

Uncovering Blackness: Racial Ideology and Black Consciousness in Contemporary Cuba

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## Abstract

Danielle Pilar Clealand: Uncovering Blackness: Racial Ideology and Black Consciousness in Contemporary Cuba  
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Racial ideology in Cuba, which negates the importance and effects of race and a racial hierarchy, gained significant legitimacy at the start of the Cuban Revolution due to increased levels of equality and the initial commitment by the Revolution to eradicate racism and racial discrimination. Racism was declared to be solved and race was subsequently erased from the public script two years after its triumph in 1959. This project determines 1) how the ideology of racial harmony and Cuban socialism join to create a racial ideology that often succeeds in reducing the salience of race for Cubans, particularly among the revolution's supporters 2) how this racial ideology affects identity formation, racial consciousness and racial attitudes among blacks as it interacts with visible racial disparities and 3) the trajectory that black politics has taken in Cuba. In the absence of black institutions, associations or networks, and amidst a powerful ideology that blocks identity affirmation, there are blacks that still feel a sense of solidarity with one another and some display a strong sense of racial consciousness as racial difference determines modes of access and influences everyday social interactions. I also maintain that while many nonwhites in particular see race as a salient category in their lives and opportunities, many still adhere to the dominant racial ideology, believe in its integrationist ethos, do not view race as a determinant in their social relations and perceive racism to be a manifestation of attitudes and isolated incidents, rather than a structural phenomenon.

Revolutionary ideals create a union among belief in racial democracy and the Cuban Revolution

such that politics, nationalism, and racial attitudes cannot be separated from each other in order to comprehensively study racial politics in Cuba.

## Dedication

To my grandmother, Dea Clealand, who I always hoped would get to read this project and whose pride in me always left me smiling and in awe.

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## Introduction

On December 21, 1959, just one year after the start of the Cuban Revolution, Castro stated, “In the United States....they have not been able to resolve economic and social problems like racial discrimination, which we did by persuasion.” (Castro 1959). This view, still promoted by the government today, portrays one of the key elements of race talk in Cuba, which suggests that Americans are plagued by racism, whereas Cuban citizens enjoy harmonious or “civilized” race relations. With regard to race, the vision often articulated by government leaders and members of the party has been one of racial unity and harmony. The importance of this characterization of race relations is the consequence: with racial harmony achieved, the need to address race or racism is rejected, both in policy and rhetoric. After the first few years of the Revolution, race ceased to be an issue open to critical discussion or public debate<sup>1</sup> (de la Fuente 2001c; Moore 1988; Sawyer et al 2004). Racial difference was deemed irrelevant with regard to national identity deeming racial affirmation and racial consciousness among nonwhites equally irrelevant. Racial ideology in Cuba, racial democracy, was not born at the start of the revolution, but the success that the regime had in creating higher levels of equality during the first years of the 1960s brought the ideology legitimacy that it did not previously possess.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that during the Special Period beginning in the mid-1990s there was a resurgence of racial scholarship and during the past decade government leaders have slightly altered their rhetoric to discuss some aspects of racial inequality (primarily housing and representation) that has its legacies before the Revolution. The structure of racism within the Revolution, however, continues to be a silenced topic.

Racial democracy rests on the assumptions that 1) race as a social cleavage is not relevant and is replaced with a universal national identity, 2) consequently, there is an absence of racial hierarchies such that race is not connected to life chances or socioeconomic status and 3) racism and discrimination are foreign problems (primarily within the United States) and while individual prejudice may still exist, it only manifests in isolated incidents that cannot be connected to a larger social structure. The ideology has become powerful enough to escape evidence of racial inequalities through the use of alternative explanations such as poverty or individual racial prejudice. Racial democracy negates the importance of racial difference which not only prevents an awareness of the links between race and opportunity, but undercuts racial consciousness among Afro-Latin Americans. The silence on the race issue accompanied by the ideal of racial democracy have become a part of the nation's common sense so that not only are citizens of all races largely conditioned not to talk about race, but they often further perpetuate the ideology themselves (Bonilla-Silva 2006). In Cuba, the ideology goes hand in hand with the accomplishments of the revolution, making it quite difficult for Cubans that align themselves with the system to acknowledge any racism within that system.

Scholars of Latin American racial politics have argued that, particularly in Brazil and Cuba, racial democracy has not achieved the dominance necessary to convince populations that race does not hold any salience in their respective lives, largely due to existing racial disparities that contradict the ideology's rhetoric. Conversely, some scholars argue for the continued legitimacy of racial democracy contending that, despite continued racial prejudice, the ideology remains an organizing principle that espouses nationalist and integrationist ideals and that race does not significantly factor into people's social or political identities.

This project represents a middle ground contending that while racial democracy holds a strong influence in people's lives decreasing the saliency of race for many, racial disparities, particularly after Cuba's economic crisis, have challenged that ideology in significant ways and increased the importance of race for blacks especially.

I combine qualitative and quantitative data to determine 1) how racial democracy and Cuban socialism join to create a racial ideology that does often succeed in reducing the salience of race for Cubans, particularly among the revolution's supporters 2) how this racial ideology affects identity formation, racial consciousness and racial attitudes among blacks as it interacts with visible racial disparities and 3) the trajectory that racial politics has taken in Cuba and how racial attitudes have developed. I point to evidence of structural racism in Cuba as well as the existence of racial consciousness in Cuba. My findings on black consciousness are actually quite extraordinary: in the absence of black institutions, associations or networks, and amidst a powerful ideology that blocks identity affirmation, blacks in Cuba still feel a sense of solidarity with one another and some display a strong sense of racial consciousness as racial difference determines modes of access and influences everyday social interactions. My survey results also show that the presence of racial discrimination is connected to a sense that other blacks are affected by similar realities and thus, levels of black consciousness and feelings of strong racial group identity are positively correlated with experiences of discrimination. I also maintain that while many nonwhites in particular see race as a salient category in their lives and opportunities, many still adhere to the dominant racial ideology, believe in its integrationist ethos, do not view race as a determinant in their social relations and perceive racism to be a manifestation of attitudes and isolated incidents, rather than a structural phenomenon. Revolutionary ideals create a union

among belief in racial democracy and the Cuban political system such that politics, nationalism, and racial attitudes cannot be separated from each other in order to comprehensively study racial politics in Cuba.

Despite the power and attractiveness of the racial harmony rhetoric, racial inequalities and discrimination continue to adversely affect the black reality in Cuba. Racial difference determines modes of access and influences everyday social interactions, creating a space for black consciousness. Race matters in Cuba for individuals' commonsense notions of identity so that racial consciousness among many blacks is indeed both present and relevant. During a book presentation in Havana last year, a well-known Cuban scholar stood up and said,

“We are in the midst of the beginning of a black movement in Cuba. Our education must reflect that by representing both parts of history, white *and* black. Our history is incomplete if only one part is taught in our schools. Our government must represent our black citizens as well. But I do not care about the number of blacks in government if these blacks do not think like blacks. If they are not conscious, then what is the point? If they think like whites, if they are Uncle Toms that wish to perpetuate white privilege and say that racism is no longer a problem, then I can do without that black representation in government.”

One of the key aims of this project is to identify what constitutes black political thought in Cuba and how racial ideology influences racial attitudes. In other words how does a black Cuban view and/or experience their social relations, life chances, and their position in the group as a whole? One of the seminal works on black identity as it relates to racial politics is Dawson's 1994 book, *Behind the Mule* where he analyzes whether race continues to be a, “major social, and political force in American society and a major shaper of African-American lives” (7). My contention, as it relates to Cuba, uses Dawson's point of departure to say that race matters to many black Cubans and does indeed shape their lives. This argument does not apply to all black Cubans, as Dawson's argument applies to the majority

of African Americans, but it contends that there are those that display racial consciousness in their attitudes and in their private conversations. I argue that this is partially due to the changes following the economic crisis in Cuba, during which racial inequality increased and blacks began to experience discrimination more visibly and more often. Not only do some blacks identify with blackness as something separate from white and mixed Cubans, but that this phenomenon has been further solidified and strengthened by the advent of the economic crisis, tourism and dollarization where race plays a more visible role.

### *Organization*

Chapter one will examine the ideology of racial democracy, its components and effects on racial norms and attitudes among the citizenry. I examine how ideology creates norms and shapes people's perceptions and interpretations of social realities. The ideology of racial democracy or racial harmony serves to legitimate the racial status quo by trivializing racial hierarchies or refuting them completely. Consequently, the ideology has created over time, standard ways of perceiving race, or racial norms. These norms are an ethos of anti-racialism, the view of racism as an individual phenomenon (most often referred to as prejudice) rather than a structural one, and the perpetuation of anti-black stereotypes that are treated as harmless recognition of racial difference. While racial democracy is an ideology that negates the importance of racial difference and the existence of racism, I also contend that the ideology actually supports the emphasis of racial difference and racial hierarchies.

Chapter two uses the theoretical points in the previous chapter to demonstrate how racial ideology operates in Cuba specifically. From independence until the contemporary period, the chapter gives an analysis of the development of racial ideology in Cuba with

particular emphasis on the Cuban Revolution. The unification of two ideologies – racial democracy and socialism – creates a racial ideology that is distinct from other Latin American countries. By supporting racial democracy with policy measures at the start of the revolution and officially declaring the end of racism, the influence of racial democracy in Cuba is particularly strong up until the present. Moreover, the initial advances that the revolution was able to make by dismantling segregation and increasing equality of opportunity for blacks provided a formidable claim by the government that race was no longer relevant in Cuba. The economic crisis that followed the fall of the Soviet Union, termed the Special Period, marked the first serious challenge to racial ideology in Cuba as inequalities increased with significant racial dimensions. Racism and discrimination became much more visible, particularly by nonwhites. I will examine the change in rhetoric among the leadership and how the ideology may have been altered during this time. Finally, the chapter will outline the various theoretical components of racial ideology in Cuba and how it interacts with the socialist system and its nationalist rhetoric.

Survey data collected on black identity consciousness in Cuba is analyzed in chapter three. Using the data, I am able to analyze how components of Cuban racial ideology influence black consciousness and identity formation. I argue that although racial democracy has been successful in creating a perception of equality and decreased saliency of race, black consciousness continues to exist and racial identity is quite significant to blacks in their daily lives. The experience of discrimination, the presence of racism and perceptions of being undervalued in Cuban society heightens the saliency of race and has a direct relationship to how blacks view their own identity and their connection to other blacks. At the same time,

the dominant racial ideology promoted by the state is paramount to how blacks view social and political realities and their racial implications.

Chapter four demonstrates how racial ideology influences racial attitudes or the racial commonsense of Cubans of all races through interview data. Racial ideology does not influence each person's commonsense notions of race in the same ways, but it indeed has an effect on each individual to some degree. In this chapter I argue that we can identify certain patterns that correlate with particular views and characterizations of racism in Cuba. The interview data demonstrates how the theoretical arguments outlined throughout this project operate on the ground. The data allow for an examination of racial and political thought among different groups and explore the relationship between political attitudes and belief in racial democracy. I also highlight the most visible areas of racist practices in Cuba: tourism, racial profiling by the police, and lack of black representation in the media and the government to emphasize the increased visibility of racism, but the continued pattern of black invisibility in areas such as the media and the government.

The last chapter of the dissertation, chapter five, highlights the political importance of blackness and the dialogue that comes out of black communities which often contradict dominant ideologies. The two forms of ideological critique, formal and informal, are discussed as equally important to the study of black thought in Cuba. At the start of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, in addition to ending segregation, the government eliminated all existing societies, organizations and media that were associated with race or created to address black concerns regarding rights and representation. Despite the lack of black institutions and networks that support black dialogue and agency, blacks have managed, both formally and informally, to challenge the rhetoric from above and remain informed and



aware of the relevance of race based on racial democracy's visible (and sometimes not so visible) fallacies. There is an element of solidarity and group identity that stems from blacks' marginal position, not only in Cuba but throughout the Americas.

My aim for this project is to be one of the first studies of black politics in Cuba that will eventually be part of a larger conversation about the intersection of ideology and black political thought, both in Cuba and throughout Latin America. As I was conducting my interviews and surveys throughout Havana many respondents expressed surprising curiosity and excitement about where this work would be published. Many thanked me for approaching such a topic and asking questions that no one had before, but that they clearly wanted to answer and continue to ponder. In this way, my small project became part of a conversation that would endure beyond the time spent filling out a survey. I hope to bring a voice to these people and be part of the process of reducing black invisibility.

## CHAPTER 1

### RACIAL IDEOLOGY IN LATIN AMERICA

The work of racial ideology is to shape people's common sense notions of race and its effects. How people perceive race in their individual lives and within the larger society is influenced by racial ideology and rhetoric, both from above and below. Ideology, supported by institutions, state policy and the mass media, holds tremendous influence in how we interpret both structural phenomena and our own personal experiences within these structures. Whether or not people think that race plays a role in their social relationships, economic opportunities, levels of access and everyday experiences has much to do with the way that race is framed ideologically and the social norms that racial ideology produces. Racial ideologies become part of a nation's identity and because they are historically embedded they have for generations represented a particular way of thinking and doing with regard to race.

The ideology of racial democracy or racial harmony serves to legitimate the racial status quo by trivializing racial hierarchies or refuting them completely. Consequently, the ideology has created over time, standard ways of perceiving race, or racial norms. These norms are an ethos of anti-racialism, the view of racism as an individual phenomenon (most often referred to as prejudice) rather than a structural one, and the perpetuation of anti-black

stereotypes that are treated as harmless recognition of racial difference<sup>2</sup>. As Mary Jackman (1994) argues, ideological rhetoric can create norms in subtle ways without directly using coercion, but still gaining social control. The ethos of anti-racism is one in which it is believed to be un-patriotic to be racist or even point to structural racism in one's country. As a result of this ethos, connections are not often made between race and class or race and economic or political opportunity. Even under this ethos, it cannot be denied that there are instances of discrimination that whites still practice against nonwhites, though often admissions of such treatment are at worst, linked to individual prejudice that is uncontrollable by government or society and at best, are viewed as mere aberrations that do not represent the national attitude towards race.<sup>3</sup> This view of racism as personal rather than structural represents a standard way of perceiving race that is supported by ideology of racial democracy and obscures any correlation between race and opportunity. Under the ideology, little importance is placed on the effect of race, though racial difference remains highly salient. The role of race differentiates people through physical and cultural characteristics creating a racial hierarchy that is ignored amidst an ideology of equality.

This chapter will examine the role of racial ideology and the standards that it has established in perceiving and acting upon racism. I will examine 1) the role of ideology in creating norms and shaping citizens' perception of social and political realities; 2) the

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<sup>2</sup> Anti-racism and the perpetuation of black stereotypes are closely related in that the belief that one cannot be racist, or the negative connotation associated with being racist enables negative stereotypes, jokes, and comments to circulate throughout conversations and individual perceptions of blacks without any guilt or recognition that they are denigrating and associated with a racist mentality.

<sup>3</sup> Part of the rhetoric common among whites is that blacks are in fact racist against themselves or even worse, racist against other whites. This notion is often communicated by whites to both deny the existence of white privilege and to suggest instead, that maybe the problem of racism is not with whites, but with blacks. The historical belief of black racial inferiority by members of that same group is not attributed to white supremacy but rather is re-interpreted as intra-racism among blacks. This argument is part of the framework of racial democracy in that racism can be deflected not only to individual attitudes and prejudice, but away from whites as well.

historical frameworks and rhetoric that constitute racial ideology in Latin America; 3) the ways in which racial categories simultaneously support the ideology of racial democracy and emphasize racial difference and hierarchies and 4) the societal effects of racial democracy. Racial democracy, as the ideology is termed in many Latin American countries, affects not only the way that citizens view racism in their countries, but also how they view their own racial identity. This racial ideology characterizes racism as a distant historical phenomenon, removing it from the present except in the form of individual prejudice. In this way, the ideology works as a mask or a guise to cover up both racism and racial inequality that the ideology maintains and supports by ignoring their existence. Finally, I argue that despite rhetoric that discourages the saliency of race, in many Latin American countries a high importance is placed on race and degrees of blackness through the use of numerous racial categories or markers.

### *Ideology*

Racial ideology is a type of ideology. The study of ideology has produced many varying definitions of the concept, most of which agree that it is a system of beliefs around which people cohere. Ideologies form the framework through which individuals perceive, interpret and make sense of their own realities (Bonilla-Silva 2001). Mannheim (1991) distinguishes between the particular and total conception of ideology, marking the particular version as one that is created by individuals and in turn one of which we can be skeptical. These particular ideologies are often used to consciously obscure reality whereas the total conception of ideology refers to the thoughts of an era or group. Much of the later work on

ideology, specifically in the Marxist tradition, uses this conception of particular ideologies in order to link ideological production to domination and false consciousness (Horkheimer 1972; Rorty 1994) using power and the use of illusion to promote consent (Jackman 1994). Marx viewed ideology as hiding the true relations of inequality to serve those at the top and as legitimating the status quo with regard to class (Larrain 1979).

A separate strand of work on ideology contends that ideologies can be conceived from below and are not only created by elites. These sets of ideologies can often be considered counter-ideologies in that they challenge the dominant sets of beliefs and create an alternative way to explain society that do not originate from positions of power. Those that emphasize these multiple sources of ideology view the conception of ideology that is only linked to domination or coercion as limited in scope (Van Dijk 1998; Eagleton 1991; Dawson 2001; Harris-Lacewell 2004)<sup>4</sup>. Eagleton (1991) calls for a definition of ideology where belief systems intersect with political power so that there is no specificity whether the ideology challenges or reinforces that power. There are indeed challenges to dominant ideologies that have roots in subordinated groups or groups that are not connected to elites or state power, which will be discussed in a later chapter.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss racial ideologies from above that seek to justify social realities about race and in turn have the power to affect thought and behavior. It is based on a conception of ideology as a framework to hide social contradictions with regard to racial ideologies in particular. Ways of thinking about and interpreting racial realities can often obscure social realities in order to justify racial inequality. The ideology

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<sup>4</sup> In the following chapter I argue that ideologies from below can be just as influential and significant as those from above to the development of political thought and public opinion.

of racial democracy seeks to reinterpret racial phenomena in Latin America as benign and consequently affects people's behavior, notions of identity and their choices with regard to race.

The role of certain institutions is cited as one of the primary ways in which social norms are created and social alternatives can be obscured (Althusser 1994; Van Dijk 1998). As Mary Jackman argues, "for subordinates, institutions limit the opportunities for, and raise the costs of, noncompliance....adaptive behaviors become molded into everyday habits, dimming each person's vision of social alternatives and hedging in her choices (64)." Within an authoritarian regime, the constraints that institutions place on citizens to challenge dominant social norms can be more pronounced than in democratic societies. Institutions that formally or informally bar the discussion of certain topics can greatly increase the cost and personal investment required in addressing these topics. Yet the presence of institutions is not the only way to inhibit the presence of ideological alternatives. The absence of institutions to address certain needs or issues can also support a dominant ideology and can lead to less cognizance of not only how to address these issues, but whether they can or should even *be* addressed. In other words, without a space to organize and express concerns or challenges, a problem becomes difficult to address and the need for an institution through which to do so is not realized even by those who would benefit from it. Even if citizens are aware of the existence of racism or racial inequality, for example, challenges to or noncompliance with the social norm carries a heavier consequence, or greater personal investment. This, as Jackman argues, confines the agenda within which a challenge may take place. This is not to argue that institutions or the lack of institutions that limit an agenda

create blind allegiance to a shared ideology, but that the absence of any dialogue or space to address a problem reduces the legitimacy of any challenge to combat it.

### *Racial ideology*

My concept of racial ideology uses Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's definition where racial ideologies are the "racially based frameworks used by actors to explain and justify (dominant race) or challenge (subordinate race or races) the racial status quo (2006, 12)." Racial ideologies are belief systems that not only serve to legitimate racial hierarchies but that also provide the lens through which to understand everyday occurrences and realities that can be connected to race. They produce dominant societal views about race which can then be connected to individual beliefs (Neville et al 2005). As Melissa Harris-Lacewell (2004) writes, "life experiences are not always endowed with social meaning. How these experiences are understood is largely a result of ideological position (18)." Racial ideologies that are diffused by elites are received by the masses according to their own ideologies, experiences and self-interest. Nonetheless, it is the dominant ideology that creates the framework and shapes the view of those that both support and oppose the ideology.

Ideologies from above and below often overlap so that even challenges to the racial status quo can be infused with elements of the dominant racial ideology that supports it. Racial realities and experiences of discrimination allow for nonwhites to formulate their own ideologies that explain the racial status quo, but racial ideology still influences the way they are formulated. While blacks may challenge racial inequality, the foundation of this challenge is entrenched in the dominant ideology. For example, blacks may create counter-ideologies by attesting to the presence of racism, but the concept of racism is often expressed

as individual attitudes rather than a racialized social, economic and political structure, a primary component of racial democracy. The racial ideologies formulated from below will be discussed in depth in a following chapter which will further outline how dominant and subordinate ideologies can overlap, pointing to the power of the dominant ideology in framing the racial common sense of citizens.

Racial democracy as a racial ideology provides a set of beliefs about racial realities, but that does not necessarily mean that the ideology allows for race to be interpreted through every day experiences. In other words, though it provides a lens through which to view race, it also masks the work of race, so that phenomena that are indeed racial are deemed non-racial and are not connected to a racialized structure. Racial ideologies that espouse antiracist ideals and emphasize racial progress as evidence of both harmonious race relations and the end of systematic racism often create a false consciousness, which in turn creates a barrier towards the fight against racial inequality (Hanchard 1994; Forman 2004; Neville et al 2005). If citizens do not use race as a lens with which to interpret realities and racial identity is suppressed, racial conflict is avoided and the ideology remains virtually unchallenged. Thus, the work of subordinate ideologies is often to uncover the racial hierarchy and other truths supported by racism.

Racial ideology exists as a way not only to explain and justify the racial status quo, but also to conceal it. The justification of a racial hierarchy is only credible to citizens if the hierarchy is partially hidden or can be attributed to other phenomena. If citizens interpret racial disparities as trivial, vestiges from the past or as having progressed remarkably over time, these disparities are easier to overlook. Anti-racist ideologies, for example, do this work by negating the presence of racism and thus inhibiting an accurate interpretation of the



root of racial inequality. In the United States, for example, racial difference was at the crux of the definition of the United States as a nation and thus infused into legislation whereby national unity was created around white supremacy up until the mid-twentieth century (Davis 2007). Formal segregation, the establishment of a racial binary, state acknowledgement of racial discrimination and opposition to racial mixing all contributed to the formation of the exclusionary U.S. racial ideology, which was not replicated in most parts of the world (Hanchard 1994; Winant 1999). More often, national unity and political stability have hinged on the creation of a seemingly cohesive nation where divisions by racial or ethnic groups are thwarted by a de-emphasis on racial identity. The anti-racist ideologies of Latin America proved to be much more successful at gaining the support of nonwhites while maintaining white privilege (Marx 1998). As Howard Winant (1999) argues, the racial ideology promoted by the United States prior to the civil rights era did not win over blacks in the way that racial democracy did in Brazil.

The ability of ideologies to create norms and thus influence citizens' interpretations of everyday occurrences and phenomena lies in their discourse. Anti-racist ideology carries with it appealing rhetoric that describes an ideal society without the problem of racism or racial discrimination. The power of ideology to create an illusion lies in its relationship to these values that are attractive to citizens. Discourse surrounding anti-racism, integrationism, and a humanistic rather than racial ethos that does not divide a nation's citizens, is much more attractive than discourse that talks of racial inequalities and unsettling topics such as racism and white privilege. Discussion of racist actions or beliefs can be viewed as unpatriotic and against the national image of equality (Skidmore 1993; Sheriff 2001). Under an ideology where race is no longer important, nonwhites can feel certain that their

opportunity will never be affected by their race and that they are equal to whites. Whites can claim that neither race nor white privilege are a part of society and thus can be free of accountability. An antiracist ethos is produced whereby whites can characterize themselves as being non-racist regardless of their actions or beliefs. Thus, both whites and nonwhites have reason to preserve dominant racial ideologies and are crucial to their maintenance and survival (Bonilla-Silva 2001).

Embedded within anti-racist ideologies are also racist strands that support anti-black stereotypes (Bobo 2004; Bonilla-Silva 2001). These strands work in tandem with anti-racist ideologies in order to place blame for inequalities on black cultural deficiencies or individual shortcomings and away from matters of equal access. As long as citizens believe that they are not racist and that the system is not a racist one, blacks are removed from a position of formal disadvantage. As a result, it becomes acceptable to perpetuate negative black stereotypes and engage in racist conversation because the notion of white privilege and black subordination is done away with. In a study done in the United States, Neville et al (2005) found that among a predominantly white sample, greater endorsement of color-blind racial beliefs were related to increased (a) racial and gender intolerance, (b) racism against Blacks, and (c) belief in a just world. Racial ideology then creates norms that are contradictory, but these contradictions work together to maintain the status quo.

### *Racial Democracy*

From the abolition of slavery until the contemporary period, history and politics in many Latin American countries have been narrated through the racial democracy ideology<sup>5</sup> which negates the importance of race as a social cleavage. The ideology of racial democracy in Latin America rests on the assumptions that 1) race as a social cleavage is not relevant and is replaced with a universal national identity 2) consequently there is an absence of racial hierarchies such that race is not connected to life chances or socioeconomic status and 3) racism and discrimination are problems in other countries (e.g. the United States) and while individual prejudice may still exist, it only manifests in isolated incidents that cannot be connected to a larger social structure. The silence on the race issue accompanied by the components of the racial democracy ideology have become a part of these nations' common sense so that not only are citizens of all races largely conditioned not to talk about racism, but they often further perpetuate the ideology themselves (Bonilla-Silva 2006). Thus, racial democracy does not stand only as an elite-driven ideology but serves as a way of seeing race, a lens by which to perceive racial issues.

The attractiveness of racial democracy is part of what accounts for its support. Its rhetoric is such that it can simultaneously attract dominated groups by making them think that it is in their interests to ignore race and see equality, and serve to keep these groups in their subordinate position by silencing alternative ideologies and masking the effects of race on life chances. Thus, they create, "an imaginary resolution of real contradictions (Eagleton

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<sup>5</sup> Various terminologies have been used to describe Latin American racial ideologies, among those, *mestizaje*, racial harmony, Latin American exceptionalism, and racial democracy. This project will use racial harmony and racial democracy interchangeably. Although racial democracy commonly refers to the Brazilian racial ideology, it, or a derivation of it is found in other Latin American societies as well such as Cuba and Puerto Rico.

1991, 6).” Many Latin American countries have used these values to build a societal norm that rejects the significance of race while also promising that they have solved the problem.

During the 1930s and 1940s, Latin America experienced a surge of intellectual thought on race that served to solidify the legitimacy of this racial ideology characterizing harmonious race relations. Transnational exchanges also characterized this period so that discourse on race was discussed and disseminated similarly by scholars from different nations (Blanco 1942; Torres 1998). Thus, racial ideologies were a product of elite exchanges throughout the Caribbean and Latin America. During this time, the proliferation of academic studies contributed to the institutionalization of racial ideology<sup>6</sup>. Tomas Blanco (1942), in his seminal work *Racial Prejudice in Puerto Rico*, first read this work in Havana in 1937, after being invited by *La Institución Hispanocubana de Cultura y por la Sociedad de Estudios Afro-Cubanos*. Blanco subsequently dedicated his book to Fernando Ortiz, a prominent Cuban scholar who promoted similar ideologies on race in Cuba. Similarly, Puerto Rican scholar Juan Manuel Carrión used Ortiz’s conception of the Cuban identity as a stew or *ajiaco*, to discuss national identity in Puerto Rico as a mix of cultures, rather than being racially based (Torres 1998).

Racial mixing served as the primary explanation of racial harmony during the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Latin America and continues to be utilized today. Racial mixing exemplified the existence of smooth race relations between blacks and whites in Latin America. The existence of the mulatto challenged the racial binary of the United States and was a physical

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<sup>6</sup> The depiction of a racial democracy was often supported by U.S. scholars and writers who viewed Latin America as free of the racism that was present in the United States, often due to lack of official segregation and higher levels of racial mixing (Falú, 2004).

example of the fusion of Spanish and African cultures. In *The Cosmic Race*, José Vasconcelos (1997) writes,

“A thousand bridges are available for the sincere and cordial fusion of all races. The ethnic barricading of those to the north in contrast to the much more open sympathy of those to the south is the most important factor, and at the same time, the most favorable to us.”

The mulatto or the mestizo represented the national identity as they both embodied this fusion and distanced the nation from blackness. Mestizaje combines with the whitening ideology where mixture is a “value-loaded process of the elimination of blackness and indigenusness from the national body politic in favor of whiter types of mestizos (Wade 2004).” In Puerto Rico, for example, discourses of mestizaje emphasized the people of Puerto Rico as “*uno solo*” or “only one” (Merino Falú, 2004). The same is true in many other Latin American countries as well.

In Brazil, scholars such as Gilberto Freyre saw racial democracy and racial mixing as a way to strengthen Brazil’s racial plurality in the early half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Freyre not only promoted *mestizaje* and whitening but he also contended that the social ascension of a handful of blacks, mulattoes and *pardos*<sup>7</sup> to positions of high social status confirmed the existence of Brazilian racial democracy (Freyre, 1964; Hanchard, 1994). The use of exceptions of success continues to be used today in the justification of equality of opportunity. The few blacks that are able to reach the upper class are cited as evidence that racism does not bar access to higher education and professional positions. Freyre, as many other scholars of race during this time, can be termed an opportunist, using the higher levels of racial mixing present in Brazil in comparison to the United States as a way to characterize

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<sup>7</sup> The term pardo refers to those of brown skin in Brazil.

Brazil as not only harmonious, but as on a higher moral ground than the United States in the treatment of nonwhites (Skidmore 1993).

### *Racial Categories*

While the racial democracy ideology does indeed negate the importance of race as a social cleavage and racism as a societal problem, it should be clarified that it does not generate silence on racial difference. The establishment of racial categories is part of racial ideology as it provides the rules for perceiving the other while reinforcing racial notions and stereotypes (Bonilla-Silva 2001). Racial categories are well defined and are used to describe, emphasize, valorize and denigrate physical difference. The multiple categories that exist in the Latin American color schema are commonly used by all races to denote differences in phenotype as well as other racial markers such as hair, nose, lips, etc. Racial descriptions are often the first preference to describe someone, most often when referring to nonwhites. Thus, while racial difference is clearly catalogued and unambiguous, the effects of one's race on their life chances remain murky and often denied or ignored.

Racial designations are used not only as mere description, but to indicate one's closeness to whiteness. They are a marker of race for nonwhites. It is common, for example, to hear someone call another person, *mulato* or *negro*, but rare to hear someone refer to another as *blanco*. Whites are not assigned race; this practice is reserved for those that are racialized and thus, nonwhite (Brodkin 1998; Frankenburg 1993; Twine 1998). The fluidity of race as evidenced by multiple color categories has been argued by proponents of racial democracy to confirm the lack of racial hierarchies and racial intolerance. A closer look at

this color continuum shows that the existence of multiple color categories is connected to racial hegemony and the various racial terms constitute clear hierarchies. Rather than multiple racial categories serving as evidence of a lack of racial sensibility, these societies tend to place a significant emphasis on race in their everyday language and when ascribing individual attributes to one another. Several scholars have argued the hierarchical significance of multiple color categories, discarding the notion that as opposed to a dichotomous racial system such as the U.S., systems that boast a color continuum have a less rigid notion of race (Vargas, 2004; Caldwell 2007). Kia Lilly Caldwell argues that, “the color continua found in many Latin American societies are as ideologically overdetermined as bipolar racial categories are in other national contexts (i.e., the United States) (36).” The multitude of ways to describe someone racially evidences a strong racial sensibility as each slight difference in skin tone or hair texture can designate a different racial description (Guanche 1996). Similar to João Costa Vargas’ (2004) argument in the case of Brazil, other Latin American countries can be considered to be societies that are hyperconscious about race and despite the anti-racist ethos that accompanies racial democracy, citizens are “deeply immersed in racialized understandings of the social world (446).”

Analyses of racial ideology in Latin America often support the view that a dichotomous racial classification scheme reflects a higher sensitivity to race as opposed to societies that place racial identity on a continuum. The number of racial categories or the use of a racial continuum, do not have a positive correlation with anti-racism, and in fact, I argue the contrary. The use of various color categories along a continuum, the classification that is employed in Latin America, is merely a way of being more specific about race. The presence of mixed categories or multiple color gradations do not connote the existence of

nondiscrete racial groups, but rather suggest a colloquial, yet fine-tuned method of categorization.

There are several authors who liken the use of race in the United States to a rigid classification system that supports an equally rigid notion of identity and race relations. In *Legacies of Race*, Stephen Bailey (2009) argues that the racial discourse in Brazil celebrates the fact that there is no clear cut criterion for race. Bailey outlines a contrast between the United States and Brazil, where Brazil's color continuum gives evidence of a more fluid way of marking race. Cuban scholar Alejandro De la Fuente (2001a) argues, much like Bailey, that the dichotomous categorization of race in the United States places an overemphasis on race and that this is "constantly enforced from above" with a "rigid and legally defined racial order" as opposed to the situation in Latin America (9). Brazil and Cuba, as well as many other Latin American countries, do indeed have a clear cut criterion for classifying race and that criterion has been enforced by the state, much like the United States (Marx 1998; Nobles 2000). When examined comparatively to the United States, the classification is different, but not unclear. The assignment of extra racial categories on the basis of color and other physical traits is a different type of classification scheme than what is used in the United States, but it is still a classification scheme. The racial classification systems of Latin America and the United States should not be analyzed according to levels, but instead according to difference. Color or racial categories are significant and connected to a racial hierarchy that prefers whiteness over blackness in both contexts (Torres 1998).

The idea that race is fluid does not, as the myth suggests, signify the absence of racism or racial recognition, but rather, signals the ability to move up these fluid racial lines towards whiteness. In other words, while it is true that the myth of racial democracy boasts



a racial fluidity or a color continuum which seems to be more tolerant than the United States' dichotomous and static categorization, in fact, in supporting an easier road towards whiteness, it also facilitates anti-black sentiment (Fernandez 2001). While this argument is often made for Brazil and its various color categories, the same can be said for any racial continuum that uses a mixed category and promotes or touts racial mixing. These color gradations, or just the presence of a middle category, are coupled with the idea that a family can gradually move up the color ladder through racial mixing. Wishes of whiteness (Vargas, 2004) can thus become not only an idea but a strategy. The saying "*mejorar la raza*" or "improving the race" is one that is prevalent in many Latin American countries and denotes the ability to improve the black race by intermarriage with someone who occupies a higher place in the racial hierarchy. It is important to note that while many realize the problems associated with *mejorar la raza*, it is still believed to be true. This can be expressed in a sentiment that might say, "I know I should love my race, but I'd rather not have a child with bad hair." There is often consciousness about the sentiment being anti-black, but it is not strong enough to dismantle beliefs that white traits are more aesthetically pleasing than black traits.

It should be noted that color categories are often most significant among nonwhites and those that occupy these many shades of blackness may be viewed similarly by whites. Hanchard (1994) writes that, "racial identity assumes the form of resemblance between individuals of similar, not necessarily identical color, through their contradistinction from white Brazilians. With the absence of dichotomous phenotypical categories in Brazil this is of strategic importance, for it allows the few *mulatos* and *pardos* who consider themselves 'black' to do so" (79). Yet also important in this contradistinction between whites and

nonwhites is the fact that the racial identity of nonwhites is determined by whites. A mulatto can call himself nonblack if he/she wants to, but many whites would just consider mulattoes to be nonwhite and thus racialized as black. Through her interviews in Brazil, Francis Winddance Twine (1998) finds that upper and middle class whites hold a binary view of race where light and dark-skinned Afro-Brazilians are lumped into one category, all undesirable for marriage. Therefore, self-identification matters little when those in power (whites) are assigning race. It is blacks and not whites who have to buy into racial democracy to justify their social position (Marx, 1998). The ideology of racial democracy relies on nonwhite support more than white support in maintaining social order and needs nonwhites to continue to operate within its realm.

#### *Racial Democracy: Myth or Ideal?*

Racial ideology in Latin America, known as racial democracy or racial harmony, has had a significant effect on people's commonsense notions of race and their perceptions of racism. Much of the debate surrounding the ideology has focused on its intent. Some scholars argue that racial ideology in Latin America is benign, while others have argued that it has been used as a strategy to maintain the racial status quo, e.g. racial inequality. I discuss the scholarship that has been written on the ideology and argue that racial democracy in Latin America is far from benign and is used to obscure racial realities. The section that follows will outline the arguments that have been made as to whether racial democracy is a purposeful myth or a national ideal. In chapter three I will examine how these arguments apply to Cuba, both today and throughout the history of the nation.

A significant part of the notion of racial harmony is couched in the notion of *mestizaje*, or racial mixing. The presence of racial mixing has been used historically as evidence of a racially harmonious society without racial divisions (Wade 2005). As the argument goes, the presence of racial mixing from the colonial period until the present suggests a more inclusive notion of race that allows for gentler race relations and precludes the existence of racism. There exists a considerable amount of work on *mestizaje* as a nation building ideology which promotes the idea of a mixed-race nation as a great strength, particularly in relation to the United States who did not embrace such a notion. The comparison employed in the ideology of *mestizaje* is usually the United States, which due to its dichotomous categorization of black and white coupled with its history of official segregation harbors a larger emphasis on racial difference and consequently, suffers from institutionalized racism that Latin America does not (Skidmore 1993; Winant 1999).

The ideology of *mestizaje* itself has been characterized as either one that lends itself to a less rigid notion of race and race relations (Bailey 2009; Loveman 1999; de la Fuente 2001a) or an illusory ideology created by elites to mask racial hierarchies (Hanchard 1994; Sawyer 2006; Nascimento 2007). Nadine Fernández (2001) argues for the latter, writing that the ideology has always been politically charged and what is necessary in the discussion of *mestizaje*, “is a discussion of power and racial hierarchy propelling the *mestizaje* itself.” *Mestizaje*, as a component of Latin American racial ideology, should be analyzed with regard to its relationship to dominant ideological production and as a way to justify the status quo. Through racial mixing, racial hierarchies are seen to be less significant – *mestizaje* serves as a way to gloss over racism by suggesting that race relations are harmonious.

Mestizaje, as with most ideology, navigates a balance between reality and illusory conceptions of reality. Those that argue that mestizaje is only a way to mask racial hierarchies must adhere to the fact that the notion should have some link to reality if it is to be absorbed as truth by a society's citizens (Sheriff 1998). Peter Wade (2005) seeks to redirect the scholarship on mestizaje away from just a conception of mestizaje as "an all-inclusive ideology of exclusion." By highlighting the ways in which mestizaje does in fact seek to create a "mosaic" of races in the national image that includes blackness and indigenusness, he points to the ways in which we can see past it as just an ideological mask of exclusion. The incorporation of blacks in particular in the national image rather than a homogenous concept of mixed race citizens that erases blackness suggests, according to Wade, why the ideology receives such support from this group. Indeed the persuasiveness of mestizaje, and racial democracy as a whole, stems from the belief that one's group is included equally in this racial mix that makes up the nation. Wade does recognize that black and indigenous inclusion is certainly not complete under the ideology of mestizaje, but he leaves out of his analysis the fact that this inclusion is largely symbolic and cultural and does not include elements outside of music, art, religion, etc. Even the black cultural elements, as Wade argues, are "reconstructed by mestizo-ness (243)."

Wade analyzes Colombian popular music as an example of inclusion of blackness and he is correct in arguing that being part of the cultural collage of the nation is largely what allows for members of marginalized groups to embrace the ideology as lived experience. This type of inclusion plays into the same stereotypes that serve to exclude. Blacks are touted as having contributed culturally to the nation but are still excluded in their historical, professional and leadership roles. Roles that are associated with power and advancement,

rather than entertainment, are often erased from the national image and narrative. What is key in Wade's analysis is how ideologies of inclusion juxtaposed against realities of exclusion can still work and be persuasive. This fact, coupled with the experience of racial mixing within families, allows for the notion of *mestizaje* to ring true to many.

### **Rhetoric vs. Reality**

The lack of congruence between the dominant racial ideology and the realities on the ground bring forth questions of ideological intent in the promotion of a racial harmony. Theories of ideology have often presented the concept as an elite created illusion that serves to mask social realities. Both Althusser (1994) and Eagleton (1991) discuss the relationship between ideology and illusion, arguing that while there may be falsehoods contained in ideology, it still has some link to reality. It would be difficult to acquire popular support of an ideology that had no root at all in people's everyday experiences. Yet scholars have argued that the ideology has both little resemblance to racial realities and enjoys wide popular support and credence (Hanchard 1994; Sawyer 2006). In the United States as well, an ideology of colorblindness has begun to enjoy similar support particularly among whites (Krysan & Lewis 2004). Racial ideology that touts the end of race in exchange for a colorblind or harmonious way of looking at people and society seem to have wide support regardless of its connection with reality. The notion of being colorblind and living in a society that has progressed beyond the evils of racism carries a great amount of popularity, regardless of one's actual views on race. Thus while it may be argued that ideology should have some link to reality, the link may be what citizens want their society to be and not what it actually is. This conception is hardly benign because most often racial democracy is not framed as an ideal, but as the present state of affairs. It serves as a denial of racism rather

than a model to strive for and in this way obscures realities of racial exclusion that as a result, remain largely unchallenged.

