

# The Juan Gualberto Gómez Movement for Racial Integration

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In 1998, we began working with the idea of creating a social movement against racism, but specific conditions in Cuba made this very difficult because the Cuban government does not discriminate by law. Thus, we had to work with great caution and objectivity during those years. By August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2000, we had a serious, well constructed and viable project that marked the creation of the *Juan Gualberto Gómez Movement for Racial Integration (MIR)*.<sup>1</sup>

This movement is historical evidence of the fact that struggles never end, because they lay within everyone's individual consciousness, like a curse or prejudice—like racial discrimination. We are the legitimate inheritors of and are continuing the fight of integration movements that came before us and set the standard for our goal: social, economic, political, cultural, and ethnic equality.

Some believe that manifestations of racial discrimination are a thing of the past, thanks to the revolutionary process. They are wrong. Not even 50 years of the same state control have managed to make it so “non white” people do not have to suffer on account of racial prejudice, despite the fact that the revolutionaries who took power in January 1959 proclaimed a ‘raceless’ kind of government.

Concern about racial integration, with a view to completing our nation- and identity-building project, has always been part of our history. Unfortunately, any legislation regard-

ing race has become ‘dead letter’ law. Thus, we are working to create a nation whose government respects and guarantees its own laws. A lack of political will or social understanding cannot be blamed for the failure to resolve the black problem, as the following illustrate:

- Hundreds of non-white young men have done prison time during half a century of socialist rule. Young men born during the revolution constitute 90% of a prison population that is already 70% black, 20% *mestizo*, and 10% white. These numbers are verifiable and speak eloquently for themselves.

- Most young people who work in prostitution and sex work, and their intermediaries, are non-whites, as a result of their lack of economic support and backing from relatives abroad, because blacks did not emigrate.

- As forms of escape, alcoholism and drug use are concomitant with brazenness, gangsterism, and other antisocial behaviors associated with overcrowding, poor housing conditions, unhealthy neighborhoods, the worse jobs, and the lowest salaries. In turn, all of these lead to a loss of self-esteem and vulnerability, because there is no known way out of this tragic situation.

The revolutionary government sought ways to please non-whites. This was a tactic necessary for it to be able to consolidate its power. When it declared war on discriminatory barriers, the government was seeking to



bolster itself up on a broad social base; its populist tendencies emphasized education as the way to situate non-whites on equal footing with other citizens. What this achieved was to ensure that most non-whites remained in Cuba to work, play, and be grateful, etc. But the honeymoon between them abruptly ended with the collapse of the socialist bloc. This forced the government to depenalize the dollar. Those who suffered the most during a never-ending ‘special period’ in peacetime were those who lacked access to hard currency. The State did minimally open up to a market economy, and permitted foreign investment in joint ventures, cooperative companies, and other economic entities. Yet, this did not preclude racially motivated, discriminatory, hiring practices.

Young people start to quit school because they have no assurances of dignified employment, even if they do complete advanced studies. Generally, non-white youth receive no help from parents and family members in getting the latest shoes and clothes to wear because older folks’ salaries are not high enough to afford such expenses. As a result, crimes against property and other violent acts

increase. Prisons give evidence of this. So-called economic crime, which falls under the category of white-collar crime, is perpetrated by white revolutionaries in Cuba who are automatically the ones considered to be ideal for watching over and administering the State’s coffers.

Any project that proposes to analyze and solve the race problem in Cuba must go to its source. It is essential for the nation not only to heal its wounds but also plant a seed that will bring back the idea of “with all and for the good of all”, as independence Apostle José Martí wanted.

We must find new forms of national coexistence that go beyond the deep divisions of the present. This task will be arduous and demands that we latch on to the principle of racial equality and acknowledge our prejudices. This requires a total turnabout in our individual and collective mentalities, so we can go forward to a future of national reencounter and reconciliation.

With all this social incomprehension, Cuba is facing dangers of unpredictable magnitude. The dissatisfaction that an inability to meet basic needs creates is compounded by the discrepancies this creates, and the ruling regime’s explicit or masked rejection.

Martí and Juan Gualberto Gómez are the example and guide [we need] to move our proposal forward, above and beyond all the defamation that any of racial integration’s enemies can muster. Our movement will work ceaselessly for equality and brotherhood amongst all Cubans, so the Apostle’s desire for “with all and for the good of all,” and his dreams of social unity, can all come true.

1- The MIR’s headquarters are on Calle D #315, between Quinta and Goicuría, Alturas de Sevillano, Arroyo Naranjo, Havana. Please send email to: [almeiracordero09@yahoo.com](mailto:almeiracordero09@yahoo.com).