

# Cuba: White Power in a Black-White Country

## Will Blacks Finally Attain Power in Cuba?

María I. Faguaga Iglesias  
Historian and anthropologist  
Havana, Cuba

**Y**es, we blacks cause so much worry now in Cuba, so much that they are racing to replace us and reinforce the protective barriers. Black men and women are causing concern, black women perhaps even more than our racial, cultural, and historical brothers. Anyone who does not believe this should stop and take a look at the people who were most recently named to the Communist Party's Central Committee. There are an unprecedented number of black men and women on it, and many more black women than men.

Suddenly, in a country that has historically functioned as a lurchingly, white-criollo, Castro-socialist, power elite—with its old-fashioned psychology and impending political decline—is shocked upon having discovered our absence. Now, as if by magic, it has suddenly decided to include us—selectively—with an eye to loyalty and unconditional obedience, and not to black people, or our history of struggle; not to our multicolored and culturally mixed society, nor to the past, present, or future of our nation, but rather to this terrible regime's ideas and projects. Woe to those

who play along with them! Woe to them, even if they are people of color, and even more so if they are black men and women! Woe to them, if not disdain, because that is what servile people and marionettes inspire.

Parents who do not let their children grow up also inspire painful shame. Masters who do not take on the challenge of their servants' struggle for freedom inspire contempt. Governmental leaders who are divorced from the reality of their people inspire rejection. We must agree with the General-President. It is most certainly an embarrassment that these self-proclaimed revolutionaries took fifty-two years to notice the overwhelming absence of black men and women among them. What is as shameful as it is reproachable and repulsive is the politically opportunistic attitude that comes with now trying to impose upon us a few black leaders, people on whom we can doubtfully depend to be representatives of their ethno-racial group of origin. Even not knowing the particularities of those new leaders, we would do well to spare them only a tiny bit of that doubt.

The government has spent decades with its back turned to the world; it has tried to see it through its own lenses, with obvious immaturity and political stubbornness. Meanwhile, what we have is globalization unbridled together with European modernity, both of which were imposed on those of us in the Americas. In addition, we have the development of Cuba's own society, which even suffered obstacles in its natural movement, and fractures in its own national strengths. Globalization and modernity are staying the course. The laws of history do help one understand arbitrariness; sooner or later, they will just be obvious, in and of themselves.

### *The Castro brothers and anti-black racism*

Some fundamentally white-criollos leaders could not help being suspicious and/or disapproving of the great battles that U.S. African Americans waged in the 1960s, when they demanded their legitimate civil rights. They could not understand that those African emancipatory struggles went beyond class struggle, or that Marxism did not hold the solution to their problems. They have not been interested in distinguishing or supporting the black struggle of people of any latitude to achieve the place they/we deserve in the development of our countries. The relative support they offered the Black Panther Party had more to do with the idea that 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'—in a Cuba-U.S. context—and not our actual ethno-racial cause.

Their eyes firmly on the extinct socialist camp—whose essential demographic and cultural reality was so radically different from Cuba's situation—the island's leaders were not able to see the reality of their own country. Neither were they able to situate themselves firmly within it. But, did it inter-

est them? More importantly, did they want to confront it? The expulsion from their territory of Afro-Cuban civic leaders and the most active Afro-Cuban intelligentsia—as a way of not dealing with the race issue in its entirety—demonstrates that there has been no political will on the part of the Castro government to deal with it. Anything else would have required it to attempt dealing with it for over fifty years, an alternative that in reality was consciously delayed, silenced, or rejected. They comfortably and indifferently established the basis of their power on intolerance, oppression, and repression. They also established the ethno-racial order, turning a racist hierarchy into one of its best weapons. Early on, they went on the attack against black societies, Rastafarians, the group of artists and intellectuals associated with Ediciones El Puente, etc.—all symbols of the independent thought and action of the Afro-Cuban population. None of this is compatible with a social order that has declared itself to be "of the humble, by the humble, and for the humble."

The black and mulatto population has continuously suffered under the worst of conditions, and have had few opportunities for social mobility, which is not a coincidence. There are hardly any whites among the people who have been trying to alert people to this situation on the island. No one on the recently named Central Committee was among those who tried to do so. We should at least take a moment to consider this matter.