The argument that racial democracy acts as a mask rather than a prescriptive ideological mechanism has been brought forth by many racial scholars (Hanchard 1994; Kia Caldwell 2007; Vargas 2007). These arguments do not deny the reach or the popular attractiveness of the ideology, but in fact recognize these elements as part of the power to create an illusion of racial equality. Citizens want to believe that their country does not suffer from systematic racism and nonwhites in particular want to believe that advancement is achieved through merit and thus opportunity is not limited for them as individuals. In his seminal work on Brazilian racial politics, Hanchard (1994) points to the strategic nature of racial democracy by arguing that state policy, “sought to mask or downplay racial differences (47).” Yet he also argues that the discourse of racial harmony associated with the ideology were part of both elite and popular conceptions of national identity. Elisa Larkin Nascimento (2007) similarly argues that the national popular consciousness is infused with what she refers to as the myth of racial democracy and the sorcery of color, which replaces race with color. She discusses racial democracy as a “scheme” that serves to erase racism both from history and from present day society in an effort to highlight color, which disguises the “racial content of hierarchies that are, in fact, based on white supremacy (18).” Several scholars have pointed to the role of ideology in justifying or obscuring racial hierarchies which in turn places the blame of lower socioeconomic positions on subordinates rather than elites (Sidanius 1997; Bobo 2004; Sawyer 2006; Bonilla Silva 2001).

### **Mass support**

The widespread support that racial democracy receives among ordinary citizens can bolster arguments that the ideology is not just the work of elites. In her book on race in urban Brazil, Robin E. Sheriff argues that racial democracy, while emanating from the power center, operates as more than just an elite conspiracy. The ideology has been able to reach those far beyond this power center and continues to win over adherents through its idealistic features. As Sheriff argues, the ideology “organizes sentiments as well as public discourses (7).” The ideal of racial democracy continues to be supported throughout Latin America, even as it is challenged on a national level. There have been many critiques of the components of racial democracy throughout Latin America, yet it continues to be an ideal to which many at the very least aspire to and at most, believe to be true. The very maintenance of the ideology requires an acceptance of the masses and would have to reach beyond those in power in order to possess the character of an ideology. The reach of its rhetoric does not discount its character as an elite driven framework to define race relations as something contrary to what they are.

The argument that racial democracy depicts a notion of race that is inaccurate may be acceptable if we accept the ideology as an ideal or a societal goal. Sheriff recognizes the contradictions embedded within the ideology and does not discount its consequences on masking racial realities, but argues that racial democracy is not only a myth but a dream as well; that to be racist is to be unBrazilian and thus the ideology has prescriptive values about what should be tomorrow, rather than what is today. This way of looking at racial democracy, she argues, is a more complete version than just framing the ideology as a myth or a conspiracy as it is just as much a system of etiquette as it is an ideology (46). In order to talk about this etiquette one must talk about the origins of the ethos of antiracism and the

ideology itself. The notion of Brazil as an antiracist nation that does not place emphasis on racial difference in the way that the United States does was formulated by elites. Thus, while popular belief in the ideology and its components may be related to etiquette, this is a consequence of the ideology and not part of its foundation. The belief, reach and implementation of the ideology in everyday minds and discourse do not discount its property as an elite created mask of a palpable social problem. It is not only those that wish for their country to be free of racism that espouse this ideal, but those that are implicit in its maintenance. To characterize racial democracy as a moral high ground or something of the future to ordinary citizens would be to deny the use of it as a guise for these citizens' real experiences and beliefs. There may be those that claim that we are all equal because that is what he/she wishes, but there are also those that invoke this ethos not only to hide one's own participation in the racial hierarchy, but because the phrase, we are all equal, is much more palatable than the truth. The ethos of anti-racism and discrimination should not only be seen as a positive way to view society and its potential but also as a way to gloss over how everyday actions produce quite different results.

### **The Role of the Racial Continuum**

The contention that the significance of race in Latin America is not a significant cause of political marginalization and social inequality when compared to the United States still operates among circles that do in fact recognize the presence of racism. Mestizaje and the fluidity of race in Latin America still have many adherents who argue that racial democracy can still describe a reality where due to the color continuum, racial identity is unimportant to many. In his recent book on racial politics in Brazil, Stanley Bailey (2009) argues that instead of being a myth or achievement created by the white dominant classes, racial



democracy, “might be best understood, then, as a collective predisposition; as a set of values, interest and experiences embraced by the masses; as a principled idea of a society in opposition to the United States and its formalized racial divides” (115). As I have argued previously in this chapter, racial divides are present both in the United States and Latin America. The difference in classification does not discount the presence of a racial hierarchy and anti-black attitudes among whites and those of mixed race as well. This sort of characterization of racial democracy ignores the evidence that indicates that race is not a salient category in Brazil (Hasenbalg and do Valle Silva 1999). Alejandro de la Fuente (2001a) offers a similar argument to Bailey’s suggesting that the Latin American rhetoric of racial inclusiveness as the foundation of nationhood has created for nonwhites a means to advance through appropriation and manipulation of racial ideologies making it more difficult for elites to practice racial exclusion. He argues that blacks have the capacity to use racial democracy to their advantage rather than characterizing the ideology as one of subordination. However, this ignores the fact that the subtle or covert practice of racial exclusion does not make it any less systemic and the established channels by which racial discrimination is carried out bars access for blacks in many sectors despite the ideology of racial democracy. The government’s unwillingness to recognize such discriminatory practices maintains them, leaving nonwhites with little room to manipulate their position.

Scholars that characterize racial democracy as an ideal or a positive set of values without negative effects do not consider that racial ideology is able to include and exclude simultaneously (Wade 2005). Historically, the ideology of racial harmony has not “othered” blacks but has brought them into the national equation as equal partners. There is no racial difference in culture, because all share the same culture. Thus, blacks can feel as though they

are equal members of the nation, not because of less discrimination, but because of how that discrimination and their membership in the national project are framed (Sawyer et al 2004). In other words, racial ideology allows for blacks to consider themselves equal to whites. This, coupled with an antiracist norm that portrays racist views as being unpatriotic or anti-national, strengthens the legitimacy of the ideology. Yet this notion of inclusion is a false one. While black, white and mixed-race citizens may all share a universal culture, patterns of racial exclusion remain. Mark Sawyer (2006) has argued this point through his term, *inclusionary discrimination*, which “allows for the idea of racial and ethnic inclusion to exist alongside discriminatory practices (19).” While racial ideology has a powerful strand of idealism with its messages of antiracism and equality, as long as racial hierarchies remain that bar access and opportunity, blacks will be unable to benefit from such an ideology. An ideology that denies these realities is implicit in reinforcing them and therefore should not be characterized as a model of what should be. The argument for racial democracy as prescriptive rather than descriptive cannot be made if the ideology continues to speak of the present and as such, masks racism and inequality.

### *Racial Ideology & Nationalism*

Racial democracy is a project of national unification, which involves minimizing social conflict or any social divisions that may threaten the status quo. On racial democracy in Brazil, Marx (1998) argues, “Brazil’s commitment to an inclusive, nonracial nationalism and to conflict avoidance is underlined by its persistence....Official racial domination was consistently avoided, while the effective racial order was left largely unchallenged. (169)”. The ideology works not only to create national unity, but to create one national identity that supersedes racial identity (Hanchard 1994). The mantra of many Latin American countries,

“We are all Cuban/Brazilian/Puerto Rican” etc. is not only a nationalist statement, but a direct denunciation of the affirmation of racial difference. What “we are one nationality” truly states, is that nation must trump race, thus associating patriotism with racial admonition. More specifically, those that wish to be a part of the nation are not welcome to assert their racial identity or bring attention to any racial disparities that may exist. In this way, national and racial ideologies were fused to maintain unity and inhibit racial consciousness.

Racial democracy, when couched in nationalist rhetoric works to decrease group loyalties, maintain national unity and discourage racial divisions (Marx, 1998). Emphasis on national identity and the importance of unity in the face of outside threats works in such a way that regardless of inequalities, patriotism is often seen as more important by revolutionary supporters. In this context, racial solidarity or forms of consciousness are not provided an environment in which to flourish because racial affirmations are discouraged as divisive.

The use of nationalist rhetoric that simultaneously embraces race as a celebration of a country’s diversity and rejects race as a marker of difference or differential treatment is quite successful in decreasing group loyalty among subordinate races. Most importantly, however, regardless of the level of awareness of anti-black racism and the links between race and class, the creation of one singular identity that comprises all races is an attractive and persuasive ideal. The notion that race does not matter and cannot bring about negative consequences joined with strong feelings of nationalism can create an environment in which members of all racial groups feel equally supported by the government. In other words, nonwhites as well as whites can perceive themselves to be equal participants in the national project. The result is often high levels of nationalism among even those that are excluded. The informal nature of

racial exclusion in Latin America lends itself to high levels of loyalty to the nation and may also prevent racial solidarity and consciousness (Hanchard 1994; Sawyer et al 2004). As Marx (1998) argues, the absence of formal exclusion may deprive informally subordinated peoples of an unavoidable demarcation unifying them as a group. Thus the ideology not only serves as a way of unifying the polity, it also functions as a way to solidify the racial status quo.

### *Racial Democracy: Consequences*

A discussion of racial ideology would not be complete without outlining the consequences of the ideology on the consciousness of the general public. The ideological framework of racial democracy has three major consequences: 1) decreased attention to racial inequality and racism 2) the survival of negative black stereotypes that blame individual blacks for their social position and 3) constraints on the development of black group identity and consciousness<sup>8</sup>. I will discuss these consequences in more detail in the following chapters as the data for this project outline specifically how these consequences are exhibited in citizens' political and racial attitudes.

As I have argued throughout this chapter, embedded in racial democracy is effectively, the denial of racism. The subsequent silence on this issue has erased the issue of racism from public discourse and relegated conversations regarding societal racism to private circles. The outcome of silence on this issue has been a national blind eye to the subject.

Without any policy to reverse the structural patterns and practices of racism, the problem has

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<sup>8</sup> Although racial democracy and in particular the abolition of race-based institutions undercuts racial consciousness among blacks, Chapter 4 will argue that black consciousness is still very much a part of black identity in Cuba, albeit in different forms.

remained, but has largely been ignored. Ideology helped this apathy along and lack of recognition of these practices produced an inability to build collective, and often individual, concern. Racist practices that continued and lack of black representation in the media and high professional positions were not attributed to racism. In Brazil, several scholars point to the inability for Afro-Brazilians to point to racism in their experiences and observations. As Hanchard (1994) writes of racial democracy, “the most damaging consequence.... is the inability of many Brazilian citizens to identify problems of race at all, and the lack of recognition that particular problems of racial discrimination, violence and inequality exist in Brazil (47).” While I agree with Hanchard in his assessment of a lack of recognition, I highlight the word attention, rather than awareness in my set of consequences because I am not convinced that racial ideology has decreased awareness completely from racial issues. While there is certainly less attention to these issues, in fact, many have had experiences with discrimination or are aware of disparities. In her study of racial democracy in Brazil, France Winddance Twine (1998) describes the residents of the small town of Vasalia as having little to no awareness of racism operating within their own community. But her nonwhite interviewees tell of familial rejection from interracial marriage, refusals to learn about enslaved family members, and being subject to racial slurs and thus, their insistence that there is no racism cannot stem from unawareness. At the very least, it is a subconscious denial which should not be conflated with unawareness. The refusal to acknowledge the truth of slavery and racism is part of their consciousness and serves as a crucial element to racial democracy justifying that race does not operate in their daily lives. In effect, Afro-Brazilians have been conditioned to operate as whites do here in the United States - they are able to escape race in their minds and their day to day experiences (McIntosh 2004).

As a third consequence, racial democracy negates the importance of racial difference which not only prevents an awareness of the links between race and social and economic class, but undercuts racial consciousness among Afro-Latin Americans. As Marx (1998) argues, the manipulation of cleavages such as race or ethnicity has shaped how dominant institutions and loyalty to them are built and how social order is maintained. The non-politicization of race serves to discourage group identification among blacks. Van Dijk (1998) in his study of ideology points to the strategy of mitigating or preventing group identity in an effort to minimize the development of counter-ideologies among groups with strong identification (182). The insistence that racism does not exist by elites works in tandem with the degradation of blackness through the reproduction of stereotypes denigrating blacks and valorizing whites so that black solidarity is suppressed.

### *Conclusion*

Racial ideologies are used to justify social realities. Racial democracy in particular works to do that by denying the presence of racism or attributing it only to individual attitudes. In this way, racial democracy works to 1) influence how citizens perceive racial disparities and experiences of discrimination and 2) decrease the saliency of race for individuals' notions of identity. While many may argue that the ideology of racial democracy acts as an ideal and not as an elite conspiracy, I argue that while the ideology can be seen as an ideal, it is most often used to describe current realities. The ideology works to influence the way that citizens view race in their present lives and thus, cannot be seen as a mere ideal or as benign rhetoric. Moreover, the consequences of such rhetoric that negates the presence of racism and the effect of race on one's opportunities are far more important than its intent. The ideology succeeds in creating a lens that inhibits racial explanations of

phenomena that are often connected to race and racism. The appeal of a society where one's race does not inhibit opportunity coupled with the link between racial democracy and nationalism serve to maintain support for the ideology among citizens, both white and nonwhite. Finally, the ideology creates an ethos that both supports integration and eschews those who wish to make claims of discrimination and racism, a combination that poses significant setbacks for black progress.

The ability of racial democracy to decrease the saliency of race is crucial for its longevity. In other words, the presence of racial consciousness among nonwhites will be one of the most important variables necessary to challenge the ideology of racial democracy and combat racism. We can expect that the impetus for any movement to dismantle racial inequalities will begin depend on blacks' collective consciousness. The significance of black consciousness and solidarity is in its ability to provide the foundation for certain levels of progress to be made amidst a racist system. Throughout Latin America, the growth of the number of black professionals, university students, government officials and representatives, representation in the media and equality of opportunity overall, has required collective solidarity (Covin 2006; Johnson 2006 & 2007). In a later chapter I will discuss the collective consciousness of blacks in Cuba and the development of ideologies from below that form the foundation of black solidarity and black political thought in Cuba.

Racial ideology and racial democracy do not operate equally throughout Latin America. Each country has its particularities and expressions of the ideology and its influence on identity are dependent on historical and political context. The ideology of racial democracy or racial harmony does have foundational similarities such that the notion of *mestizaje* and the negation of the importance of race and racial hierarchies are integral parts

of the ideology in each context to varying degrees. For this reason, the literature on racial democracy in the region is quite relevant to racial ideology that is dominant in Cuba. In the next chapter I will discuss the genesis and development of racial ideology in Cuba and highlight the key differences that emerge when ideology and nationalism join with socialism. By promoting an anti-discrimination ethos, diminishing class differences at the onset of the revolution and declaring the end of racism, Fidel Castro was able to unite belief in the revolution to belief in the erasure of racism. The ideology is bolstered by rhetoric that simultaneously embraces diversity but collapses it into one singular national identity which discourages racial affirmation. The working of Marxist ideology with racial democracy is key to the analysis of racial politics in contemporary Cuba as socialist ideology and belief in it strengthens the power of racial democracy in the country.



## CHAPTER 2

### *TODOS SOMOS CUBANOS: THE DEVELOPMENT OF RACIAL IDEOLOGY IN CUBA*

Since 1959, Fidel Castro and the Cuban government have married socialism and the ideal of racial harmony to create a formidable ideology that is an integral part of Cubans' sense of identity and their perceptions of race and racism in their country. By promoting an anti-discrimination ethos, diminishing class differences at the onset of the revolution, and declaring the end of racism, Castro was able to unite belief in the revolution to belief in the erasure of racism. The ideology is bolstered by rhetoric that simultaneously embraces diversity but collapses it into one singular national identity which discourages racial affirmation. The working of Marxist ideology with racial democracy is vital to the analysis of racial politics in Cuba because socialist ideology and belief in it strengthen the power of racial democracy in the country.

The Cuban Revolution places a unique claim on producing a society of racial harmony through socialist policies and the promotion of a revolutionary character that does not tolerate racist practices or attitudes. The ideology of racial harmony itself is not a revolutionary creation; it has been a part of Cuba's national image since the wars of independence and the abolition of slavery. Throughout Cuban history the call for unity has been accompanied by a call for racial harmony in order to discourage racial divisions. Much of the rhetoric during the wars of independence that spoke of the need for racial unity after

abolition in order to fight for sovereignty as an integrated country was the same rhetoric that Fidel Castro used to foment unity under the revolution, against U.S. aggression. In both cases, the declaration of racial problems as something of the past did not reflect an absence of racism, but the political needs of the governments at the time. Policy oriented remedies to racism in Cuba have never been seriously or adequately explored and instead of a socio-economic problem, racism has continuously been treated as a political obstacle and thus disregarded.

This chapter will explore the genesis and consolidation of racial ideology in Cuba since the end of the colonial period and its further development during the Cuban Revolution as it was merged with socialist ideology. As chapter two has shown, the ideology of racial democracy has been historically predominant in Latin American countries. At the same time, its progression in Cuba alongside a Marxist revolution that downplays the role of race is exceptional. The initial advances that the revolution was able to make by dismantling segregation and increasing equality of opportunity for blacks provided strong support for the ideology of racial democracy in Cuba. Supporters of the revolution also became believers in the claim that racism had ended in Cuba because of their defense of the new government and its rhetoric. Challenges to the ideology were few until the emergence of the economic crisis caused by the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989. The period, termed the Special Period, marked the first serious challenge to racial ideology in Cuba as inequalities increased with significant racial dimensions. Racism and discrimination became much more visible, particularly by nonwhites. I will examine the change in rhetoric among the leadership and how the ideology may have been altered during this time.

The second section of the chapter will examine the relationship between socialism, nationalism and racial ideology and the components of racial ideology in Cuba. I argue that the Cuban government has created an ideology that has joined these three concepts of socialism, nationalism, and racial democracy to create a racial ideology that, while critiqued and challenged by some, remains a large part of Cubans' everyday notions of race and politics. The ideology, despite the changes that occurred in the Special Period, creates a national consciousness that deems racial inequality and black rights issues that, unlike other social ills in Cuba such as gender inequality, did not require any struggle or action to eradicate.

#### *Cuba as a Mulatto Nation and the Erasure of Race*

Contemporary racial ideology in Cuba cannot be separated from its prerevolutionary roots in Cuba's history. The overarching theme throughout the history of racial ideology in Cuba is the image of Cuba as a mulatto nation. The following section will discuss the development of the mulatto nation and its relationship with the genesis of racial ideology in Cuba.

The development of the Cuban nation and the wars of independence to secure that nation required high levels of nationalism and unity. Much like the beginnings of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, aligned to the call for unity was the erasure of race in exchange for national identity. During the wars for independence, the issue of race was silenced despite Cuba having recently abolished slavery (Ferrer 2000). The national ideology can best be characterized, and was, by Cuban national hero José Martí who wrote in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, that the Cuban is more than white, more than mulatto, and more than black (Martí 1963-1966). The quote has become the ideal to which both the government and the citizens have

ascribed since the wars of independence. Martí's words formed the ideological foundation for the supremacy of nationhood, aimed to unify the Cuban people under one singular national group that discarded racial categories. It also supported a silence on race during this period that was used politically to inhibit racial divisions. The silence then, was not a mark of the disintegration of racial beliefs and anti-black sentiment. As Ada Ferrer argues, "the silence was active: it was an argument, a slogan, a fantasy" (2000, 62). As such, it represented the beginnings of racial democracy in Cuba and would not be the first time that racial issues would be falsely dismissed for political reasons, specifically national unification.

José Martí used the ideal of racial equality to unify blacks and whites, and to erase the importance of racial identification. He did this during a critical point in Cuban history when national unity in the face of Spain and victory in the war would have been threatened by black calls for racial equality.<sup>9</sup> In this article, titled *Raza*, he wrote, "The black man who proclaims his race, when what he may be proclaiming only in this incorrect manner is the spiritual identity of all races, authorizes and provokes the racist white man (Martí 1963-1966)." He encouraged whites not to be racist, but he also encouraged blacks not to recognize or affirm their racial identity in order to not provoke white racism. The consequence to becoming part of the nation, and the method to avoid being a victim of

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<sup>9</sup> Fidel Castro, in an equally critical moment in the face of U.S. aggression encouraged blacks to do the same at the start of the revolution as he cautioned any talk of racism. In the first years of the revolution he declared racism and discrimination solved to avoid any racial criticisms of Cuban society and the revolutionary government.

racism for blacks was the same – ignore race, both as it applied to identity and to equality in general.<sup>10</sup>

Martí is lauded in Cuba as the father of social justice and Cuban nationhood and his writings on race carried far into the future and are used even today by the government and Cuban writers alike. Martí's ideology of nation over race has been used throughout the history of the revolution as a way to dispel any racial conflict or division (Font & Quiroz 2006). The idea that Cubans are more than their racial composition provided the foundation for the beginnings of mestizaje in Cuba.

Perhaps one of the most famous authors of Cuba as a mestizo nation is Afro-Cuban poet, Nicolás Guillén, who wrote that “the spirit of Cuba is mulatto” and pushed for the fight against racism to include not just blacks, but both races (Morejón 1993; Fernández Robaina 2007). Guillén poses an interesting case in thinking about how black Cubans view race. On the one hand, he is included as one of the proponents of mestizaje along with Vasconcelos, Freyre and Ortíz (Fernandez 2001), but on the other hand black Cubans often summon his works as one of the key writings affirming black pride (Morejón 1993). Guillén represents the tendency for black Cubans to want to be a part of this Cuban mix that is a symbol of national pride while at the same time wanting to affirm their blackness. Throughout history that has often proved to be perceived as against the national project. Since its inception, the concept of the mulatto nation has required of its people to eschew race, and blackness in particular. The practice of a cultural homogeneity, even if this homogeneity consists of

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<sup>10</sup> This idea is not particular to Cuba, but common in race-less, or color-blind ideologies throughout the black Diaspora. As Paul Gilroy (1987) argues in the case of Britain, the “price of admission to the colorblind form of citizenship...blacks are being invited to forsake all that marks them out as culturally distinct before real Britishness can be guaranteed” (59).

heterogeneous ancestry, neglects racial and cultural diversity. As Fernando Martínez Heredia (2009) writes, “there are Cubans who consider themselves Cuban above all....but also identify themselves as blacks and mulattoes. We need for these identities and that consciousness to march together and to be the force of the socialist revolution and its project. And that...is very difficult in its practical realization” (323).

The characterization of Cuba as a mixed nation, the primary component of the ideology of *mestizaje*, is an integral part of the silence on race. The framework focuses on degrees of mixture, rather than race and posits that Cuba is a mulatto nation, rather than one of black, white and mixed race citizens (Martínez Echazábal 2003; Moore 2000). The ideal has been a part of Cuba’s representation of its national image since independence and supported by black and white Cubans alike. The importance of nationalism and national identity are significant components of racial ideology in Cuba. *Mestizaje* speaks of all citizens being of mixed race to portray Cuba’s people as many shades of the same ethnicity, the same national identity. The notion erases the importance of color or race because if everyone shares a mixed heritage, everyone, regardless of appearance, is somewhat equal.<sup>11</sup> The mixing of the races acts as a way to unify the populace such that being Cuban is the most important in the hierarchy of identities. *Mestizaje* also inhibits the importance of race because it blurs the race lines suggesting that racial categorization with any accuracy would be impossible. Thus, what unites people is not race, but national belonging and national culture.

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<sup>11</sup> In many of my interviews the presence of the one drop rule here in the United States is part of the ideology of *mestizaje* as it is seen as a sign of less cordial race relations. The presence of a mixed category and the recognition of a national culture that is racially mixed often served as evidence that Cuba did not have the race problem that the United States does. *Mestizaje* was also seen as something that placed Cuba in a morally superior position with regard to race.

Cuba as a mulatto nation with a rich culture of multiple origins does not glorify each origin equally. The cultural sameness acts as a political strategy for unity, but also serves as a dismissal of blackness. The cultural center to which all shades of Cubans should aspire to is a Eurocentric one (Martínez-Echazábal 1998; Robaina 2007) that characterizes black cultural expression as folklore. Policies to reinforce this were instated from the onset of the Republic (the period after independence and before the revolution in 1959) and continued throughout history through to the revolution. Shortly following independence for example, policies were created to whiten the majority black population with European immigrants (de la Fuente 2001a). In the early 1900s, Afro-Cuban drumming, music and related activities were banned, an official measure enforced by Cuban police (R. Moore 1997). At the onset of the revolution, Afro-Cuban religious practice were banned and although all forms of religion were deemed incompatible with the new socialist system, Afro-Cuban religions in particular were officially deemed primitive, akin to witchcraft and often associated with criminal activity (de la Fuente 2001a). Despite the legalization of religious practice during the economic crisis of the early 1990s, Cuba has not seen the construction of an official place of worship for Afro-Cuban religions and they receive little to no attention in official spaces.<sup>12</sup> While official discourse has consistently boasted a unified array of colors under a singular identity, the reality has historically been not only a preference for the whiter cultural elements, but a blurring of Cuba's diverse elements, rather than their celebration. Lourdes Martínez Echazábal (1998) calls the notion of *mestizaje* a solidification of a "fictitiously homogenous national identity" which are motivated by political agendas (38).

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<sup>12</sup> The official cultural group that exists for the performance of Afro-Cuban dancing and music in Cuba is the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba, or the National Folkloric Group. This group receives significantly less attention than the Cuban National Ballet. In addition, the Cuban National Ballet has received criticism for its low representation of nonwhite dancers (AFP, La Habana 2010).

The preference for Eurocentric values within the national imagery has been debated up until today and recently has been described as part of Cuba's problem with race (Robaina 2007; Morales 2008). In his critique of the dominance of whiteness, Cuban scholar Esteban Morales (2008) calls not for a reconstruction of racial identities, but to resolve the national problem of respecting diversity. A call to respect diversity may not prove to be useful in discouraging Eurocentricity as diversity is often used as evidence that racism does not exist and thus, precludes recognition of racial valuations. Diversity and mestizaje are used similarly by celebrating the many colors and cultures that make up one Cuban culture in order to create a rich mix of people. The rhetoric of mestizaje claims to respect diversity but what it in fact does is erase racial difference, primarily blackness, so that diversity goes hand in hand with racial (white) hegemony. Cuba has been described by the leadership as a racial mix yet the historical contributions of black Cubans historical contributions go largely unmentioned with the exception of a few historical figures. In addition, the absence of blacks and mulattoes in managerial positions and higher positions of government provide further evidence that this inclusion is superficial (Sawyer 2006).

#### *Racial Politics at the Start of Cuban Independence*

The Wars of Independence marked the beginning of the development of Cuban national identity due to nonwhite participation in the wars. Many of the war's soldiers had recently been freed from slavery and although blacks and mulattos represented one third of the population, they comprised half of the troops (Saney 2004). Black and mulatto war heroes among the senior ranks emerged altering the previous conceptions of Cuba as a white nation. The war from 1895 until 1898, in particular, was fought with a majority of Afro-Cuban soldiers. For many, their participation in the wars advanced their social position and



served as a means to lay claim for their rights as citizens (Portuondo Linares 2002). Their sacrifice in the war raised hopes of a new society following the war that would grant Afro-Cubans equality and justice not only under the law, but in their everyday realities as well (Pérez 2006). Yet following independence, these expectations were rejected with laws banning blacks from the political process and the institution of formal and informal segregation practices. During the U.S.-controlled elections of 1902, Afro-Cubans, women and those with less than \$250 could not vote. Additionally, Afro-Cubans were banned from holding government posts and barred from ownership of private businesses. Blacks were also barred from holding various employment positions (including the police department) and finally, in spite of their service in the wars, they were banned from high military positions as well (Pérez 2006; Portuondo Linares 2002). Not only did blacks find themselves in the same marginal position as before, but there was also an assault on black culture (R. Moore 2000). Afro-Cuban culture and Afro-Cubans in general became a threat to Cuban identity and their cultural forms were prohibited by the state.

The largest challenge to the practice of black exclusion following the wars for independence was the founding of the first black political party in Cuba. In the 1908 national election, black candidates, who were only permitted to run for certain local positions, experienced losses for every position they contested. Political parties, as Jorge Domínguez (1978) writes, did not reflect any ethnic cleavages and the parties were “alike in opposing black affirmations of identity as well as in courting their votes” (49). The sweeping losses that blacks experienced during this time triggered the then, *Agrupación Independiente de Color*, to found the first black political party, *El Partido Independiente de Color* (The Independent Party of Color) or the PIC. The government, led by President José Miguel

Gómez, was seen by the PIC as racist and eager to stamp out those of color from power and citizenship. The party was seen as a threat to the dominant political parties, specifically to the Liberals who had established a hold among the Afro-Cuban electorate (Pérez 2006). The PIC became the target of much opposition from the Cuban government as they continued to remain vocal about civil and political rights for Afro-Cubans. Their platform stated that, “freedom is not asked or begged for, it is won; and rights are not handed out anywhere, rights are fought for and belong to all. If we go on asking for our rights, we will die waiting because we will have lost them” (Portuondo Linares 2002).

The PIC was accused of promoting racial exclusion, yet much of their platform centered on social justice and equality for all Cubans, not just black Cubans. Moreover, party membership was not exclusive to black Cubans. Nevertheless, in 1910, in response to the party’s continued existence and support by blacks, Martín Morúa Delgado, conservative black Senator passed the Morúa Law banning political parties on the basis of racial or class affiliation. To enforce the law, party leaders were incarcerated and publications were banned (de la Fuente 2001a). Morúa Delgado promoted conciliatory thought and maintained that organizing on the basis of race was detrimental to national unity and black progress. The implementation of the law by Morúa Delgado was emblematic of the usual rhetoric used to stifle black calls for rights and equality guised within the threat of unwanted divisions in society. Although the PIC made several attempts to fight the Morúa law, they were unable to be recognized as a party and began to protest publicly leading to the organization of a rebellion in 1912. The armed demonstration by the PIC was quickly framed by the media as a race war against whites, thus justifying the government’s brutal response. In May and June of 1912, the Cuban government ruthlessly ordered soldiers to crush the rebellion, killing

more than three thousand blacks irrespective of their involvement with the party (Portuondo Linares 2002). More than solely a racial massacre, the government response to the PIC served as example to future associations looking to vocalize demands pertaining to racial discrimination in Cuba. It also reflected the position of the Cuban government as President Gomez declared that the killings were done to “defend the civilization against barbarism” (Pérez 2006). The massacre thus blocked Afro-Cubans’ ability to mobilize and was subsequently hidden from Cuba’s written history. This racial history has been hidden despite its potential to produce a narrative much like the revolutionary narratives today. The massacre of 1912 uncovers injustices that are remnants of the racism and violence that the revolution can say it has overcome, but this history has remained veiled<sup>13</sup>. The PIC represented one of very few breaks with the status quo of racial discourse in Cuban history.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the dominant ideology of silence on the subject of race, as in all racial ideologies, there was dissent during the years of the Republic by those who did not believe that addressing the problems of race and affirming a nonwhite identity would lead to national division. There were also Cubans of color during the wars of independence and in the decades prior to the revolution that wrote on the problem of racism in Cuba. Several black

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<sup>13</sup> In 2008, to mark the centennial of the founding of the PIC, there were events held in Cuba to commemorate the party. The government sponsored these events, but the history of the PIC is still absent from official channels and most Cubans are not aware of their existence.

<sup>14</sup> Serafin Portuondo Linares, son of one of the members of the PIC, authored a book on the party in 1950. In Portuondo’s critique of the PIC he remarks that because they were banned by the Morúa Law, by creating a popular entity rather than a racial one, they could have advanced while remaining under the legal auspices of the amendment to create a third party. This critique is not meant to suggest that Portuondo was not in favor of the racial basis of the PIC, but rather, presents an alternative way that the party could have maintained its existence. Portuondo, in fact was heavily criticized by the socialist party for advocating a place for racial discourse within the party and Marxist theory. Yet what was unprecedented about the party was its focus on race and its willingness to vocalize the needs of the Afro-Cuban population in particular. Championing the cause of a historically silenced community was necessary and had the party conformed to a program that focused solely on social justice, the issues of racial exclusion and discrimination would have continued to be ignored. It is notable that the revolution has not taken Portuondo Linares as one of their heroes; he was a founder of the Local Workers Federation, Secretary General of the Communist Party, and a son of a veteran of the war of independence.

organizations and newspapers were created during the decades of the Republic prior to the revolution. *Sociedades de la Raza de Color*, or Societies of Color became centers for religious practice, political discussion and organization, athletic competition, and were also social clubs created out of exclusion of the black and mulatto middle class from white social clubs. These societies often received government subsidies and served as a primary way for blacks to advance socially and politically (de la Fuente 2001a). Alongside the organizational aspect, a black press developed during this time that produced black publications which addressed black and racial issues in Cuba. These organizations were created as a voice for nonwhite Cubans in all aspects of society and were crucial in creating a public dialogue regarding race in Cuba prior to the revolution.

Much of the writing that came from the Afro-Cuban elite served as a challenge to the myth of equality, yet stayed within the limits of nationhood espoused by the dominant ideology. In 1939, Journalist Alberto Arredondo, in his book titled *El Negro en Cuba*, wrote, “that blacks are the *most exploited factor of our nationality* does not mean, and would never mean, that blacks constitute a nation within the Cuban nation. It only means that among the integral groups of the nation the black group is the most exploited” (1939, 93). A common theme among black Cuban thought throughout the Republic (which continues today) is the recognition that blacks have not been granted equal rights coupled with the simultaneous reinforcement of Cuban over black identity. Accusations of racism, inequity and discrimination were often made by black associations and their leaders throughout the years following independence up until the revolution in 1959, but these complaints were always couched in the ideal of universal inclusion and the supremacy of nationhood.

Racial inequality during the years of the Republic experienced little improvement from independence until 1959. Illiteracy rates for black Cubans were significantly higher than those of whites where by 1919 49% of the nonwhite population over ten was illiterate compared to 37% of whites. In addition, only 429 Afro-Cubans in that year received professional or academic degrees compared with 10,123 Cuban white males (Pérez 2006). Literacy requirements for voting meant that many Afro-Cuban males were disenfranchised and their representation in the public sector was far unequal to their proportion of the population. As 33% of the population, they constituted 8% of the teachers and 26% of the soldiers and police force. Land ownership by blacks actually decreased from 1899 to 1931 decreasing from 16.0% of the farms owned by blacks and mulattoes to only 8.5% in 1931, which was largely due to foreign investment in sugar production in particular (de la Fuente 2001a). It was also due to European immigration promoted by the government that displaced many Afro-Cuban workers. In 1931 Club Atenas, an exclusive Afro-Cuban society, protested the immigration policy in Cuba and called on the government to stop immigration into the country citing the damage that it had done on unemployment among Cuban natives, but particularly among people of color. They argued that those that fought for the independence of the country were not being ignored and forgotten (Montejo Arrechea 2004). Inequality experienced a slight change in 1951 when President Carlos Prío instituted a decree that banned racial discrimination and then met with several store owners in Havana encouraging them to hire black women. Several mulata women were hired as a result and the effort was used as evidence by members of the government to declare that Cuba was free of racial discrimination. The move by Prío was in response to pressure from an Afro-Cuban association that promoted Afro-Cuban representation in professions with higher salaries (de

la Fuente 2001a). Such a move by Prío shows the importance of civil rights organizations to promote black advancement.

Presidents Prío and Batista created anti-discrimination legislation that would prohibit discriminatory hiring practices in employment. Both moves were due to pressure issued by the Afro-Cuban associations but were limited to the labor market. In 1952 Batista issued a law that banned discriminatory hiring due to class or race, but did not issue, as Prío had during his term as president, any consequences to those who broke this law. Outside of employment, there were no laws that were created to curb the social segregation that existed in Cuba at the time. Beaches, recreational facilities and other social spaces were segregated, albeit informally, and kept blacks out. Blacks were also subject to discrimination regarding social and professional mobility through these informal practices put into place by white associations and individuals as well. The Cuban Revolution came into power and eradicated both formal and informal segregation by opening up social and recreational spaces by disbanding many of the organizations that participated in exclusionary practices. While Castro allowed for social integration and black upward mobility in unprecedented ways, he did not create any legislation that would secure this upward mobility and eliminate discriminatory practices into the future.

### *Race and the Cuban Revolution*

The end of the Batista regime and the start of the Cuban Revolution began a promise of inclusion for previously marginalized sectors of the Cuban populace. The initial phase of the revolution was ushered in with messages of equality, democracy and social justice. For the first time racial issues were vocalized by the government, making racial discrimination

officially acknowledged and rebuked. This impetus did not only come from Castro and his leadership. As early as January 6<sup>th</sup>, the Communist Party newspaper, *Hoy*, highlighted racial discrimination as one of the “most immediate tasks” for which the government should create policy. In addition, Afro-Cuban intellectuals and political leaders also began to bring forth public discussion on the racial issue (de la Fuente, 2001a). The new government’s initial task was to create a society that was free of prejudices and free of obstacles barring black access to employment. In a speech to a labor rally in March of 1959 Castro said,

“Of all forms of racial discrimination the worst is the one that limits the black Cuban's access to jobs. It is true that there exists in our country in some sectors the shameful procedure of barring blacks from jobs.....and so we commit the crime of denying the chance to work to the poorest group particularly. While the colonial society made the black work as a slave, made the black work more than anybody else, and without pay, we commit the crime in our current society, which some have wanted to call a democratic society, of doing just the opposite and trying to prevent him from working to earn a living” (Castro, 1959).

His inclusion of Afro-Cubans solidified his support among a group who had historically been left out of the political process. A 1962 survey found that 80 percent of Afro-Cuban workers were “wholly in favor of the revolution” whereas only 67 percent of white workers were (de la Fuente 2001a; Saney, 2004). Afro-Cubans were vital for the revolution’s support and success. Consequently, the beginnings of the Cuban revolution were characterized by rhetoric that vilified a racist past and glorified a future of equality and an end to discrimination. Embedded in Castro’s speeches were not only promises of an end to systemic racism, but calls for a new man, free of personal prejudices as well.

Much like the period of consolidation that Cubans faced during the independence wars, Fidel Castro at the start of the revolution sought to consolidate the state and herald in a strong sense of nationalism among the populace avoiding threats to national unity and to the revolution. By eradicating official obstacles for black advancement, he was able to declare

that race was in the past, a remnant of the prior regimes. Castro used José Martí's work on racial unity in order to forge a national identity that negated the importance of racial difference. Castro took Martí's ideology and adopted it in a much more systematic way by bolstering it with policy. By prohibiting discussion of race and racial organization, Castro effectively legislated Martí's ideology and as a result, Cuban identity and racial thought.

Castro's discourse of historical legacies to explain any continued existence of racial prejudice in Cuba was, and continues to be, the foundation of state rhetoric on race. From the start of the revolution he described any discriminatory treatment of blacks or personal feelings of racial prejudice among non-blacks were vestiges of pre-revolutionary society or "leftover prejudices." Defining racism as an evil inherited from Cuba pre-1959 relieved socialism from any responsibility to further examine racial inequality beyond class. Consequently, the government banned all race based publications, organizations and societies (de la Fuente 2001a). The duty of the revolution was to equalize access for blacks by abolishing segregation and class disparities to generate equality of opportunity. The consequences of creating this parity would be a similar ideology of racial harmony from the past, but with increased legitimacy due to revolutionary social reform. While Castro was able to claim that he did a better job at eradicating racial discrimination than other Latin American nations through formal steps to equalize access for blacks discussed below, his rhetoric of racial democracy was strikingly similar to these very nations.

Castro's March, 1959 speech addressed not only free access to employment, but to all previously segregated social spaces.

Let whites and blacks all get together to end hateful racial discrimination at work centers. In this way we will gradually build the new fatherland. At school blacks and whites learn to live together like brothers....But when they



are educated separately, and the aristocrats educate their children apart from the blacks, it is logical that later whites and blacks cannot mingle (Castro, 1959).

Following this speech the Cuban government began its gradual process of desegregation.

The beaches were the first to be nationalized as many of them were private beaches owned by country clubs and hotels for which non-members were barred (de la Fuente, 2001a).

Although many white country clubs carried informal rules regarding membership, their practices of racial exclusion were clear. The country clubs were nationalized one by one and several were converted into “workers social circles” along with exclusive professional organizations for which membership was dependent on family income through quotas. Low income workers began to replace the elites as members of these circles throughout Cuba.

Castro’s initial speeches addressing the issue of race and discrimination received mixed reactions from whites who were traditionally on the receiving end of the benefits of racial segregation. Desegregation did not come without resistance. Many clubs refused to integrate and alternative, integrated clubs with similar functions had to be created. While the government did try to integrate, often resistance was not met with enforcement. Segregated clubs were allowed to continue to exist initially without experiencing any repercussions. The practice of redesigning and creating new institutions that would not discriminate often created a façade of integration while many whites continued to remain separate from blacks. It was these very attitudes and structures that continued to operate despite the Revolution’s attempt to create racial equality. Nevertheless, the government’s project of opening clubs and facilities to all Cubans changed the landscape of Cuban society markedly.

The project of desegregating facilities only attacked the problem of segregation superficially. Housing, primarily in Havana, still remained largely segregated with whites

remaining in more desirable, central neighborhoods and blacks living in historically poorer neighborhoods. Quality of housing also differed among these neighborhoods giving whites a clear housing advantage. Furthermore, although after 1961 the government was put in charge of hiring state workers, few blacks were found in prestigious government positions. Despite the incomplete nature of introducing racial equality to Cuba, the Cuban revolution provided opportunities and advancements for blacks that were unprecedented and accounted for much of their support of the revolution.

While Castro did indeed institute these acts of desegregation to “rid” Cuba of racial discrimination, building national unity and maintaining white support of the revolution was a priority as well. Thus, the government’s refusal to institute legislation outlawing discrimination and their reticence to engage in race-based hiring was an avoidance of radical policies that may have alienated white Cubans. Desegregation was done carefully, so as to not upend white backing of the revolutionary process. Whites were not made to think that the revolution would force them to change their lifestyles by mingling with Afro-Cubans in social and professional circles.<sup>15</sup> In this way, the revolutionary government sought equality, but not at the price of national unity. Later on, the silencing of the black voice when pertaining to racial issues by barring any public discussion of the topic would not only help to consolidate unity, but would maintain the notion that the revolution is free of racial problems.

