

Blacks in Cuba

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Despite the fact that the races are mixed in Cuba, there is discrimination. The law prohibits it but that is inconsequential. Blacks and their descendants are still the inferior race. Many cannot believe this.

It is lamentable that this “socialist democracy” prohibits the dissemination of data that could prove this. I have no other alternative but to describe what I feel as a black person in Cuba. This is my testimony as

a woman who was born into and grew up under a system that supposedly eliminated racial discrimination.

The topic is taboo, something about which no one can speak—because it supposedly doesn’t exist, which makes it even more subtle and cruel. How can we say we endure such discrimination?

The differences between blacks and whites, and all the intermediate colors, are assumed to be imperceptible, but they are



always right there. African religions basically combined with Catholicism, but establishing equality for Cuba's African descendants is a problem that is avoided. The result? Cuba's blacks curse their past.

Today's newer generations of African descendants in Cuba are plagued by many a psychological complex. My eight-year old son does not want to be black; he wants to lighten his skin. The same thing happened to me despite the fact my mother always told me there was no reason to renounce one's race. She showed me that my color was something that distinguished me and that I should be proud of it.

What she was never able to explain to me was why I was subjected to social discrimination. She was unable to protect me from the pain of hearing those whose sole purpose was to offend me by saying 'black' and pronouncing the word with all the contempt they could direct at our race.

There are times when people are extra careful in talking about blacks. They even use special euphemisms: "los de color" [colored people], "los morenos" [dark-skinned people], "los mulatitos" [the slightly mulatto people]. It is as if just saying the word were offensive or the term were the most injurious thing with which they could quash someone.

¡Tenia que ser negro! [He had to be black!] Expressions like this one make us feel inferior with regard to whites. We are the ones with *pasas* in our hair ['nappy' hair] and who sweat profusely, the ones who are slovenly and slow of thought.

They even use history to punish us: "The first case of armed robbery in Cuba took place the day Carlos Manuel de Céspedes lib-

erated his slaves." The reflection of this historical premise is present in contemporary Cuba. The majority of Cuba's prison population is black. While it is true that blacks commit more crimes, they are also the poorest members of Cuban society.

According to the racists, being black presupposes a tendency towards criminality or delinquency. They think this without ever considering the direct relationship between criminal behavior and poverty. It is just easier to be wantonly prejudiced.

Many are the social, economic and political disadvantages we blacks face but that is not the only thing with which we have to put up. We also have to deal with those who claim to have no problem with blacks, those who with a condescending phrase constantly remind us that we are members of an imperfect race, or those who make mighty sure that there is no one of our race around when they say: "I know that not all blacks are the same but..."

Sometimes they are even quite open in their disdain for us. In the meantime, we try to be indifferent to their offenses, hiding our pain so much so, that we become one with the discrimination itself, even to the point of hating ourselves for being black.

We blacks are totally aware of white indifference, contempt and hate. Although we don't talk about it, we most certainly feel them. No matter how much we try to take the discrimination and pretend it is a natural and everyday thing, it hurts us and inflicts pain on us. Those wounds will be with us for the rest of our lives.

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