Despite the fact that black intellectuals go all over the place saying exactly the opposite, and in the limited, controlled spaces where simulated or practice, internal debates also take place, the skin color of our leaders is fundamental. Yet, we need color with conscience, conscience with action; actions with visible and far-reaching, positive results.

None of this is guaranteed us while our leaders—no matter what color—are not freely electable and elected by us. As a result, additionally, we should be able to demand results from them in their work, or criticize and even remove them. This is not so much about racial democracy as it is about democracy in its totality. This is what we should have, but do not. This is not about constructing a black nation, as some insidious intellectuals have said, but rather about finally building our very necessary Cuban nation, a fully and truly integrated and integrating place. This is what we deserve; as such, we are historically called to be such.

We do not need staged black personalities. This is what we've had up till now, and throughout most of our history. We do need, blacks, yes, but ones that coherently think and act in tune with our true history of oppression and resistance, of struggle and omission, of repression and growth. We need for people like that, descendants of Aponte and Maceo, Quintín Bandera and the Independents of Color, Mariana Grajales and María Cabrales, Afro-Feminists from all times, and black Cubans who have been exiled for the past fifty years, to be ready to play out their roles as collective social subjects, to achieve places for themselves in the upper echelons of power.

The time for waiting is over. It must now be time for definitions and actions, so that future generations can finally enjoy a time when they can truly realize themselves. There can be no middle ground, no room for possible conformity, or justifications like: "Well, at least it's something," "We can't deny that we're better off than before," or "We blacks have never had it as good as now."

*Frustrated Afro-Cubans from both sides:  
party-liners and oppositionists*

When they cannot alienate us, they are still trying to gag the black Cuban popula-

tion's thinking. When they cannot weaken us, they continue assassinating us. When they can't silence us, they continue exiling us. When they can't lock us all up in the numerous prisons it seems they've built for us all over the island, they keep trapping us via stereotypes. The disdain, hiding, and twisting of our history continues. Our daughters and sons continue being forced to prostitute themselves in the arms of depraved and decadent, colonialist Europeans who have been lured here to buy them by the publicity of national tourist agencies. These victims have been equally conditioned for this by the impoverished conditions of survival. Given this situation, why should we wait? Why should we be concerned with and protect the benefits of those who subject us? Instead, why shouldn't we think about our own? What is it that is so special and priceless that we must be grateful to them for? Can we trust that these newly appointed, black leaders will represent our frustrations and support us in our search for solutions? We must remember: just because they are black does not mean that they have an ethno-racial consciousness. Having received this promotion, and if they did have one, they have thus far been pretenders, or behaved like chameleons instead. The regime would not have taken them in if they had expressed attitudes more in tune with their origin, and the experiences and bad living conditions of their people. So, what should make us think that their attitudes would be any different now?

The black population has not been marginal, but rather pioneer-like in its contribution to a Cubanness that we still productively nurture, even today. Our cultural, political, military, intellectual, ethical, and philosophical contributions are hardly negligible. Why should we allow ourselves to be placed in a position to receive crumbs? Liberation is a conscious and responsible process; it requires

firmness and coherence. It comes from the actions of oppressed people, and is never a gift from the oppressors, or from those who have heretofore been our revolutionary leaders. As Afro-Cuban historians Iván César Martínez and Juan F. Benemelis have said, they see every single space in which we builders of the nation move as a donated space. This is very significant, because it shows us that the leaders see us not as social subjects, but rather as passive, receiving objects awaiting their mercy.

All this, and our past and present, incoherent frustrations and inconformities—regardless our political affiliation—explains the existence of the pro-government Cofradía de la Negritud and the oppositionist Afro-Cuban Foundation, the Juan Gualberto Gómez Movement for Racial Integration, and the Citizens' Committee for Racial Integration, because contrary to what some black, intellectual émigrés say, we Afro-Cubans are indeed interested in politics. Even so, we have always been excluded from being officially involved in them, which has been good for all our oppressors, and bad for us.