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<sup>15</sup> See Carlos Moore (1988:212)

Following the desegregation process, the Cuban government announced that it had taken all of the required steps to ensure equality. On the second anniversary of the revolution, Castro proclaimed the end to discrimination and prejudice:

“The revolution was able to do away with prejudice, with unjust and cruel discrimination (applause). The revolution was able to create hope in the people, to awaken in the sleeping people the most noble aims and ideals” (Castro, 1961).

With the race problem “solved”, there would no longer be a need to address race or racism in Cuban society. Racist attitudes were characterized as a thing of the past in exchange for more noble, revolutionary ideals. Within the revolution, race ceased to be an issue and any critical discussion was removed from both the government’s script and from public debate. Castro would continue to present Cuba as a model for racial equality and tout his government’s ability to eradicate discrimination, but any discussion beyond racism as part of history was eliminated. Speeches that followed by Castro focused on racism as a part of the past, or an international matter that other countries were still struggling with (Castro 1981; Castro 2000) . Consequently, in Cuba the revolutionary government has from the first months of the revolution’s triumph described a racial reality that in fact, was not at all visible on the ground. As racism was proclaimed to be solved and subsequently banned from public discussion, racial ideology took on a clear strategy to mask racial divisions and disparities in exchange for national unity. Racial ideology was quite deliberate in Cuba with clear political ends. The idea that racism was no longer a problem in Cuba stemmed from Fidel Castro’s formal announcement of such a victory (Castro 1961). Castro mapped out for Cuban citizens at the start of the revolution the importance of the creation of an etiquette that espoused anti-racism and the reformation of minds plagued with prejudice.

Silence on the race issue following the initial years of the revolution had effects beyond dialogue on discrimination and civil rights. Carlos Moore (1988) argues that the non-racial outlook of the revolution involves stamping out black cultural expression as well. Both Moore and De la Fuente (2001a) cite assaults on Afro-Cuban religion, the abolition of the Afro-Cuban mutual aid *Sociedades de Color*, the persecution of the *Abakuá* secret societies, an unofficial offensive against Afro-Cuban language patterns, and attempts to discredit African religions as primitive, as evidence that black culture was derided and stifled. Moore also argues that though the government maintained tolerance towards the Catholic Church after a brief period of tension between the clergy and the government, this protection was not provided to the Yoruba religion. It would not be until the struggle in Angola in 1975 that the Cuban government would summon its African roots as an integral part of Cuba's national identity.

Race remained an international issue throughout the first three decades of the revolution; the government would discuss racism and racial injustice as external issues particular to other countries. In 1975, Castro made a significant racial appeal during the military campaign in Angola. Castro, explaining the decision to go into Angola, said,

“The leadership of the Cuban Communist Party did not have more than twenty-four hours to make the decision, which it did, without vacillation, on November 5, in a long and serene meeting. On another November 5, this one in 1843, a slave from the Triumvirate sugar mill in Matanzas, called Black Carlota, had risen up, machete in hand, at the head of a slave rebellion, and was killed in the act. In homage, the solidarity action in Angola was named after her: Operation Carlota” (Castro 1981).

The military involvement in Angola and the fight against South African Apartheid that accompanied the struggle was discussed by the Cuban government as a show of solidarity through Cuba's black heritage. Castro declared that Cuba was an “African Latin” nation and the military effort reflected this Diasporic connection (Sawyer 2006). Half of the Cuban

troops that were sent to Angola were black, which represented a much larger percentage than their share of the total population<sup>16</sup>, as well as their share in the military. This was done purposefully by recruiting black soldiers from the different regions of Cuba. The racialization of the military during this operation was meant to create a degree of racial parity among the Cuban and Angolan troops (Dominguez 1978). Although the battles across the Atlantic did summon recognition of Cuba's black population, the effort did not veer from the characterization of racial injustice as an external problem that did not affect Cuba.

The revolution's silence on domestic racial issues was broken for the first time since the early years of the revolution during the Third Party Congress in 1986. Perhaps due to the statistics reported in the 1981 Census that included the race question, President Castro acknowledged the need to increase the representation of blacks, women and youth among the ranks of government officials. He signaled that representation of previously marginalized groups could not be left to chance and put forth an affirmative action policy to encourage their participation (Saney 2004; de la Fuente 2001a). As a result of this push to secure greater levels of equality through policy, the Central Committee elected during the Third Party Congress contained 28% black membership, a considerable increase since the previous Committee. These numbers however, dropped again to the lower numbers seen previous to 1986, which was under 15% in 1980 (Adams 2004). The reforms were never implemented in the long term and had little effect on representation. The leadership at the time of the increase of blacks in the Central Committee did not increase any dialogue on race or representation and the lack of attention to this matter was further exacerbated by the fall of

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<sup>16</sup> Census records for 1970 do not include race in the published version and the 1981 Census is the first record of racial makeup in Cuba since the start of the revolution. The 1981 Census documents blacks as 12% of the population and mestizos as 21.9%. The 1953 Census, the last record previous to 1981 marks the nonwhite population slightly lower (grouped into one category, Other races) at 27.2%.

the Soviet Union in 1991. During the economic crisis that followed, blacks experienced considerable losses in equality with whites and racism became exacerbated following the economic reforms of the early 1990s.

### *The Special Period*

Following the fall of the Soviet Union, Cuba suffered an enormous loss from the collapse in foreign trade, credit and Soviet aid, termed the “Special Period in the Time of Peace.” In the latter part of the 1980s, Cuba’s dependency on the Soviet Union amounted to 85 percent of Cuba’s exports and a comparable portion of its imports (Perez Villanueva 1998). Cuba experienced a 75 percent fall in imports from \$8 billion in 1989 to \$1.7 billion in 1994 (LeoGrande 2000). The gross national product shrank by an estimated 40 percent from 1989 to 1993 and 60 percent of industry halted (Dilla 2002). Such a dramatic plunge was largely due to an end to the barter agreements between Cuba and the Soviet Union exchanging sugar for oil and industrial machinery. Cuba’s primary export, sugar, left the country with little ability to lessen the shocks of its loss of economic protection. Food rations, public transportation services, and school and medical supplies declined severely. The shortage in petroleum severely reduced vehicle usage due to extreme increases in gas prices. Public transportation was not able to cushion this shock and in fact, cutbacks led to significantly fewer public buses. The government was able to maintain the social net that had always been the core of the revolution, however at much lower levels. Consumption experienced such a decline that even as late as 1998 Cubans had to purchase in dollarized markets 60 percent of their protein needs, 50 percent of edible oils, and 30 percent of their caloric intake (Dilla, 2002). While the government still provided a set amount of food and necessities, the state was unable to cover the full quantity needed by the population.

The profound societal changes brought about during the economic crisis caused by the fall of the Soviet Union produced inequalities not seen in the earlier decades of the revolution (Fernandez Robaina 2009). Cuba's recovery from the economic shock largely depended on the development of tourism and the legalization of dollars. The outcome has produced a dual currency where Cubans are paid in Cuban pesos, but must purchase most of their goods in hard currency or Cuban Convertibles. As a result, access to hard currency has become necessary for survival for all citizens.

Beginning in the early 1990s, tourism became the center-piece of not only foreign investment, but of the economic revival, growing significantly each year (as much as 20 percent). In 1990, 340,000 tourists visited Cuba and in 2004 a total of 2,049,000 visitors were received through the country's airports bringing Cuba from 23<sup>rd</sup> in the Caribbean to 8<sup>th</sup> in the region in visitors and revenues. (ONE, 2006). In August of 1993, the government legalized the possession of hard currency (primarily U.S. dollars), a reform that became tightly intertwined with tourism and had major effects for the Cuban population. To gain further profit from the emergence of dollars the government created a domestic market economy, or "dollar stores". Cubans who held hard currency were able to shop at these stores, enabling them to obtain items not available among the state-provided provisions. These stores were particularly important during a time when the government was no longer able to provide their citizens with their previous standard of living. By 1997, dollar sales in these high-priced stores represented 17 percent of Cuba's total dollar income and by 1999 sales had reached one billion dollars (Hotstetter, 2001: 59). What has resulted is a highly visible difference among those who have dollars (and necessities) and those who do not.

The two principal policies that were implemented to save the Cuban economy following the crisis, 1) the legalization of hard currency and 2) the introduction of tourism, have exacerbated racial disparities. Uneven access to hard currency between blacks and whites has resulted in an increase in inequalities (de la Fuente 2001c; Sawyer 2006; Rodriguez & Espina 2006). Hard currency is obtained either via remittances or employment in the tourism sector where salaries and bonuses are paid by foreign business owners or through tips from tourists. While there is no record of the race of families that send money to Cuba, it can be gleaned from the self-reported racial makeup of Cuban Americans in the 2000 U.S. Census that the majority that receive remittances in Cuba are white (Blue 2007). In a survey done in Havana in 2000, Sarah Blue found that whites have more access to hard currency than nonwhites via remittances, bonuses in state employment, and jobs in the tourism sector (Blue 2007).

The opening of the tourism sector in the early 1990s led to the development of various hotels financed by joint ventures, which currently account for some of the most lucrative jobs in Cuba. Work in the hotels brings tips and salaries that are considerably higher than the average Cuban salary, with some Cubans making up to \$40 per day, a two-month salary for state workers. In addition to work in hotels, the legalization of self-employment has been used by Cubans to open up room rentals and restaurants in their homes for tourists. Both of these opportunities have remained virtually closed to blacks and to a lesser degree, mulattoes. Managers and owners of hotels, albeit not explicitly, make jobs only available to lighter Cubans, as these are the faces thought to be preferred by European tourists (de la Fuente, 2001a; Duarte Jimenez et al, 1997). Moreover, housing patterns, still racially segregated in many areas of Havana, do not allow for Afro-Cubans to benefit from



the option to rent rooms to tourists or open up private restaurants, as do many white Cubans living in more attractive, central neighborhoods. As it became clear that the immensely lucrative new sector would not accept blacks as employees, Cubans began to witness the first instances of visible employment discrimination since the start of the revolution.

The economic crisis not only exposed the racial inequalities that the Revolution failed to eradicate, but disparities were exacerbated revealing discriminatory treatment of blacks coupled with an increase in anti-black stereotypes (de la Fuente 2001c; Saney 2004). While the entire population relies on extra income in one way or another in addition to state salaries, blacks are often scapegoated as the only group that engages in illegal activities to earn hard currency (Duharte Jimenez et al 1997). The stereotype may be partially true but due to limited opportunities: Rodriguez and Espina (1996) found that blacks are almost three times as likely as whites to rely on activities outside of their regular employment (and outside of the realm of legality) to earn dollars and make ends meet. In addition, they are often profiled as criminals and summarily thrown out of hotel lobbies, being stereotyped by doormen and hotel employees as hustlers or pimps in pursuit of foreigners' cash. Following this logic, blacks experience much more attention from police than whites, repeatedly being stopped in the streets for verification of their identification. These conditions increased the everyday significance of being black in Cuba beginning with the Special Period and continue to create visible examples of racial inequality that often cannot be ignored.

The increase in racial disparities has led to some increased recognition of the problem by the Cuban government, albeit infrequently, throughout the 2000s. This attention, while a slight departure from the revolutionary rhetoric of the previous three to four decades, did not lead to an overall change in the dominant ideology of racial harmony, but did modify it a bit.

Although racial ideologies are historically embedded, they are also malleable and while states make race, they can also alter its ideologies. As Bonilla Silva (2001) argues, the flexibility of ideologies bolsters their legitimacy as they can be changed to accommodate the needs of the state and new information or conditions. Charles C. Holt (2000) writes that race must “be reconstructed as social regimes change and histories unfold” but these new constructs are never entirely new and have elements from the past embedded within them (19). In his book *Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba* (2006), Mark Sawyer develops the theoretical framework of race cycles to describe the changing rhetoric that has taken place in Cuba throughout history to suit the needs of the state. Sawyer argues that racial politics are driven by crises or critical events that create a new equilibrium where racial ideology and policies that support the ideology are altered (3-5). These authors coincide in the recognition that while states may make ideological adjustments when economic or political transformations call for it, the foundational elements of the ideology remain the same. These foundational elements have survived throughout the nation’s history and are often as old as the nation. Thus, while the Cuban regime did show a limited amount of flexibility in its rhetoric in response to the new set of social relations that emerged during the state crisis, it is important to clarify between a change in rhetoric and a fundamental change in the ideology. The Special Period, indeed a profound state crisis for Cuba, produced a new opening for racial dialogue as the state was forced to acknowledge that the revolution had been unable to completely eradicate racism and racial disparities. While the racial democracy ideal still holds in Cuba (according to state rhetoric), the Cuban government has begun to sporadically<sup>17</sup> discuss race and inequalities, altering the rhetoric. The state has been

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<sup>17</sup> My use of “sporadically” is generous in that the presence of racial disparities or racial discrimination has been documented in speeches by the Cuban leadership only 3-4 times since the year 2000 when it was first

able to adapt its characterization of social conditions in Cuba but the core of the racial ideology remains true to its historical origins.

This change in rhetoric is most clearly seen in Fidel Castro's speech in 2000 at the Riverside Church in Harlem, New York.

I am not claiming that our country is a perfect model of equality and justice. We believed, at the beginning, that when we had established full equality before the law and complete intolerance of sexual discrimination in the case of women, racial discrimination in the case of ethnic minorities, these phenomena would vanish from our society. It was some time before we discovered that marginality and racial discrimination are not things that one gets rid of with a law or even with 10 laws, and we have not managed to eliminate them completely, even in 40 years....There has never been and there never will be a case where the law is applied according to ethnic criteria. We did discover, however, that the descendants of slaves who had lived in the slave quarters were the poorest, and continued to live, after the supposed abolition of slavery, in the poorest housing....We do not have the money to build housing for all the people who live in what we could call marginal conditions. But we have lots of other ideas which need not wait and which our united and justice loving people will implement to get rid of even the tiniest vestiges of marginality and discrimination (Castro 2000, 59-60).

This speech, one of the only speeches on racial discrimination given by the Cuban government during this time, demonstrates the shift in rhetoric by Castro while remaining true to the fundamental components of racial democracy expressed since the triumph of the revolution. Castro acknowledges that there are racial disparities in housing, yet he makes sure to frame these disparities as remnants from the past that the revolution inherited. He does not reveal what the solution might be to these problems, but he expresses that through unity they will be accomplished. The fundamental component of the revolution's racial ideology remains intact: racism is a vestige of the past not supported or maintained by the revolution. It should also be noted that this speech was given in New York rather than Cuba

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mentioned (Adams 2004). There have also been a few television shows primarily for young people pointing to racial prejudice as ethically wrong.

and would not reach the numbers in Cuba that a speech made on the island would have. Nonetheless, the rhetoric does mark acknowledgement of racial disparities that were not eliminated by the revolution.

The Special Period necessitated a modification of discourse on race because racism became more visible, but it also provided a way for socialism remain a legitimate way to end racial inequality. The period after the economic crisis is often described as a resurgence or re-emergence of racism, rather than a period in which racism and discriminatory practices became exacerbated (de la Fuente 2001c; Morales 2008). Castro's speech on housing disparities does suggest that there are problems of the past that the revolution was not able to eradicate, but it does not point to any racist practices that may have occurred after the revolution equalized opportunity for all races in the first years of the regime. The introduction of semi-capitalist reforms to the Cuban economy allowed for new discriminatory practices against black advancement in the emergent sector to be attributed to the presence of capitalism in Cuba. The rise in inequality, the lack of opportunity for blacks to acquire hard currency, etc. are said to be consequences of capitalism allowing for socialism to continue to be the best way to combat racial inequality (Mesa Redonda 2010). Thus, the revolution can acknowledge a few areas that need special attention such as representation of blacks and mulattoes in the Central Committee, but overall, the blame is placed elsewhere and the Cuban government is only responsible for the solution, and not the problem itself.

In December of 2009, Raul Castro discussed the problem of racial representation in government, pointing to the lack of women and blacks in top leadership positions:

Personally I consider the insufficient advance on this subject in 50 years of Revolution to be an embarrassment, despite the fact that 65% of the work force is composed of women and that the citizenry forms a beautiful racial rainbow without any formal privileges, but they subsist in practice...still in societies such as Cuba, derived from a radical social revolution, where the people reached full and total legal equality and a revolutionary educational level that threw out the subjective component of discrimination, it still exists in another form. Fidel labeled it as objective discrimination, a phenomenon associated with poverty and a historical monopoly on knowledge. On my part I will exert all of my influence so that these harmful prejudices continue to give way until they are finally suppressed and that women and blacks are promoted to leadership positions at all levels for their merits and professional qualifications. It is necessary to select and prepare our pool of cadres with this perspective, to take into account the ethnic and gender composition of our population (R. Castro, 2009).

This, plus a few other speeches made throughout the past decade have constituted the change in the way in which racial inequality is framed. Until now, there have been no concrete policies that have openly addressed the problem of racial inequalities in housing, nor have there been policies enacted to increase black representation in leadership positions. These speeches do give some space for dialogue among the citizenry so that racism, over time, may be given more attention and acknowledged to be something that Cuba has not yet closed the book on.

The Cuban government consists of five bodies that include the Politburo, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, the Council of Ministers, the National Assembly of Popular Power and the Council of the State. The executive and main decision making bodies are the Politburo, the Council of Ministers and the Council of the State. During the 7<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba in 2011, Raul Castro pointed to the need to increase the number of young people in the Central Committee and build new leaders to take over for party veterans, but did not make any new mention of race. Nonetheless, black and mulatto representation increased considerably after the Congress.

The largest increase in nonwhite representation was achieved through the new appointments to the Central Committee, which rose to 31.3% from 13.3% in 1997. According to the 2002 Cuban Census, blacks and mulattoes together make up approximately 34% of the population and thus the new Central Committee comes the closest in history to representing the population statistics.<sup>18</sup> There are ten black members of the Council of the State (out of a total of 31), which make up about 32.2% of the membership. It should be noted that nine of these members are black and one is mulatto. Within the Council of Ministers, there are three black members and three mulattoes out of 37 members, representing 8.1% for each group<sup>19</sup>. Two of these members were newly elected within the past year. Among the presidents of the nineteen Provincial Assemblies there are two black presidents, of Matanzas and La Habana, representing 10.5% of the body. The Politburo, historically the body least racially representative of the population (Adams 2004), currently has three nonwhite members out of fifteen, one of which was newly elected in 2011 during the Seventh Party Congress. Thus, there seems to have been an attempt following Raul Castro's speech to add nonwhite members to the top governmental positions and nonwhite representation has increased significantly in the Central Committee, but this is largely speculative. Membership continues to be below the proportion of the nonwhite population particularly among the Council of Ministers and the Politburo, the two bodies with the highest decision making powers.

Possibly the greatest change regarding race that has occurred in Cuba following the Special Period was the political opening that allowed for academic and artistic expression on

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<sup>18</sup> There are estimates that place the percentage of nonwhites at a higher number, which would make the levels of underrepresentation higher (Moore 1988; Adams 2004).

<sup>19</sup> The two ministers that were recently elected are in Information Systems and Hydraulic Resources, however the nonwhite ministers prior to the new appointments were the Ministers of The *Cuban* Institute of Sports, Physical Education and Recreation and the Trade Union, two positions that can be considered stereotypical appointments for blacks.

the issue. Beginning in the early 1990s, writers and scholars introduced various publications regarding racial prejudice in Cuba, inequalities and black identity. The Union of Cuban Writers and Artists (UNEAC) was particularly supportive of such a debate and one organization, *Color Cubano*, came out of the new dialogue to discuss issues of racism in Cuba. There have been several publications throughout the past fifteen years that have dedicated issues to the subject and this has increased the awareness of racial inequalities, at least among those that seek out such material. A documentary has been done on race in which the Vice-Minister of Culture was interviewed on the subject in 2008, and the state's daily television program, *Mesa Redonda* or Roundtable, hosted a discussion on racism in Cuba in 2010. Keeping with the dominant rhetoric however, in the *Mesa Redonda* panelists were quoted as saying racism, "exists among social relations at a very low intensity, more differential than exclusionary" and that racism still exists in "interpersonal relations" rather than structurally (*Mesa Redonda* 2010). In sum, the special period marked both an increase in racial inequality and a significant change in the previous silence on racial issues, but the foundational elements of racial ideology in Cuba remain the same.

As this historical narrative has shown, racial harmony in Cuba has been a foundation of racial ideology in Cuba since independence. The Cuban revolution did not give birth to this ideology, but it held a much stronger claim to it through socialist policies that increased both racial and economic equality and through its promotion of anti-racist revolutionary attitudes. The government from 1959 until today has been able to promote an anti-racist program and assert that it has created racial equality so that those that believe in the revolution also should believe in the absence of racism in Cuba. Even after visible disparities and a change in rhetoric, the ideology still holds true and supports an argument that the

revolution has the ability to solve whatever remnants of racism it thought to have solved by 1961. Racial ideology and socialist ideology can reinforce each other and create a formidable ideology that both strengthens national unity, but ignores racial inequalities at the same time. For this reason, the power of the two ideologies is connected to enduring racism in Cuba. Despite some recent changes in rhetoric and black representation in government, the dominant ideology remains strong in Cuba even with increasing inequality in the Special Period. The government has not addressed racism outside of the ideological framework and without policy changes the modifications do not represent a tactical change or a weakening of racial ideology in Cuba. The following section will explore the various components of racial ideology in Cuba during the revolution and its relationship to socialism and nationalism. The section will examine how racial ideology and socialism merge and why they are compatible. The role of institutions will be explored to argue that the staying power and influence of racial ideology is bolstered by the lack of institutions that either address race or support alternative ideologies. Moreover, the definition of racism as prejudice barring a structural analysis allows for the revolution to escape responsibility for enduring racial inequalities. Through powerful rhetoric that promotes national unity, the framing of racism as benign and outside of the government's realm of control and the creation of an institutional framework that does not support alternative information, socialism and racial democracy in Cuba have achieved strong influence on the population.

### *Racial Ideology & Socialism*

A socialist revolution that at its triumph ushered in a more equitable society than the previous regime provides for a distinct case in which to study the power of racial ideology. It has been argued that ideological frameworks can often be threatened by resistance from



exploited classes who recognize their contradictions (Althusser 1994). In the case of Cuba, the ideological frameworks constructed by the revolutionary government promote an ideology that seems to be in favor of the exploited classes. Consequently, this ideology acts at best as an improved reality from previous regimes and at worst as an ideal to strive for, against which there is little resistance. Much of Althusser's work, and others in the Marxist tradition, discuss ideology in a capitalist and exploitative context, arguing from a leftist vantage point (Mannheim 1991; Althusser 1994). These scholars do not examine the power of *leftist* ideologies to use rhetoric that seems to support previously marginalized groups, but in fact seek to silence these groups in terms of race. Socialist ideology, coupled with racial democracy ideology, seeks to incorporate previously marginalized or exploited groups and is thus has the potential of generating high levels of support among these groups.

The ideology of racial harmony was not novel when the revolution's leadership began to develop its racial ideology during its first months and much of the rhetoric borrowed from the political scripts from the past regarding race. The change in racial ideology once the revolution came into power was not a set of new ideas, but a stronger claim to racial harmony through policy. The revolution, from 1959 until today, has borrowed from historical rhetoric on race, but with heightened legitimacy as it brought about much higher levels of equality and did away with any de jure segregation that existed prior to 1959. Marxist thought contends that the problem of racism can be solved when the problem of class inequality is solved (Larrain 1979). Today, Cuba continues to rely on this class centered explanation of racism which 1) attributes any evidence of racism as vestiges of the capitalist system pre-1959; 2) names the Cuban Revolution as the solution to racism and releases it from responsibility for current inequalities and 3) creates a strong link between support of the

revolution and belief in its racial ideology. The rhetoric still serves to exonerate the government from further obligation to Afro-Cubans: with racial harmony achieved, the government rejects the need to address race or racism and the link between race and access is barely acknowledged. Nonetheless, racism continues to exist in Cuba and while it may be argued that ideology should have some link to reality, the link may be what citizens want their society to be and not what it actually is. This conception is not benign because racial harmony in Cuba is not framed as an ideal, but as the present state of affairs. It serves as a denial of racism rather than as a model to strive for, and in this way obscures realities of racial exclusion that as a result, remain largely unchallenged. Castro's declaration of the end of racism at the start of the revolution set Cuba apart from other Latin American countries where the debate centers on the role of racial ideology as a myth or an ideal.<sup>20</sup> Castro, by combining socialism and the ideology of racial democracy, de-politicized race in a way that other leaders in the past did not.

The notion of unity cannot be separated from why racial harmony is important to the leadership and to the supporters of the revolution. The idea that racial difference and discussion of racism breeds division among the nation is a primary component of racial ideology in Cuba (de la Fuente 2001a). Among many supporters of the revolution it continues to be taboo to discuss the presence of racism in Cuba. The state's ideological rhetoric has allowed for critique regarding sexism and women's rights, and more recently, homophobia and gay rights<sup>21</sup>, and Cuba has launched many campaigns and a *batalla de*

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<sup>20</sup> This is not to say that other countries in Latin America with similar rhetoric have a weaker level of support for racial democracy, only to point out that Cuba has connected this belief to political support of the revolution.

<sup>21</sup> Although the Cuban government initially rebuked homosexuality, in the past decade it has launched campaigns against homophobia.

*ideas*<sup>22</sup> to overcome the country's challenges and injustices. Similar critique on racism or even individual prejudice has not been given a space and continues to be a subject that is seen as divisive. What is important about this silence is that it is transferred to most of the supporters of the revolution such that belief in the revolution is tied to belief in racial democracy in Cuba. Socialism is seen by many to be incompatible with racism because of the emphasis on class in order to solve the problem indirectly (Sawyer 2006). Sexism and homophobia are given attention that racism is not in order to eradicate these injustices and discriminatory attitudes. Bolstered by this logic, the leadership has managed to connect political attitudes toward the revolution to racial attitudes. Revolutionary ideals create a union among belief in racial democracy and the Cuban political system such that politics, nationalism, and racial attitudes cannot be separated from each other in order to comprehensively study racial politics in Cuba.

The Cuban leadership did not only claim to eradicate racial discrimination; they argued that through socialism, racial equality and human rights were achieved. Socialism is expressed as the primary vehicle by which racial justice came to Cuba and no debate on this subject was presented to the public. Political rhetoric conveyed no doubt in the erasure of racial discrimination and thus, political supporters of the revolution should have no doubt in their minds either. For Cubans, particularly supporters of the revolution, there is significant difficulty in making the connection between a government that came into power to solve problems of inequality and social injustice with one that is also complicit in reinforcing racist practices. The message that a socialist or revolutionary government could not support

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<sup>22</sup> The *batalla de ideas*, or battle of ideas, is a national campaign that, "signifies the total comprehension of the ideals of the Cuban people, the wish of sovereignty independence, peace and development. It is a battle for justice that has been converted for us into a life attitude." The campaign focuses on economic recovery, education, culture, peace, and the freedom of the five Cubans imprisoned in the United States (Borjes 2007).

structural racism is a powerful one and is strengthened by the rhetoric that connects the government to social justice. It is here where revolutionary ideology has been able to make believers out of the citizenry in favor of racial democracy despite examples of racism and racial inequality throughout the island<sup>23</sup>.

In April of 1981, Fidel Castro made this connection between socialism and racial equality in a speech commemorating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bay of Pigs. Here he proclaims,

When I mentioned the things that socialism made possible I left out another one of our great successes: the end of the cruel discrimination that existed in our country, the discrimination on grounds of race or sex. [Applause] So we could also ask this question: Has the United States eradicated racial discrimination? [Shouts of “No!”] Has the United States eradicated discrimination against women, the exploitation of women, the prostitution of women? [Shouts of “No!”] No, a thousand times no! [Applause] These are truths. The facts speak for themselves; they are convincing facts which explain and demonstrate what socialism has meant to our country (1981).

Castro is explicit with his association between racism and the United States. The United States is used as the primary example of a racist country both to tout Cuba’s racial achievements and to solidify the use of the United States as a common enemy both to Cuba and its citizens. The United States is thus everything Cuba is not, capitalist, exploitative, imperialist and discriminatory towards its racial and ethnic minorities. The United States also buffers the silence on race domestically: Castro discusses race often in his speeches throughout the decades of the revolution, but he discusses it in an international context. Race and the problems of racism are mentioned, but always in the context of an external issue, further reinforcing the absence of racism in Cuba.

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<sup>23</sup> My characterization of revolutionary and racial ideology together creating a false consciousness does not suggest that Cubans are living in a fantasy world. Rather, it is to emphasize the power of ideology in creating alternative explanations for social injustices (Van Dijk 1998; Eagleton 1991).

The United States is a crucial component to racial ideology in Cuba and the government has used it to justify the recognition of national identity over racial identities. Against a colossus such as the United States, Castro is able to push for national unity so that challenges to this unity could serve as detrimental to national strength in the face of U.S. opposition. Castro attaches national unity and identity to the survival of socialism, making serious discussions of racial hierarchies inimical not only to national cohesion, but to the endurance of the system. In this way, supporters of the revolution have a high stake in promoting the governing ideology of racial equality. While the use of the United States, both as a racist nation in comparison to Cuba and as a threat to the Cuban Revolution was more pronounced in the earlier decades of the revolution, it continues to be a part of governmental rhetoric today. The United States is also an integral part of the definition of racism in Cuba. The presence of segregation prior to the civil rights era coupled with racial incidents such as riots, killings and other violent stories in the media help to paint a picture of racism as an overt phenomenon connected with violence and the separation of the races. The United States thus is a central part of racial ideology in Cuba and is part of what connects political and racial attitudes as it serves as both the common political enemy and the example of a racist society.

#### *Individual Prejudice vs. Structural Racism*

One of the most significant successes of racial ideology in Cuba is to define anti-black racism as prejudice rather than a structural phenomenon. As Fidel Castro stated in 1959,

“It ought not to be necessary to issue a law against an absurd prejudice. What should be proclaimed is loathing and public condemnation against those men, full of leftover

traces of past prejudices who are unscrupulous enough to discriminate against a Cuban, to mistreat a Cuban, over a matter of lighter or darker skin, because we all have darker or lighter skin” (Castro, 1959).

By trivializing racism as “absurd” attitudes that are morally wrong, Castro suggests that it is the citizens’ responsibility to combat racism. If racism is defined only as acts of individual prejudice, it takes the onus away from the government, as it makes the problem a moral issue that is beyond its realm of control or influence. Racial democracy then is expressed as an acceptance of racism among individuals rather than on a systemic basis which would deny any ongoing anti-black discrimination by the government or its institutions (Hanchard 1994). Cuban scholar Esteban Morales (2008) who has talked publicly at length on the presence of racism but is also a member of the Communist Party, writes that where stereotypes and racial prejudice exist, racism is present; although it doesn’t exist or manifest in an institutional way but rather, in the consciousness of individuals or certain groups.

While there are certainly instances of blacks who have been discriminated against by individuals in their personal relationships, scholars have noted instances of blacks being denied jobs, promotions and educational opportunities because of their race (Duharte Jimenez 1997; Sawyer 2006; Morales 2008). Several scholars have, through interviews and observation pointed to the continued exclusion of blacks in certain employment sectors, high positions, and within the government as well (Adams 2004). De la Fuente (2001a), who argues primarily in favor of attitude-based racism, does point to the absence of blacks in the “state sponsored media” as well as the government enterprises that reproduce racist practices, particularly in the tourism sector.

Several scholars have pointed to state rhetoric in pushing for a conception of individual prejudice over the term racism throughout Latin America, including Cuba (Vargas; Fernandez 2005). Much of the scholarly production on race in Cuba has suffered

from this depiction of racism as one of individual attitudes rather than part of the social, economic and political structure of the country (Rodriguez Espina 2006; Alvarado Ramos 1996). Nadine Fernandez (2001) finds that scholars concentrate only on attitudes, personal feelings, and racism reproduced in the family, not taking into consideration how these attitudes do not stay in the household but are transferred to social and professional settings. Fernandez does not couch this pattern in the larger framework of state limits and ideology in order to identify that these authors are not only contributing to the rhetorical boundaries of racial democracy but they are limited by the state on what they can publish.

### *Institutions*

An integral part of the wide support and the level of dominance that the myth of racial democracy achieves among the citizenry is the level of access to information and alternative ideologies. As Van Dijk (1998) argues, elite ideologies may be widely adopted if there are no strong popular alternatives or these alternatives are unknown or marginalized. Further, if elites are able to prevent or limit access to these counter-ideologies from the public domain, dominant ideologies are able to enjoy broader support. In the case of Cuban racial politics, dominant ideologies counter much of the reality on the ground, yet state control of media, expression and information plays a significant part in mitigating such contradictions. Challenges to the notion of racial harmony are controlled nearly completely by the state and as such, do not reach a large percentage of the population. The government's power over space determines who is able to meet, discuss, and express their views in public. Even within spaces of contestation that are permitted, limits are placed on what can be published, sung, rapped, and discussed. Challenges to racial ideology in Cuba do exist, but their reach

is quite limited which not only lends more legitimacy to the dominant ideology, but also puts constraints on awareness at the individual level should one want to actively participate in such a challenge. The lack of access to alternative information serves to keep marginalized groups in their subordinate position by silencing alternative ideologies and masking the effects of race on life chances, while permitting Cubans in general to ignore race.

Institutions have the role of creating social norms and values and are thus the tools that are used by the state to promote and disseminate a shared ideology (Van Dijk 1998). Education, mass media, and even families are social teachers that when disseminated universally, have great influence on what issues are important to whom and what values one holds. As Van Dijk writes, “as the individual subordinate’s social and material survival is conditioned by her ability to accommodate herself to the daily demands of social institutions, adaptive behaviors become molded into everyday habits, dimming each person’s vision of social alternatives and hedging in her choices” (64). In Cuba, state control of all institutions and institutional space creates a centralized framework through which to support certain projects and ideas and discourage or silence others. The two particular institutions that are most directly involved in the dissemination of ideas are education and the mass media. Both institutions have historically omitted the subject of race relations and have been narrow in their representation of black Cubans. History books written for primary and secondary levels for example talk about the Afro-Cuban experience only through slavery and place little to no emphasis on the black contribution (Torres-Cuevas & Loyola Vega 2001). Television in Cuba does not only support silence regarding race, but also has been notorious in its scarce representation of blacks (Morales 2008).



There are several institutional spaces that provide for the debate and discussion of social concerns. Citizens are able to voice issues of concern to their neighborhood and society as a whole through their small neighborhood associations that are connected to the local government. These Committees in the Defense of the Revolution (CDRs) support local concerns, but problems of racism in Cuba are not a subject welcome in CDR meetings.<sup>24</sup> This was partially motivated by the fact that during this time, it was anti-communist or counter-revolutionary to be racist. Thus, such problems should not be a concern because the ideal expressed that the country had achieved racial harmony (de la Fuente 2001a). In addition to discussion on citizens' issues, the Cuban government created spaces at the start of the revolution for the advancement of marginalized groups, namely women. The Federation of Cuban Women (Federación de Mujeres Cubanas or FMC) was founded in the first years of the revolution to address issues of opportunity, access, and prejudiced attitudes against women. During a time when racism had been declared a problem of the past, the problem of sexism and women's rights was given much more attention and the FMC served not only to include those who were left out of the national project prior to the revolution, but they were given the support to fight for and publicly demand gender equality. The creation of the FMC without a similar organization to combat racial inequality reinforced the notion that the rights of women should be fought for on a constant basis while the rights of blacks do not require such a struggle. The battle against sexism throughout the revolutionary regime has never been deemed divisive as a battle against racism has. Discussion of gender inequality is a topic that is open for discussion, unlike discussion of racial inequality, which people tend to

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<sup>24</sup> Several of my interviewees shared that race or racism was not a topic that was discussed in the CDR meetings and was understood as something that political candidates or those connected to the party will bring up. A president of a CDR shared that there were some racial tensions in a solar in her neighborhood but this was brushed aside and not treated as a political concern because one cannot control others' attitudes.

shy away from because of political sensitivity or a belief that such discussion is against the revolution and national unity. The ideological framing that the state has given to sexism vs. racism has significantly influenced how people view these two issues and whether they feel open to talk about them. The problem of *machismo* was recognized by the population as a whole and the problem of racism was ignored or deemed solved, much like the ideological rhetoric suggested. The FMC created a national consciousness regarding the rights for women whereas black rights were erased from this consciousness.

The FMC during the first years of the revolution included many blacks and mulatas among their ranks and the inclusion of nonwhites was evidence that blacks did not need their own organization. If blacks were subsumed into other organizations that addressed social ills other than race, they were not being excluded and thus, equality of opportunity was present. While the same argument could be made about the inclusion of women into mass organizations, women were given their own organization and freedom to address issues specific to their demographic. Blacks were to be included in the mass organizations but not given a separate space to debate their own issues and develop goals towards their levels of access. This policy supported black inclusion and simultaneous invisibility, not only in terms of the government, but among the citizens as well. The institutional structure and the organizations that existed within it, supported the erasure of race and black rights as a whole.

Although the FMC does claim membership that is racially proportional to the population, currently the National Secretariat, or the governing body of the FMC, does not have any nonwhite members and the rest of the leadership (classified as “other members”) has 25% nonwhite membership, with blacks constituting 14.7% and mulatas at 10.2% of the 88 members. Women of color are not represented at all within the top positions and are

underrepresented in the lower positions of the leadership as well. The organization as a whole did not discuss issues of race within their own meetings and race is not included as part of their listed goals to achieve equality. While their two essential pillars are to defend the revolution and the struggle for equality, there is no mention of race within this struggle. The organization is quite vocal about the process of inclusion for women, the responsibility of the revolution to promote women's rights, the need to enact policy to support equality and the inclusion of women in the national historical memory and educational system (FMC 2009). They receive a high level of support from the Cuban government, yet a discussion of the same issues and goals for blacks receive very little support recently and have been deemed completely taboo in the past.

Ideology that promotes the idea that a race-based organization is divisive and/or exclusive and as a result prohibits its existence has a significant influence on society's perception of the role of race. Moreover, the illegality of creating such an organization without the approval of the state deters efforts among those that do recognize the need to organize based on race. At worst, citizens believe that promoting black rights and black identity is indeed divisive and at best it discourages any action or organization despite opposition to the ideology. As Mary Jackman (1994) writes, "The surest strategy of social control is to confine the agenda within which a challenge might take place (67)." The state in Cuba is able to do this quite easily as it controls space on the island: space to live, space to meet, and space to convene such that any official challenge to state ideology must be done within the state's parameters. The state must let you in before you can challenge it. Thus, the state controls the boundaries of the expression of counter-ideologies and consequently, to what extent that expression reaches others.

### *Effects of Ideology*

As I have argued throughout this chapter, the act of declaring racism a solved problem by the Cuban government has been the foundation of racial ideology during the Cuban revolution. The subsequent silence on this issue erased the issue of racism from public discourse and relegated conversations regarding societal racism to private circles. Yet the sweeping reforms that the Cuban government implemented in the early years of the revolution in favor of workers, the poor and previously marginalized communities brought a surge of nationalism, unity and support for the revolution and its leadership. The reforms targeting racial segregation in particular were policies that signaled to the country that the tangible and visible patterns of racism had disappeared. These moves by the government along with speeches that championed a strong anti-racist stance were enough to show that racism would be a thing of the past and that talk of racial difference would be detrimental to the newly unified revolutionaries. The outcome of decades of silence on this issue was a national blind eye to the subject.

One of the most significant effects of Cuban racial ideology is the support it gives to anti-black stereotypes. The declaration and subsequent belief by the population that true equality of opportunity exists, leads any examples of inequality to be attributed to individual shortcomings among blacks. Amidst the anti-racist ideology that dominates, racist ideology remains an integral part of its survival and the two are interconnected (Sawyer 2006). Although this pairing of egalitarian and racist ideology can be found throughout the Americas interacting with various political and economic systems, in Cuba it is particularly strong in that socialism, in theory, creates equality of opportunity. Thus, individual

weaknesses are used to justify any remaining social inequalities as part of the ideological framework of socialism and racial democracy. In other words, the belief that all Cubans are equal due to socialist policies and the leadership's efforts to end racism assigns the blame for inequalities to insufficiencies in black character or motivation.<sup>25</sup> The rationale that there is equal access to the university, for example, derives from the fact that 1) there is no charge to attend the university and 2) primary and secondary education is equal and universalized regardless of neighborhood. Therefore, the lack of black enrollment in the university or the underrepresentation in the nation's top positions must be a reflection of the lack of desire among blacks to want to study beyond high school and achieve success. The small number of blacks and mulattoes that have indeed achieved success also reinforces the notion that opportunity is there, but blacks do not take advantage of it. In this way, white privilege is maintained with little to no accountability or recognition of such privilege. Van Dijk (1996) writes that egalitarian norms are not inconsistent with the maintenance of privilege and exclusive access because "the acts controlled by the ideology are not perceived as discriminating in the first place: if they qualify then minorities may well occasionally be admitted" (26). The coupling of racism with the appearance of equality through socialism has particularly damaging consequences on the exacerbation of negative black stereotypes in Cuba.

