects of racism. The debate of the different focuses and perspectives and the inclusion of works about other countries of America and the world with a multi-racial population should contribute toward clearing the true essence of the problem and opening the way for its solution. And although works will be included of a historical and socio-cultural character, as a means to understanding many of the present realities, special attention will be granted to the contemporary problems which affect a population, which in the case of Cuba, according to several calculations, is a majority and the aspirations of which have been braked everywhere.

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