### *Racism is a political conflict*

If not for our skin color and a physiognomy that identifies us as people of color, who besides us has this consciousness, and the responsibility to act accordingly. We clearly know that any ethno-racial conflict is a political one, and that its solution cannot come solely from politics. Instead, ethno-racially discriminated groups must be part of the political structure and fight on behalf of those who are discriminated against. Anyone from outside who says differently, regardless the regime he or she is trying to justify, is nothing more than an example of a colonized individual, of a traitor for whom his or her people should feel pity and

shame. They are often also imposters protecting their own selfish interests.

The black Cuban problem has never been confronted. This problem is much more than just what people say; it is an entire system, not only of prejudices and customs—as some would like us to see and believe—but also a blend of (anti)values and corresponding practices that affect the entire lives of individuals and their communities, even before or after their conception. This problem has persisted for five hundred years, and dozens of generations have been touched by it; it has necessarily been transmitted and reproduced, as has the precariousness of their lives, and their precarious existence.

This is not just wordplay, but rather a verbal representation of the daily challenge millions of Cuban men and women, descendants of those who paid the price they could to produce their society's wealth, and win its independence, must face. No one aspect of the black problem is unimportant; they are all fundamental and interdependent.

This is the truth that must be clearly told on a national scale, in a loud voice and fearlessly, as should be. We should not suffer reprisals for this, as has always been the case. The black Cuban problem is not something that was implanted into our society; we created it ourselves. It did not come with U.S. troops; it was already here. Conditions for its continued existence are still being carefully protected, nurtured, and affirmed for preservation. This caused Antonio Maceo to be assassinated during the war for independence, and also caused the killing of his followers, the Independents of Color, during the republic's early years. This is why they drove Walterio Carbonell insane, and imprisoned anti-establishment rappers and Afro-Cuban, civil activists.

The black Cuban problem continues without solution. Up until now, we have seen no will to confront it on the part of our governing leaders. That fact, like the racist and hierarchically racialized colonialism that created and maintains it, is one of Cuba's principal problems for the twenty-first century. Dealing with it is not tolerating or even understanding it. Its solution must be found in people being able to unquestionably participate in civil society. It can be no other way, and must involve all levels and angles of society in equitable and truthful proportions. If the economy is worrying and choking the white criollos, now that the only life saver is the Bolivarian government of Hugo Chávez, the consequences of the atrophy into which our nation was born, when it emerged as an independent country, have strangled the black and mulatto population for five centuries.

It is time not only for all of us to publicly acknowledge that, but also to deconstruct the complex, out-of-date, and sickly institutionalization that allow the asymmetry of our race relations to endure and be reproduced. Band-Aids and salves—which is what these newly promoted black figures on the Central Committee represent—are not the solution, but rather just another way of delaying, in a prolonged, arrogant inertia, a subterfuge for not confronting this fundamental national trauma. Precisely because they know this, that is what the Castro Ruz brothers, who are now awakening to the reality that it is not good to be seen as racist in the modern world, are giving us.

#### *A need for real Afro-Cuban leaders*

We need not just black leaders, but Afro-Cuban leaders, that is, leaders conscious of who they are, of their origin and history,

and knowledge of their people's situation. They must be truly willing to take action in a consonant manner. We need empowered Afro-Cubans who will on their own work to construct the nation of which we should be a community.

We need civic leaders and not bosses. The times make them urgently necessary. They must have sufficient intellectual clarity to understand that the problems of subalterns are always political, that the historically persistent and unjustifiably powerful black problem is an extremely complex political issue. It must be on every agenda, because it reaches and impacts every single level of our society. To be effective, we need black leaders with power and authority who do not act like psychologically colonized, and thus, inhibited and controllable beings.

White criollo power was born on the backs of enslaved, black men and women. It solidified in their battles against us; we were always forced to be subalterns. We must recognize this: even though we have not always been aware of it, and it has been distorted in a way that twists the way we see and understand this reality, we have been in a political war for five centuries.

Necessarily, all class struggles in Indo-Afro-American societies involved deconstructing the racialized, racist, and hierarchized (dis)order we have had imposed on us. Understanding this has cost many of our Cuban civic intellectuals and activists the price of exclusion by 'in-sile' or exile. We are all pursued by social death.