The claim by the Cuban leadership to have solved the problem of racism attempts to erase history from the black experience and as Gilroy would argue, contains blacks in the

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<sup>25</sup> This point is not explicitly stated by the government but is a consequence of the ideology of racial equality in a country where racial equality does not exist. Several authors discuss this in their study of the United States. In the post-civil rights era when formal obstacles to black advancement have been eradicated and significant advances have been made to secure equality of opportunity, the lack of black achievement and socioeconomic parity with whites is thus attributed to their lack of work ethic or desire to succeed (Bobo 2007; Forman 2007). In several of my interviews including university professors, this conclusion was made – if education is universal and anyone can go to the university, blacks are not there because they don't want to be there.

present (1987). In sum, it is not only overtly racist ideologies, but also those ideologies that do not promote a racist message and deny its existence that can be seen as a different strategy for “containing blacks.” Embedded in racial democracy under socialism are the same racist ideologies that we find in discourses of the past. Black affirmation is prohibited, discussion of racial inequalities is silenced and blackness continues to be tied to inferiority if black advancement remains stagnant since, as the ideology states, racism no longer exists. In Cuba in particular, racial ideology alleges to have eradicated racism and thus, any remnants are due to past history. While it is important to make distinctions across different ideologies, in the end, an ideology that supports and maintains racism by denying its existence is also a type of ideology that perpetuates black inferiority by trivializing the central role of race.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter has examined the ways in which racial ideology has been used throughout the history of Cuba to foment national unity and consolidate political strength at key historical points. The notion of *mestizaje* in Cuba suggests that the racial hierarchy is to be ignored since race has no place in a nation of mixed race people. Moreover, the role of racism in barring blacks from equal opportunity and access has been declared solved with the triumph of the revolution. In essence, a mask has been placed over the role of race and the government’s maintenance of inequality such that supporters of the revolution, despite the reality in the ground, largely believe in equal opportunity for all Cubans. The Cuban government has slightly adjusted its rhetoric and the limitations placed on its citizens regarding racial dialogue in order to adapt to the new environment of increased racial inequality brought on by the Special Period, but the lack of institutions to ensure equal rights

for blacks suggests that officially, race is not yet a national concern. Those that continue to deny the relevance of race, often do so through their identity as revolutionaries, which is still powerful in Cuba. While this chapter argues for the salience of race and the role of racial ideology as a mask over existent racism, it also argues that this ideal continues to have a hold on notions of identity in Cuba. I contend that this is especially true in contemporary Cuba due to the union of revolutionary and racial ideologies. The following two chapters will explore exactly how ideology affects attitudes in Cuba through survey data on black consciousness and interview data of Cubans of all races. Even among the dominant ideology's challengers, there are many gray areas where racial democracy is infused into racial attitudes producing distinct representations of consciousness and solidarity.

## CHAPTER 3

### BLACK AFFIRMATIONS AND IDEOLOGICAL ACCEPTANCE: SURVEY DATA

Days after Barack Obama's presidential win on November 4, 2008, the black Cuban poet and essayist, Victor Fowler, wrote, "I still feel alarm in my chest. What are pooling in my eyes are tears of pride and of a profound relief. I hear Barack Obama...I look at my skin, I look at my children, I cry and I smile" (Vicent, 2008). This sentiment, expressed by many others during my time in Havana in 2008 and 2009, is a testament to the presence of black consciousness in Cuba. During the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign, blacks throughout Cuba were watching Barack Obama with a sense of pride as well as hope that a black man could ascend to the top position in the country. President Obama represents the political possibilities that blacks have not just in the United States, but throughout the Americas. His election, while happening in another country, elicited throughout black circles in Cuba conversations about black advancement and black pride. This chapter will examine the attitudes among blacks regarding these elements of black consciousness and how blacks view their racial identity in Cuba.

Through survey research I analyze how components of Cuban racial ideology influence black consciousness and identity formation. I argue that although racial democracy has been successful in creating a perception of equality and decreased saliency of race, black consciousness continues to exist and racial identity can be significant to blacks in their daily



lives. This consciousness is not just based on skin color or heritage, but the experience of discrimination, the presence of racism and perceptions of being undervalued in Cuban society. Discrimination in particular, heightens the saliency of race and has a direct relationship to how blacks view their own identity and their connection to other blacks. At the same time, racial ideology is paramount to how blacks view social and political realities and their racial implications. We cannot separate ideology from identity; the former has great influence on the latter, even among those that reject the dominant ideology.

The dimensions of black consciousness are crucial in understanding black political attitudes and identity formation. In order to grasp racial attitudes and black political thought in Cuba we have to understand not just whether or not blacks are racially conscious, but what this consciousness looks like. The argument has been made that black consciousness or group identity in Cuba, and elsewhere in Latin America, is lower than that of the United States. There are fundamental differences in racial categorization, racial ideologies, and the process of identity formation between the United States and Cuba that imply there should be important differences along levels of consciousness.

This chapter will examine survey data on black identity, racial attitudes and experiences of discrimination in Cuba. The first section will analyze survey data questions focusing on six categories: social relations, self-identification, racial significance, representation, racial perception, and organization. The second section shows the commonality of experiences with discrimination and demonstrates who is more likely to experience discrimination in Cuba and in what forms and settings. The final section discusses the relationship between experiences with discrimination and black consciousness.

## **Social Relations**

Racial prejudice among individuals in Cuba plays a dual role. Its presence is used to both acknowledge the presence of discrimination in Cuba, but to deny the presence of systemic racism. In other words, revolutionary rhetoric acknowledges that there are people that harbor racial prejudice who can affect black opportunity or personal experiences. Coupled with this, it uses the role of individual prejudice as the only way to explain the presence of discrimination in Cuba so that the government is not responsible for maintaining racist practices, only individuals. In addition to racial mixing, there is a perception that social relations, friendships and the like are relatively color blind in Cuba and elsewhere in Latin America (Telles 2004; de la Fuente 2001a). At the same time, compared with the United States, despite the acknowledgement of prejudiced individuals, Cuban race relations are characterized, both by its citizens and the government as fairly congenial. The argument that race does not play a role in people's social relations is used primarily to deny the existence of racism because blacks whites and mulattoes all get along and live together. The United States, on the other hand, is characterized as a society where race matters in people's social interactions and race relations are therefore more rigid than in Cuba. Edward Telles (2004) uses the concept of vertical and horizontal relations to show that racial discrimination and economic exclusion (vertical relations) can exist simultaneously with racial mixture and harmonious social relations (horizontal relations). He argues that in the case of Brazil, while racist practices exist to produce racial inequality and lack of opportunity for blacks, social relations among Brazilians are relatively pleasant without a high emphasis on race. In his

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<sup>26</sup> Information on the data and survey methodology can be found in the methodological appendix.

study of Cuba, Sawyer (2006) found that Cubans generally found that race relations were better in Cuba than in Latin America and the United States.

The questions that makeup the Social Relations section are as follows: 1) My social relations have a lot to do with the fact that I am black 2) It would be beneficial for blacks to marry whites and 3) Black and whites have more commonalities than differences. In accordance with dominant ideological rhetoric, I would expect to find that blacks will perceive race to be unimportant in their social relations. Since the start of the revolution, integrated neighborhoods, high levels of equality and the lack of social or informal segregation should lend itself to everyday interactions where race is not a consideration. It should be noted that while I expect Cubans' perceptions to reflect harmonious social relations, this does not mean that race is not a salient category in people's lives. I use the term perceptions because while race may not be as much of a social consideration as it is in the United States, anti-black sentiment among whites is still a reality in Cuba and can affect people's relationships, particularly among romantic relationships.

For the first question, whether social relations have a lot to do with race, a majority of the sample, 63.8%, answered that their social relations are not race based (see Table 1<sup>27</sup>) while 21.3% thought that their social relations did have a lot to do with being black. We can glean from this result that friendships can often be of mixed race as well as other types of social relationships. Race does not seem to factor into many people's opinions of how they relate to people or build friendships. Nonetheless, as I will discuss later in this chapter, among those that had experienced discrimination, many of the respondents (41.7%) cited being discriminated against by individuals or in a relationship. While there are many that

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<sup>27</sup> Tables and Figures are located at the end of the chapter.

may have interracial friendships and even relationships, the role of race still plays a part in how people relate to one another.

Interracial marriage has often been cited as evidence of the progress in race relations. Studies in Cuba have shown that interracial marriages are at high levels in comparison to the United States (Fernandez 1996). Yet interracial relationships in Cuba can also be strategic and may not always signal improved race relations but rather, the desire to escape one's blackness. The saying *adelantar la raza* or "advance the race" refers to the strategy of marrying a lighter person so that one can advance by having children that are less black. To address this sentiment, respondents were asked if it would be beneficial for blacks to marry whites. My expectations for this particular question were that there would be a slight majority of blacks that would agree with the statement, but also a significant number that would not. The sentiment that blacks should marry lighter exists among many blacks, but there is also awareness and racial consciousness among blacks which would lead to a rejection of the statement.

A minority of the sample, 22.8% said blacks should marry whites, 47.2% were neutral or expressed that it did not matter who one marries and 30.0% responded negatively towards the question, recognizing the preference for some to marry lighter skinned persons<sup>28</sup>. The small number of respondents that agreed with the statement that blacks should marry whites was much less than what I expected. The desire to whiten does exist among black communities however, it may no longer be among a majority of blacks. Moreover, the oversampling of younger Cubans could highlight a trend toward race either not being a

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<sup>28</sup> Many of the respondents that circled neutral expressed that they did so because color should not matter in relationships and many that chose yes or no, expressed that they either embraced the idea of "*adelantar la raza*" or they rejected it and preferred to marry other blacks.

consideration for marriage, or higher awareness that the notion of whitening is a negative one for blacks.

The saying, *todos somos cubanos*, does not only refer to national unity, it also represents the idea that regardless of race, all Cubans share the same culture. Thus, racial ideology suggests that differences of skin color are only matters of phenotype. Similar to the question on social relations, Cubans should not believe that there are major differences between blacks and whites. To suggest affirmatively, would be to suggest that there are significant cultural differences and that race would be significant among social relationships and interactions.

A small minority expressed that blacks may have clear differences from whites which parallels the results for the first question regarding social relations. In the question, “blacks and whites have more in common than differences”, 73.8% either strongly agreed or agreed, while only 11.2% thought that blacks and whites have more differences than commonalities. One of the respondents expressed that she feels fine socializing with people of any color and that she does not take into account any differences between blacks and whites. Although respondents expressed differing opinions regarding interracial marriage and intimate relationships, the majority found that among their friendships race is not taken into consideration. This is reflected in the survey results for the first and third questions in this section.

### **Self-Identification**

The questions in the self-identification section are as follows: 1) Being black is an important part of my self-image; 2) I am proud to be black; 3) I reject the fact that I am black

and 4) Being black is more important to me than being Cuban. In chapter one, I argued that while the racial democracy ideology does indeed negate the importance of race as a social cleavage and racism as a societal problem, it should be clarified that it does not generate silence on racial difference. Racial categories are well defined and are used to describe, emphasize, valorize and denigrate physical difference. Using this logic, although blacks may not take race into consideration regarding their social relations, racial identification should still remain significant for blacks. A person's race and physical characteristics in Cuba are a large part of self-image, whether that image is negative or positive. Blackness being a significant part of self-image stands in contrast to dominant ideology, but racial difference receives considerable attention in Cuban society and should factor significantly in black lives. The second and third questions in this section should show that blacks are both proud to be black and do not reject that blackness. There are few, despite the presence of the notion of black inferiority, that would say that they reject being black. The problem of black inferiority certainly affects blacks, but this would probably not lead to an admission of rejecting one's race.

The fourth question deals with the relationship between nationalism and racial identity, which is a complex one. Racial democracy has been especially successful in creating high levels of nationalistic feelings among all races of a particular nation. Throughout Latin America racial democracy created national identities that emphasized identity as singular without racial ties or differences (Marx 1998). In the United States, the majority of blacks would be expected to place their racial identity above their national identity, due to the experience of racism and the idea that that blacks have never enjoyed full citizenship as Americans (Sawyer et al 2004; Sidanius et al 1997). Conversely, racial

democracy has insisted that all races are part of the nation since the abolition of slavery. In a study conducted in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic in 2000, Sawyer et al (2004) found that racial democracy is so entrenched that despite clear evidence of the awareness of racial hierarchies, all races in the three case studies consider themselves equally genuine participants in the national project. The Sawyer et al piece points to the role of nation building and nationalism in the dissemination of the racial democracy ideal. Taking this information into account, we would expect that few to no black Cubans would affirm their racial identity as primary to their national identity.

A similar survey conducted with 96 respondents in 1995 in Santa Clara, a city in the central region of the island, found that only eight percent of blacks felt that their racial identity was more important than their Cuban identity (Hernandez 1998). The Sawyer et al piece does not ask directly whether blacks place their racial or national identity first, but the high levels of patriotism among blacks suggests that national identity would take precedence or have equal importance as racial identity. While none these surveys cannot claim to be representative of black Cubans as a whole, the results suggest that national identity is of high importance to blacks.

Although social relations seem to be based less on race, the majority of blacks in the survey felt as though race was an important part of their identity. When asked whether being black is an important part of their self-image, 81.5%, either strongly agreed or agreed while only 9.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed (see Table 2). These results are parallel with my expectations and my argument regarding the importance of racial identity despite ideological rhetoric that suggests otherwise. For the second question, "I am proud to be black," 92.4%

either agreed or strongly agreed. Similarly, 94.2% of the sample chose disagree or strongly disagree when given the statement, “I reject being black.”

In order to test the importance of national identity vs. racial identity, respondents were asked if being black was more important than being Cuban. The results were surprising in that 27.0% say that being black is more important than being Cuban, 20.3% were neutral and 53.3% chose their Cuban identity as more important. Although this cannot be said for all respondents, many that chose the neutral answer expressed that to them, both identities were equally important. Thus, those that fall into the neutral category may differ on their reasons for choosing this answer and may in fact display strong measure of black consciousness.

Although a majority did respond that their national identity is more important, 26.4% consider their racial identity to be more important. Thus, the data suggest that racial consciousness among blacks surveyed exists at a high level for a sizable minority. We do not know how levels of consciousness may have changed due to the economic crisis but these changes were still underway in 1995 when Hernandez conducted her survey and increased levels of discrimination may have contributed to the higher finding in my data. Nonetheless, slightly more than a quarter of the sample is a surprising number and beyond my original expectations considering the patterns of identity formation due to racial democracy.

Many black Cubans feel no less Cuban than white Cubans or mixed Cubans and thus, racial democracy has worked as a nationalist ideology that uses nation to trump racial identity and consequently racial inequalities. A black person can be aware of his less than equal standing in society but never connect that consciousness to being less of a citizen or separate from the Cuban nation. As Cuban author Victor Fowler writes,



“It would be these (injustices) in the work world, interpersonal relations, the reproduction of stereotypes in the media or the silence regarding the contributions of certain figures in our national history, without being legitimate or almost natural, individuals drink their bitterness and continue on that other level, where they look at themselves, act, progress and are represented as “Cuban”. Said another way, voluntarily they...then exclude various experiences to assume other ways to elaborate a different future. (Fowler 2009)

Black Cubans then according to Fowler, recognize the injustices within their country but either through conscious or subconscious denial continue to see themselves as Cuban first and ignore racial associations.

### **Racial Significance**

This section focuses on the significance of race and racism to blacks. The first two questions demonstrate the importance of knowledge of black culture and history. This particular grouping of questions serves to determine whether blacks see black history and black culture as something that is essential, particularly for blacks. In other words, do blacks feel especially connected to black history and culture or are they just seen as part of Cuban culture as a whole? Respondents were presented with the statements, 1) It is very important to me to teach my children the black/African cultural and spiritual traditions and 2) For us (blacks) it is very important to know the role that blacks have played in the history of our country. Although there are many whites and mulattoes that practice African religions in Cuba, they are still considered part of the black heritage. Thus, identification with the religion can be a source of racial consciousness among blacks. I expect that both black history and spiritual traditions would be important to blacks because of the significance of tradition and the black contribution to Cuban culture. Agreeing with both statements would not be against Cuban racial ideology and it should follow that the majority of blacks would hold knowledge of their contribution to the national culture and history as important.

The majority of the sample, 67.1%, strongly agreed or agreed with the statement showing the significance of the survival of African religion in Cuba to many blacks. For the second question regarding the black historical contribution, an overwhelming majority 93.1%, strongly agreed or agreed. The significantly higher percentage that affirmed the second statement in comparison with the first is most likely due to the fact that the entire population in Cuba does not practice African-based religions and thus it may not be important to them to pass this tradition on. The historical contributions of blacks are of much higher importance to a larger portion of respondents.

A different set of questions asked about racism in Cuba to address how blacks perceive the experiences of their group in relation to their own realities. These questions read: 1) the difficulties that blacks encounter because of racism affect me personally as well and 2) blacks should be aware of racism in Cuban society. The first question demonstrates the level of group identity by linking the experiences of the racial group as a whole, to individual experiences. In addition, the question points to a perception of racial identity as part of a unique group with a unique set of experiences. The second question addresses the existence of racism and whether blacks in particular should be aware of its existence. I would expect that while a majority of respondents will identify with the black experience of racism and recognize its existence as well, there should be a sizeable minority that does not agree with these two statements due to their adherence to racial ideology in Cuba. The existence of racism and a unique experience among blacks would be contradictory to racial democracy which suggests that racism is not a problem in Cuba.

The first question regarding experience shows that 58.7% of the sample either strongly agreed or agreed while 27.2% either disagreed or strongly disagreed (See Table 2).

Thus, a majority of the sample identifies with their racial group and its experiences. For the second question regarding awareness of racism in Cuba, 79.2% of the sample agreed that blacks should be aware of the racism in Cuban society while only 9.3% did not agree or strongly disagreed. This finding shows that the level of awareness of racism in Cuba is quite high, which challenges the notion that the revolution had solved this problem. As a respondent shared with me while answering this particular question, “every single black person knows about racism here in Cuba. There’s no reason to have a meeting about that, everyone knows.”

### **Representation**

The issue of representation in Cuba was often discussed among both survey and interview participants as the most tangible and visible problem of racism in Cuba. Lack of black visibility in the tourism sector, on television, and in top professional positions are frequent examples given by blacks when discussing racism and how it manifests. This recognition is also juxtaposed with the idea that Cuba grants everyone equal opportunity and messages of mestizaje and nationalism that emphasize national identity over racial identity. Thus there are conflicting messages where black Cubans are poorly represented, but dominant ideology says that all races constitute equal parts of the nation and have equal access. As a result, there are multiple discourses that travel among black circles and that constitute black thought. Some of these discourses reinforce the dominant racial ideology, and some of them can discount the ideology as problematic because of the existence of racism.

The questions in this section read: 1) We, blacks have made notable advances; 2) We (blacks) are recognized as an important part of the culture and history of the country; 3) The

African and Afro-Cuban ethical and cultural values have not been fully recognized by our society; 4) Blacks should advance more and more in order to gain access and be visible in the different social and economic levels of the country and; 5) Black representation in different levels of politics in the country is important. Blacks are largely absent from the history books and from national cultural promotion (Torres-Cuevas & Loyola Vega 2001; Sawyer 2006; Morales 2007). Black historical leaders, writers, scholars etc. are left out of the universal curriculum in schools and in particular, the Independent Party of Color is generally unknown among the Cuban population. Nonetheless, the few leaders that are highlighted in the educational system are also highlighted by the government as national heroes. Antonio Maceo, one of the heroes in the wars for independence is one of the most featured Cuban heroes in Cuban history. Due to the national emphasis on a few black figures and the invisibility of many, many respondents should feel that blacks are adequately represented because there is no information to suggest that they are not. At the same time, there should also be a number of respondents that are aware of the lack of attention to many black historical figures, particularly those with higher levels of education, that will recognize that blacks are not properly represented. Without information about how blacks have advanced in Cuban society, I would expect that a good portion of the sample the majority of the sample that attests to blacks' notable advances refers to only those few who are included in the historical narrative in Cuba: Antonio Maceo, Juan Gualberto Gomez and two or three others. As a young black artist aptly described in an interview,

“The strategy has been first, trying to convince you that you haven't done anything. That blacks haven't done anything. Or there are few blacks that have done something. That's the first step. When they convince you of that, which the system does with all of the young children here in the schools, you learn that the only ones that ever did anything are Maceo, Gualberto Gomez, Quintín Banderas y *all* the rest are white. Second step, since you don't know that there are more, it becomes the

truth and you think, 'I'm represented.' Between that and the media, it creates a feeling of inferiority. All the cartoons are white. So you read the book, and there are four blacks that are noteworthy and ninety-six whites that are. Who do you want to be? Like the ninety-six that are the majority. If there are no educational alternatives that can create some kind of conflict in the brains of young children, then everything will remain the same. And people will continue to think that they are represented.

Black invisibility is maintained with a rhetoric that promotes equality within the revolutionary and national projects so that black citizens have to look for black history rather than learn in through official channels.

The last three questions should have disparate results. Cubans that practice Afro-Cuban religion should recognize that the religion does not receive the same support or attention that the Catholic Church receives in Cuba. There are no official spaces to practice the religion, only a recently created Association of Yoruba Culture and I would expect that the majority of the respondents find that this religious tradition is not fully recognized. The last two questions of this section that address economic advancement and political representation in Cuba should have a large majority that advocate for such representation but a minority who will find that racial representation is not relevant since all are Cuban and equal.

The questions that were asked regarding representation shed some light on these multiple ideas and contradictions showing that there is a simultaneous recognition of racism and an acceptance of a good portion of ideological rhetoric coming from the government. A large majority of survey respondents felt that blacks were represented well by the country despite the fact that many of these respondents cited the existence of racism and discrimination. Of the sample, 81.2% thought that blacks in Cuba have achieved notable successes and 81.8% agreed that blacks are recognized as an important part of the culture and

history of the country (see Table 3). This second result was unexpected as it would seem that a larger majority would recognize the absence of blacks in history. It suggests that the lack of alternative information leads blacks to believe that those that are highlighted are the only black historical figures that have advanced in Cuban history. Only 8.7% felt that blacks were not properly represented in the culture and history of the island which points to one of the major successes of the revolution's racial rhetoric. Blacks surveyed overwhelmingly believe that they are given equal attention and are equal participants in the national project. The absence of blacks in the history of Cuba creates ignorance about the black contribution, but also creates a false sense that blacks, if not present in the history books, must not have done much.

The final questions regarding black representation received similar results in that almost the entire sample felt that black representation was crucial in Cuba. A large majority, 89.6% thought that blacks should advance more and more in order to gain access and be visible in the different social and economic levels of the country. Similarly, 89.1% answer that the representation of black men and women in the different levels of government in Cuba is important. The government has acknowledged that black representation in the government is an important goal and this finding supports an agreement with that goal. It also suggests that black advancement in particular is important to other blacks, showing a measure of solidarity.

The question of whether the ethical and cultural values of our African and Afro-Cuban heritage have been fully recognized in Cuba produced slightly different results with 55.1% disagreeing with the statement and 29% agreeing (See Table 3). Thus, while there is not much recognition of the absence of blacks in historical teachings, the valuation of Afro-

Cuban culture is seen by slightly more than half of the sample as not being recognized. Here, there is no absence of alternative information. For those that practice the religion, the country's lack of attention to it and the absence of a place to worship cannot be as easily overlooked. As a respondent claimed, "I consider it completely disrespectful what they have done with the Yoruba religion. The religion is used for tourism and for commercial purposes and is no longer sacred. And where is the space where you can meet and worship? The connections to Africa are not even made by the government! Look at the number of years that it took to finally get the Yoruba Association and even that the government has coopted for the commercialization of the religion."

### **Racial Perception**

The questions that fall under the category of racial perception examine anti-black stereotypes and blacks' perception of how significant they are in Cuban society. If blacks are comfortable in their social relations with whites and race does not affect these interactions and relationships, then it would follow that blacks do not think that most whites hold anti-black stereotypes. Revolutionary rhetoric promotes the idea that racism may lie with a few individuals, which is beyond the control of the government to regulate. Racism then, is defined through attitudes and it may be that blacks recognize that these attitudes are present in Cuban society. Racial ideology however, contends that these racist or prejudiced attitudes are only present among a few and an anti-racist ethos is a significant part of the ideology. As chapter two discusses, to be racist is to be un-patriotic and thus my expectations are that while some do recognize anti-black attitudes among whites, most will believe in congenial race relations and a lack of these attitudes among whites.

The questions in this section are as follows: 1) Blacks are respected by others; 2) Many do not consider blacks to be as efficient as whites; 3) Many white people distrust or are suspicious in their relationships with blacks. For the first question, because race was not specified here, the answers are not specific to whites, but to all groups. The answers were distributed across all categories in that 45.8% claimed that blacks are respected, 24.2% said that they are not and 30.0% were neutral (See Table 5). This is similar to the expectations in that while the highest percentage thought that blacks were respected, there was a minority that recognized anti-black sentiment among the population.

While the results of the first question suggest that anti-black stereotypes or negative perceptions of blacks are not very significant, perceptions of black competency, especially among whites, seem to lean more negatively. In the second question regarding black efficiency when compared to whites, the majority of the sample, 78.4%, confirms that many think that blacks are not as efficient as whites and only 14.0% disagree with the statement. This result is quite surprising showing that there is a substantial perception among blacks that whites hold negative attitudes regarding their competency. A similar number, 71.8%, think that many white people distrust or are suspicious in their relationships with blacks. This last result in particular suggests that although blacks may have friendships with whites and mulattoes and do not think about race when building these friendships, the role of race does play a part in how they believe they are perceived. Personal relationships then, may be interracial, but not color-blind.

## **Organization**

The absence of institutional support for the struggle against racial inequality coupled with the taboo nature of discussing racism in Cuba may have a particular influence on how



Cubans view organizing on the basis of race. Moreover, the lack of a black movement in response to racism and racial inequalities can be used as evidence of low levels of black consciousness in these countries. It can be argued that if race is not a salient factor in black lives, there would be little need to form any organization based on racial identity. At the same time, we should also expect to find a minority of blacks that do display levels of racial consciousness that would cause a desire to organize on the basis of race. Thus my expectations are that while a majority will not agree that blacks should organize, a significant minority will agree. Two questions on racial organizing were asked to determine how blacks view the possibility of a black organization. The first statement asked respondents to give their opinions on the statement, “Socially blacks should organize.” The adjective socially was included rather than politically as the revolution bans any organization based on race, and thus opinions on political organizing would be influenced by possible consequences by the government. In other words, it would be impossible to parse out those that disagree with the statement based on their feelings of consciousness and identity, and those that do not want to face any state persecution. The second question reads: Black people in support of a black organization would be just as racist as whites that exclude blacks. For this question I expect that in accordance with social norms in Cuba, most respondents will agree with this statement. The lack of institutions or organizations for blacks has perpetuated the idea that racial organizations are divisive and unnecessary in Cuba.

As seen in Table 7, 60% of respondents say that blacks should organize, 29% are neutral and 21% say that they should not organize. The results indicate that blacks find that race is salient in their lives and that they would benefit from an organization that is based on race. Contrary to expectations, an important majority of the sample see potential and purpose

in a black organization. This is also contrary to racial ideology in Cuba which has suggested and implemented through the prohibition of race-based organizations that such an organization would be against national unity. These results are both surprising and exciting concerning the potential for black mobilization in the future.

The support among blacks for an organization that represents them is not the entire story. The second question in the survey regarding organizing stated that “black people in support of a black organization would be just as racist as whites that exclude blacks.” Here we find that 59.2% either strongly agree or agree with this statement while only 27.6% say disagree or strongly disagree (13.2% are neutral). This question determines whether blacks that were surveyed buy into one of the main components of racial democracy that suggests that any racial organizing would be racist. We find that although blacks see the value in organizing, many still find that racial organizations are racist and are influenced by government rhetoric on race. The results are quite contradictory and of the 240 respondents that thought blacks should organize, 124 of them, or 51.7% also thought that a black organization would be racist and 81 (33.7% of those that agreed with black organizing) thought that such an organization would not be racist (See Table 7). Not surprisingly, as two conflicting ideologies (the dominant and the counter-ideology) join, they produce incongruity in the contours of black thought.

The following section will examine respondents’ experiences with discrimination and what variables may make such an experience more likely. Through open ended responses, the section will determine whether discrimination takes place at a structural level or the individual level or both. We would expect that most respondents would share experiences that are related to individual or personal relationships if we are to understand racism in the

way that it is defined by the dominant ideology – as personal prejudice. Evidence of structural discrimination would point to forces other than prejudice that are driving the existence of racism in Cuba. The next section will take some of the measures of black identity in the survey and examine their relationship to an experience with discrimination. An experience with discrimination will now be the independent variable in order to determine whether it has an effect on consciousness and identity among blacks.

### *Racism, Discrimination and Experience*

In addition to the questions that the survey asked on black identity and group consciousness, respondents were asked if they had an experience with discrimination. They were given a choice of yes or no and if they answered yes, were given space to explain the experience in greater detail. Through the explanation portion of the question, the survey was able to extract what form of discrimination people were experiencing and their opinions on the subject. This option on the survey provided a more detailed explanation of what kinds of situations blacks are finding themselves in when confronted with racism. The survey found that 176, or 45% of respondents had experienced discrimination in some form. Although this percentage is significant on its own, it only marks those who have had a direct experience in their lives. I suspect that there are other respondents that knew of certain instances from friends or family, or had observed others being discriminated against. Thus, I would expect that the number of those that have observed some form of discrimination would be higher than 45%. The data indicate that discrimination is a fairly common experience among black Cubans. Similar studies in the United States have shown that approximately 60% of African American adults experienced discrimination in their lives (Kessler, Mickelson and Williams, 1999; Sander-Thompson, 1996) (quoted in Sellers et al 2003).

I have separated the detailed positive responses on the discrimination question into two categories – structural discrimination and attitudinal discrimination. Responses that pointed to discrimination on a systemic basis such as governmental or employment discrimination, racial profiling, or racism due to lack of access or opportunity for blacks were categorized as *structural discrimination*. Those that pointed to discrimination on an individual basis pertaining to relationships, incidents on the street or disparaging remarks by friends or family were placed into the *attitudinal discrimination* category. This type of categorization was employed to test whether the rhetoric associated with racial democracy in Cuba that defines racism as every day attitudes actually represents the reality for blacks. The responses show that while we do indeed find instances of discrimination that are attributable to attitudes, there are many instances of structural discrimination that fall beyond the boundaries of what the government has defined as vestiges of racism left from the Republic. Although there are those that do attribute discrimination to individual attitudes or isolated incidents, a higher percentage of those that experienced discrimination were of a structural nature. Those that cite being discriminated against due to individual attitudes, 38% of those that cited discrimination, most often describe the parent of a white partner that has not accepted them because of their skin color. Others discuss looks that they receive from whites, racist comments that have become part of the culture<sup>29</sup> and preferential treatment of whites in everyday interactions. One respondent, for example, wrote that since middle school people have told her that she is “*una negra blanca o una negra rubia*” (a black person who is white or a blond black person) because of her polite mannerisms, her intelligence and

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<sup>29</sup> One of the most prevalent responses was the existence of the phrase “*tenía que ser negro*” or “he/she had to be black”, a saying that is common among whites and mulattoes when something bad happens. It suggests that if someone does something wrong, it just has to be a black person. Sayings such as this one were reported often by the survey respondents.

her education. She found this to be the worst experience of discrimination that she has had because it means that good qualities are associated with being white.

A total of 62% of respondents that reported having an experience with discrimination cited some form of structural discrimination. Many of the respondents that cited structural discrimination pointed to inequalities produced by the government, absence of representation in government, managerial positions and the media, and a devaluation of blacks by the country as a whole. Respondents also expressed that Cuba is a racist country or that the system in Cuba is racist. A 26 year old male writes, “Cuban society continues to be a racist society and this manifests in all spheres of life in Cuba.” A female university student wrote, “Despite all that can be done to eliminate discrimination here, you confront it daily when applying for a job, when you put on the television, in every relationship, in popular phrases, etc.” A young man working as a welder expressed that Cuba is racist, “from the television to the hierarchy” while another wrote that blacks in Cuba, “are not valued.” A 36 year old woman expressed the sentiment that the government is to blame for racial disparities. She writes, “because of Cuban society and the policies of the heads of the country, the best positions are for whites only.”

Within the category of structural discrimination, 16.7% of those that had an experience with discrimination cited specific incidents of job discrimination. A 40 year old male professor, for example, wrote, “promotion always has a limit for blacks here in Cuba” while a 49 year old female wrote, “job offers and exchanges are subtly managed by whites. Whether you have money or not, they only accept other whites.”<sup>30</sup> Another respondent

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<sup>30</sup> Her response refers to the practice (albeit illegal) of purchasing employment opportunities in the most lucrative sectors such as tourism.

expressed that whites always have better opportunities in Cuba. There were references to tourism and other jobs that provide access to hard currency that are unavailable for blacks. A 31 year old secretary wrote, “in tourism there are few blacks.” Many of the responses referred to other job opportunities that are not given to blacks and as whites occupy most of the managerial and administrative positions, they are likely to hire their friends and family who are white as well. Several of the responses pointed to this practice, which aside from the issue of job discrimination, also points to some form of racially defined social relations. One respondent wrote, “because job opportunity is done via friendship, whites only hire each other.” Finally, one respondent expressed that even blacks in positions of authority will not hire other blacks. She wrote, “in institutional and work spaces blacks experience discrimination doubly, both by whites and blacks.”

There was also reference to the inability of blacks to report any sort of injustice, as the government does not recognize the existence of institutional racism. A 38 year old female author explained, “Cuba has always been a racist country. Discrimination here is invisible therefore those that are discriminated against feel impotent. In governmental terms discrimination does not exist and one has nowhere to go or a place to complain when you are mistreated.” Another wrote that, “sometimes being black or mulatto has put brakes on advancement in certain fields and although it is never said directly, you are made to feel inferior or blocked out of opportunity.”

The most common response among young males referenced poor and unequal treatment by the police. A male university student wrote, “most of the time, the police force is racist and detain young black males in the streets without having committed any crime.” Many respondents referred to the practice of asking for identification, that the police seem to

reserve only for blacks. One young artist described racial profiling as being “defined by the police” when walking through the streets, while another expressed an inability to walk in public with white friends without being stopped by the police. Discrimination within the schools was also a concern for respondents. One male artist wrote that in high school he was blocked out of the career that he wanted when the opportunity was given to a white student, despite the fact that his grades and performance were ranked better than hers. At a very early age, he wrote, that affected him deeply.

In order to identify patterns of discrimination among different groups, the relationship of gender, age, educational attainment and occupation with discrimination were explored. I expect to find demographic differences in the experience of discrimination as well. In Cuba, it is common to hear the argument that young black males are overwhelmingly targeted more than any other group by the police and thus may have more experiences with discrimination. In addition, young black men and to a lesser degree women are often stereotyped in the tourism industry when entering hotels or being in the company of tourists and they are also denied employment in the industry (Sawyer 2006). Finally, while no official numbers are available, many have observed that the percentage of blacks both in higher education and in professional and managerial positions is well below their share of the population (Adams 2004; Morales 2008). Studies outside of Cuba have also pointed to the increased experiences of discrimination that middle and upper class blacks experience as they move up the social and economic ladder to find that these spaces are dominated by whites (Hochschild 1995; Lewis et al 2004; Caldwell 2007). Thus, I would expect for significant relationships to show that experiences with discrimination are more likely for males, younger Cubans and those in

higher educational and occupational levels. My first hypothesis reflects these expected differences:

H1: Experiences of discrimination are more likely to occur among a) young b) male Cubans and those in c) higher educational and d) occupational levels.

As shown in Table 8, there is in fact a significant relationship between experiences of discrimination and gender, where males are 2 and one half times more likely to report an experience. Within the total sample, 58% of males experienced discrimination while only 33% of females reported such an experience. There was no relationship found between discrimination and the three other variables, age, occupation and schooling. The survey results showed that experiences were almost equally distributed among all levels of these three variables. The data thus confirm my expectation regarding gender but do not show a higher incidence of discrimination for younger blacks or those with a higher education level. This suggests that more research would have to be done to differentiate what kinds of discrimination certain demographics are experiencing to see if there is indeed more profiling of younger males by the part of police or if those with higher levels of education in professional occupations are more likely to experience job discrimination.

### *Black consciousness and Discrimination*

On the role of perceived discrimination and racial identity, while some find that experiences with discrimination strengthen group identity, others have found that the reverse is true, perceptions of discrimination are higher when a person identifies strongly with their racial group (Sellers 1998). Sellers et al find suggest that there is probably a cyclical relationship in the United States where both can be true. I designed my model with the



argument that experiences shape identity, so that those in Cuba that have direct experiences with discrimination are more likely to have high levels of racial consciousness and group identity. While I do not discount the reverse, those that have higher levels of racial consciousness are more likely to be aware of racial discrimination, the model focuses on discrimination as the independent variable because such an of societal changes that made experiences with discrimination more common in Cuba, a context that is much different than the United States. The increased experience of discrimination that came with the Special Period as well as the increased saliency of race due to economic reforms, created a dialogue on race that changed the way that people view race. The new importance of blackness in people's daily lives and observances challenged the rhetoric in a way that had not happened in the previous decades of the revolution and produced new ways of perceiving race among blacks.

As a preliminary test, I have used two questions to analyze racial consciousness and group identity. The questions read: 1) Black people should be aware of racism in our society; 2) The difficulties that blacks experience because of racism affect me as an individual as well and 3) Being black is more important to me than being Cuban and 4) Socially, blacks should organize. The nature of the questions do not allow for the construction of a scale, as they test different components of black consciousness and would not correlate as a measure together. In other words, while there may be a significant number of black Cubans who feel that blacks should be aware of the racism in their country, few would place their black identity in front of their Cuban identity. Both are measures of black consciousness, but in different ways, or different levels. This phenomenon is due to the

workings of the racial democracy ideology and the revolution in creating a single unifying identity, Cubanness, that overrides any racial affiliations.

The relationship between discrimination and group consciousness was examined using multinomial logistic regression. I was not able to use ordinal logistic regression on this analysis because the proportional odds assumption that goes with using ordinal logistic regression did not hold. As shown in the previous section, the tests of group consciousness have positive results. In the analysis of racial consciousness and group identity, the survey showed that 58.66% of the sample felt that racism against blacks in general affects them as individuals (see Table 2). We can glean from this result that not only are blacks conscious of racism affecting their racial group, but that a majority of the respondents show solidarity with other blacks as well. Respondents also displayed significant levels of consciousness in the results for question 2 where 79.25% of the sample answered that they strongly agree or agree with the statement, “Black people should be aware of racism in our society.” A respondent being personally affected by negative treatment of their racial group suggests a higher level of consciousness than just displaying awareness of such treatment, however both measures are indicative of black attitudes towards anti-black racism. Both results show a majority of blacks in the sample possess clear feelings of black consciousness and solidarity because of racist treatment against their group.

I expect that there will be a relationship between an individual’s racial consciousness or sense of racial group identity and having an experience of discrimination as these variables should reinforce each other. To test whether an experience with discrimination is correlated to racial consciousness I will explore the following:

H2: There is a positive relationship between experiences of discrimination and feelings of group identity.

I expect to find that blacks do in fact feel connected to other blacks because of a common experience of racism and the distinct reality that they live in comparison to whites. The visibility of racism after the economic crisis should reinforce this perception of different social realities due to the increase in racism in Cuba. Regardless of the number of people that display the different levels of consciousness that I have listed through the four questions, I expect to find that all four will have some significance when analyzed with an experience of discrimination. In other words, although there is a low percentage of Cubans that place their racial identity before their national identity, I still expect to find that an experience with discrimination has a significant relationship to this strong level of group consciousness. My hypothesis, as argued above, should show that there is indeed a relationship between an experience of discrimination and strong group identity on multiple levels.

In order to analyze the question, “Blacks should be aware of the racism in this society” cross tabulations are shown in Table 9. The relationship between discrimination and the question, “blacks should be aware of racism in this society” indicates significance ( $p=0.00$ ) in that 91% of those that experienced discrimination either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. All but 4 of the respondents that disagreed had no experience with discrimination. While the majority of the sample agreed with the statement that blacks should be aware of the racism in Cuban society, there is a clear and statistically significant pattern indicating a relationship with discrimination and the importance of awareness of racism.

Multinomial logistic regressions were done to analyze the three stronger measures of group identity, 1) The difficulties that blacks encounter because of racism affect me as an individual as well; 2) Being black is more important to me than being Cuban; and 3) Socially, blacks should organize. The survey results examining the relationship between the first question and an experience with discrimination are significant. Table 01 shows that an experience with discrimination increases the likelihood of agreeing with the statement, “the difficulties that blacks encounter because of racism affect me personally as well.” Respondents that had an experience with discrimination are 4.90 times more likely to strongly agree with the statement and are 3.80 times more likely to agree with the statement than those with no experience with discrimination. Level of education also shows significance with those that have a high school education or some college are more likely to strongly agree or agree with the statement than those who do not have a high school diploma. Other control variables do not seem to be driving the results: occupation, gender and age all show to be insignificant, with the exception of one age group (those in the category of 35-50 years of age) more likely to choose neutral. These results suggest that a personal experience with discrimination is connected to a sense that other blacks are affected by similar realities. In addition to that awareness, what happens to individual blacks with such an experience is joined by a sense of group identity such that they consider what happens to the group as a whole as having an effect on them as individuals.

The second question, “Being black is more important to me than being Cuban” when regressed with an experience with discrimination gives results that are insignificant. The bivariate relationship between these two variables does hold and we can thus determine that the relationship is significant because the controls in the regression analysis are not

significant. As seen in Table 11, 31.0% of those who answered no to an experience of discrimination also placed their national identity before their racial identity. Of those that did have an experience with discrimination, only 21% placed their nationality above their racial identity. Thus the data show the common experience of discrimination to be a factor in an individual's sense of national vs. racial group identity.

For the final question, the relationship between an experience with discrimination and whether blacks should organize was analyzed with logistic multinomial regression analysis. The results were insignificant and thus, contrary to expectations, the desire to organize based on race does not seem to have any relationship to whether a person has experienced discrimination or not. The bivariate relationship was insignificant as well.

### *Discussion*

Following the Special Period, the Cuban government changed their rhetoric regarding racism slightly, acknowledging that there may be some vestiges of racism left over from pre-revolutionary times that they have not been able to eradicate. In 2000 Fidel Castro, in a speech at the Riverside church in Harlem, admitted that there was a correlation between descendants of slaves that lived in the poorest areas following abolition to their descendants today living in similar conditions. Legacies from the pre-revolutionary era and individual attitudes among some white Cubans continue to be the only concession that the government is willing to make regarding the presence of racism in contemporary Cuba. If the government is either correct, or successful in masking the presence of discrimination outside of individual, errant attitudes, then we should find few respondents that report having experienced racism. Moreover, respondents should attribute any experience with

discrimination to individual attitudes or some legacy of prerevolutionary times such as housing or quality of life in poorer neighborhoods.