We may all make history today in Cuba, but it continues to be written by those who retain control of power. Black men and women continue being represented as second-class citizens and buffoons in our nation's written history, and are easily excludable and amply

excluded. Despite his obvious communist tendencies, Afro-Cuban historian and attorney Walterio Carbonell's re-reading of our history from a subaltern perspective highlights the selective nature of our nation's historiography. The same can be said of contributions of Afro-Cuban historians Juan F. Benemelis and Carlos Moore. New works by Afro-Cuban intellectuals on the subject of race, even that by pro-government individuals, has made virtually no splash whatsoever in Cuba. It seems that the white criollos are telling us that blacks are acknowledged in the boxing arena, but not in the elite, intellectual one.

*Castro-style power: exploitative of blacks, Negrophobic, and communistic*

Those in power find the complaints and concerns of blacks about Castro-style rule to be quite surprising, and consider them to be even more insolent than those of any other social group. This is a government that is open only to platitudes, praise, and applause. That is why it has made sure to make the Afro-Cuban diaspora invisible. This explains Fidel Castro's lack of respect for the black brigadist captured at Playa Girón, and the cruelty of his answers to black and mulatto dissidents and oppositionists, even if they are women, who are denigrated by insults calling them delinquents and black monkeys.

The logic of those who exploit black people only sees them as subjected, down-trodden people, and for this they expect and demand gratefulness. Over the past fifty-two years, the few black people we have seen in any position of privilege, and not power, have been guilty of not using their critical sense, assuming submissive positions, genuflecting, and being grateful. That good black person of yesteryear, now transformed in today's

black revolutionary, is the one who thinks like a white man, denies himself, laughs at racist jokes, and avoids his own people. Anti-black power requires the existence of blacks who will subject themselves and even go against their own people, to repress them if necessary. They behave like recycled bufo actors from the Teatro Martí, imitating white actors who die the visible parts of their bodies black, to do a burlesque representation of black Cuban men. Weeks prior to the Cuban Communist Party's VIth Congress, there were a series of arbitrary police arrests, and frequent attempts to hold meetings to reaffirm revolutionary commitment. People whose honesty is questionable—all white and Cuban Communist Party devotees—began to circulate flyers containing an explicitly fear-inspiring message: "We must be cautious. Now blacks want to take advantage of the situation and take power." There was nothing new in this message. Racist, anti-black government leaders were using an age-old mechanism of social control: Negrophobia, which earlier was fostered in academic circles and was now being promoted on the street. It is noteworthy that the collective community is periodically induced to fear that people from traditionally discriminated, subjected, excluded, and vilified social groups want to take over. For decades, it has been rumored that Jews have an "international campaign, because they want control of the world, which is why they already control the United States; much caution must be observed as far as those people are concerned." This happens not only in the most unbelievable places, but also in the Castro brothers' Cuba.

This is the warning I was given by a pro-Fidel, pro-Cuban Communist Party anthropologist; he was dead serious, took me aside, and spoke to me in a discreet whisper. I should point out that this man is not crazy. All



of them know the value of words, of certain intonations, of ambience: "Words kill, words save," says an African proverb wellknown and accepted amongst Afro-Cubans. This colleague of mine may very well be going around, discreetly saying the same thing about black Cubans, as if giving out a warning about national salvation.

The events of what came just prior to this revitalized Negrophobia were not pervasive among the greater public, but they did exist, and have truly worried Cuba's leaders. The First Afro-Cuban Assembly for Civil Rights made way for the Race and Society Forum. Black women expressed themselves as feminists, and openly differentiated their feminism from the sort that in recent year has been presented more officially, which is led by professional white women who know nothing about their black and mulatto sisters, and their particular necessities. Through their art, black artists show the inequitable ethno-racial situation there is, and how it is detrimental to the black population. There are now organizations in which people interested in the asymmetry of ethno-racial relations gather, and requests for public arenas in which to debate the topic. All of this has disquieted the moribund regime's leaders, who have no need for non-submissive blacks, much less those in a truly forward-moving, offensive position from which a true Afro-Cuban leadership could emerge.

Pain and suffering are immeasurable, but space and time are. If we calculate the amount of time we have been subjected and humiliated, and include in that equation other factors, like our ubiquitous presence all over Cuba, and our broad, quantitative and qualitative contribution to our nation's collectivity; if we take note of the fact that we have been customarily situated in a marginalized posi-

tion within what is persistently called a Cuban ethnicity, we might be able to understand the pain and suffering that the antipathy, scorn, disdain, phobias, and hostility of white Cubans towards us have caused and continue to cause generations of black Cubans.