The chapter shows that racial democracy has sway over the majority and influences racial attitudes significantly. For respondents, race bears little meaning in their social relations and despite evidence that suggests otherwise, a large majority of those surveyed feel that they are equally represented relative to whites in the history and image of the nation. This is particularly revealing considering the relative youth and higher level of education within this sample. As the survey showed, there are many blacks who attribute discrimination only to the attitudes of a few and do not possess feelings of racial group identity with other blacks. Moreover, respondents do not as a majority place their racial identity before their national identity. The overwhelming tendency to feel Cuban is more important than being black (53% vs. 27% with 20% neutral) evidences the influence of racial ideology in Cuba over identity formation. Racial ideology then, has succeeded in reinforcing national identity over racial identity so that for blacks, nation trumps race. The section on racial perception shows the complexities of ideological influence on blacks as well. While relationships are seen to be color-blind by a large majority of respondents, they also recognize that race is a consideration for whites in their relationships with blacks. Thus there are clear contradictions in how race is perceived to affect personal relationships where the presence of racism is recognized among individuals alongside a general perception of racial harmony.

There is evidence in the sample that a percentage of blacks do regard racial identity as most important in their lives. Racial difference determines modes of access and influences everyday social interactions, creating a space for black consciousness. What it means to be

black in Cuba has changed during the last few decades, transforming for many individuals conceptions of identity and producing consciousness. Through responses about experiences with discrimination, my research shows that while blacks continue to be victims of harassment by the police, while they continue to be shunned from jobs in the lucrative emerging sector, and while there are significantly low levels of black representation in high positions both within the government and throughout different employment sectors, they see their race as an impediment to their own individual opportunity and advancement. The importance of how Cuban society has changed for blacks following the economic crisis cannot be understated. There is limited data to test levels of consciousness prior to the Special Period, but my interviews, conversations and observations with blacks suggest that the meaning of race, and in turn identity and consciousness, has indeed increased during the last two decades creating a common experience of blackness in Cuba.

Despite the power and attractiveness of the racial harmony rhetoric, racial inequalities and discrimination continue to adversely affect the black reality in Cuba. As the data show, discrimination was not only about isolated incidents with individuals, but also about broader issues related to employment and to the state. Employment discrimination, systematic targeting of blacks by the police as well as exclusion from government positions and media outlets are not only prevalent, but a significant minority of blacks surveyed displayed a clear cognizance of their existence despite dominant racial democracy ideology and associated nationalist rhetoric. The ideology of racial democracy has not been debunked by the special period; rather, based on this data, I would argue that its legitimacy has been challenged by the part of society that identifies its fallacies.

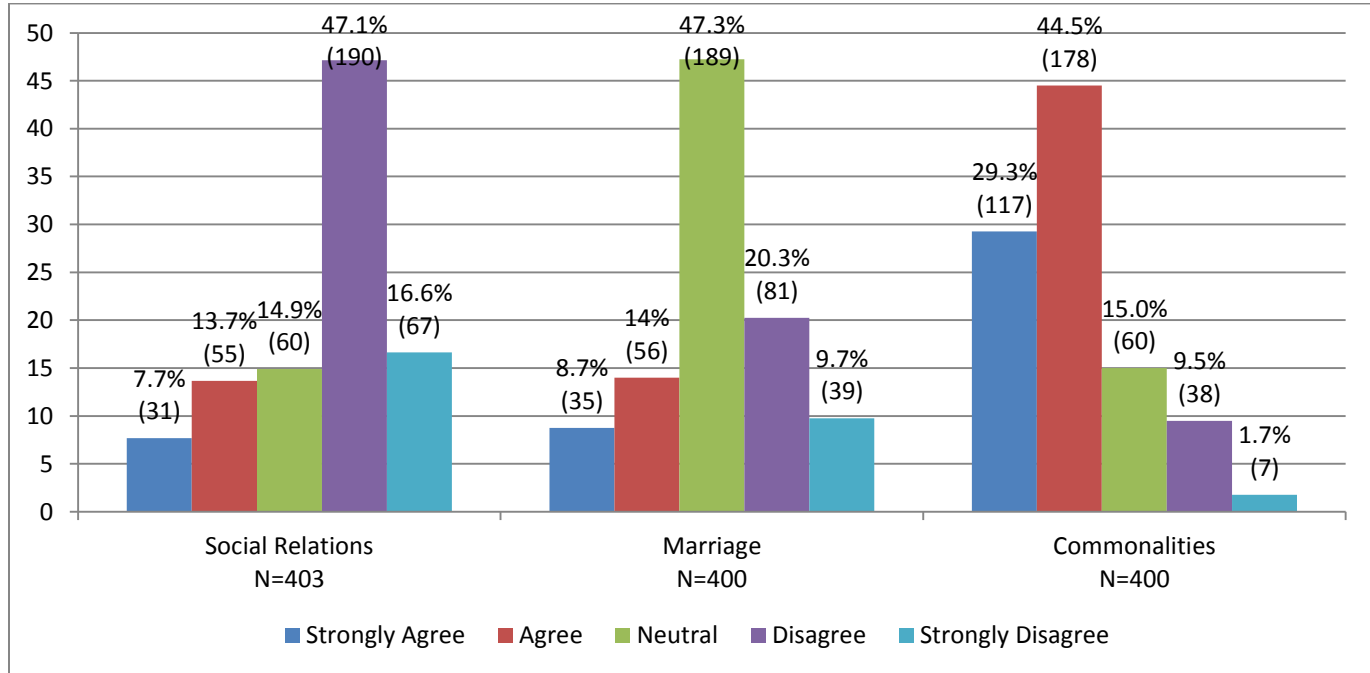
Respondents that were surveyed, as seen in the methodological appendix, represent on-balance, a somewhat younger and more educated segment of the Cuban population. Thus, the survey disproportionately captures Cubans that were born after the revolution and those that are under 35 years of age and thus, grew up during the Special Period. The exposure to the revolution of this younger cohort has been a much different one than those over 35. One would expect that their vision of revolution would also differ due to the economic crisis, the increase in inequalities and the economic difficulties that Cubans experience due to the dual currency. Despite this difference, there is still a large majority of the sample that holds national identity before racial identity and that sees themselves as equal participants in the revolution and as equally represented by the nation. Thus, revolutionary ideology regarding race is still powerful among the younger population.

In sum, there are clear contradictions in how blacks view race and politics that are driven by the differences in ideology and reality. Thus the chapter shows that ideology can be challenged and embraced simultaneously and in the case of Cuba, racial consciousness cannot be defined in dichotomous terms. There are many gray areas where racial democracy is infused into racial attitudes producing distinct representations of consciousness and solidarity.



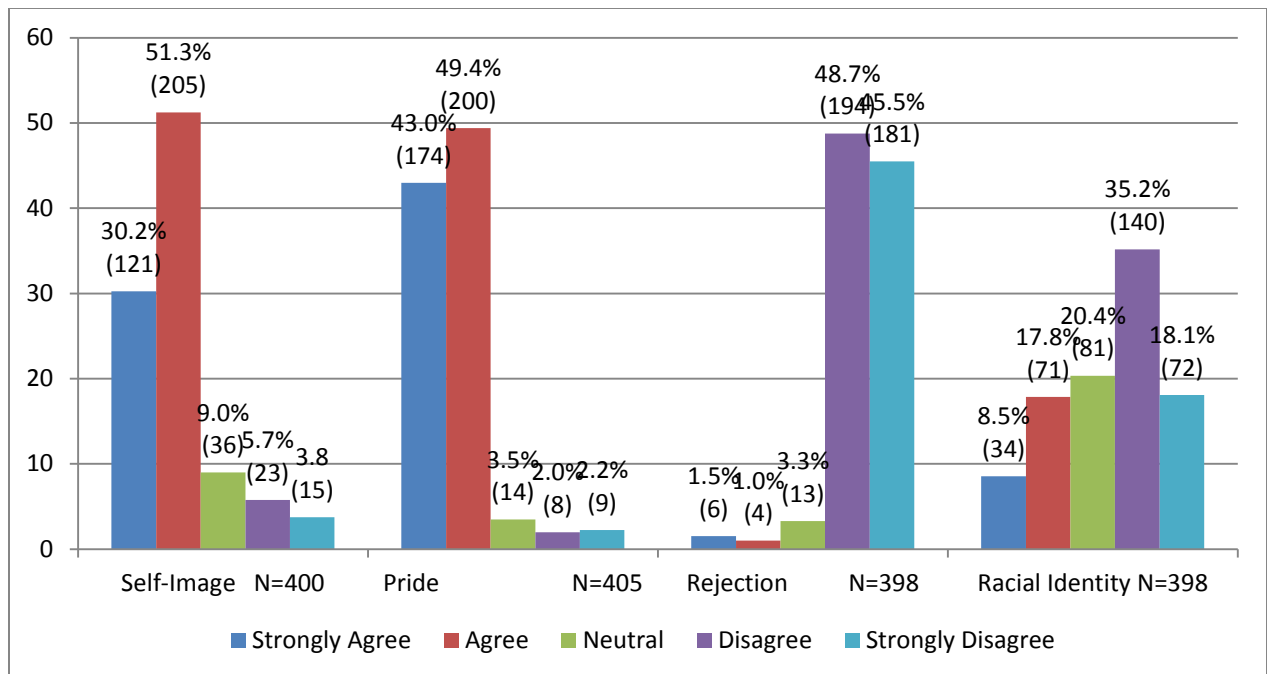
## Tables and Figures

Table 1. Social Relations



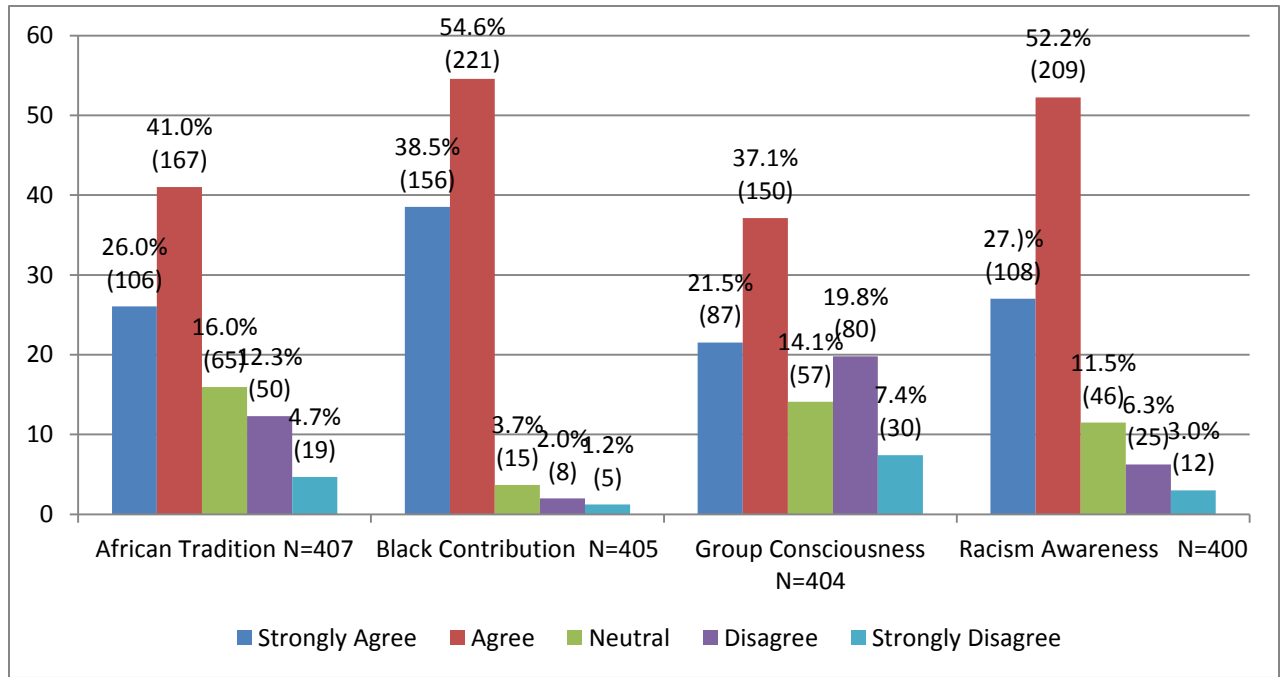
Note: Social Relations: the question reads, “My social relations have a lot do to with the fact that I am black.”  
 Marriage: the question reads, “It would be beneficial for blacks to marry whites.” Commonalities: the question reads, “Blacks and whites have more commonalities than differences.”

Table 2. Self-Identification



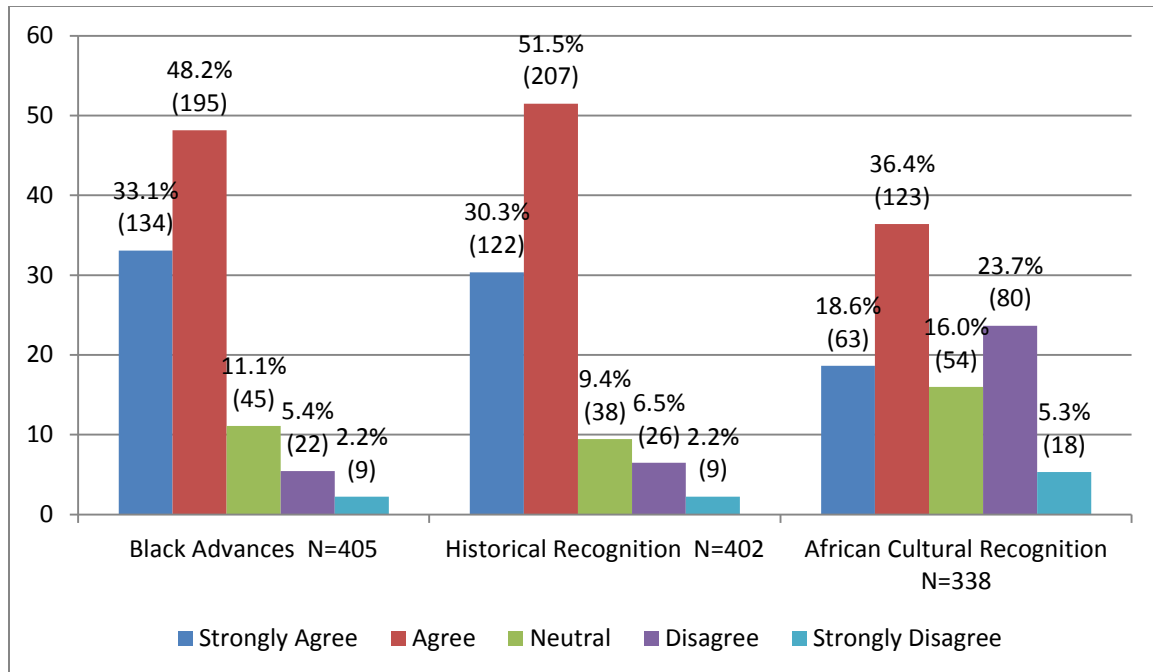
Note: Self Image: the question reads, “Being black is an important part of my self-image. Pride: the question reads, “I am proud to be black.” Rejection: the question reads, I reject the fact that I am black.” Racial Identity: the question reads, “Being black is more important to me than being Cuban.”

Table 3. Racial Significance

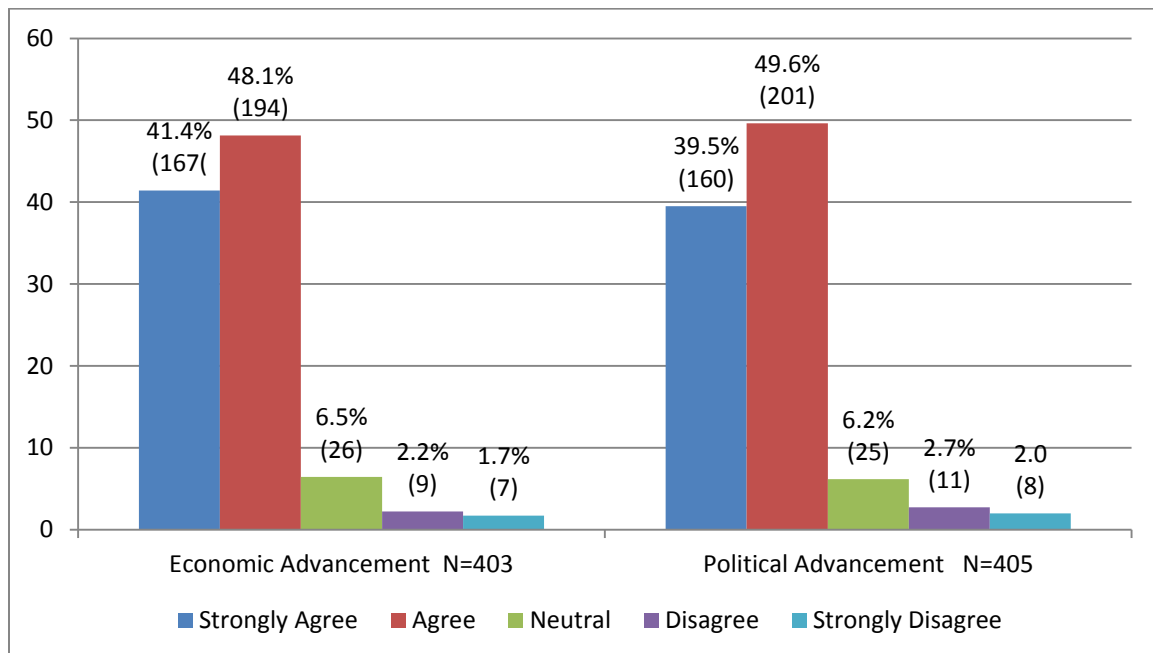


Note: African Tradition: “It is very important to me to teach my children the african cultural and spiritual heritage.” Black Contribution: “For us (blacks) it is very important to know the role that blacks have played in the history of our country.” Group Consciousness: “The difficulties that blacks encounter because of racism affect me as an individual as well.” Racism Awareness: “Blacks should be aware of racism in Cuban society.”

Table4. Representation

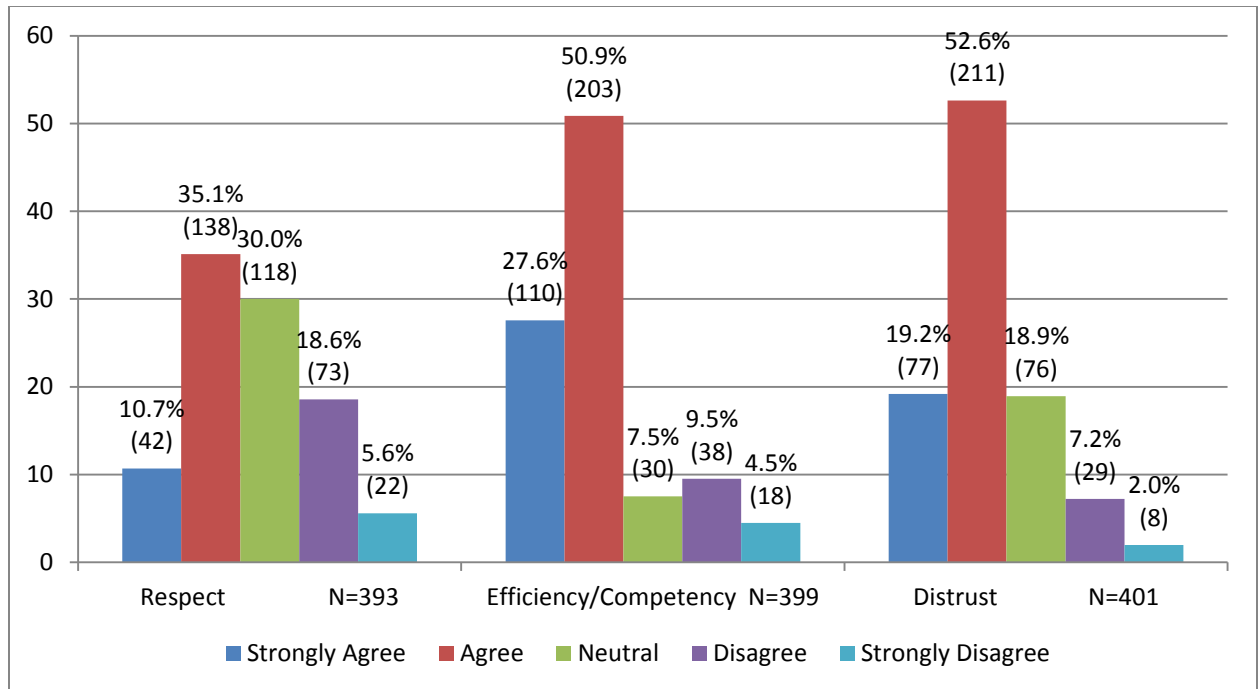


Note: Black Advances: “We, blacks have made notable advances.” Historical Recognition: “We (blacks) are recognized as an important part of the culture and history of the country.” African Cultural Recognition: “The African and Afro-Cuban ethical and cultural values have not been fully recognized by our society.”



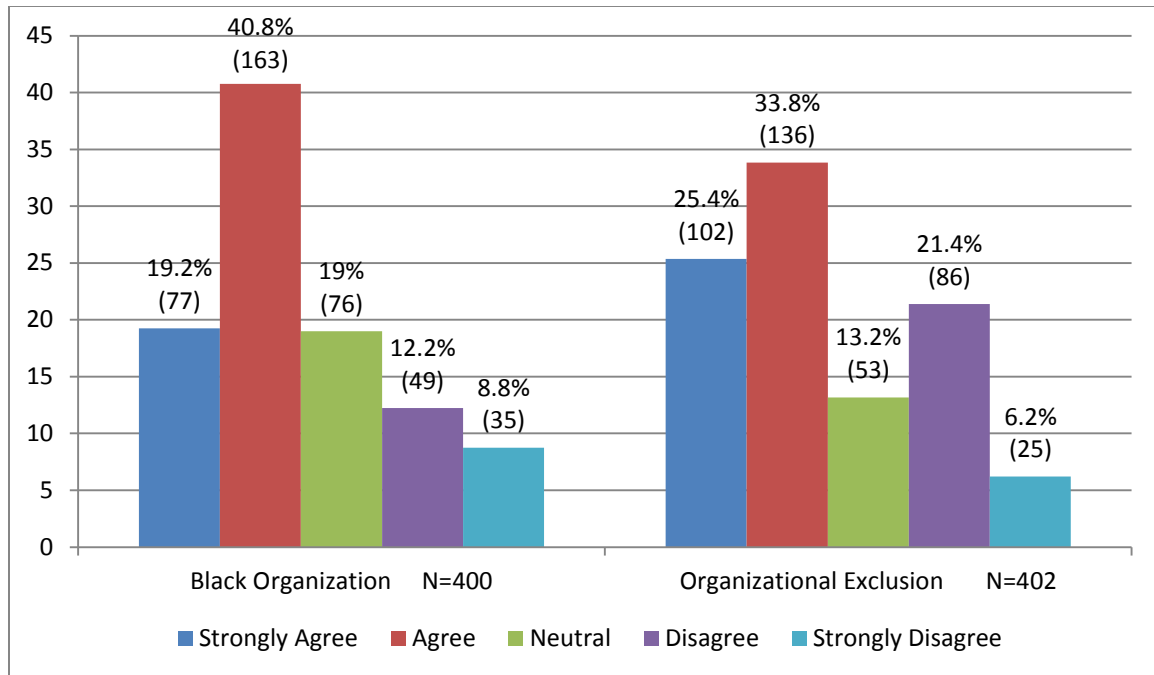
Note: Economic Advancement: “Blacks should advance more and more in order to gain access and be visible in the different social and economic levels of the country. Political Advancement:” Black representation in different levels of politics in this country is important.”

Table 5. Racial Perception



Note: Respect: Blacks are respected by others.” Efficiency/Competency: “Many do not consider blacks to be as efficient as whites.” Distrust: “Many white people distrust or are suspicious in their relationships with blacks.”

Table 6. Organization



Note: Black Organization: “Socially, blacks should organize.” Organizational Exclusion: “Black people in support of a black organization would be just as racist as whites that exclude blacks.”

Table 7. *Relationship between racial organizing and perceptions of a black organization*

<b>Black organizations are racist</b>	<b>Blacks should organize</b>					<b>Total</b>
	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	
Strongly Agree	5.3% (23)	2.3% (9)	3.8% (15)	4.5% (18)	3.0% (12)	19.5% (77)
Agree	4.3% (17)	19.0% (75)	4.5% (18)	10.9% (43)	2.0% (8)	40.8% (161)
Neutral	6.6% (26)	7.3% (29)	3.0% (12)	1.5% (6)	0.0% (0)	18.5% (73)
Disagree	2.8% (11)	4.3% (17)	1.3% (5)	3.3% (13)	0.8% (3)	12.4% (49)
Strongly Disagree	5.3% (21)	1.0% (4)	0.8% (3)	1.3% (5)	0.5% (2)	8.8% 35
Total	24.8% (98)	33.9% (134)	13.4% (53)	21.5% (85)	6.3% (25)	100.0% (395)

Pearson chi2(16) = 89.0664 p = 0.00

Table 8. *The Determinants of Experience with Discrimination*

	Variables	Odds Ratios
1	Gender	2.65***
	Age	1.07
	Education	1.16
	Occupation	1.04

\*\*\* =  $p < .001$       N= 341

Note: Entries are odds ratios from a logistic regression on a dichotomous variable indicating experience/no experience with discrimination. A value of 1.00 mean there is no predicted difference based on the independent variable. The gender difference of 2.67 means that men are that much more likely to experience discrimination than women.



Table 9. *Racial consciousness and experience with discrimination*

Blacks should be aware of racism in Cuban society	Experience with Discrimination	
	Yes	No
Strongly Agree	37.7% (65)	18.0% (38)
Agree	52.3% (90)	53.5% (113)
Neutral	6.4% (11)	14.7% (31)
Disagree	2.3% (4)	9.5% (20)
Strongly Disagree	1.3% (2)	4.3% (9)
Total	100% (172)	100% (211)

Pearson  $\chi^2(4) = 30.68$ ;  $p = 0.00$ ;  $N=383$

Table 10. *Relationship between an experience with discrimination and group consciousness*

Group Consciousness	SA/SD	A/SD	N/SD	D/SD	
Discrimination	4.90***	3.82**	1.40	0.55	
High School	7.91**	5.43**	12.39	3.84	
Some College	6.46**	4.13*	4.43	2.10	
College Grad	5.60*	2.85	8.60**	1.57	
Occupation	0.54	0.43	0.65	0.39	
Gender	1.40	1.95	1.18	1.12	
Age Group 2	1.14	0.60	0.63	0.45	
Age Group 3	0.34	0.36	0.13*	0.23	
Age Group 4	1.09	0.85	0.65	0.79	

Note: Entries are odds ratios from a multinomial logistic regression on a categorical variable with responses of strongly agree (SA), agree (A), neutral (N), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD); strongly disagree is the base category. The measure of group consciousness reads, “The difficulties that blacks encounter because of racism affect me as an individual as well.” A value of 1.00 indicates there is no predicted difference based on the independent variable. The first significant significant coefficient under the SA/SD column, for example, may be interpreted to mean that those with an experience with discrimination are 4.90 times more likely to respond SA to the question than those that did not have an experience with discrimination. The dummy variables for age are as follows: age group 2 = ages 25-35; age group 3 = 36-50; age group 4 = 51+.

Model  $\chi^2$  (20) = 79.51\*\*\*

N= 335

\*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.10$

Table 11. *Relationship between experience with discrimination and group identity*

Being black is more important than being Cuban	Discrimination		Total
	Yes	No	
Strongly Agree	6.3% (24)	2.4% (9)	8.7% (33)
Agree	9.2% (35)	9.2% (35)	18.4% (70)
Neutral	8.1% (31)	12.9% (49)	21.0% (80)
Disagree	12.9% (49)	22.0% (84)	34.9% (133)
Strongly Disagree	8.1% (31)	8.9% (34)	17.1% (65)
Total	44.6% (170)	55.4% (211)	100.0% (381)
Pearson chi2(4) = 15.9903 p = 0.003			

## CHAPTER 4

### VOICES ON RACE, RACISM AND REPRESENTATION IN CUBA: INTERVIEW DATA

After entering a taxi cab near Santa Maria beach<sup>31</sup> in Havana, the taxi shut off and would not start, a common occurrence for a 1950s Chevrolet. The driver, who was white, called over his friend, who was mulatto to take a look at the car for him quickly so that he would not lose the fare. As he was fixing the car, the driver turned around to me and said, “You see? Here the white people drive the cars and the mulattoes fix them.” The driver was very surprised by my reaction of offense to the comment and insisted that it was only a joke. The experience points to one of the components of racial commonsense that operates in Cuba. The absence of any dialogue or examination of racism allows for racist remarks to be considered trivial or even humorous. Comments with discriminatory intent are brushed off as harmless and a anti-black discourse and attitudes are expressed without being challenged.

The previous chapter provided statistical evidence that a significant proportion of black respondents surveyed had an experience with discrimination and also displayed levels of racial consciousness. In addition, the survey found that social relations were not perceived by blacks to have a significant connection to race. Despite this finding, the majority of those

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<sup>31</sup> This beach is particularly for tourists in Cuba. Being at the beach and taking a taxi both were signals that it was likely I lived outside of Cuba.

sampled did point to anti-black attitudes among whites. This chapter has two goals: 1) to highlight both the strength of racial democracy ideology as well as how it affects racial attitudes and 2) to highlight ways in which discrimination is experienced by blacks across all social sectors in Cuba in ways that indicate it is a more deep-seated problem than recognized by official ideology. The chapter provides further evidence for the strength of racial democracy ideology in Cuba as well as the ability of some limited sectors, particularly nonwhites, to challenge the ideology.

The analysis in this chapter is based on 42 in-depth interviews conducted in Havana during 2008 and 2009. Interviews were conducted with twenty-one blacks, eleven mulattoes and ten whites. Twelve of the black interviewees also filled out the survey analyzed in the previous chapter. Interviews were conducted by myself only and ranged in length from twenty minutes to two hours. The interviewees ranged in age from 19 to 83 and interviews were conducted in various neighborhoods in Havana differing in socioeconomic levels. Despite the sensitivity of the subject of race, most of my interviewees spoke about the topic with surprising candor. My position as both an American and a *mulata* allowed me to gain interesting insight into people's racial attitudes. As an American, I was perceived as being outside of Cuban racial categorizations and as a person of mixed race, I was able to navigate racial lines in a way that made my white interviewees feel comfortable expressing their views of blacks and blacks were similarly comfortable expressing their attitudes regarding whites. While various studies on the race of the interviewer have pointed to the limitations of blacks interviewing whites and vice versa (Finkel et al 1991; Davis 1997), there haven't been similar studies on the effects of being a foreigner or a member of a mixed race category in a country that does not have a dichotomous racial classification scheme. In my experience,

being of mixed race did not place me in the black or white category and thus did not limit people from expressing their candid views about these two groups. Interestingly, as a foreigner I would often be considered by Cubans to be outside of racial meanings on the island which also seemed to allow people to be candid about race as well.

Although the survey data in the previous chapter examined black identity on its own, these in-depth interviews were conducted by me with Cubans of all races. The interviews are used to examine racial attitudes and discuss how race and racial ideology influence whites, blacks and mulattoes. The interviews serve as a complement to the survey data in that they provide a more nuanced view of how people view race and they also serve to explain more in detail areas that the survey instruments cannot cover. This is not a random sample in a conventional sense, though on occasion I provide aggregated replies or broad trends in the interviews to reinforce the evidence provided by the survey data in the previous chapter. While the questions in the survey can give insight into questions of black identity and consciousness, the interviews are able to address the meanings, thoughts and reasons for many of the survey results. In addition, it is necessary to understand how members of different races view the same topics and whether perceptions may differ according to race. Finally, interviews are able to make up for some of the limitations that arise from survey respondents answering what may be socially preferable answers as opposed to their true positions on racial matters. In one of my interviews for example, an interviewer shared that she had no problem socially mixing with nonwhite Cubans and had many friends who were black. As the interview progressed, she began to tell a story that indicated she had racist views of blacks. Through people's stories, opinions and feelings we can get a far more

comprehensive idea of what their racial attitudes are than the answers given on a questionnaire.

My argument on the strength of the dominant racial ideology in Cuba matches my expectations regarding my interview data. I expect that racial democracy will have an influence on racial attitudes among Cubans of all races, albeit in different degrees. Acknowledgement and definitions of racism should differ among racial groups with whites displaying less recognition of racism and blacks, due to experience, should display a higher recognition of racism in Cuba. I also expect blacks to be more likely to characterize racism as structural in addition to attitudinal. If blacks have a higher recognition of racism and have experienced racism in their lives, they should be more likely to recognize that racism affects black opportunity and access, rather than only being present in their personal relationships.

This chapter seeks to examine racial ideology in Cuba and the relationship between ideology and racial common sense. Racial ideology does not influence each person's commonsense notions of race in the same ways, but it indeed has an effect on each individual to some degree. In this chapter I argue that we can identify certain patterns that correlate with views and characterizations of racism in Cuba. The racial category of respondents and their political ideology strongly influence the way that they think and talk about race. Although the majority of respondents described racism as present in individuals rather than the country's structure and institutions, there was a difference between the way blacks and whites<sup>32</sup> talk about racism.

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<sup>32</sup> Mulattoes often fall in the middle where some have views similar to whites and some have views closer to blacks.

The chapter is divided into eight sections: characterization of racism, racial attitudes, social relations, black consciousness, experience with discrimination, tourism, representation and organization. The first four sections examine the effect of racial democracy and revolutionary ideology on perceptions of racism and racial attitudes. The next three, experience with discrimination, tourism and representation examine how racism operates in Cuba today. I highlight the most visible areas of racist practices in Cuba: tourism, racial profiling by the police, the media, and the government to emphasize the increased visibility of racism due to the introduction of tourism, but the continued pattern of black invisibility in other areas such as the media and the government. Finally, the last section, organization, discusses Cubans' perceptions of organizing on the basis of race as a way to combat racism. The next section discusses how race and racism are characterized in Cuba and how ideology influences these characterizations.

### *Characterization of Racism*

The ways in which Cubans characterize racism in Cuba depend on their political attitudes, their own experiences and most importantly, the work of ideology. Ideology in Cuba has created a cultural and political norm of anti-racism that motivates people's expression regarding race and racism in Cuba. The ideal of being non-racist and living in a country that is non-racist is promoted specifically by the revolutionary government since its inception and has a significant influence on how people view and talk about race. Responses regarding race relations in Cuba often begin by stating there is no racism, that the situation is improving, or that it is latent and not as overt as it was before the revolution. Yet when



people are probed further, often you will find that these same people can point to numerous examples of a racist society and racial inequality.

The silence regarding race in Cuba prevents, among many, an honest and careful look at racism and the various ways that it operates on the island. This does not discount that there are also Cubans who recognize the role of race, think about it, analyze and express views that point to the contradiction between ideology and experience. Yet for some, the revolution has prevented racial analysis and in doing that, has created apathy about the presence of racism in Cuba. One 29-year old black musician reflected on his own apathy on the matter until he became more self-conscious about the issue:

It didn't matter to me because I knew nothing about it. There is an ignorance in Cuba about the racial issue. If you are unaware, you are unable to make a critique. I was not aware of many experiences with racism with other people because I ignored a lot of things. And the way that we are educated here, these things are normal: racist jokes, comments, and actions that were normal and common to me even though they were against me and many black people in Cuba. But if you don't recognize it then you can't confront it. No one ever told me that when someone tells you this, they are being racist against you, because of this and that, so don't laugh. And because no one ever tells black people these things here in Cuba, we assimilate and we accept it and we laugh and say, 'how funny.' The same racist phrases that *we* use, then they reproduce themselves because they are passed on generation to generation and we pass them onto our kids, our friends. For example, 'don't marry a black person because you don't want to comb naps.' These are things that keep reproducing because there's no one to stop you.

Comments such as the one that I experienced in the taxi are examples of such a norm.

Moreover, as will be seen throughout the chapter, the lack of attention that the issue has received in Cuba leads many to deny the existence of racism, even as they give clear examples of it. Ideology has thus trivialized racism, and often the same treatment can be found in people's personal views.

As part of this trivialization, throughout Latin America, and in Cuba in particular, the term “racism” is often left out of the lexicon of government speeches and instead replaced with the term “prejudice.” In this way, the issue is relegated only to individuals who harbor negative ideas about blacks, rather than considering it as a systemic problem that affects black advancement in addition to blacks’ personal relationships. A black activist shared her frustration with terminology:

How can twenty years pass since the beginning of the Special Period and you (the government) are still saying that there is prejudice but no discrimination? They haven't even read any of the work that has been written on this topic. What is prejudice? We need to take this so-called prejudice and apply it to the institutions of power. If you arrive at the University of Havana and after 50 years of revolution 70% of the population is white, that is not prejudice.

In fact, though, her viewpoint was unusual. Many of my interviewees, congruent with racial democracy and socialist ideology, expressed as evidence of equality the presence of blacks at the university. One of my interviewees, a mulatto university student, expressed that at the University of Havana there are black and white professors alike and there are black, mulatto and white students in equal numbers. His characterization of racism downplayed its existence:

Interviewee: I’m not going to say that it doesn’t exist, but there is only a minority that is racist, and you hardly notice it. If people were to make racist comments they would look ridiculous. It just isn’t that much here. It shows up more with relationships, that’s where it shows up a little bit. But in employment it doesn’t show up, not like in a relationship with a daughter and her boyfriend. That’s where racism shows up a little bit in Cuba.

Interviewer: Have you had an experience with racism?

Interviewee: Yes, that definitely. I have seen it, I don't have an experience, but I know people that have experienced racism. That, I have seen when people are waiting in lines, in restaurants, in tons of places, at Coppelia<sup>33</sup>, all of those places.

The student starts out initially trying to portray racism as something trivial within Cuban society. His use of phrases such as “a little bit” or “you hardly notice it” are in direct contradiction to his response when I ask about concrete experiences. At that point he describes discrimination as a common occurrence that is happening all of the time and in plain view. He followed the dominant ideological tendency to describe Cuba as non-racist or its citizens as non-racist where expressions of racism are unwelcome and foreign to most. When asked to talk about experiences however, he cited many, indicating that initial descriptions of racism in Cuba can often be automatic reactions that follow cultural norms, rather than actual observations and opinions.

Half of the sample of non-blacks, when asked about racism, assigned racist attitudes in Cuba to blacks rather than whites, claiming that blacks are in fact racist against their own group. If they acknowledged the presence of racism, these whites and mulattoes would say immediately after, it's the blacks that are racist. This excuse was used to describe blacks' self-rejection or their embrace of whiteness as superior. A 27-year old white male shared that his mother always taught him to never come home with anyone black, that whites should stay with whites and blacks should stay with blacks. He said that he had always followed her advice, but that was not as bad as some of the self-discrimination that he has seen among blacks. The unspoken message was, it's not that bad that I am racist if blacks are even racist against themselves. One interviewee, a 25-year old mulatto cook, said, yes there is racism in

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<sup>33</sup> Coppelia is a very popular ice cream parlor in the center of Havana.

Cuba, but it's *those* people (pointing to a black man standing close to us) that are most racist against themselves.

There were also instances of non-blacks who did not describe black rejection of other blacks, but instead suggested that historically blacks were racist against whites as well, when given a position of power. The practice of redirecting anti-black sentiment against blacks or discussing anti-white sentiment takes the attention away from whites and mulattoes and suggests that racism is present among all groups. In an interview with a 41 year old mulatto security guard, he shared that Antonio Maceo, the most celebrated (and one of the only celebrated) black heroes was, in fact, racist:

In the Cuban independence war, there is a story that Maceo was racist. He had his troop with people that were mulatto and black and the whites complained about Maceo's racism. And in Cuba that exists, it's natural. The white against the black, but the black against the whites also.

Interviewer: Well could we see the story of Maceo, assuming that it is true, from another angle? Could it be that during that time blacks and mulattoes did not have much opportunity to move up in the ranks and Maceo was giving nonwhites opportunities? Or that whites would not have tolerated being led by someone who was not white?

Interviewee: No, I don't think so. Blacks were free when they fought and didn't need any extra opportunities. The Cuban thinks that racism is only against blacks. They have this idea that racism is only regarding blacks. But racism comes from both sides. Black people also say, '*mira el blanquito ese*'<sup>34</sup> and they say it in a derogatory form. And that is done even today.

While there were interviewees that were inclined to say that hardly anyone is racist to trivialize the matter, there were also a few who would say that everyone is racist, both to trivialize it and to distance it from whites and mulattoes.

### *Individual Prejudice or Structural Racism?*

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<sup>34</sup> This phrase translated, says "look at that little white guy."

The fact that racism in Cuba is viewed predominantly as a problem among individuals, rather than as a structural problem has a strong tie to ideology. Cuban racial ideology suggests that racism is not something that is present within the system and thus, can largely be attributed to individuals. Any evidence of inequality beyond individual attitudes is a consequence of the presence of racism prior to the revolution. Among those interviewed, an overwhelming majority (29 of 41) characterized racism in Cuba to be primarily among individuals, three cited racism to be structural or systemic and ten thought that it was a combination of both. The three interviewees that viewed racism as systemic, were also the three interviewees that described themselves as being against the revolutionary government. Those that cited both structural racism and on an individual level were mixed in their views of the government, but were all black Cubans. All of the white interviewees expressed racism as being a consequence of individual prejudice and the mulatto respondents were mixed in their views. However, those that expressed views that were highly in favor of the revolution or were members of the communist party all chose the individual characterization for racism.

The tendency to cite racism as an individual phenomenon often did not correlate to the description of racism that interviewees gave following the initial question. Those that recognize the presence of racism, even structurally, still seemed to characterize it as something that can only be seen among individuals. The notion that lack of opportunity for blacks, employment discrimination and poor representation in high positions including the government did not always translate to structural discrimination for respondents. I asked respondents how they defined racism and if they viewed it as a phenomenon only among individual attitudes or as something systemic. A 30-year old black hair stylist said,

I see racism among people, not within the system. I never had an experience with racism but it's there. There are jobs that are for whites and jobs that are for blacks. For example in the stores you find blacks in few places. In the hotels, in all the places of higher rank and money there are whites only. Some white teachers also show preference to their white students. With respect to jobs, whites have more opportunities than blacks. At least here. At the good jobs whites also have a thing where they always help another white person. But blacks have a hard time helping another black person to get a position.

Government rhetoric that defines racism as a phenomenon that is associated with people and not structures leads many to define systemic racism as the existence of discriminatory laws. Several of my respondents pointed to the lack of discriminatory legislation as evidence that racism is attitudinal. As a consequence of racial democracy ideology and revolutionary rhetoric, in their view if opportunity is legislated to be equal, if there are no overtly racist laws, then logic follows that it is not the system itself which is racist. Even observations of what outside observers would consider examples of structural racism do not always lead to reproach of the government. A 35-year old accountant shared an opinion quite similar to the dominant racial ideology, although he claimed that the government was not completely open in their characterization of attitudinal racism.

The system doesn't advocate racism. Really. Now, I will say there are things from the past. Things that are not in public but everyone knows that they exist. And we are still struggling against that. The revolution has preached that it doesn't exist, that it can't exist, that it has ended. That is what they say to people. IT EXISTS. A feeling, that comes from before, very subtle and hidden that still prevails. It's very simple. I have never heard of a group of people getting into trouble and someone has said, 'they had to be white.' (Laughs.) NO! It's always, 'damn, they had to be black.'

This same interviewee goes on to say,

Interviewee: There is a lot more to be done. Here there are opportunities for everyone, but not really for everyone. In some cases yes, in some cases no. It's true that to get high up professionally, there are few blacks. However, when it comes to sports, we are favored. We are appreciated. In boxing for example, we are the good ones."

Interviewer: Why do blacks excel in sports and not other areas?

Interviewee: Sports are not on the same level as professional positions.

Interviewer: So then it's a question of power?

Interviewee: It's a question of power. Really. A university graduate in physical education is not the same as an economist or an engineer.

After thinking about my questions he begins to think about stereotypical positions that blacks are able to advance in as opposed to those that come with a measure of prestige and influence. Despite this realization, he does not attribute the lack of opportunity to the government. A major component of racial ideology in Cuba uses the example of the United States and their policies of Jim Crow from the past both to define racism and to locate it outside of Cuba's borders. Indeed, half of those I interviewed made some reference to the United States being the model of both structural and individual racism, whereas Cuba, with a more mixed population, did not suffer from that kind of racism. One young mulatto musician told me, "we have racism here in Cuba but it's a mild racism, not a violent racism like in the United States." Portrayals of events in the United States, such as race riots and previous segregationist policies and the over-all characterization of the United States as racist by the Cuban state media helps lead to a contrasting view of racism in Cuba as something that occurs, only among individuals and is not promoted by the state.

In an interview with a former president of a CDR<sup>35</sup> in Havana, she not only characterized discrimination as existing only if it was legislated by the state, but she discounted the role of individual prejudice as something that could cause any unrest in Cuba. She stated,

There is no official discrimination – that's a fact. But there are familial patterns that get transmitted from generation to generation. When I was the president of my CDR there was a woman who would not let her daughter play with another girl in the solar (housing tenement

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<sup>35</sup> CDR stands for Committee for the Defense of the Revolution which are local governmental organizations or committees which were created to encourage mass political participation. Each neighborhood has their own CDR.

in Havana) that they lived in because she was black. But it's not a social pattern. It's not anything that could produce a movement or struggle. Prejudices exist and we should work on that but it's not a social problem. My children don't see color, Afro-Cuban doesn't mean anything to them. They meet a person and they don't remember what color they are.

It is unclear whether, as a member of the Communist party and a former president of a CDR if this interviewee expressed these sentiments because she believed them, or if she wanted to portray a certain characterization of Cuba to someone from the United States. While she did acknowledge individual prejudice among some, she claimed that others have no perception of race. Her answers then, seem to be a justification to downplay racial prejudice. Another interviewee who was a recent university graduate expressed a similar sentiment regarding the absence of overt racist policy, but did look to the government to provide some sort of dialogue about the issue:

Racism escapes past the conception of the system if the system is established so that everyone has the same opportunities. But at the same time, when you put in a particular hotel a white manager with white friends which almost always is how managers acquire their personnel and control everything, racism is linked to that. They are part of the system but at the end what is produced is only a link, so the system is not producing any racism. Because within the system we all have the same rights. Yes, it's true that the system is a part of the reason that we do not discuss the issue, because we solved the problem a long time ago, that is one of the achievements of the revolution. In that sense the revolution has contributed to the fact that there is little discussion. The system is implicit in that because they don't make any concrete action in order to make the debate more open.

Those that defended the revolution throughout their interviews often pointed to the revolution's accomplishments in 1959 and did not attribute any remaining evidence of racism to the governments' actions or lack of action on the subject. The older generation, in particular, who saw the vast improvements that were made toward black advancement and equality of opportunity, often pointed to those changes when describing the presence of racism today. One 65 year old black doctor said,



When this revolution started, defending blacks, and when Fidel started, the houses that the rich left, the real rich people, were made into schools. Although racism exists in Cuba now, but much, much, much less! Here we have black doctors, black nurses, black professors, a lot of blacks in health care. The vice-president Lazo, is black, so black he's almost blue! He's *black*. There are two or three black members of government in Santiago de Cuba. There are black people inside the central committee of the Communist party and I feel proud of that. There are blacks, there are wonderful doctors...you can see there are whites and blacks.

Despite the majority of the sample that defined racism within the limits of people's attitudes, there were some that did attribute inequalities to society's structure. A black 66 year-old self-employed worker said,

Of course the system is racist. The country is racist if all of the bosses are white and all of the higher positions are for whites. There are very few blacks there, they are the minority. There is racism. Even Raul said that we have to put more blacks in these positions. It's there. If there were more blacks in government then that would change something. If they occupy those high posts it would change.

This particular interviewee was very adamant about his desire to leave Cuba and his disagreement with the government and its policies. He rejected most of the rhetoric that has been espoused by the government including that on race, which may have been part of the reason that he was able to speak frankly about the role of the government in maintaining racism in Cuba. Nonetheless, he did make a direct connection between lack of opportunity for blacks and systemic racism that others did not.

### *Racial Ideology and Political Ideology*

Cubans that support the ideology of the revolution also often support ideology on race. Many of those who spoke highly of the revolution highlighted the fact that the revolution eradicated racism.

Racism is according to how you see it. With the triumph of the revolution equality was established. But there is always latent racism that is maintained in magazines, in sayings, and it's present on television as well. But we are not as racist as the North-American.

A 65-year old psychologist, who expressed a staunch support for the revolution, shared the following opinion:

In my personal opinion let me tell you since the triumph of the revolution until now, things have changed 100%. What's more, the problem was so bad that we had black societies, white societies, mulatto societies. Today I think that if you go to the university you see a mass of blacks, there are a lot of black doctors, black officials. Today me, *me*, maybe someone else has a problem, but I have no problem. I don't feel discriminated against, I can enter Habana Libre<sup>36</sup>. Maybe I can't enjoy a series of things because I don't have Cuban Convertibles<sup>37</sup> but no one can tell me that I can't come in. Maybe what is missing is that blacks progress more, because to enter into school there is no difference. If someone wants to be an engineer, they just have to study. We have the same opportunities.

Here the problem of access into certain spaces is attributed to economic and cultural issues, and not race. The lack of overt policies that would exclude blacks leads to an understanding that racism no longer exists. Other respondents explained that the lack of racism is specific to Cuba because of the revolution and the society that it created. As the 35-year old black male accountant expressed, the revolution has created solidarity that transcends racism in ways that other countries have not been able to accomplish, a sentiment that the government has espoused throughout the life of the revolution.

I think that above all, the Cuban has a trait of feeling, solidarity, union. It's a matter of Cubanness. Since always. That feeling, well it has to do with the revolution. The revolution triumphed and people started to understand that racism is an injustice. That is very real. I think we have less racism than other countries because of that. That's how I see it. We are a bit better with this issue.

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<sup>36</sup> Habana Libre is one of the more famous hotels in Havana and with its central location and shopping complex, it is visited by many Cubans and tourists alike. My interviews highlighted quite a few instances where blacks were either barred from entrance or given a hard time at the door in order to get in. This particular interviewee, because of his age and conservative dress has probably not had any problem entering hotels in Cuba. Those that are targeted are often younger black males and/or those that are dressed in a non-professional way.

<sup>37</sup> Cuban Convertibles or CUC, is the hard currency in Cuba replacing U.S. dollars in 2004.

Despite these common characterizations downplaying racism by revolutionary supporters, there were some I interviewed that connected the revolution's racial ideology to the problem. Those that work on the subject of racism in particular, have much different ways of seeing and interpreting the problem. A young black male who actively works to increase black consciousness talked about the contradiction between revolutionary ideals of unity and solidarity and awareness of racism.

The racial issue in Cuba has *never* caused a problem. Because the people have not complained. They are ignorant of it. The black person has an invisible bill (*billete invisible*) and they don't know that they are enslaved! They don't know who the master is either. Am I imprisoned or aren't I? Am I a slave or aren't I? The slave knew he was a slave. And he knew who was keeping him a slave. When the revolution came into power and said we are all equal, could black people see who was racist or not? They couldn't see it. In the United States you *knew* who the enemy was – the white man. But here, no. You get stuck in the strategy of unity. The responsibility does not only lie with the government, there is a great responsibility among those that suffer. You can't let someone step on you, you have to fight against it. And the black Cuban is waiting for the other guy to do it, or they don't even realize.

Thus the emphasis on unity in fact maintains racism because it keeps people locked in a false consciousness. While the interviewee doesn't say that racial ideology in Cuba is a racist one, he does point to the ways in which it can perpetuate the problem of inequality by keeping people in the dark about the issue.

The treatment of race by the government was clear in many of the interviews with individuals that were connected to the government. They espoused elements of the dominant ideology giving similar views of race in Cuba, declaring that race is irrelevant in Cuba because people do not notice difference. In an interview with a white member of the Cuban government, I asked how she views racial issues in Cuba. She talked about race as irrelevant in Cuba and dismissed any cultural connections that blacks may have with Africa due to racial mixing.

Afro-Cuban does not exist here because we have nothing from Africa. There is no connection with Africa, not in the music, or the culture, or anything. That is not part of our history. We have all mixed. That's why Color Cubano<sup>38</sup> does not interest us, because we do not see skin color. Skin color here does not matter. They got Afro-Cuban from the African Americans. There is a tendency to view the Cuban reality with a North American eye. But we don't have the same problems. A black male athlete is just as good looking as a blond woman with blue eyes. Just go out into the street and you see a white man with a black woman or a black man with a white woman everywhere. We don't have any kind of differences between us. There is a saying here that says, '*el que no tiene de Congo tiene de Carabali*'<sup>39</sup>. We have a mix and there is really no pure black person. That doesn't exist here. What we have are cultural differences, cultural discriminations but not social or racial discriminations. For example in black relationships, it's custom for the man to pat the woman on the butt. White people don't do that, they don't understand it. Those are cultural differences.

Her discussion of race relations in Cuba draws heavily from the ideology of *mestizaje*, which suggests that racial mixing erases the saliency of race. If everyone is mixed to some degree, race becomes insignificant because there is no way to tell who is black and who is white.

Alongside the critique of Cubans not seeing color however, she makes reference to black and white physical difference when talking about interracial relationships and then even suggests that there are cultural differences between blacks and whites. Her example shows that rather than cultural differences, she is pointing to behavior among blacks that whites would never engage in. She makes references to black stereotypes by discussing black male athletes and what she perceives as a black cultural tendency to make inappropriate gestures with their mate, a practice that she insists white people do not understand. What her central point is, despite her clear recognition of racial difference, is that the government does not want to give race any societal significance, much less so an organization like Color Cubano which advocates open dialogue regarding racism and black opportunity. Although Color Cubano

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<sup>38</sup> The interviewee referred to the organization, Color Cubano, which arose out of the Union of Cuban Writers and Artists, without me making reference to it. She was saying that we, the government and the Communist Party, are not interested in the organization's goals – to address racism and black invisibility in Cuban society.

<sup>39</sup> The saying refers to the mixing of the races in that everyone has a bit of blackness. It can be translated as "he/she who doesn't have something from the Congo has something from the Carabali," which are two ethnic groups/regions in West Africa.

was founded within a state organization (UNEAC), this particular member of the government does not support its existence.

Conversely, one of the founding members of Color Cubano suggested that the government produces inaccurate numbers regarding the Census in an attempt to whiten the discourse. She discussed the government's treatment of race by the government via the Census results in 2002.

How do the people of the Census see the racial problem? The government doesn't provide racial data because they say no one has asked for it. These are arguments that are so petty. They present a Census where 65% of Cubans, of the Cuban population are white. 10% black and 24% mestizo. I raise my hand to say, *where are you??* You must be coming from the point of view that the nonwhite population is a minority. There needs to be a change of focus. A minority?!? There are other methods. If you design a census where you come to my house, you look at me and you say I'm white because it's clear to you, what validity does that have? I don't want to throw the Census on the floor and create a chaos in Cuban society but this is a serious questioning. Simply looking as you walk in the street you see that 65% to 70% of the population is nonwhite. I don't care about conflictive terms like mestizo, mulato, I put everyone in a nonwhite sack. But the discourse is always whitened.

She offers a critique that does not only question the validity of the Census but the intent as well. Instead of pointing to the government's lack of attention to race because it is not salient, she contends that the government in fact is purposely creating a picture of race that does not exist.

### *Black Consciousness*

There are various discourses throughout black communities with regard to racial issues in Cuba such that there can be no one way to characterize black racial attitudes. Racial ideology coupled with revolutionary socialist ideology has produced many conflicting attitudes among blacks, some in accordance with this dominant ideology and some in

opposition to it, but many with a combination of the two. This section highlights the group that displays racial consciousness; those who are producing alternative ideologies that address racial issues rather than ignore them or believe that they are not significant. These ideologies are produced both by those that are expressing them in public spaces along with those that discuss race in their own circles away from the public eye. Hanchard and Dawson (Hanchard 2006) point to the necessity to examine black ideologies within the larger realm of ideological production and societal norms. As they argue, black ideologies have a “highly situated character within a wider field of political rhetoric, discourse and ideology” (87). These black ideologies may not be promoted by the majority of blacks, but they do not need to be. Even alternative ideologies that are circulated through a minority, in this case a significant minority, can affect racial ideology in prominent ways.

Racial consciousness has many origins for each individual. In addition to experience, which was explored in the previous chapter, information regarding race within the family can also be a source of consciousness. If family transmits these messages of racial consciousness this can often offset the dominant images of blacks that are present in the media that reinforce negative stereotypes and indifference regarding racial identification. As an engineer explained,

“It’s education. I’m not talking about education from a school point of view, it’s familial education. My family, my mother, my father always taught me to have black consciousness because black pride influences a lot. Family teaches you that. The images, the stereotypes, what is taught, mass media, what people see and the ideas that people formulate all go against that and often it’s those things that define what a black person is in our society. And so I am able to think the way I do, but maybe someone who is almost the same as me think the same way. I try to be better every day and I’m conscious of the role that I represent in my society, there are few blacks that are where I am.”

Although this interviewee feels that formal education may not produce consciousness, in fact another interviewee described the beginning of his racial consciousness after being exposed to black history that he had never been exposed to before. He talks about learning about the *Independientes de Color* from a friend:

I had never heard about the party. I learned about it from someone else who had me listen to his song about it and explained to me what happened. He recommended a book to me and I bought it. That's how I came to think about race differently. He also lent me the book, *Our Rightful Share*, and with that book, after I read it I realized so many things. Being from Santiago I felt close to the movement and I started to identify with it.

This particular book by Aline Helg, which documents racial politics during and shortly after the wars of independence, is a source of knowledge and pride among many blacks that have been exposed to it, particularly those involved in racial activism. The book was mentioned by several of my interviewees. The presence of writings that discuss racism in ways that have been hidden in the educational system produces new knowledge and consciousness regarding race. It may follow that inclusion of such texts or similar information at the high school and university level would have a great influence on black political and racial attitudes in Cuba.

The election of Barack Obama produced quite a bit of dialogue in Cuba, not just among blacks but among whites as well. Many expressed to me that they did not believe that the United States, the country that supports racism according to the Cuban state narrative, would ever elect a black president. When Barack Obama won the election, it produced a sense of pride for many black Cubans and blacks were following the election closely, not just for political reasons, but because Obama represented a historical advance for black people throughout the Americas. A 70 year old housewife expressed this sentiment:

All of our presidents have been white, why doesn't a black person have the right to be president? I was so happy, we were so happy here in Cuba with Obama. Maybe other black people that are full of it weren't, but many, many were. Because black people have a right to be president. I feel proud, not only because of what he can bring to the country but to have a black man in that position is very important. And the way he speaks, the way he acts, the man is marvelous.

The interviewee points to the role that racial solidarity had among blacks with the election of Barack Obama. This, coupled with the high awareness that I found among my black interviewees of the number and names of black members of the Central Committee, suggest that within a democratic system, black Cubans would be likely to use race as a consideration when voting for political candidates.

Blacks that display a high level of black consciousness do not always discount the importance of national and racial unity. Black consciousness, in other words does not connote racial separatism or a rejection of revolutionary ideals. As one female hip hop artist shared her opinion on the saying, *todos somos cubanos*, as a way to distance the population from racial difference and towards national unity.

It's not a lie that we are all Cuban (*que todos somos cubanos*). There are times when yes, color doesn't matter, that we are Cuban. Color doesn't matter in certain struggles and up to a certain point that saying is right. What affects us is the unawareness of who you are. A person that is without that reference clashes with a lot of issues in society. So we can defend the project of we are all Cuban but what is important is knowledge. I am black and historically this has happened to my ancestors and my family, I come from this place. And socially we have to be black. That is important.

The importance of national unity does not always clash with racial consciousness and many blacks who support the revolution argue that consciousness should be an increase in awareness and not an abandonment of revolutionary beliefs. Without this consciousness, the fight against racism will not be possible as citizens will continue to ignore the influence that race has on life chances and opportunity. Thus, black



interviewees who did believe structural racism was present in Cuba expressed frustration with the lack of consciousness among other blacks.

There are so many experiences that we go through and they don't always produce consciousness. Incredible! Filling out the survey people actually put that they never had an experience with discrimination. That just gets me! How is it possible that so many things, so many things happen to us and it doesn't always click? The police pass seven white people and they ask you for your ID and this is highly discriminatory. What happens is that we need to discuss the issue. But it's only discussed in closed circles, while generations of Cubans continue to grow around this idea that we are all equal in this society, there's education for everyone, we all have the same opportunities. If the police only ask *you* for your ID, it's not a remnant of the past.

This interviewee, a university graduate, points to many of the dominant discourses that affect people's awareness of race. For him, ideology has a role in barring blacks from recognizing racism, even when it happens to them directly. The willingness to discuss race tends to be low because of the national silence on the subject. As the interviewee highlights, those that are working on this either cannot or do not extend the dialogue past their small meetings amongst themselves. The extension of this dialogue, while politically sensitive, could have an important influence on black communities in Cuba. Their level of consciousness, knowledge and commitment to the issue could prove to be critical in consciousness building among Cubans. The leader of one of the organizations that explores the effects of racism displays an incredibly high level of consciousness.

The first thing is that we are all human beings. The second is that I am a black woman. The third is that I am Cuban. And that is changeable, it could be that I go somewhere else and become a citizen. And that is a feeling, a position that you take before life. I can't take off my skin, they haven't invented anything to be able to do that. No matter where I go, I am a black woman. And if there is a project to promote me as a woman and as black, I can't feel offended or reject it. If I feel offended my self-esteem is very low. And my social conscious is messed up. I look in the mirror and what am I? A black woman. Whether that makes me happy or not is another thing. If black families do not assume their blackness, there is a conflict. And no one in the party is going to use me either, that depends on me. If I don't have strong legs I'm going to be, I don't know, whoever, a Condoleezza.

Politically, she discusses the danger of being used in that contact with the party would show a commitment among them to address this issue. She does not want to be treated as a “token” the way that she thinks Condoleezza Rice has been used in the United States. Regardless of her characterization of U.S. racial politics, her interview displays a commitment to the political advancement of blacks. Organizations that are working towards higher awareness of racism against black Cubans are in fact small circles and it is unknown if they would be permitted to increase their reach among the populace.

### *Racial Attitudes*

During my time in Havana, I entered a taxi at the Melía Cohíba to take me to my apartment in the neighborhood of Vedado. The driver tried to overcharge me and would not put on the taxi’s meter so I got out of the cab and went into the cab parked next to it. The driver in the first cab was black and the driver in the second cab was white. The driver asked why I left the first cab and he insisted that he’d put on the meter so that I was charged a fair price. After we start driving for a few blocks he tells me, “that’s because blacks don’t know how to do anything. They try to cheat you all the time. They don’t understand that this is a white country. This is our country.” Naturally I was shocked that someone would make such a statement in the open, especially to someone who is not white, even if I am not Cuban. During an interview with a professor at the University of Havana, he explained that he fought with a colleague because she said, “the only thing I don’t forgive Fidel for is taking blacks down from the trees.” These and other similar incidents that I experienced in Cuba point to the freeness of using racist language in a society that has claimed to be rid of such a problem.

The silence that exists on issues of race and racism prevents a collective evaluation of the implications of such language. Amidst an anti-racist culture or national etiquette, crude expressions of racism continue to thrive without much rebuke because all have achieved a measure of anti-racist attitudes and do not need to curb or reflect on their racial attitudes.

### **Silence and the persistence of racist attitudes**

An integral part of Cuban's characterization of race relations is the absence of such a characterization. Many of my interviewees either never talked about race with their families and friends, or they made a point not to talk about race with their children. In this context, silence about race was often conflated with the quality of being non-racist. If you do not teach your children about race, then you are teaching them to be non-racist. When I asked a young black male if his parents had ever talked to him about race he said:

*Never ever.* Because my parents grew up that way. So it was reversed – I had to teach them. And at first they were defensive. And they tried to accuse me of being a racist (laughs). Which shows you what ignorance exists. They called me a racist saying I wanted to see everything in extremes. There is a problem but people don't see it. It's like the fish in the refrigerator - its eyes are open but it sees nothing because it's dead. That's how Cubans are with the issue of race. Racism is all over, all over: inside your house, with your neighbor, at work. But Cubans don't see it. It's not convenient. But this society has always suffered from racism and that didn't end in 59 or at any other time.

The attitude described by this interviewee – the avoidance of any discussion about race – supports racist attitudes. Racist comments become common place and many blacks neglect to address these comments. They are often exposed to them because these comments are not always reserved for white audiences or spaces. The absence of an evaluation of societal racism leads these comments to be expressed even in the presence of blacks. In an interview with a 19-year old white woman she explained to me her view of racism in Cuba coupled with her first experience in a relationship with a black man:

Interviewee: With friendship there's no problem. At least in my case. I can have best friends that are black but with respect to relations, that mix doesn't work for me. Especially after my experience. I dated a black man just to test it, to see if it was in me. And I realized that it didn't fit. I was with a man of color. You know, he smelled good, he was very friendly, he didn't have any black characteristics and he treated me like a princess. But well, what I felt, it was disgust what I felt. I don't know, sometimes it's difficult to say it because it sounds bad. The mix of colors was bad.

Interviewer: And had your parents ever taught you anything about race, that they preferred you to be with a white person?

Interviewee: My father always had that thing that white women look ugly with a black man.

Even after such an admission the interviewee did not consider herself to be racist because she has friends that are black and mulatto and only discriminates in intimate relationships. Her characterization of black people as smelling a certain way or acting a certain way would not, to her, be considered anti-black. A mulatto woman expressed to me a similar sentiment:

A leader of the party once told me that they would never have relations with a black man. I've heard sayings like, "I've never drank petroleum." One day another person from the party told me in a theater that you don't have to be scared of black people, what you have to do is learn to dance with them. These are phrases. Is that not racism?

One of my interviewees, after explaining that she was not racist and had many friends who are nonwhite talked about the city of Guantanamo where she is from, which historically has been a majority black area.

When I traveled to Miami I didn't see that many people of color. But in Guantanamo, Guantanamo has changed. Guantanamo has gotten worse, and before it wasn't like that. I came to Havana nine years ago and there were white people, but honey, now it's mulatto, black, mulatto, black and there are few whites. In Guantanamo and Santiago.

These interviews point to the reasons why the survey data showed that few blacks found that their race had an effect on their social relations. All of those that I interviewed said that they did not pay attention to race in their friendships, whites and blacks alike. When asked more questions however, whites displayed anti-black attitudes especially when considering

intimate relationships. All of my white and some of my mulatto interviewees either would not date a black person, or had family members that did not want them to do so. Social relations then, are not harmonious with regard to race and are interracial only to a limit. There is a false sense of harmony that many adhere to as part of the notion that racism does not exist in Cuba coupled with the belief by individuals that they cannot be racist.

### **Black image/inferiority**

When I arrived in La Habana in October of 2008 I rented an apartment from a black family that lived close to the university. A friend of mine helped me to the house with my luggage and sat with me while I went over the paperwork with the owner of the house. As we were going over the rental forms, the owner could not stop commenting on what a nice man my friend was and how wonderful it was to see a young black man that is pursuing engineering at the university. Rather than finish with the paperwork, the man insisted that we should be a couple. I laughed, and continued filling out the forms but it was clear that the owner of the house felt a connection to my friend because of their mutual blackness and felt proud that he was among the best educated. There are many stories such as this one, where black people, amongst each other, express racial solidarity and consciousness. The owner of the house expressed a measure of racial consciousness that even if only on a social level, could certainly extend to behavior and political thought. Stories of solidarity, however, do not constitute the entire story of black consciousness in Cuba. In a conversation with the owner and his mother a few days later, the same man expressed that he wished he were lighter. Speaking to his mother, he said, “it’s your fault that I came out so black.” The mother then responded, “my father was pure, from the Congo. But yes, he was very black. He was a very good looking man, but he was very black.” When I suggested to the man that

he should be proud of being black, he gave me an uncomfortable laugh and said, “yes, yes I’m proud.” The two conversations with this family shed light on the nuances of black identity and black thought in Cuba. Black consciousness in Cuba is present, but it can also be mixed with a measure of shame, often without full realization. There are few who will tell you that they are not proud to be black ,but those same people may also say that they would like to marry a lighter person so that their children do not come out as dark as they are.

How does the notion of blackness as inferior in Cuban society affect black consciousness? If you are black, but would rather be white or of mixed race, does that mean that you do not feel a strong connection to other blacks or display feelings of group consciousness? Does the hyper valuation of whiteness mean that blacks are not concerned with the lack of representation of blacks in the media and in high professional positions? In many instances during my field research I found that although there is an estimation of white superiority for some blacks, this does not necessarily affect political consciousness. One of my interviewees, for example, complained about the lack of blacks on television and noted that the lack of representation is even worse in the government. He cited the need to discuss racism and wanted more blacks in government as a way to combat these problems. Later on in the interview he shared with me that he wanted to perm his hair so that he can look like a mulatto. Both of these cases represent the nuances and contradictions of black consciousness in Cuba. Identity has many complexities; black people do not always embrace their blackness, but at the same time, as chapters three and five show, black solidarity and consciousness continue to exist. The valuation of whiteness as better is one component of Cuban racial ideology that has an effect on black identity. The concept is historically

embedded, maintained by the lack of black representation in all spheres of society and is also a product of the silence on racial issues.

It would be impossible to describe the numerous ways that race affects people's lives, decisions, attitudes and behavior. As one interviewee stated, "there are so many conflicts with race. The black man who wants to be with a white woman because he thinks that black women are not attractive, or the black woman who is pretty and thinks that she deserves a *mulato* or white man because of it, the *mulata* who thinks that she is a race and distances herself from blacks and tries to be white, the white woman who has a black best friend but will not allow her son to marry a black woman. Imagine! There are so many things happening! It's complex." Yet all of the scenarios that the interviewee gave me were instances of black rejection. While the issue of race is certainly complex and appears amidst many scenarios there is one theme that runs through all of them, the belief in the superiority of whiteness. A mulatto female shared a story about her daughter in daycare.

The teacher at the daycare where I had my daughter told me, my daughter had a bad attitude, and the teacher told me, you are saved because your daughter is light, because if not, no one would pay attention to her and you would have to take her out of daycare. And this teacher that I'm talking about was black, black, blue black, as we say. It's very hard, in the schools with the teachers they themselves question themselves and we don't realize.

Blacks are not the only group that tries to move toward whiteness or sees white as better than black. Mulattoes as well often try to identify more with whites and distance themselves from blacks. The idea that blacks are inferior dictates self-identification and racial preferences among many mulattoes. The same mulatto scholar stated:

There's a tendency for mulattoes, when they can to identify with whites and pass that barrier, because here the color barrier, you know it's pretty flexible and there is that aspiration to whiten. When I had my first child my mother in law who was *mulata* right away took off her diaper to see if she had the mark. My youngest daughter loves black people and my mother

and law *suffered*, she passed away. But she suffered and she would say, “I worked so hard to improve (*adelantar*) and this child loves black people.” That aspiration exists and it’s strong and people think that whitening is a solution to the problem. Of course it isn’t.

Despite the presence of the whitening ideal and the image of blacks as inferior, less competent or less attractive, there were many instances where blacks did not accept this belief. Examples of black consciousness came out in many of my interviews with blacks. Although consciousness did not always completely reject the notion of white superiority, there was an awareness of the problem as well as the presence of a racial hierarchy in Cuba.

### *Social Relations*

Cuban perceptions of social relations among different races differ widely. While social relations are often used as evidence that race relations in Cuba are relatively harmonious, they can also be drawn upon as evidence that racism is still strong in Cuba. Every day observations of interracial marriage and friendships were talked about frequently among interviewees, particularly those who wanted to point to the absence of racism. At the same time, experiences of discrimination were often cited as having to do with these interracial relationships. Often what occurs is while blacks and whites share close friendships, the same comfort is not always present among families when confronted with interracial relationships. Survey data in the previous chapter demonstrated among blacks that social relationships were not based on race for the majority of the respondents. In my interviews with members of all races, even among those that shared this majority view from the survey, still pointed to contradictions and frictions that suggested racial harmony was in fact not as prevalent as the survey would suggest.



In an interview with a mulatto manager of a company, he talked about his experience when he married a black woman. He said that his parents were shocked and disappointed when he brought her home even though he had black people in his family. His college roommate asked him why he would date a black woman when there were plenty of white and *mulata* women to choose. After many years, he encountered the roommate again on the street and was told, “you’re still with that black woman? What is your problem?” He noted that this reaction was not uncommon and that many of his friends did not approve of his relationship in addition to his family.

In an interview with a 70-year old white woman who was retired from a factory job, she expressed similar sentiment. While she at first talked about racial relations as harmonious, she later expressed a rejection of blacks as a potential partner for her children.

Interviewee: I’m going to be honest with you. I have very good friends of color and I believe that there are blacks and whites that are good people and there are those that are bad people. I get along with whomever. My best friends are mulattoes they aren’t white and when I worked I had a lot of friends, good, good friends of color.

Interviewer: Well what about marriage, would you be bothered if your children married black people?

Interviewee: I’m going to be honest. I really wouldn’t like, and I’m not talking about in the old days I’m talking about now. I wouldn’t like for my daughter to marry a black man. Maybe a mulatto (*Quizás un mulatito*). But when it comes to that (places her hand on her chest) I....um....well. I always tell my daughter that females are always the ones that are most precious.

Her initial reaction, despite anti-black attitudes that she has is to describe herself as anti-racist because her friends have been of all colors. Yet at the same time she clearly views blacks as inferior to whites and unworthy of marriage with her daughter. She feels that she must protect her daughter from a man who is nonwhite when she says that daughters are the most precious.

Racial mixing or mestizaje has been presented as proof of racial harmony for centuries, not only in Cuba but throughout Latin America. The presence of interracial relationships and a large mixed race population is viewed by many as a way to gauge whether or not racism is present in society and/or whether there has been progress over time. A black male says,

Since the colonial era the Spanish were mixing with the blacks, for whatever reason, but they were mixing. And many people here don't care about having relations, sexual or a friendship, whatever it may be, with blacks. After the triumph of the revolution that has gotten better, or it's getting better. What I don't want to say is that there are no manifestations of racism, because you can't change someone's mentality. But to speak, publically in a debate or a meeting in a racist way or to attack a black person can bring a person a lot of problems here. Many people are racist, maybe not at the magnitude that a North American can be, but you can't change people's mentality. The revolution changed many things, but that is not going to change here.

This quote represents much of the ideological rhetoric by the government being expressed by a citizen. This particular interviewee points out 1) the ability of the revolution to improve race relations among individuals through socialist policy and rhetoric; 2) the characterization of race as a matter of mentality among individuals only and 3) the notion that a U.S. citizen is more likely to display racism, a stronger brand of racism than any Cuban could.

At the start of the revolution, the Cuban government created high levels of equality through salary changes in line with socialist economic policy (Dominguez 1978; de la Fuente 2001a). The policies were made to severely diminish the role of class in Cuban society. Nonetheless, class markers tend to remain and race continues to be connected to class with blacks still being among those earning less. In an interview with a female scholar, she pointed to the differences in class and the connections that whites made between blacks and lower class status.

In the neighborhoods where there is less integration I think that there is more discrimination and more stereotyping. The neighborhood where I live was upper middle class and half of it emptied out when the revolution began. They filled up the houses with soldiers and it continued to be a white neighborhood. Nonetheless, in the 70s and 80s the government constructed a lot of buildings and a lot of mixed and black people moved into them. As a result the people in the houses who are white reject those that live in the buildings. They make a border there and there is a lot of racism in general. I think that in these kinds of neighborhoods, more residential, black people feel more discriminated against and have a greater awareness of the difference.

Thus, black inferiority can also be connected to class despite high economic equality and a socialist system. Blacks are still associated with the lower class and experience rejection by whites because of it.

### *Experiences with Discrimination*

Experiences with discrimination are often connected to how blacks view racism in Cuba. Perhaps an unintended consequence of racial democracy has been the proliferation of racist jokes and commentary without any backlash or awareness that these comments are indeed racist. As seen in interviews above, silence on the topic of race and Cuban discourse on race breeds unawareness and anti-black stereotypes and talk can often be brushed off as humor, which sanctions its use and trivializes the presence of racist attitudes (Caldwell 2007). As Kia Caldwell argues, while we may associate verbal forms of racial discrimination with societies where racism is more overt, not only can we find verbal forms of racism and discourse that promotes black inferiority, in societies that espouse racial tolerance as the dominant ideology. In addition, these ideologies of racial tolerance support the existence of verbal expressions of racism by negating the relevance of racism so that these jokes and comments are passed off as benign.

Comments that may seem to be markers of description can also bear a derogatory meaning by pointing out racial difference and hidden within that racial inferiority.

People will always say, man, “*esto es un tipo de negro*” or “*el negro de clase y el clase de negro*”<sup>40</sup>,” which are different things. And *el clase de negro* is almost always used negatively. They can call me a black man with class but what does that mean? It’s derogatory and I still need to work harder than whites because if not, forget it. Because in the end you are black. Those sayings have a lot of interpretations. I have had a lot of problems with that, I don’t like the saying. I don’t like the way they call me black, I have stopped people who call me *negro* and say, how do you mean to say that? Because in English for example they have the word nigger and that is an extremely negative word.....here we don’t have that. Here they say *negro* normally...but on the inside it has a lot meanings and it’s the same thing.

What the interviewee does not directly say is that calling someone a black person with class suggests that they are in the minority, that most blacks do not have class. Sayings that are popular in Cuba such as, ‘she’s so pretty she looks white’, or ‘you have to do things the way white people do them,’ perpetuate the idea of black inferiority. Moreover, because they have become part of the normal lexicon they are not recognized as such. Although ignored, these comments constitute discrimination as well.

The quality of being one of the few blacks in a university classroom has produced experiences of discrimination for black students and some of my interviewees provided situations where they were openly spoken to in an offensive way by their professors. A university student described to me a scenario in which he was singled out by a white professor as the incompetent black student in his classroom.

I’m sitting in the classroom and the professor comes in with this crazy presentation and then asks if there are any questions or doubts. I say that I don’t really understand and I wasn’t the only one, but I was the only one who spoke up. So the professor says, ‘Oh come on, it’s the

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<sup>40</sup> “*Esto es un tipo de negro*” translated means, this is quite a black man. ‘Clase’ in Spanish can mean class or type/kind and thus the difference between *un negro de clase* (a black man with class) and *un clase de negro* (what a black guy) have different meanings where the second refers to the type of black person.

black student who doesn't understand' rubbing his arm.<sup>41</sup> I got mad and turned around and asked the class, 'is there anyone here who understands this?' And everyone said no. Then I turned and looked at the professor and said, 'do you see that no one understands this and it's *not* because I'm *black*??? Do you realize this??' And I know that he did it unconsciously because in Cuban society that's a really normal thing, it's become common. It's always like this, society is like that and we have to live with these things. Because there is no consciousness, no education, no culture.

Following the class the professor apologized to the student saying that he didn't mean to upset him and that he did not mean the comment to be racist. He also made mention of black friends that he has, a frequent, yet trite commentary to justify an anti-racist attitude. For this kind of dialogue to be used in front of a classroom, expectations of a reaction such as the one the student gave are low. In other words, a lack of consciousness about what should be rejected as discriminatory allows for these racist comments to continue without being checked. During a conversation with a physics professor at the University of Havana, he explained to me that there is equal opportunity in Cuba and admitted that there were a lack of black university students. He said that this phenomenon occurred not because of racial inequalities but because blacks are lazy and do not want to study. The role of silence on the issue of race and more specifically regarding opportunity for blacks and the presence of racism cannot be understated. Without any admission from the government or public dialogue about this problem, anti-black stereotypes will continue to prosper among both the educated and uneducated. Racist attitudes in Cuba are not exclusive to class or level of education, which makes them even more pervasive.

Barriers to black access often occur subtly where blacks may not gain employment opportunities, but it is not explicitly stated that race is the reason. It is difficult to identify such instances because they are not overtly expressed as discrimination. One interviewee

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<sup>41</sup> In Cuba, the gesture to describe someone of color is to rub your finger along your arm, as if pointing to the different skin color.

however shared with me an instance where it was stated quite clearly why his sister, who is black, was kept out of an opportunity because of race.

My sister wanted to enter into synchronized swimming; she was one of the best swimmers. And they told her that she couldn't get into it because the problem was that sport required a special pigmentation. And her pigmentation did not go with that sport. My parents did not fight for it and because she was young she didn't say anything either. My mother is a strong revolutionary and denies that racism exists in Cuba. Even with that experience. And until today and I have never seen an interracial synchronized swimming team. Because of that I think that black people have a lot more to show in the society that we live in. Blacks in the U.S. for example have succeeded in getting their own channel – BET. They have their own way of dressing, their character, Obama is black. It seems to me that in the struggle against racism you are far ahead.

Here, we see that there are clear practices to exclude blacks. Although his family did not fight against what happened to his sister, there are no institutions that exist where they could issue a formal complaint. The lack of an official process through which to report an experience with discrimination not only leaves blacks disempowered when confronted with such a situation, but produces a lack of awareness about such a right.

The tendency to portray racism as a problem primarily among individuals in their relationships and daily interactions led to many interviewees' anecdotes about romantic relationships that brought them to the realization that whites in Cuba continue to be racist. A 19-year old waiter told me that he has always had trouble with families when he has dated a white or a mixed race woman.

I had a white girlfriend when I was in HS and her father was in the military and they did not accept me at all. And the military is supposed to be this accepting, progressive institution that follows the ideal that we are all equal and they are never supposed to be racist because they represent the government. But forget it, her father would not allow her to be with a black guy.

Experiences such as these reinforce for blacks the contradictions that exist between the state's racial ideology and what is practiced on the ground. For this reason, experiences of discrimination are often the impetus for blacks' rejection of the dominant ideology.

### *Tourism*

At the start of the Special Period, the expansion of tourism was spearheaded with joint ventures and hotel construction all over the island, but primarily in Havana and Varadero, the two most popular cities for tourism in Cuba. Foreign hotels, primarily European, opened up and subsequent jobs that brought employees impressive salaries through tips and bonuses as compared to state salaries became available as a result. As it became clear that whites were receiving most of the jobs in the hotels and restaurants, issues of discrimination arose. Much of the blame however, for the lack of black presence in tourism is placed on the foreign owners who, it is said, keep blacks out because they prefer whiter employees. In several interviews with Cubans that work in the tourism industry, the European hotel owners are blamed for the lack of representation. However, there are reasons to believe this is excessively simplistic. The process of hiring in the hotels is left up to mostly Cuban managers; while European owners can express a desire to keep out black employees, Cubans in fact are responsible for hiring decisions and there is no evidence that they have sought to hire black employees. In order to be considered for a job in a hotel or restaurant, Cubans are put on a list through the state employment agency (*bolsa de trabajo*) and from there are selected on a first come first serve basis. All of the interviewees that I talked with who have a job in the industry said that they got there because a friend got them the job, and they did not go through the formal process. Moreover, when positions are open for certain specialties within a hotel, preference is given to those that already work in the hotel. The

hiring process then, is not color blind, as those who enter the employment list are seldom chosen for the positions. The Cuban managers of the hotels, who are overwhelmingly white, have control over the process in each hotel. A waiter who worked in one of the top restaurants in Havana was able to get his job through his best friend's father. He recognized that had he not given him that space, he would not have been able to get a spot in tourism. He explained that while black people may be given the chance to study tourism and enter into an internship, they will often not be hired and in this way are kept out of the industry.