The implicit indifference of white people to racism, which is criticized by media intellectuals and professionals in globalized Europe, a place that also exploits and marginalizes its immigrant black population, is a reality in black and white, revolutionary Cuba. Yet, debates about this are possible in old and racist Europe, but they are not in our own integrated Cuba, critical of foreign injustices, and where international functionaries come to tell black Cubans how to think, feel, and act, and also blatantly and conclusively classify our particular kind of racism.

### *Castroism, racism, and a caricature of racial integration*

Everything on the island has remained structured for the reproduction of anti-black racism, to keep blacks far from power and its benefits for black people. To that end, the media have been invaluable instruments for those in control. The absence of black people, or their representation via denigrating roles, has served the hierarchization of race well, as well as the persistence of asymmetrical interracial relations. The use of repressive forces, where many blacks can be found at the bottom, and hardly any at higher levels, promotes an idea of black inferiority. The use of those repressive forces against the black population—which is increasingly notable—is another, similarly functioning factor, and also foments disunity among blacks and mulattoes. It is wellknown that this tactic is essential to keeping any group trapped by oppression.

The tentacles of power, of its reproductive mechanisms and oppressive instruments, are so subtly elaborate and interwoven, that those who are affected by them too often do not notice them. This makes it difficult to find their source, which is essential to our being able to undo them. Thus, we remain trapped, even if what we want is our freedom. The fact that actions, consequences, and images serve as an essential sign of union throughout the individual and collective liberation process, does not mean that the last two lack value in and of themselves. Images can serve as discursive material, generate ideas, and dynamize or highlight them, working on the subconscious and conditioning attitudes.

It will be interesting to see how a population used to seeing white people in power, that cannot believe and still doesn't understand how a black man took office in the White House, and continues believing that Cuba's entire, long-term, independence struggle was won by whites, reacts to the Cuban Communist Party's Central Committee's new black members. Will they consider this treacherous to the Party, or Party treachery? Will they abandon their Party affiliation? In any event, what will something they may interpret as an error on the part of two octogenarian brothers suggest to them?

Several positions are emerging from the black population. There are those who are sure that things are really changing now; this is a first step, have patience. Nevertheless, there are others who say they don't know what to think. After all, Juan Almeida and Esteban Lazo were already there, and things are still the same for us. Some Afro-Cuban intellectuals believe we must wait and see, we have to know what is going to happen behind all that. No group wants to offer an opinion, or doesn't dare, because it knows what the consequences could be.

### *In Cuba: Will blacks achieve power?*

People are so anxious and desperate for the economic improvements the General-President assured would take at least five years to achieve, and so aware of the fact that nothing has changed, that they don't care about the skincolor of their leaders. Despite the reality that so many people outside of Cuba—even those who know it, are aware of how weary the Cuban people are but choose to ignore or not understand it—the fact is that most Cubans on the island are unaware of the increased black presence on the Central Committee. They did not see the closing session or read newspapers, because they tell them nothing. The black presence on the Cuban Communist Party's Central Committee is not going to contribute to, or shatter and dismantle our political, economic, and social (dis)orders' racist and racialized nature. This presence is not thought of as an internal force in opposition to government omissions, lies, anachronisms, and misstatements; neither is it conceived of as a way to create a real balance of power at the top. More than anything else in that power structure, that black presence is particularly decorative, and conceived of as a way to plump up the statistics that are offered to international organizations that cautiously study these figures, and see them as indicative of progress, or a lack of it, without ever really checking the real facts. Their presence is a sophism, an easy and fragile ruse; it is an evasive tactic that is being used to face an Afro-Cuban population that is starting to be a bother to a white criollo elite that has already publicly announced that it will once again, soon attempt to repress this population.

The presence of blacks on the Central Committee was taken to be the incorporation of this large and growing ethno-racial group.



This does not promise to bring about radical changes, energy, leadership; it does not mean there will be any change in the content and form of politics. Its decorative potential was considered, because it can keep us really far from power; it tries to present Afro-Cuban activists as enemy agents, traitors to Cuba, individuals hungry to make their mark, for annexation, all ruses traditionally used in a political war always plagued by personal attacks whose purpose it is to distort their real objectives.