The difference between foreign and Cuban ways of seeing race was described by two white hotel managers.

There isn't much of a racial issue with the workers here, there are black workers. Now black bosses, that's a different story. For a black manager he'd have to come from somewhere else, Jamaica or something. Or maybe if he's really good. Oh there was one guy here that had to go, black, *black*, that did not get along with the manager of the hotel. And I'll tell you the truth, in a hotel like this, if the manager says that he doesn't want blacks, there won't be any. And it's not the hotel owners that hire workers, it's mostly Cubans that hire workers. We had one Brazilian manager and he was used to black people, coming from Brazil. But he said he didn't want the black guy to be a boss and he told him to resign. And he had to do it, saying he didn't want to be the boss anymore. That's always going to happen. Whether it be Cuba, the United States, wherever it is, blacks are black and they are always seen that way. I don't look at blacks that way but foreigners are different and don't see blacks the way that we do. I can say, "hey negro, what's up," but I see him as a person.

While the managers admit that Cubans are in charge of the majority of the hiring, they maintain that Cubans are not as racist as foreigners and place the blame on these outsiders in keeping blacks out of the industry and higher positions in particular. In an upscale restaurant in the Vedado neighborhood of Havana, a waiter described the process of keeping blacks out of the industry.

There is a lot of racism in the field and if they don't want you there they will find a way to keep you out. A friend of mine was doing her internship at my restaurant and little by little they started to push her out because she was black. They told her that they were pushing her



out because she wasn't working well but they told me that it was because she was black and not pretty enough. They said she didn't fit the image that they wanted. 'Maybe if she were *mulata*, prettier', they said. They pushed her out and so she never got hired. I know that I have to work hard and not fit into the stereotypes that they have for blacks. I am on my best behavior.

The notion that blacks are less attractive leads to the perception that they are unfit to greet or wait on tourists. This is particularly true for women who are subject to a standard of beauty in Cuba that favors whiteness (Sawyer 2006). Male stereotypes pigeon-hole black males into certain jobs within the sector as well. In an interview with a taxi driver he noted that blacks are often not present in jobs related to tourism but that there are many doormen and taxi drivers that are black. He noted that, "taxi drivers cannot be cowards they need to be strong," and thus, many blacks can serve in that position. Blacks as physically stronger than whites is a stereotype that allows them access to jobs as doormen or taxi drivers rather than working at the front desk, as a bartender, waiter or hotel manager.

It is difficult to identify or document overt discrimination in the tourism sector, as there are no set policies that exist to keep blacks out, either of employment opportunities or as consumers. An employee of a hotel in Havana stated that when you begin work at a hotel you are told that the hotel does not take into account your color, religious beliefs, your political beliefs, etc. But the employees create an environment where blacks are often not given these positions because those at the top rarely hire black workers.

There are very few blacks that work in my hotel, black people like me, not mulatto. We are very competent and we have never had a problem with the racial issue. But always in a subtle way we have to work harder. Because although it's not directly, it's still obvious that people see the difference. Even though we live here, even though we live with socialism in all that we do, there is always the racial issue that remains. To get a job in tourism you have to enter through the lotto (state employment agency or the *bolsa de trabajo*), and many people graduate and after their internship they have to wait. Who knows how many black people are waiting in the lotto but if you look in all of the tourist jobs there are very few blacks working or getting hired. In my personal case I've had to go beyond, I speak two

languages and I'm trying to learn a third. People are always watching me and so I need the tools. People in the hotel are always evaluating the black employees and we always have to be extra good. Because they don't fire you outright but they look for the chance to indirectly make a small problem a much larger one. In general in Cuba there are few blacks in high positions, if I can remember there are only 2 or 3 hotels that have black managers. The rest are white. That's at least in tourism.

In addition to the process of gaining employment in the industry, tourist spaces are one of the primary ways that blacks are discriminated against. Security guards and doormen often keep blacks out of hotels or subject them to questioning before entering and police will invariably stop black Cubans who are seen with tourists or within tourist areas. Stereotyping of blacks as delinquents, criminals, or hustlers lead to increased discriminatory treatment. Tourism has in fact, heightened blacks' sensibilities about racism due to these practices. A security guard who used to work in a hotel in Havana shared his experience where the hotel had a special code that they communicated to each other when black people entered the hotel.

When I was in tourism I was in a company that was called SEPSA. I was working in a hotel one day and they told me that there was a code that we were to use to communicate for the security. For men we would say H (hombre) and for women, M (mujer). One day a black guy walks in, dressed in a typical way, not bad but what they would consider to be the dress of a delinquent or a *jinetero*. He was dressed more or less like me with baggy shorts and a baggy T-shirt. So the security person says on the radio, 'an H just walked in with the complexion that you are familiar with.' And I said, 'what does that mean, that I am familiar with?' She answered, 'yes, yes, the complexion that you are familiar with.' In my gut I knew what she meant. I had a conversation with the person about it and they stopped using that code while I was there. I was there for a year and so many people would come in there trying to rob merchandise and they were never black.

Another black man working in a hotel shared his experiences when standing at the door with the doormen.

When I'm at the front door with the security guards at the front I see it happen all the time. It exists. You find yourself in a group of guards and a black man will be coming and they'll go, who is this here? And it's the comments that they make. We're not letting this savage in here. If a black person comes in here, "I'm gonna get him." And sometimes black people

fall into that same game. When I complain they give me a laugh and say, “it’s not like thaaaat.”

The tourist sector represents one of the most visible sectors where there is a lack of equal black access to employment or equal representation. The overwhelming number of whites that work in the industry coupled with the experiences of keeping blacks out of these spaces has been difficult to ignore. In a speech in 2000, Raul Castro declared that black people should not be denied access to enter into hotels or any other location related to tourism (Adams 2004), giving credence to the existence of the practice. Nonetheless, there are those in government that will continue to deny that there is a lack of opportunities for blacks, even in this particular sector. The former black president of the CDR shared her view on why blacks are not present in the tourism industry:

It is true there are hardly any blacks in tourism but that has its reasons and causes. There were never black workers in tourism, even before the revolution – throughout history there hasn’t been a tradition of blacks in tourism. Blacks have always been interested in working in public health, education and sectors such as these – it’s traditional. This is why you’ll notice that there are plenty of black professors in academia – because there are no racial limits in education.”

While some justifications of the disparity will be present among Cubans discussing the tourist sector, most Cubans will agree that racism is present in the industry. Indeed, all of those I interviewed, except for two, agreed that blacks were kept out of tourism, received negative treatment when entering these spaces, and that race was significant in this sector more than any other, even if they differed regarding the causes or consequences.

## **Police**

Racial profiling of blacks by the police was a prominent topic among my black interviewees. While black men in particular pointed to many instances of discrimination by

the police, white and mulatto interviewees also noted that the police stop black Cubans much more than those of other racial groups. One interviewee, a 43-year old male, shared that racial profiling by the police was the only instance of discrimination that he could point to in his life.

I haven't had too many problems with discrimination except for the police. They always stop you, hey! Good afternoon, good morning. Your ID card. After the man goes over the IDs of me and my friends I ask, 'what did we do for you to stop us, was there a problem?' He says, 'no it's because the problem is we are here to control.' It happens all the time. Another time I asked one of them, 'there are other people passing by, of another race, another color and you didn't stop them. Are we doing something bad?' If something happened in that area or you happen to look like someone, forget it! And if you observe, the majority of who they stop are black. Let's go to the prisons. I don't know exactly what the percentage of blacks in the prisons is but I am completely sure that there are more blacks than whites; you can be sure about that. Anyone who tells you no is fixed. My vision is at 100% and I see it that way.

A 26 year old construction worker had a similar sentiment noting that white people do not receive the same treatment by police.

Here they see the black man as a bandit. The police will ask a white person for his identification if he's going on a trip perhaps, but blacks always are asked for their identification. White people pass by a police officer and they don't tell him anything, but black people they always say, hey, what's this one doing? And they always stop him.

Black men have a unique experience with police; as seen in the survey data discussed in the previous chapter they are also more likely to report an experience with discrimination. These experiences are frequently shared in conversations among them and serve to build sensibilities about race and the meaning of being black and male in Cuban society, particularly in Havana. Throughout my trip in Cuba comments were made often about the practice of racial profiling in Cuba even outside of the interviews and survey that were conducted.

### *Representation*

In addition to tourism, what is termed the emergent sector (jobs that were created related to the economic reforms in Cuba in the early 1990s) also constitutes a visible area where black access is systematically blocked (Rodriguez Espina 2006; Sawyer 2006). The issue of the relative absence of black representation in socio-economic, cultural and political circles, however, was present well before the start of the Special Period. Racism and inequality were indeed exacerbated starting with the economic crisis, but black visibility in other areas such as the media, historical texts and government positions have suffered throughout the decades of the revolution (Adams 2004). Few studies have examined Cuban perceptions of racial representation in the media yet when asked about representation or racism in general, several of the interviewees discussed the absence of positive black images on television. Furthermore, organizations on the island that are focused on racial equality have pointed to black images in the media as a significant problem<sup>42</sup>. The following section details interview responses regarding three areas of representation: mass media, employment and government.

Black access to desirable employment seems to have worsened since the economic crisis since the most desired jobs are those that are connected to hard currency. These are also the jobs that are least available to blacks and mulattoes to a lesser degree. Racial representation within the government however, is cited by many nonwhites in the sample as a problem that has existed since before the Special Period. As one 29 year old male stated:

In Cuba there is no racist system that is sustained through laws, that doesn't exist. But let's look at the system itself. Although it is changing, it used to be difficult to see a black person on television...it still is difficult. There are so few blacks in government. The other day they

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<sup>42</sup> Both Color Cubano and the Cofradia de la Negritud, organizations based on racial equality and black rights, have outlined the increase of black representation in the mass media as their goals.

held an event in the anti-imperialist stage. It was a political event about terrorism and a black person gave the speech. That is one of the first times I have seen that.

This passage suggests that as a black person, he is cognizant of black representation both on television and by the government. When there is a slight improvement, it is noticeable by many blacks, such as the example given here. Other respondents also pointed to the introduction of a black character or a black government official that appears in the media as something that pointed to a small change in black images on television.

### **Black Representation in the Media**

The issue of black presence on the television was one of the issues which most frequently was raised during the interviews I carried out. Blacks would continually point to the lack of black characters on television that were not slaves, or criminals or had a marginal role. There have been some changes made on state television to reflect a higher representation of blacks and there have also been a few programs given sporadically regarding the importance of anti-racist attitudes. These programs discuss prejudice only on an individual level, but it is an improvement from the complete silence previously followed. In the newscast that is shown three times daily, a black anchor was recently (2008) added to the lineup in the evening, one of the most visible changes to the racial makeup of state television. There are also nonwhite teachers and professors that appear in the *Universidad Para Todos* (University for Everyone) programming segment that teaches college level material through the television. Blacks still remain largely absent from the most popular programming on Cuban television: soap operas, primetime series and movies.

A recent documentary that was filmed in Cuba about racism, titled *Raza*, featured an artist that talked about his son not having any figures on television that look like him. In the

documentary he says that he suffers trying to find people in the media or dolls that are black so that his son is not traumatized by his blackness and his features. During a discussion about this documentary one of my interviewees, a young black male said:

Sometimes I stop and think, children always have a role model to follow....you know, they say, 'I want to be like this person.' When you sit a boy, a black boy, down in front of the television who does he want to be like? There is no black person there so what he will repeat are the same models that are in his neighborhood, which is often marginal. We don't have a Will Smith or a Denzel Washington. And look, at the end of the day they are media figures but you still feel represented, you can identify. That's important.

Blacks are overwhelmingly represented in musical shows as well as athletic competitions that are featured on television. These stereotypical roles can serve as a way to overlook the lack of blacks in other programming and it can also reinforce the notion of blacks possessing talent only as musicians and athletes. An 83-year old white artist and former actress said in response to a question regarding black representation on television:

Sometimes my daughter and I are watching a movie and there will be a black person on there dancing and singing, when black people sing, it's marvelous. The majority sings better than us and they dance!!! In the arts I think that blacks have more or less the same space as whites. There are mulattoes, blacks; I don't even think that there is a legitimately pure white person. We are a mix, from Africa, many Chinese. We have a mix and we are more or less equal. And here blacks aren't treated the way they are in other places. And I already told you that there are blacks in the Central Committee. *Black* blacks.

By emphasizing blacks' seeming innate ability to perform well, this interviewee can ignore the fact that in other facets, blacks are largely absent. Moreover, within her description of representation is a discourse of *mestizaje* that also justifies this absence. If we are all a mix and whites have black ancestry as well, there is no need to focus on the details of representation. Nonetheless, as is prevalent in many interviews, there is still emphasis on racial difference by describing blacks as being *black* or so black that their skin looks blue, which is quite a common reference among all three racial groups in Cuba.

Despite the previous interview, I found that many of my interviewees, of all three racial groups, did recognize that blacks did not appear often on the television. A 40-year old mulatto female florist complained about the roles that blacks always play in Cuban programs:

On the television the black man is always a musician or an athlete. Or a slave!! And from slavery still the idea of the black man as strong, the worker with good physical attributes still remains. And that was born in the mind of the Cuban until today.

A 19 year old white male, although very open about the existence of racism, did not seem to think that the main problem was lack of access for blacks to enter into television:

Interviewee: The soap operas here, look for a black person. Try to find one. If you do find one he has to be a super actor. Put simply, they eliminate themselves.

Interviewer: But it is a problem of not seeking out the opportunity or of being rejected by that sector?

Interviewee: It's both. There are also people that keep blacks out. It's clear that it's always been that way. And there are times when blacks themselves don't look for the job because they say, that's not my world. They say, I'm black, my thing is baseball, or I'm black my thing is sports. In professional terms they don't try to meet a goal. It's either their upbringing or their own racism. In a house where everyone is black they say, no no no let's not study, let's go beg for money or ride our bikes or let's go to the *malecón* (boardwalk) and we'll make money that way.

Here the interviewee moves from a discussion of blacks on television to a critique of blacks in general that suggests they are lazy, they do not want to work and that they go out and perform on the *malecón* (a popular spot for tourists) or beg for money instead. Thus, while there is recognition of racism that may exist within the mass media, his stereotypical views about blacks dominate his theory about their lack of representation and advancement.

There was a high awareness among black interviewees of the number of blacks in the Central Committee and 16 out of the 20 black interviewees mentioned the black members and complained of the lack of representation. It was clear through the interviews that the topic of blacks in government and television was something discussed and thought about



often among them. A 66-year old black male was not only bothered by the lack of black presence, but he also noted that the government tries to highlight a few token blacks during their programming to create a façade of diversity.

Right here in Cuba at the university the percentage of students with those majors that lead to good jobs are white. And the majority of the university is white. And the Central Committee has like four or five blacks. Almeida, Lazo, the one from the unions, that's it. Three! On television during political events or programs they direct the camera to the blacks that are present, boom, boom, boom, 1, 2, 3 so that they come out on the television. There! Three blacks!

Similarly, a member of UNEAC (Union of Cuban Writers and Artists) discussed that the topic arose in meetings of UNEAC by black artists that felt underrepresented.

What bothers the black population the most in general, is that there are almost no blacks on television. So that it happens to us on soap operas, particular programs, series, even though they have tried to change that problem recently. Because that topic has been debated a lot in UNEAC conferences and symposiums about the mass media. It comes up because there are people in UNEAC and other organizations that are black and they become upset and because they are on the inside they protest about it. Why don't they select the black actors? They say that it is because there are no quality black actors. But black actors are just as good so why don't they do it? The level of participation should be equal.

UNEAC is the only mass organization that consistently addresses the problem of racism in Cuba. Color Cubano was founded by members of the union and their annual conferences often feature discussion on the topic of race. When Color Cubano was in existence, one of their main goals was to increase black representation on television and in the state's history books. The members that led the organization still continue to work toward this goal despite the dissolution of the group.

### **Employment Opportunities and Black Advancement**

Black opportunity, particularly in employment, is one of the most important issues regarding racial inequality, and one of the least addressed issues in Cuba. The government

has made no reference to the presence of employment discrimination, yet many of my black interviewees cite the problem as significant. Even in the tourism sector, the issue focused on by Raúl Castro was lack of access to tourist facilities by blacks, not employment discrimination. The lack of data makes it difficult to know the extent to which employment discrimination drives black opportunity. In the tourist sector in particular the disparity is so stark that awareness of discrimination is noted by most, even if only by observation. Other areas of employment, however, are not as racially exclusive and while many mention the lack of black managers and directors in all sectors, the evidence is only anecdotal. The results according to my data are mixed: in the survey chapter in the previous chapter, 17% of those that had an experience with discrimination pointed to employment discrimination specifically and 62% of those that had an experience with discrimination pointed to structural discrimination in general. In the interviews, there are a good number of those who felt that employment discrimination existed, but there are also many who do not believe that blacks can be denied certain jobs because of their race. What is clear in the interviews I carried out is that beliefs in both the existence of equal educational opportunity as well as absence of employment discrimination because of the revolutionary leadership prohibiting it, drove the opinions of those that did not think blacks were left out of employment opportunities because of race.

In an interview with a hotel worker, he told me that there were some black people, primarily male, that are starting to appear in the service positions in hotels as bartenders, waiters, etc. but that there are no black managers. Even so, in a more prestigious hotel like the one where we held the interview, Hotel Sevilla, he said that it would be hard to find a black person in any position except for cleaning. Indeed, there were no black workers in the

hotel except for the cleaning staff. He said that what happens with the cleaning positions is that mostly black and *mulatas* are in these positions because of the stereotypes of black women but also because these women are not educated and they fall into the cleaning and dishwashing positions. Black people, he thought, are mostly living in marginal neighborhoods and do not have the same resources and environment as white people. Many fall into delinquent behavior or lose interest in their studies because of their surroundings. Black women are often not given opportunities to educate themselves, although education here is free, and they end up in these positions. Perhaps the most important point that he made was that while he was in school studying tourism, his black professor warned him that he was going to suffer in the tourism business as a black man, and that he had to be prepared and work doubly hard to prove himself. He felt that after his internship he would be able to keep his job as a waiter because there were some black workers already in the restaurant that would support him being hired. Thus, while there is a keen consciousness of the lack of black representation in the tourism sector, there is also a measure of solidarity among blacks that are there in order to help one other succeed under difficult conditions.

Another interviewee felt that employment discrimination could not exist because without any legislation barring him from being in a position, he can place himself wherever he'd like to be.

I believe that black people have to better themselves, come out on top and prepare because that's the only way to have a weapon to be able to fight. I always say, if you don't put me there, I'll put myself there. They can't limit me from anything. Race can't be limiting. What can be limiting is knowledge, because the one who doesn't know anything, white, black, Chinese, is marked. And definitely being black. Because I'm telling you, being black and having all the necessary qualities they still eliminate you. Imagine if you have none. If you have none of them you're even worse off because then you're *un negro imbécil, un negro bruto* (a stupid or ignorant black person) and those words are qualifying.

As this quote indicates, there is a simultaneous belief in equality of opportunity and the presence of employment discrimination, which contradict each other. The interviewee occupies the position of director of an institution and perhaps because of his position, he is able to believe that anyone can attain his level of success, but as he recognizes later in the interview, he is the only black person working in the entire institution, let alone such a high position.

A black engineer shares a view that is contradictory to the previous interview in that education may be framed as a guaranteed vehicle toward success, but in fact there are barriers set to keep black access low. One interviewee spoke of a glass ceiling that exists for blacks where you can advance but only to a certain point. In addition to the perceived glass ceiling for blacks, there is also the notion that blacks must work doubly hard to succeed, or to break through the ceiling. A mulatto who works in gastronomy said,

If you are black and you want to be in a high position, you have to be so good that there is no choice but to hire you. If you are black you have to work twice as hard to get a position. Tourism is even worse because they hire according to how you look. There is a certain look that managers and owners look for and often credentials are less important. That is the reason that you'll hardly see black people in that sector. What is considered a pretty face here in Cuba is not associated with black skin. When I was looking for a job decades ago it was skills that got you in. Now it's the way you look.

Access to hard currency has much to do with perceptions of opportunity as most of the jobs that are most desired are associated with convertible Cuban currency (known by their acronym in Spanish, CUCs) which provide access to special stores and consumer goods not generally available to the population at large. When asked if there was a disparity among blacks and whites who have access, the 66 year old self-employed worker who made ends meet by painting and selling things on the side said,

There are more whites that receive remittances and have CUC. Everyone knows that. Blacks left with the *balseros* and Mariel<sup>43</sup> but the white people that had money had already left. Look at where we are now. Almost all of those that are in prison are black. There are whites but very few. Because we have had less opportunity. And everything comes from that. The government is aware of that.

Another mulatto male interviewee regarding access to CUC pointed to the practice of gaining good jobs through social connections.

No one really gets paid in CUC. Only those that work with foreigners. And there are both blacks and white in those jobs, except for tourism. If a black person is smarter than a white person then he can get in there. But what happens is that a white person will pull someone in on the side and then the black person who could have gotten in and has all the credentials, doesn't and is told that there are no openings. Also there are those that pay for job openings and get in that way.

There is a conflict between what people perceive as the rules of access that support equal opportunity and what actually happens when blacks seek jobs in high positions or lucrative industries. Social connections and systematic exclusion of blacks in tourism both have an effect on black access to CUC and to employment in the emergent sector in general. Outside of this sector it is very difficult to determine the role that employment discrimination plays in Cuba. Through survey and interview data, we can at least note that it does exist and that some blacks are aware of race being an impediment to advancement.

### **Black Representation in the Cuban Government**

The black presence in the Cuban government has experienced periods of increase throughout the decades of the revolution, often followed by periods of decrease or stagnation (Adams 2004). Often white interviewees would cite the number of black members of the Central Committee with pride and black interviewees would describe the same number as

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<sup>43</sup>Two waves of emigration from Cuba to the United States occurred in the 1980s, called Mariel because those that left were brought to the Mariel boatlift in Havana and in 1994 when Castro allowed those who wanted to construct their own rafts, or *balsas*, to leave for the United States. Both were associated with a high nonwhite racial makeup as opposed to the first wave of those that emigrated during the beginning years of the revolution.

evidence of racism. In addition to representation in government, during conversations that focused on the representation in government, interviewees often mention the lack of black history in the education system as part of the way government excludes blacks. A black historian expressed:

It's as if there was a piece missing from the history. These are themes that we have to continue to analyze and work on and in some way have to introduce them into the general education. When we talk about the Republic, we talk about two or three blacks. First is Juan Gualberto Gómez and after that we don't talk about a black person until Jesús Meléndez<sup>44</sup>. And not even in our own revolution after the national education policies that Fidel initiated there are no blacks that are emphasized. Because it was also a set of policies that were initiated from the university. But how many black people studied at the university at that time? I believe that the only person after the triumph of the revolution that is emphasized is Almeida.

In an interview with a mulatto 36-year old truck driver, when asked about racism in Cuba the first thing that he said was,

"Our history is all white. When you learn about black people you learn about Maceo. That's it! They may put in 2 or 3 other black people, talk about slavery but we don't have any black history in our schools."

Although the survey data suggest that most blacks feel adequately represented in the country's history, there are those that disagree with that assessment. Furthermore, there were some black interviewees that recognized the lack of instruction on the Independent Party of Color. There is the problem, however, that if you do not know who the major black figures are that are missing, you are not able to formulate an opinion that points to black invisibility.

In a discussion with a black elementary school teacher, she said that she made a point to emphasize Antonio Maceo's role in the wars of independence because he was black, but she

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<sup>44</sup> Juan Gualberto Gómez was one of the foremost leaders of the struggle for black rights during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Founder of *La Fraternidad*, a newspaper dedicated to the advancement of Cubans of color, he also served as the president of the Central Directory of the *Sociedades de la Raza de Color*. Jesus Menéndez was a leading figure in the workers movement during the 1940s and served in government as well as the director of the National Federation of Sugar Workers. He fought for the rights of sugar cane workers through the union and was a defender of the displacement and exploitation of farmers and workers in Cuba.

had never heard of the Independent Party of Color. There is a lack of awareness that drives the survey data results suggesting that most blacks feel represented in Cuban history.

Black representation within the government structure, particularly the Central Committee, was a frequent topic discussed in the interviews. A 70-year old housewife shared her views on the lack of blacks in government positions:

No one in the government talks about race because they say that there is equality but that's a lie. I think that they should talk about the issue because it's so important. Black people can be ambassadors, we can be politicians because there are blacks who have potential and ability. But in the government you can count....we have Lazo and now we have one more new one. Everyone else is white, white and old already! When they die I don't know what they are going to do. They are going to have to bring in old white people from who knows where.....I get tired of it, so I laugh.

The frustration that she exhibits is clearly not something that arose because of our conversation about race. This interviewee, as well as many others, displayed a high level of concern with how many blacks were in government and this seemed to be the proxy with which they viewed the government's commitment to racism. More nuanced views of the Central Committee pointed to which positions blacks were given:

The minister of the unions has always been black, since I can remember. That is very interesting. The minister of sports is also black. Blacks are in certain positions. Lazo is a vice-president and he's black, black. So he is an exception. And it happens that way. In tourism it happens. The main government positions in the provinces are not blacks and the ministers are never black. What I mean is, there's a great difficulty to gain access. They have always discriminated against blacks. Aaaaaalways. And history doesn't talk about that, it tells you that blacks haven't been. But we have to continue the battle. That is clear; we have to continue the battle.

Similarly, a 37-year old security guard said:

There's only one black person in the high levels of government, Lazo. Oh and the head of INDER<sup>45</sup> as well is there. There are those. And even Lazo, they get him to do anything that

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<sup>45</sup> INDER stands for National Institute of Sports, Physical Education and Recreation.

has to do with Africa. He's always traveling there or meeting an African delegation. The head of the workers is also black. But that's it. Why? There are blacks at the local level of government and those are important positions but they don't have any power and they don't make any decisions.

The problem of black invisibility seems to be less significant at the local levels of government but the presence of blacks at the higher levels were the examples that came out in the interviews. I did not have any interviewees who mentioned local government positions when they discussed issues of representation. When I asked about them, they did point to more blacks at that level but they also noted that they never discussed the issue of race or racism. How many blacks are in the Central Committee and the Council of Ministers and who they are, were of prime importance to my interviewees of all races.

### *Organization*

The banning of all race-based organizations in the early years of the revolution was accompanied with rhetoric that deemed these organizations unnecessary. Removing official barriers towards racial equality effectively rid the island of the problem of racism and discrimination leaving no need for an organization to battle these issues. Through interviews and conversations, there are still many who believe that a black organization would have no relevance in Cuba. Whites and mulattoes in particular have this view and while there were blacks that believed it would be racist to have such an organization, the majority of blacks interviewed felt the need to organize. The survey results reported in the previous chapter shows that a majority of them were in favor of organizing socially. These interviews were able to examine in more depth what people's feelings were regarding an organization that would work for black rights in Cuba. Among those interviewed, only three out of twenty blacks were opposed to a race-based organization with all ten whites and nine out of eleven



mulattoes also opposing. A white Cuban actress said that she did not see the need for any black organization yet she did see the need for the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC).

The women's struggle, as Fidel said, was a revolution within a revolution, which is the same as blacks, a revolution within a revolution. What happened was, since at the start of the revolution, removing the barriers to exclusive clubs that were for the white elite and with all of the things that were done at the time to get rid of racism, I don't think that a black organization or federation would have been necessary, because really that was fought on a daily basis. Within the country there were many manifestations, racial as well, that went into creating the revolution. The Conjunto Folkorico<sup>46</sup> was created, there's a culture of racial mixing where Spain is present, China is present, the Cuban race is present, just like a great press, we are all Cuban.

Her mention of Conjunto Folkorico which has no political, economic or social purpose suggests that as long as blacks can express themselves culturally, they are represented.

Expressing support for the FMC, but not for a similar organization for civil rights for nonwhites was common among my interviewees and reflects 1) the differences in attitudes regarding gender and race and 2) the ideological discourse from the state that promotes the idea that Cubans can organize and fight against gender inequality and sexism, but not racism. In addition, black women in the FMC cannot bring up the race issue or use that space to create dialogue regarding racism or issues that pertain to black women only because all women are Cuban and have the same battles. The difficulty in discussing race vs. gender is not unique to Cuba, support for affirmative action in the United States, for example, has been found to be viewed more negatively for blacks than for women (Eberhardt & Fiske 1994).

Women's rights and gender inequality seem to be more comfortable topics to talk about among men and women while racism is something that is often only discussed among those that are marginalized. Debates on affirmative action, racial organizations and even the

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<sup>46</sup> The Conjunto Folkorico is a dance/cultural group that was created in the early 1960s to promote Afro-Cuban dance and music.

existence of racism tend to be contentious in any country and governments and citizens throughout the Western Hemisphere often prefer to ignore the problem entirely<sup>47</sup>. The Cuban government takes this pattern a step further by prohibiting organization entirely among blacks for the acquisition of their civil right and equality of opportunity.

Black interviewees that were opposed to the development of black civil rights organizations often did so in accordance with their beliefs about the revolution. The black member of UNEAC shared with me why he was against the creation of any black organization in Cuba:

A black organization could be created, but why do you have to create a black organization if there is no white organization? Do you realize? (laughs) If there isn't this, why should there be that? Here we don't have a society of whites, what reason is there for you to say that there should be a black society? Right away, to propose that there be a group of only blacks is a racist position as well. It's not a revolutionary, integrationist position at all. Because if what you are looking for is that there be no differences and that I am accepted as I am, then you are not creating your vision. You are differentiating yourself from the rest. If we are a country that is not racist, where the Martian principles, man is more than black more than white are alive, our constitution doesn't consider race. I know that in television you can count the black people on one hand, but we are still working.

Aside from those that did not separate their revolutionary beliefs with their beliefs on race, the majority of blacks that were interviewed did believe that the black communities would benefit from organizing.

Of course blacks should organize and I think it should begin from the foundation, which I consider to be the family. Family is the principal social organization in society and black families lack that network. There should be organization in all aspects of black life in order to achieve their rights, social and political.”

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<sup>47</sup> In the United States for example this trend can be seen as politicians, and Barack Obama, in particular, shy away from national discussions on race and racial inequality (Harris 2009).

A black bellhop expressed the need for the government to acknowledge racism in order to raise awareness about the problem. When asked if he thought there should be an organization to fight against racism he said,

Yes. We have to promote that. At a particular moment I think that there is a lot of will to do it. We have achieved after a long time a day against homophobia. What I mean is that little by little the country has progressed. But in order to take steps like that, the government has to accept that there is racism. Workers, teachers. We need workshops about race and civil rights just as we have them about gender. If police stop you to ask for your ID you should know how to react. We need tools, workshops. The topic of blackness is hardly discussed. When all of that begins people will say oh! That's the way it is here? Because racism exists.

The topic of mobilization also came out in some of the interviews in addition to the need to organize. Many of the black interviewees that felt the need to mobilize on the issue also acknowledged that it would be a difficult task because racial consciousness is not present among many blacks. A hip hop artist discussed the issue of complacency and lack of awareness of racism among blacks.

You have to mobilize....I'm sure that in order to get there we need a crisis. Everyone has their ration card, everyone eats and that's the end of it. When people don't have that card, and blacks realize that they don't have the job that the white person has and they can't eat, then we'll have a crisis. But the thing is right now you always end up eating. Maybe worse than the white person because of history, but you eat. And people resign themselves to that.

The bellhop that I interviewed expressed:

I would say we are fifty-fifty on the issue of black solidarity. But there are those that say, no no that doesn't interest me. I wish that we could mobilize. Right now I don't see the intention or inspiration to do so; maybe my children, my grandchildren, my *great-grandchildren*. You have to be proud to be black. And there are those that don't even. If we carry that policy with us we can progress. I am absolutely sure that without that things are not going to get better for us.

He expresses the need to mobilize in order to achieve rights but the dominant ideology has a strong influence on many in the population and as a result the issue of race isn't seen as relevant to them. In addition, because the topic is prohibited from discussion, this further

impedes people's will to discuss, organize and mobilize. What is clear is that those that do express a sense of racial consciousness and feel strongly about the role of race in black lives recognize that 1) without consciousness blacks will not be able to organize on this issue and 2) without organization, progress will not be made.

### *Conclusion*

Racial democracy in Cuba interacts with revolutionary ideology but it also interacts with alternative ideologies and lived experiences that together make up a varied set of views on race and racism. Thus, it would be incomplete to determine simply whether Cubans accept the dominant racial democracy ideology or not because racial attitudes are more nuanced and do not operate dichotomously. What the survey results indicate and these interviews provide further evidence for is that belief in the revolutionary government's accuracy in explaining Cuban racial realities depends especially on political attitudes as well as on racial consciousness. At the same time, racial consciousness and partial adherence to the dominant racial ideology can occur together. Most people, especially blacks, see that there is racism in Cuba. Whether they define that racism as individual acts, vestiges from Cuban society before the revolution, or structural racism depends on the individual. There are a number of people in Cuba who believe in the revolution and thus do not believe that it can produce racial inequalities or a racist structure. But even these people will acknowledge that there are whites with racial prejudice. Conversely, there are blacks that possess a strong concept of racial consciousness and reject much of the elements of racial democracy ideology by recognizing a racist structure and the need for an aggressive policy to open up

opportunities for blacks and combat racial inequality. But even those that possess such consciousness are influenced by racial democracy in some way.

While most of my interviewees pointed to the existence of racism in some form, there was a visible difference between how different racial groups characterized racism in Cuba and in them as individuals. Discourse that promotes revolutionary ideals as anti-racist has produced an etiquette where whites rarely think they harbor racist attitudes. To be racist is to be un-patriotic. The lack of recognition regarding individual attitudes of racism maintains the presence of racist and anti-black discourse within common conversation even in the presence of blacks. Ironically then, anti-racist etiquette has supported racist social norms and behavior. The use of openly racist expression proved most surprising to me throughout my interviews and observations. I did not expect for such commentary to be used so freely and without recognition that such attitudes constitute racism.

There was also a difference in how those with different political attitudes characterized racism. Those that were strong supporters of the revolutionary government did not believe that there was any structural racism, only individual attitudes of racism found within a small minority of the population. Government supporters aligned with racial ideology promoted by the state and occasionally were even stronger in their denials of racism.<sup>48</sup> There were also those who supported the revolution but favored changes in the treatment of the racial issue in Cuba. They recognized structural issues and pushed for more policy that would address these issues. Those that were opposed to the revolutionary government were the harshest in their critique of the system and pointed to a racist system of

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<sup>48</sup> While the Cuban government has recognized housing disparities and some measure of racial inequality, strong supporters of the revolution would not concede even on this point.

which the government was cognizant. In sum, in these interviews I found a close relationship between political attitudes on the revolution and on race in Cuba.

There are several key areas where those that recognize the presence of racism find it most visible: the tourism sector, the media and police treatment of blacks. To a lesser extent, blacks point to limited black representation at the top levels of government as a sign of racism as well. Employment in the tourism industry and racial profiling by the police have produced increased experiences with discrimination and form part of a new sensibility and awareness about race, among blacks especially. Issues of representation and lack of opportunity show that there is a recognition that race does influence levels of access, even if many characterize racism as an individual phenomenon instead. Recognition and awareness do not always match citizen's definitions of racism, largely due to ideology and rhetoric that is part of the dominant racial ideology. Ideological definitions of racism influence much of the perception of what racism is and who perpetuates it. The data in this chapter show that both the dominant ideology that trivializes racism and defines it as individual prejudice and alternative black (and sometimes non-black) ideologies that reject dominant constructions of racism work together to produce racial thought and attitudes in Cuba. Mass surveys are not permitted in Cuba to examine nationally representative samples and thus, we cannot determine whether this relationship between political attitudes and racial consciousness holds across racial categories, controlling for education and age. Further research to establish whether there are demographic variables associated with particular views would enhance these findings and determine more about why individuals accept, critique or completely reject the dominant racial ideology in Cuba.



## CHAPTER 5

### *DE AQUI PA'L CIELO: BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS AND POLITICAL THOUGHT*

“Black solidarity, that seemingly involuntary readiness of most blacks to act individually and collectively to protect black people from harm and injustice, is an invaluable moral and political resource.”

– Tommie Shelby, *We Who Are Dark*

The fact that the powerful often win does not mean that a war isn't going on.”

- Tricia Rose, *Black Noise*

The voice of Estenoz is heard! And it is heard not because it is strong, but because it speaks a language that everyone understands, because it expresses a situation that everyone feels and it has the courage to present a path for blacks. Is Estenoz ambitious? Perhaps, but what is certain and resounding is that his attitude has stayed recorded in the trunk of history, not as a personal gesture of a leader, but as a vehicle of one of the most formidable black protests in Cuba.

- Alberto Arredondo on the leader of the Partido Independiente de Color,  
*El Negro en Cuba*

The effort to search for the meaning of blackness seems like a daunting task for which there could be no definitive answer. Even in my more narrow focus of Cuba, it still would be impossible to produce a definition that includes each individual experience, each personal reality and each social and political significance. This chapter's goal then, is not to define blackness in Cuba, but to locate it and identify its potential for collectivity and the



development of a black counter-ideology. I will discuss its varied meanings and interpretations among those that matter most to its definition, black people. Moreover, I want to attach these meanings and interpretations to their political importance as I consider race and identification to be a political stance that cannot be relegated only to the personal or separated from the political. The political importance of blackness and the dialogue that comes out of black communities also can be found in their ability to contradict dominant ideologies. There is a strong link between racial identification and power that lies in black consciousness. The ability to create discourse that speaks to the black experience in Cuba and the possibility of action based on this discourse require black consciousness and solidarity.

At the start of the Cuban Revolution in 1959, in addition to ending segregation, the government eliminated all existing societies, organizations and media that were associated with race or created to address black concerns regarding rights and representation. Blacks could no longer organize on the basis of race and the topic was silenced as racism was declared to no longer be a societal problem. Despite the lack of black institutions and networks that support black dialogue and agency, blacks have managed, both formally and informally, to challenge the rhetoric from above and remain informed and aware of the relevance of race based on racial democracy's visible (and sometimes not so visible) fallacies. Above all, I argue that black consciousness exists in Cuba and that race matters to black people. There is an element of solidarity and group identity that stems from blacks' marginal position, not only in Cuba but throughout the Americas. This chapter examines how the politics from below construct black ideologies, often different from revolutionary ideologies.

There are two forms of critique occurring in Cuba that challenge the official ideology and serve as a testament to the presence of black consciousness. The first consists of above ground political activity led primarily by academics and artists that have opened a space for expression regarding race in Cuba through art, scholarship and debate. This above ground movement has benefited from the political opening created during the economic crisis that followed the fall of the Soviet Union, the Special Period, and has introduced art, music, scholarship, and even some journalism that talks candidly about black identity, anti-black racism and stereotypes, and discrimination in Cuba. Bounded by the confines of what the Cuban state will allow, these expressions and works do not have complete freedom, but they do highlight issues that have previously been silenced. Their role is critical as the beginnings of a black consciousness movement, but their reach outside of their own circles is limited. Academics and other activists do not command a non-elite audience nonetheless their work is vital to the conversation and is commanding a different audience, government officials.<sup>49</sup> Hip hop in Cuba has garnered the largest following within the above ground movement and its musicians are the primary messengers of black expression in Cuba. Many of their songs exhibit consciousness, solidarity, pride and most interestingly, pro-revolutionary rhetoric.

The second form of critique is primarily underground and is the forum that those outside of artistic and academic circles utilize to express the meaning of blackness and the

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<sup>49</sup> One of the primary activist groups, Color Cubano, created out of the larger group UNEAC (Union of Cuban Writers and Artists), has received various important members of the Cuban government, primarily from the Ministry of Culture, at their debates. Their founder also received government funding for an experimental affirmative action project that renovated a *solar*, Cuba's poorest housing inhabited by mostly blacks and mulattoes, giving each resident their own kitchen and bathroom. The project, Proyecto California, also created workshops and events for the residents of the *solar* on health care, computer skills, and Afro-Cuban culture, among others. The group has garnered much attention among academics and activists and although there have been no tangible accomplishments, they have indeed been successful at raising the issue of race to the government's attention. To their credit, they have also scheduled meetings with the Ministry of Education to propose changes to the curriculum and with representatives of the television stations to increase black visibility and promote positive images of blacks in television.

common experiences among them. What occurs underground is an unorganized, informal, and often unintentional group of collectives that create and reinforce their own ideas about blackness and its political implications in their everyday lives through conversation. My discussion of underground critique follows James Scott's concept of hidden transcripts, which is particularly relevant for Cuba as an authoritarian regime where critiques are largely forbidden. As Scott argues, "subordinates in large-scale structures of domination...have a fairly extensive social existence outside the immediate control of the dominant. It is in such sequestered settings where, in principle, a shared critique of domination may develop" (Scott 1992, xi). Knowledge of these hidden transcripts in addition to dominant ideologies is necessary to understand power relations in their entirety (Scott 1992). Through familiar talk, blacks can create their own intimate networks of information about race. These conversations vary including discussions on the lack of black representation on television, stories of experiences with discrimination, complaints about obstacles that impede black progress and many other issues that uniquely face black Cubans. They remain under the radar yet the informality of this form of expression does not undercut its importance. These underground conversations are the foundation of racial micro-politics and black public opinion in Cuba. A study of black politics in Cuba that only analyzes the public challenges to racial discrimination would indeed be incomplete. The private discourse coupled with the arena, albeit small, of public discourse together make up black political thought in Cuba and both serve, in different ways, to challenge the status quo.<sup>50</sup> These two modes of discourse

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<sup>50</sup> The anti-racism and pro-black expressions that have been introduced during the last 15 years or so have had an influence on the government's willingness to address the race question but it should be noted that these elite efforts are virtually unknown by those that do not seek out these circles and information. Thus, while elite activity coupled with the private activity of the majority of blacks constitute black political thought in Cuba, the latter, more often than not, operates without knowledge of the existence of the former. Certainly this fact is not accidental as elites are allowed by the state to create this debate within their own circles and not on a mass level that could lead to any kind of widespread movement or challenge to the state's policies on race.

serve to maintain and reinforce black consciousness among a racial group that is not afforded the proper institutions or networks to do so in the public sphere.