The very few times exiled, Afro-Cuban historian Carlos Moore has been mentioned to us, it has been to call him a CIA agent; the few times exiled, Afro-Cuban historian Juan F. Benemelis has been mentioned to us, it has been in an attempt to discredit his solid, heterogeneous, notable and prolific intellectual production; the few times Afro-Cuban philosopher Enrique Patterson has been mentioned to us, it has been to accuse him of being on the U.S. payroll. That is the way they operate: they assign infamy and stigma to those who cannot defend themselves, and the rest of us are not allowed to hear or read their work or learn about their actions. We are consciously disrespected and polarized for the benefit of the anti-black, white, criollo, Castro-socialist, power elite.

### *The promotion of black Cuban women to the Central Committee*

The fact that the new additions to the Central Committee are black women is evidence of a perfect logic. What follows was essentially and formally established ever since the Fourth World Congress on Women (Beijing, 1995), organized by the United Nations: women's rights are human rights, and likewise, human rights are women's rights. Prior to this, the liberating boom that women

experienced in the 1960s and 70s led to us having a space in the United Nations in which we could determine and promote progress on that score, and criticize those governments that limit, hinder, or deny them. In 2011, the U.N. Women's Agency, led by ex-Chilean president Michelle Bachelet, will consolidate its international work.

Ever since the end of the 1970s, which saw the emergence of the first, internal, oppositionist and illegal organizations to watch and denounce human rights violations, and the years that followed, when isolated but persistent, international criticism was launched, and later became accusations at the United Nations, the Castro Ruz brothers have been worrying about and occupying themselves with their international credibility.

Before, Cuba had the protection of the entire socialist camp's umbrella. With it, it shared its lack of internal freedoms, and the distortion of the whole world's measures for progress, stagnancy, and regression. Like it or not, the political solitude and economic fragility of the Castro-socialist government has forced it to make some changes. This is the context in which the addition of black women to the Cuban Communist Party's Central Committee is highlighted. There is now extremely limited authorization for *cuentapropismo* [self-employment], and the fictitious, caricaturesque, and unbelievable creation of a revolutionary civil society. There is also momentary tolerance for a few, chosen, manipulable people from all social sectors. Organizations that watch out for human rights, and women's rights, and other international organizations, would classify this controlled presence of blacks in the Central Committee, particularly that of black women, as a possible attempt to respond to recently developing, authentic, Neo-Afro-Feminism. It is em-

ployed to gain ground in the effort to achieve this end. Pro-government researchers show that poverty dresses like women, children, the elderly, and blacks in Cuba. Let us now imagine the situation of black girls, women, and elderly ladies who are doubly discriminated, on account of their sex and race, as well as their class position, which is undeniable. A group of chosen and unconditionally loyal black women, who represent everything black Cuban women are not, are playing a role in the power elite's plan to show them off to the world, and set them against those subalterns who should be their natural sisters. Setting subalterns against other subalterns is nothing new; this tactic has been openly employed by the Castro Ruz brothers. In their arrogant superiority, they will assure us that the chosen few should express their gratitude; those who are repressed should silently step back. This is what the Castros do so they can see further down the road. It is somewhat like "divide and conquer," but together, at the same time. As for as ethno-centrism, anti-black racism, Machismo, and partisan politics are concerned, they very well might be creating a terrible situation for future, Afro-Cuban and Neo-Afro-Feminist struggles, something we know we will have to stage on all fronts.

The Castro Ruz brothers are trying to ensure their political-ideological survival in a post-Castro era. Since they, themselves, will not be able to fight that battle, they are presently creating and planting those who will be their black guarantors in a possibly democratic future. It will be a time when the Afro-Cuban population must finally politically position itself with real power, for their own benefit, and that of the entire nation.

For this to happen, we must free ourselves of Castroism. Because the Castros know that history will not save them, they are trying to

pre-construct their own salvation: what social actors could possibly be better to employ than those who had previously been out of favor? What sector could possibly inspire more sensitivity than that of black women, particularly at a time when Afro-Feminism is connected worldwide? Thus, if power is going to be shared by social subjects—that is, if they cannot totally keep it to themselves—they are forced to give up at least a little bit. The best thing for them is for it not to fall into the hands of those who will not truly make demands of them, and condemn them for their radical acts, but rather into the hands of those who will be eternally grateful to them, the saving Uncle Toms with the soul of white folks, even if the price they pay is their very own souls.

This does not mean we should horribly condemn these women, but rather that we should be vigilant, and constantly search for a way to possibly identify the real puppet strings that those in power—and not these women—manipulate behind the curtain. We need to identify their true colors, and the strength of the fabric from which they are made, while also searching for something that can guide us to a beginning, a time when we can take individual and collective care of ourselves without suffering from the naivety of 1868, 1895, 1902, and 1959; without allowing ourselves to become trapped by the fear that resulted from 1912. Fear, terror, discredit, and stigmatization are the factors in the perverse equation that has been systematically used against Afro-Cubans.

*Yes, Afro-Cubans want political participation*

Naivety will leave us trapped and victimized in that equation. We must avoid seeing as normal something we witness on every single day. We must individually and collectively

realize that all that is afoot is nothing more than a political strategy for the perpetuation of their anti-black domination. May this give us strength, and may we act with conscience, consistency, coherency, and responsibility, without fighting amongst ourselves or demonizing the frightened black images we saw in photographs. Upon assuming our own consciousness and responsibility, we can set out on a true search for structural change, and initiate the non-racialized practice of getting along and organizing ourselves. Those who tolerate the inaction of their leaders are just as racist as those leaders who visibly practice racism. If after a short period of time we do not see this current Central Committee—with its new, pronounced black presence—fight for laws that validate and protect the rights of black people; if we don't see them create concrete measures to protect us from historic injustices, we will know their real intentions and goals.

Uptil now, power in Cuba has been structured in a way that benefits white people at the expense of others, knowingly or not. Will this change now that there is a black presence on the Central Committee? If these new people do nothing, or what they do falls short or lacks importance—as is the case with that entity—it will be hard to propose activism, and carry it out properly. The Central Committee will continue to function as a racialized and anti-black power structure—because of its inaction—even if it keeps including black members. We must clearly tell our real truths to those who are worried, and those who are worried and occupied, if we are to clear up the rumors that are floating around the hallways, neighborhoods, and even internationally. Unlike the General-President, we have no reason to be ashamed of ours, because they are legitimate.

Yes. We Afro-Cubans are certainly interested in politics. This explains why we had an Independent Party of Color during a past, historic moment, at a time when we were excluded from the shaping of the early republic. Given the marked, ethno-racial inequality that characterizes how Cuba's riches are enjoyed, this explains why there are those among us who would like to see that party reappear—particularly since the only party we have, the Communist Party, uses us for its sacrifices and excludes us from any resulting benefits.

Yes. It is indeed the case that Afro-Cubans want their share of a power they should already have, as pioneering founders of Cuba, and as co-creators of a Cubanness we have never been fully granted. Only when we truly have power will we be able to participate equally with whites to make decisions that will impact all the benefits that come with all those riches. That is what we want, and what we work for, alone, because whites have generally never been our allies. Even so, we do have the support of white Cubans who act conscientiously and responsibly, for the good of Cuba. They share our burden with us. We are now one year away from commemorating the hundredth anniversary of the mass assassination of our most organized predecessors: the Independents of Color. It is up to the anti-black, white power elite to decide if it will once again massacre all Afro-Cubans, if they will preventively put us all in prison, or it will finally act in an historically responsibly manner and deconstruct itself, leaving the way clear for a new Cuba that has not yet been allowed to exist. It is up to the black men and women who were recently incorporated into that Central Committee to define and decide what attitude they will adopt towards Afro-Cubans; if they will be our allies, if they will try to maintain an

impossible neutrality; or if they will act like our enemies, and betray themselves.

Whether we are organized or act independently, we Afro-Cuban men and women are going to continue our struggle, trying to undo the popular fatalism with which many of our black, cultural, and historical brothers and sisters say that this is just our lot. We are

going to turn around the inertia this phrase inspires, because what we must do now is think about freedom, use our creativity and sense of justice, grow as decolonized subjects, free ourselves as social subjects: we must empower ourselves, and honor our history of resistance and rebellion, which is at present being silenced or distorted, if not all together omitted.