### *Group Consciousness*

Most works on group consciousness have referred to the 1980 article by Gurin et al, which delineates the difference between consciousness and identification. They define identification as the relationship to others within a stratum, whereas consciousness is a “set of political beliefs and action orientations arising out of this awareness of similarity” which takes into account the group’s position in society (30). My definition of black consciousness follows Gurin et al’s conceptualization in that black consciousness represents an awareness of the position of blacks as a group in relation to others, namely whites and mulattoes, creating a politicized identity. Consciousness not just one’s social condition, but how one perceives and evaluates that social condition. Those at the bottom of the social hierarchy, for example, may perceive that position as a result of inequities and use the group’s status as a marker for their own opportunities as a member of that group, relative to other groups.

Black consciousness is most useful as a political tool through participation, voting and activism which seeks to combat racial inequalities but often authors conflate consciousness with political action. Political action can be a product of group consciousness which can facilitate organization, but group consciousness does not always lead to agency. Gurin et al go further than the concept of consciousness as a set of political beliefs relating to group position to identify group consciousness as “an action orientation, the view that collective action is the best means to realize the stratum’s interest” and in their 1981 (Miller et al) article say that consciousness is a “commitment to collective action aimed at realizing

the group's interests (31, 495).” Tajfel (1974) states that, “when group action commitments fail to arise, either group membership has not been made salient, or the cognitive work that provides the group ideology, referred to here as political consciousness, has not taken place (67).”

It is on the point of collective action that I depart from the bulk of the literature on group consciousness. I would agree that a distinction between identification and group consciousness needs to be made in order to understand the set of beliefs associated with one's relative position as well as the potential for political action. The same distinction should be made between consciousness and action. Group consciousness represents a cognizance of group position relative to other groups and a feeling of identification and solidarity with members of your group. Group members can display this viewpoint and even express it to other members of the group without acting on it, for various reasons. Inaction does not discount their group consciousness, but action is often a product of group consciousness. The authoritarian nature of Cuba's political system impedes the opportunity for most political activism as well as the exercise of vote choice. Thus, if we equate group consciousness with political activity or collective action, we would exclude the possibility of black consciousness among all Cubans.<sup>51</sup> I do not omit political action from the definition of consciousness with only Cuba in mind. Even in democratic societies, there are those that display markers of black consciousness without engaging in political activity (Sellers 1998; Shelby 2005).

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<sup>51</sup> As I've stated above, there is a degree of political activity among elites in Cuba aimed toward eradicating anti-black racism and its accompanying stereotypes. This space is only open to academics and other elite activists and a public space such as this is not afforded to nonelites.

By grouping blacks into one concept of black consciousness I do not wish to suggest that all blacks have the same opinions or beliefs on what it means to be black in Cuba. Nor do I wish to argue that all black Cubans possess group consciousness and solidarity. There are many different ideas among blacks about the causes and solutions to blacks' social position. What remains true to many blacks is the acknowledgement of the experience of being black in Cuba. As Ingrid Banks (2000) argues about black women's consciousness in the United States, "although a black women's consciousness is not essentialist in assuming that all black women are alike, we know that as a group black women have a particular historical and political reality in the United States (18)." It is this particular reality that produces difference in experience among whites and nonwhites. As one of the leaders of racial activism in Cuba said in an interview, "you can say that there is discrimination towards black Cubans that occurs in hotels, restaurants, etc. That is our experience, any black person will tell you that." The political reality in Cuba is clear to many blacks and nonblacks as well: discrimination exists. There is a shared position that is acknowledged by many, yet how does the awareness of positionality manifest politically and socially, if at all? The varied forms that blacks view, discuss and act on their commonality constitute black consciousness.

There is a clear difference between racial consciousness that remains within the individual and that which is expressed and acted upon. Michael Hanchard (1994), in his discussion of Afro-Brazilian racial consciousness, develops a distinction between apolitical, identity-based similarities and an identity-based collective with clear political goals, naming them faint and strong resemblances, respectively. In his definition of faint resemblances he discusses an ephemeral bonding that is based on attitudes or emotion, but does not possess

any strategic component. Strong resemblances lie in the ability of a group to place race as a primary and overriding foundation for organization with a stated political agenda or objective. The distinction that Hanchard makes is a critical one, whereby those that simply identify with being black do not possess the same ideas or conceptualization as those who turn this identification into political strategy.

What I put forth is a crucial third category in between the above two categories that tends to get lost amidst the search for tangible examples of racial politics and movements. The category is rooted in my argument that group consciousness does not equate political action, nor do its members have to possess any commitment to political action. Those that possess an acute awareness for their racial group's hierarchical position due to distributional inequities as well as the ways in which racism and even individual prejudice can hinder their own progress, do not always possess the desire for political involvement. While those among this group may indeed believe that political organization is necessary to further their group's advancement and combat inequality, they may never enter any such organization nor express their ideas publicly. Their ideas are politicized, but their actions are not so that one can display solidarity outside of a political realm and be race conscious without ever transferring that into a political act.

Group consciousness can lead to collective action, yet political action may also have to do with certain characteristics that are not tied to strong feelings of group consciousness. Miller et al (1981) define collective action through voting, participation in group organizations, lobbying, demonstrations or engaging in other pressure tactics on behalf of the group. These activities, with the exception of voting are not necessarily common activities of the average citizen, but are activities that political activists may take part in. A definition of

black consciousness should go beyond the set of beliefs among those most active in the community. In Katherine Tate's (1991) study of black political participation in the 1984 and 1988 elections, she highlights the characteristics that would lead people toward political participation. She writes that people possessing certain political skills and resources such as experience and education can more easily bear the cost of voting. In addition, those who are familiar with the political process – usually older and better-educated citizens – are more likely to vote. Psychological attributes that favor political participation, Tate argues, include civic duty, a sense of efficacy, and having a general interest in politics. It is possible for someone to possess group consciousness but not possess the attributes that would make them likely to engage in political activity. In Cuba in particular, a sense of efficacy is particularly significant as citizens do not possess freedom of association and are not presented with multiple candidates for each position at the voting booth. Fifty years of similar rhetoric and policy toward race would suggest that any challenge to such an entrenched policy would be futile. Factors such as political efficacy are presented here for definitional purposes for the group consciousness concept, as it is beyond the scope of this project to test the sources of political action. My goal is to expand the definition of black consciousness or black group identity to include those who do not act politically, but think and speak this way, albeit in a private space.

### *Discrimination and the Influence of Experience*

My foundation for analysis of black consciousness is based on the concept of common experience, which has become evident to blacks in a way never seen during the first three decades of the revolution. The profound societal changes brought about during the economic crisis caused by the fall of the Soviet Union produced inequalities not seen in the



earlier decades of the revolution (Fernandez Robaina 2009) and thus gave racial meaning to everyday experience. Heightened discrimination against blacks and visible, tangible evidence of racial inequality produced a rupture between the ideology of racial democracy and the racial reality on the ground. These conditions increased the significance of being black in Cuba and created visible examples of racial inequality that could not be glossed over with revolutionary rhetoric. As race became more salient through observed inequalities and personal experiences of discrimination, so did the importance of racial identity and the common experience among blacks.

The changes in the Special Period only served to bring race to the forefront and I do not suggest that consciousness arose only after this period. Many markers that point to racial disparities have always been present such as the preponderance of blacks living in the poorest neighborhoods, the absence of blacks on television, and the domination of whites in high professional and leadership positions. As a noted Cuban author writes in reference to the existence of racism in Cuba,

As a black man myself, neighbor of an area next to Cayo Hueso, having lived very close to the so-called Canal del Cerro, or in only walking through the city during my years as a bank messenger, or having a son living in Veguita de Galo in Santiago de Cuba or participating in experiences of families and friends of my skin color, or for a thousand other reasons, despite the lack of statistics, I never had any doubt (Fowler 2009).<sup>52</sup>

Cuba has always operated under a system where whites control modes of access and occupy privileged positions (Adams 2004). Thus there were always blacks aware of the existence of racial inequality who expressed a strong black identity as well, before the Special Period.

The economic crisis changed the scope of these privileged positions as they became the only

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<sup>52</sup> Cayo Hueso and Canal de Cerro are two of the poorest neighborhoods in Havana and are inhabited largely by black Cubans. Veguita de Galo is a similar neighborhood of Santiago de Cuba in the Eastern province of the island.

way to thrive and possess hard currency, which determines purchasing power – a reality not seen during the revolution before this period.

Access to dollars has become the primary preoccupation for Cuban survival which in turn has a significant effect on occupation choice, access to facilities and activities. Cubans with access to hard currency are disproportionately those with family abroad or those working in the tourism sector. As discrimination and unequal treatment of blacks becomes a norm, grievances take on clear racial explanations and consciousness and solidarity are built through conversations of recognition. The Special Period served to further cement feelings of solidarity among Afro-Cubans. The lack of available data on previous levels of consciousness and solidarity among blacks bars the possibility of a quantitative analysis of the effects of the Special Period on black attitudes. Authors, within and outside of Cuba, have agreed that race came to the forefront after the economic crisis (Sawyer, 2006; Rodriguez & Espina 2006) creating enough attention that leaders began to address the issue, albeit sporadically (de la Fuente 2001c). De la Fuente posits that the racialization of the economic crisis could produce a racial response as well as exacerbate racial tensions. Based on my interviews, as well as the arrival of activism, art and dialogue that express high levels of consciousness after the Special Period, I argue that black identity is strengthening. The positive correlation between an experience of discrimination and notions of black consciousness serves as evidence for the changing racial dynamic influencing identity. In addition, the increasing presence of dialogue on this issue, particularly through the work of the hip hop movement, has created a heightened awareness about the importance of black consciousness. Blacks identify a unique experience among each other that conflicts with the

racial democratic notion that all Cubans are equal, and turn to each other to reinforce this idea.

Black youth share the commonality of experience especially through discriminatory treatment by the police. A 25 year old male construction worker stated that most black males can be expected to be stopped in the street at some point.

Here they see the black man as a bandit. The police will ask a white person for his identification if he's going on a trip perhaps, but blacks always are asked for their identification. White people pass by a police officer and they don't tell him anything, but black people they always say, hey, what's this one doing? And they always stop him.

Males in particular can often count on being stopped by police in areas of high tourist traffic even without being in direct contact with tourists. This experience is not unique to Cuba. Police activity against the black community is often an impetus for black political activism throughout the Diaspora (Davenport et al 2011; Ogbar 2004; Cashmore 2001) and Wiezter and Tuch (2005) show that attitudes toward the prevalence and acceptability of racial profiling are influenced by personal experiences with discrimination by the police. In Cuba, the treatment of blacks by the police has unearthed racism's presence in the form of every day incidents, making them impossible to ignore. The common experience of young black males to be stopped and harassed by the police has contributed to a more conscious black population especially among the younger generation. The existence of racial profiling is noticed as blacks see that white people are seldom stopped for their identification and if walking among a group of white people or with a tourist, black people are always the only ones that are asked for ID. A 28 year old university student described an experience at the university:

It has happened to me on the university stairs. I'll be walking up the stairs and there is a white person in front or next to me and the guard says, "your identification please." And I'll say, "did you ask for identification from that white guy?" He'll say no, and so I tell him that I'm not showing him mine either. And I keep walking.

Differential treatment of blacks by police and barred entry from certain spaces are among the changes during the Special Period that lifted the veil that kept racism hidden or at the very least, sufficiently subtle to be ignored or glossed over by many blacks. This is akin to Patricia Hill Collins' (1998) concept of surveillance and containment where the police essentially contain blacks away from tourist areas which are *spaces of privilege* and keep them under surveillance by checking their IDs and stopping them in the streets.

My analysis on experience does not discount the role of phenotype or heritage and ancestry - what Shelby (2005) terms *thin blackness* - as religion, history, and feelings of common ancestry do factor into solidarity<sup>53</sup>. The common experience, the new relevance of race that has changed the meaning of blackness in Cuba, has created a stronger, more politicized identity that heritage would be unable to capture. As Manning Marable (1995) argues, racial inequalities and different experiences based on race cause blacks and whites to "perceive social reality in dramatically different ways" even in close social interactions with each other (678). Whites can choose to see a racial democracy or a lack of discrimination due to their social position and personal experiences that lack a racial component. Conversely, it is increasingly difficult for blacks to ignore the meaning of their race by attributing experiences of exclusion to factors other than race, as is common under racial democracy. As a male student expressed,

There are whites that are drug dealers, that have been arrested, that don't do anything with their lives, and that shouldn't be my problem. But it is, because a black person,

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<sup>53</sup> Ancestry does in fact factor into Cuban conceptions of blackness more than in the United States (the focus of Shelby's study) due to the ability of black Cubans to retain the Yoruba language and religion brought over during the slave trade.

more than being a thief, is a black thief. A white thief is just a thief, but a black thief is always the *black* thief. Or the *black* man who punched someone, not just the person who punched someone. White people don't realize this, some black people don't either, that marginalization of blacks and lack of education about race, produce these realities.

Whites often have a raceless character, whereas blacks are racialized against negative stereotypes. This racialization is done by both blacks and whites and as the interviewer points out, many do not realize simply because the topic of race is not often discussed.

Despite the promises of the revolution to equalize the country, both economically and racially, Cuba continues to be a country where blackness is devalued. Blacks as a group continue to be overwhelmingly represented among the nation's poorest and remain underrepresented within the higher valued professions and employment sectors, including the government. As a 27 year old female expressed,

The system can say to blacks, if everyone can study, that there is no racism. Everyone has the opportunity to study and human capacity is not limited. Those who can do, will do. But there is something called a glass ceiling for us. The system accomplishes what they want us to be. First we have to take high administrative jobs. But what are they doing? Nothing. The head of the ministries are all white. And how many blacks are there to be heads of ministries and institutes? Many! But we are not there.

The recognition that blacks are a subordinate group who are given less opportunity as compared to whites often cannot be ignored even by blacks who choose not to realize it or gloss over it.

A considerable number of U.S. scholars have done work on racial solidarity and consciousness rooted in experience, or the shared experience of oppression. In his book on black solidarity, Shelby (2005) calls for, "a conception of solidarity based strictly on the shared experience of racial oppression and a joint commitment to resist it (11-12)." William

E. Nelson (2002) argues that black political consciousness “develops in response not only to positive stimuli but negative stimuli as well. Under crisis conditions, black people will organize to challenge the main instruments of their oppression (86).” Michael Dawson (1994) writes that “critical to the formation of social identity is the active process of comparing in-group and out-group members. The more differences that are perceived between the in-group and the out-group on the salient social dimensions, the stronger the group identity of in-group members (76).” The economic changes during the Special Period, created racial explanations to disparities in access, widening the gap between blacks and whites. Differences in black and white opportunities, while always there, bubbled to the surface, thus making black group identity stronger as the saliency of race increased. Being black leaves many vulnerable to certain things: obstacles to job entrance in lucrative sectors, targeting by the police, being stereotyped and profiled in tourist areas, etc. This is not to say that all blacks experienced all of these treatments at once. There are certainly those who have not had an experience with discrimination and those who have been able to advance into the higher echelons of society. Even in these cases, the lack of representation of blacks is not overlooked, as the case with the university student quoted above. Those who are granted certain opportunities are often more aware of discrimination than those who remain locked out at the bottom. One of the directors at a library in Havana told me,

In this library for example, I’m the only black man. But from a professional and academic point of view, I am in a position where my employees count on me. Because I’ve put myself in that position – I’ve stood my ground because that’s what you have to do. Since I was young my mother has always told me that blacks are always pushed to the side, so I have made sure that I’m not. But I am the only one here.

Many academics and directors that I spoke with were quite cognizant of the lack of representation at their level of employment. In the upper levels one can observe firsthand the few blacks that are in similar positions.

In addition to the recognition that there are few blacks that occupy top positions, a sentiment exists that in order to get to the top, you must not only be qualified, but more qualified than white people. A 38 year old bellhop working in a hotel expressed such a reality:

I can't tell you right now how many blacks there are working in the hotel where I work but I can tell you that if you do a search through the tourist sector there are very few blacks working there. In my personal case I have had to advance a lot, I know two languages and I'm learning a third because people watch you and I've had to really prepare myself. You can see the difference between the way that they treat black and white employees, they are always evaluating you and trying to label you a bad worker. There are three blacks where I work and to have gotten there they have to be *good*. Because they won't fire you but they look for the chance to, a bit indirectly, to find a problem and make it into something more. There are only two or three hotels in Cuba that have black managers, the rest are white. And that is how it is in tourism.

Many other interviewees pointed to the lack of blacks in top managerial positions with the recognition that you have to be superior to your white counterparts in order to get there.

Compounded with the requirement to be a shining star among the rest, as one interviewee described it, there is a threat that you are also under a higher level of scrutiny than white employees. These testimonies often cited these examples not as personal opinions, but as something that is understood among blacks. They are part of the "hidden transcript" that circulates throughout black communities that point to the distinct black experience due to racist practices, particularly following the Special Period.

The role of experience is crucial not only in creating a different reality for blacks and whites, but in evaluating one's opinions about the meaning of race in Cuba. An experience of discrimination can often cause someone who may have ignored race in the past to begin to

process its relevance in their lives and the lives of other blacks as well. Andrea Y. Simpson (1998) in her study of black college students in the United States finds that, the experience of discrimination or memories of one's first realization of racial difference, "are crucial in the processing of the meaning of race in the students' individual lives and in the lives of others (26)." While conducting field research in Cuba, a Cuban of mixed descent expressed interest in filling out one of my surveys. I told him that the survey analyzes black consciousness. His response was, 'Well, I'm black.' When I asked him if he considered mulattoes to be black, he responded, yes. He told me that when he would date white or lighter women in the past, he would always run into problems with the woman's parents because they never accepted him. He then told a story of when he traveled hundreds of miles across the island from Havana to Camaguey because they had operated on his girlfriend at the time. When he got to the house, his girlfriend's mother asked who he was and he said that he was the girl's boyfriend. She insisted that he could not be and said that he was going to have to leave or she would call the police because her daughter doesn't have a boyfriend. When he insisted for a second time that he was her boyfriend she said that she didn't want any black people in her house. She then sent him off to hitch a ride home with suitcase in hand. It was this experience that convinced him he was indeed black and that the designation of mulatto meant little to whites. This man's repeated experiences with discrimination, the one told above being the most disturbing to him, reinforced his feelings of black identity and increased his cognizance of racial meanings in Cuba.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> I do not suggest here that all mulattoes, or even blacks, embrace a black identity or develop strong consciousness because of an experience with discrimination. In the case of mulattoes, there are some that indeed embrace a black identity and some that try to move as far away from blackness as they can. I do want to argue that experience does have an effect on how one perceives race and one's own identity.



### *Everyday talk*

The foundation for black solidarity and consciousness lies in the common experience of blackness. From the experience, dialogue grows that reinforces consciousness through collective recognition. While it is true that consciousness lies in individuals' ideas that become politicized, these ideas must be shared in order to gain recognition as common experience and reinforce the solidarity among the group members. In a society where there is very little freedom of expression, no freedom of association, and a genuine fear of speaking out in public spaces, how then do you build racial solidarity and reinforce consciousness?

The role of underground expression regarding race is one of the most significant ways in which solidarity is built. In his book *Race Rebels* (1994), Robin Kelley provides us with a way to redefine politics among oppressed groups by emphasizing the politics of the everyday that originates not from above, but from below. He cites James C. Scott (1992) in his conception of a hidden transcript which is a, "dissident political culture that manifests itself in daily conversations, folklore, jokes, songs, and other cultural practices (8)." Despite a public display of consent of the official transcript by subordinated groups, the hidden transcript tells the true political ideologies of these groups but remains buried in private, everyday conversations. What Scott terms *infrapolitics*, I argue are the building blocks of black solidarity in Cuba, especially in the absence of black institutions or public spaces. These everyday forms of resistance are of course purposely hidden and designed to remain outside of the public sphere but are of no less importance to Cuban politics. Kelly writes that, "by traditional definition the question of what is political hinges on whether or not groups are involved in elections, political parties or grass roots social movements (9)."

When access to this kind of participation is barred, it is replaced by political talk. This talk may not always be deliberately political, but it speaks to the lived experience of black people. Talk couched in race that relays what it means to be black in Cuba is always political. As Kelley aptly writes, “politics is not separate from the lived experience of the imaginary world of what is possible; to the contrary, politics is about these things (9).”

The effect of infrapolitics on power relations is of supreme importance. Everyday resistance to the dominant ideology affects those that perpetuate the ideology, just as the dominant ideology affects identity formation and racial norms. The young generation in particular is talking more about race and experiencing its meaning and weight in their everyday interactions. This generation will take part in a new way of viewing society, much different than the older leadership of the revolution that ignored these issues. In this sense, the hidden transcript has the potential to affect the social order and become part of the public transcript. In classrooms, mass media, music and resistance to everyday manifestations of discrimination, the newer generation continually shapes the dominant ideology and challenges its legitimacy.

A crucial component to black consciousness building is the sharing and distribution of information. While continuous contact with the dominant ideology has the power to influence how one may view their own social realities, counter-ideologies possess this same power. Those that may be exposed to racial democracy’s counter-ideologies may alter their approach to analyzing race and viewing their own experiences. The spaces that elites have been afforded to explore racial issues is an example of the conscious distribution of information about race, albeit on a small scale. Those who gain access to these spaces and are exposed to academic workshops, debate in the classroom, etc. are part of the current shift

in racial thinking among blacks. This in turn can create a cycle of information, or a network that circulates these ideologies to a different, or even larger black audience. In an interview with a popular hip hop group in Havana, Obsesión, they expressed to me that much of their consciousness had come from workshops that they attended by a well-known race scholar<sup>55</sup>. Considering hip hop is one of the primary vehicles of race talk and the celebration of black identity, I asked them if they entered into the hip hop movement with a black consciousness.

No that came later. In fact, it's incredible because my first song talked about racism but it wasn't really what you would call a conscious treatment of race - it was because the hip hop movement in the United States talked about those things. They talked about being discriminated against and so did I until I said, hold on a minute, this applies to me too. Tomas had a lot to do with our learning process also, he accelerated the process. There were a lot of unconscious texts with the racial issue but they became more conscious beginning after a workshop that we attended with Tomas. From there we were able to explain many things to ourselves and it made us continue to look more into depth at race. We have many more questions, more doubts that we still have not answered, but we've advanced on quite a few.

The work of the Diaspora is present in most hip hop movements and throughout Latin America there are many similarities in the connections that hip hop have to activism and in turn, black affirmation (Pardue 2008). Through their music the group presents strong messages of black consciousness to their audience who in turn are made to look more into depth at racial issues. They also provide a much needed space for the expression of black pride.

Other scholars have made use of Scott's theoretical work on infrapolitics (Helg 1995; Harris-Lacewell 2004; Hanchard 2006; Sawyer 2006) and Michael Dawson (2001) introduces a similar construct known as the black counterpublic. The black counterpublic, or the black public sphere is a concept used to define the space for black political thought and debate, created because of historical exclusion from the mainstream public sphere. Dawson

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<sup>55</sup> The scholar referred to in the interview is Tomas Fernandez Robaina, author of many books in Cuba on race and one of the foremost scholars on black Cuban history on the island.

discusses the counterpublic among blacks in the United States, but the counterpublic among black Cubans manifests itself much differently. Without black institutions or public spaces that allow for debate that stands counter to the dominant racial ideology, would-be public spaces are private and less formal, among friends and family only. Melissa Harris Lacewell (2004) offers a critical theoretical work on the significance of everyday political talk in black politics. In her work she argues that everyday talk, while often not purposely political, tackle issues central to racial politics and its driving mechanisms. She writes, “embedded in conversations that are not always overtly political is language that seeks to understand American inequality; to define the importance of race in creating inequality, to determine the roles of whites in perpetuating inequality and to devise strategies for advancing the interests of self and group (4-5).” Many conversations that center on race try to avoid the political and just concentrate on the every day. In Cuba there is a tendency among the non-elites to not discuss anything political (both due to the sensitivity of freedoms of expression and the barrage of politics presented in state-owned media) yet these informal conversations about inequalities, race, and opportunities are not only political but, as Harris-Lacewell argues, vital in the creation of black political ideologies.

The space where black political expression takes place in Cuba is more often an informal one, particularly among those that are not part of the group of above ground activists that are afforded recognition. Harris-Lacewell puts forth a definition that states, “the hidden transcript is a collective enterprise that must be created within a public sphere that operates beneath the surveillance of dominant classes (7).” These spaces do not necessarily have to be public: the creation of political thought and ideology construction can occur in everyday conversations in private spaces as well. Thus I want to expand this definition to include

private spaces that are away from the gaze of the government as well, but are not necessarily official spaces. The only spaces in Cuba insulated from control and surveillance from above are private and thus must be included as a locale of the creation of hidden transcripts. As long as the space is kept away from control and surveillance from above, we can consider this a place for the creation of hidden resistance and debate. A *mulata* woman who worked at the front desk in a large hotel in Miramar noted that there are hardly any nonwhites working in the positions visible to tourists. She was the only mulatto that worked in the lobby area of the hotel. I asked her if nonwhites in the hotel talk about the issue of whites only working in the hotel.

The issue of racism is talked about in particular groups, but not in public. Just in select groups. And here whites are always nice in front of you, behind your back I don't know, it could be different. So there is solidarity, but not that much because we can't always be talking amongst ourselves in little groups at work. People stop working and they go home. It's in the house or with friends that you talk about those things.

It should also be noted that the informal and private character of black dialogue in Cuba undercuts its diffusion into black communities and its effect on the dominant ideology.

Hanchard and Dawson (Hanchard 2006) discuss the upward diffusion of black ideological discourse and idea clusters that can significantly influence black discourse, thought and cultural production. The silence on race and the elimination of racially based organizations in Cuba produced not only an informality of black politics relegated to private spheres or spaces, but it prevented this upward diffusion of black political thought so that the state produced ideology remains unchallenged in any kind of formal or public way. While social structures and hierarchies can serve to challenge the dominant ideology, those that occupy the upper positions in these structures are not obligated to separate practice from theory or reality from ideology.

Amidst a state that does not recognize the existence of discrimination nor the societal relevance of race, blacks need a space where they can discuss how blackness affects their lives. In addition, these conversations can also help to frame the interpretation of inequality and obstacles towards black advancement. If one adheres to the doctrine of racial democracy it is possible to attribute an experience of discrimination to something else. In other words, if you do not believe that blacks are disadvantaged in Cuba, you do not possess the necessary information or framework to identify that disadvantage when it affects you personally. During my time in Cuba conversations regarding racism often centered on the media. Discussion regarding the lack of blacks as major characters in Cuban programs arose often particularly when juxtaposed with movies shows from the United States where black actors are much more visible. In many instances with blacks in Havana, discriminatory treatment by the police also sparked complaints by black males. Conversations about race are not only present, but they are important and can reinforce blacks' views on race and inequalities within a society that does not discuss such phenomena.

Harris-Lacewell cites barbershops as one of the public spaces where black political thought is created through everyday conversation, yet in Cuba state control of space coupled with black invisibility severely undercuts the ability of blacks to create a space as informal (and necessary) as a barbershop. In Cuba there are no black hair salons or barbershops, despite the necessity for them in a majority non-white nation. Women are especially affected by the absence of black hair products in the market, so that even if a space were granted to black women to do their hair, the necessary products still would not be available. A 30 year old manicurist shared with me,

The stores sell Chinese products but what does that have to do with black women?  
These places don't know how to do black hair and they assume that we all have the

same hair, use the same products, the same shampoo, and that we want the same hairstyle. We don't have the same kind of hair as white women and we don't have a salon for ourselves where we can have women that specialize in our hair. If we had salons, it would be very different, much easier. As it is now you have to find someone in the neighborhood that knows and you have to have the money for it because many don't charge in Cuban pesos.

This phenomenon speaks to the great invisibility under which blacks live and their lack of autonomy to solve their basic needs. While hair care may not be traditionally political, it becomes political in that it serves as an example of the Eurocentrism that dominates Cuba's economic market and in turn, exclusion of black identity. A student expressed a similar sentiment:

There is a real problem with racism and products. The people who are in charge of buying products for Cubans don't conceive of a black woman buying these products. Which is terrible because there is a market for it. But they don't think that way, they don't even think like business people! The way the state sees it, those that are going to buy products are white. But there are black women! Let's look for products for these women. That would be to think about the black population, but they don't. That has an influence on us.

The lack of recognition of blacks as consumers contributes to an overall feeling of marginalization among many. Among others, the presence of black hair products and salons may not be attributed to racism as lack of visibility in the market has become the norm.

While I do argue that private spaces are often the site of black political talk, I also acknowledge that one of the major influences of racial ideology in Cuba has been to silence even these conversations. There are those who may or may not believe that blacks are systematically disadvantaged but those that display a sense of racial consciousness may not discuss the issue. The silence on race, although challenged by some, still persists for many, even in private spaces. As I was surveying Cubans in the neighborhoods of Havana, I found that the ideas expressed in the survey were issues that blacks were yearning to talk about, but

did not have the space to beyond their household or small circles. It was clear that I was uncovering latent feelings about race and racism that blacks were holding in because it was publicly deemed inappropriate. Through this work, I was giving blacks a chance to express their opinions about concepts that no one had asked them about, but that they clearly had a strong opinion on. The censorship on race remarkably succeeds in infusing these norms even into households and private conversations. Moreover, these norms do not only bury political conversations among blacks beneath the radar of whites and elites, they can also bury them within individuals without ever being expressed.

### *Integration and Assimilation*

The absence of black public spaces is justified with the integrationist ethos espoused by the revolution which bans all race-based organization, calling such collectives divisive and detrimental to national unity. This integrationist philosophy that many Cubans adhere to often brings non-blacks into conversations regarding race, although often the space is made up of only blacks. As a result, it is common for blacks to believe that even though they subscribe to black group consciousness and recognize the uniqueness of their experience, that the solution to inequalities are everyone's moral duty and can only be achieved via a multi-racial collective. During an interview with a 28 year old researcher, he thought that the search for black consciousness was important, but served to dilute the struggle for equality, which needed to be a multiracial effort.

We (blacks) can say that we have to look for consciousness, identity, that we need spaces, but you have to take into account that Cuba is a multiracial country. Because the first debate is on racism and inequality, that's our first battlefield. Yes we are black, white, red, blue, green, a diverse society, you have to be conscious of that but if you keep talking only about black identity, you dilute the debate and cannot focus



only on inequality. So we have to keep in mind that we're not black or white or green. We are *Cubans*.

Those that are most conscious of the obstacles to black advancement have a philosophy engrained in the way that they view society such that it becomes difficult for them to perceive the acceptability of a black movement, instead of a multiracial one. As a point of clarification, I do not argue for racial essentialism in that a multiracial coalition should not be a goal for combating racial inequities. I do argue that collective action, not only against unequal distribution, but action that celebrates blackness, fights against Eurocentrism as a dominant ideal, and rallies for equal representation not only throughout the various sectors of employment but in the mass media as well, must start with the black communities. It is crucial to understand that black pride and solidarity is a vital component of progress in other realms and must be part of any movement.

In addition, often debates regarding anti-black racism are hindered by talk of the struggle being that of all marginalized groups - women, homosexuals, blacks, etc. - creating goals for a movement with too wide of a breadth. Conversely, in other black public spaces and institutions throughout the Diaspora (primarily in the United States), often cleavages are erased in exchange for an emphasis on black progress, regardless of one's other intersectionalities (Caldwell 2007). While both tendencies have the potential to dilute certain voices, the inclusionary philosophy that has been strongly reinforced by the Cuban revolution hinders the potential of black progress.

Class has historically been analyzed as the major cleavage with the potential to break apart political racial homogeneity. In capitalist regimes, class differences within black communities can create barriers toward political consensus by creating differences in black self-interest. In other words, self-interest may trump group interest for blacks that have

ascended to the middle and upper classes. While scholars have refuted this possibility (Dawson 1994), it continues to be a consideration. Overall, cleavages that compete with race in the way that beliefs are constructed and organized, can prove to be more of a threat when black consciousness is not widespread or fully developed. In the case of Brazil, Hanchard (1994) writes that, “unitary consciousness that can mobilize an entire social group is problematic, given the array of cleaving variables (gender and class among them) that complicate forms of identification (94).” The case of Cuba proves to be an exception in that class issues would instead serve as a unifying variable because given a few minor differences, most Cuban citizens struggle economically. Class distinctions are significantly smaller in Cuba than in other countries throughout the Diaspora and would not be a significant factor in undercutting racial consciousness or dividing a race-based movement.

What can prove to be divisive are political ideals - revolutionary ideals vs. nonrevolutionary ideals. Many blacks feel that certain elements of racial consciousness are not compatible with their commitment to the revolution. There still exist those that follow the revolution and all of its rhetoric, which includes race not being a relevant marker of difference, and others who see race’s relevance but do not consider the existence of racism or political beliefs based on race. There is a clear fissure between those that have a solid commitment to revolutionary ideals, which include the idea that racial organization is divisive, and those who believe that the revolution can be contradictory in its rhetoric.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> I would like to make the distinction between those that are anti-revolution and those who recognize that its leaders and rhetoric can be contradictory or espouse falsehoods. One does not have to be a counterrevolutionary or a dissident to possess black consciousness. On the contrary, many of the leaders of the dialogue on race and racism in Cuba are staunch revolutionaries but realize that the revolution has its flaws and are critical of the government’s lack of attention to racial issues.

While attractive in its language, the education that espouses revolutionary, unifying ideals has created a philosophy of black assimilation, not integration. Although the revolution has never directly communicated a program of assimilation, integrationist rhetoric, principles emphasizing unity over division and the prohibition of black institutions have led to such a program. Blacks have not been given a space to express their own needs, thought and culture and are thus expected to assimilate into institutions and spaces already controlled by whites, under the guise of inclusion and integration. The Federation of Cuban Women, for example, does not include the discussion of race in their public documents and their National Council does not have any nonwhite members. I term this an assimilationist program as blacks are not expected to affirm their race nor make any demands or initiate any programs based on race or racial inequalities within these institutions. It is not uncommon to hear a member of the Communist Party tell you that there is no need for black organizations because for example, the Cuban Federation of Women has members of all races and there is no discrimination within the institution. In reference to the development of black organizations or groups that would deal with race, a former leader within the Communist party told me, “We can’t sponsor things like that because they are against national unity. In Cuba unity is maintained over color.” The absence of formal discrimination is often used as a justification for the lack of race-based organizations in Cuba.

While assimilation can be viewed as an incorporation of black culture into national culture, making for a hybrid culture, this incorporation often never happens. Instead the national culture is dominated by white ideals and acceptance of black culture into the mainstream often does not occur and the realization of this can, as Andrea Simpson (1998) argues, lead to a heightened importance of ethnic group identity for the marginalized

individual. While Simpson's argument is for the United States, I would adhere to her finding for some blacks in Cuba, in that the discovery of a rejection of blackness by the national culture can lead to heightened consciousness. Following this, there are those that would embrace elements of black autonomy within Cuba, however the majority have bought into assimilation and do not seek out black institutional spaces. In my survey data, 60% of respondents felt that the formation of a black organization would be just as racist as white organizations in the past that excluded blacks. A female librarian expressed this idea in her conception of race-based organizations:

Here there is not white society, so how can you be right in saying that one should exist for blacks? Right away to begin with, to propose that there should be a black only organization is a racist position. You can't say that racism is only among whites. There is also racism among blacks against whites. There are black people that don't want anything to do with white people. And that is also a racist position. It's not at all an integrationist position.

In this sense, racial democracy has succeeded in convincing a significant number of blacks that any race-based organization would be divisive and even racist. This viewpoint stands contradictorily juxtaposed with the feeling by many that blackness is an important part of their identity and that racism against their own group affects them individually as well.<sup>57</sup> Dialogue and black thought are consequently relegated to the household or other private spaces. The potential for black collective action is often lost among those that find black organizations to be racist.

### *Black Organizing*

The opening that has been offered to racial dialogue is occupied primarily by supporters of the revolution. The fear among members of the government in Cuba that the

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<sup>57</sup> These ideas will be further explored in a later chapter where I give in depth analysis of the survey.

growth of civil society would undercut state legitimacy and provide a catalyst for a strong opposition movement, has not come true. Spaces for dialogue and organizations seeking representation have arisen as a result of the opening, but goals continue to be communicated within the revolutionary framework. In other words, much of the criticism that has been introduced in Cuba, especially pertaining to race and racial discrimination, has been introduced by those who do not seek to alter the socialist system, but to support and improve it. Academic works that have called for more democratic representation, less inequality and a more open dialogue concerning disparities are often authored by members of the communist party.<sup>58</sup>

In addition to academic and artistic production, these same actors have begun to organize, often convening to discuss issues of race and possible courses of action to increase national dialogue on race and black representation as well. Alejandro de la Fuente (2001a) argues that the emergence of racially based inequality in Cuba during the Special Period has and will continue to have the potential to create racially based groups of resistance. These groups of resistance, he contends, will likely not be able to prosper or remain in existence due to strict regulations put on racial dialogue by the Cuban government. Groups calling for an end to racial discrimination and an emphasis on black representation and culture have gained considerable legitimacy in the Cuban government. One such group, *Color Cubano*, arose out of debates concerning racial issues among members of the state sponsored organization UNEAC – *Union de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba*. A second group, *La Cofradia de la Negritud*<sup>59</sup>, was founded in 1998 and was revived in 2009 when scholars that

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<sup>58</sup> See Hernandez (2003) and Morales (2007).

<sup>59</sup> The group's name translates to Fraternity or Brotherhood of Blackness.

had formerly been involved with Color Cubano<sup>60</sup> joined the organization. It remains to be seen whether these groups, in accordance with de la Fuente's argument, will be stifled by the government or allowed to flourish and make recommendations.

In 1993, members of the Union of Cuban Writers and Artists began to critically discuss the representation of Afro-Cubans in the mass media in Cuba. The complaints of the group dealt with both the stereotypical portrayal of blacks as domestic workers, entertainers or criminals as well as the more typical absence of blacks in most Cuban television shows and movies. The group of intellectuals then moved beyond just representation and began to discuss issues of discrimination and unequal access barring Afro-Cubans from positions enjoyed by whites. Out of these debates grew the group Color Cubano, initially a forum created to publicize the members' concerns regarding racial disparities. The group's stated purpose was to open a dialogue surrounding racial identity and racial discrimination that according to its founder, Gisela Arandia, should begin within the academic circle. More specifically, the organization's intention was to "to carry out in present-day Cuban society an intelligent debate regarding the manifestations of racism to the degree that they constitute a factor that impedes the complete (or full) consolidation of determinant factors of social equality." (Arandia, 2005) Their projects included the only affirmative action project to address the issue of housing disparities, increasing positive representation of Afro-Cubans in Cuban television and cinema and lastly, Color Cubano has articulated the need to transform primary and secondary school texts and materials to reflect not only Afro-Cuban culture and history, but the topic of race as well. Although the organization no longer exists, its

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<sup>60</sup> Color Cubano ceased to exist in 2009 although its founding members continue to work on the issue of racism in Cuba.

leadership continues to work on these issues with the Cuban government, albeit with limited success and attention by government officials.

The first project put forth by the organization, named Project California, dealt with the housing dilemma in Cuba. The poorest housing developments in Cuba, *solares*, are occupied primarily by Afro-Cubans and house many Cuban families at once, often in decrepit conditions with community bathrooms and kitchens. Gisela Arandia, the leader of Color Cubano chose the *solar* California as a pilot project of what she calls affirmative action. Funds were acquired from the government to renovate the *solar* so that each housing unit received its own kitchen and bathroom. In addition to the renovations, programs focusing on healthcare, cultural awareness, computer programming and job training were also implemented for the residents. The project has proved successful, however the process to acquire resources was complicated by the government's slow response and willingness to fund the project. State responsiveness to these projects is crucial and will determine whether other similar projects can be carried out. Strategically, an endeavor such as Project California should be easily accepted by the Cuban government as the focus is not directly on race, but rather on housing, an issue that Fidel Castro has spoken about publicly.

The position of Abel Prieto as former President of UNEAC made him an ally to UNEAC and its members. As evidenced in my interviews, Prieto served as the key conduit between Color Cubano and the government, facilitated by the personal relationships that he has with Color Cubano's founding members. It is unclear whether the organization would receive such support and be granted exposure by the government had these personal relationships not existed. Moreover, it points to the question of whether groups or issues are given special privilege based on individual preferences such as Prieto's, or on a government

commitment to expression of those issues. The targeted nature of the political opening does not allow for certain issues such as Cuban/US relations to be discussed, yet it is unclear what the reasoning may be for what *is* permitted or supported. Even if government commitment to racial issues is present, the personal relationship of UNEAC members to the Minister of Culture has further facilitated their support from the state and their exposure.

The Cofradía de la Negritud declares itself an organization dedicated to social activism with the goals of increasing consciousness among the state and civil society of the growing racial inequality in Cuba so that attention can be paid to the situation. They also seek to promote the advancement of black Cubans both economically and spiritually within Cuban society and to work to ensure attention to the defense of black civil rights in Cuba. The group points to the strong racial component that is associated with the increase in economic inequality brought on by the Special Period in that blacks more often occupy the group of “have nots” whereas those with more access to hard currency are predominantly white. La Cofradia also points to the lack of action that the government has taken on the matter of racial discrimination and inequality and argue that the lack of attention to the problem since 1959 has caused black Cubans to lose too much time. Thus, the group lists as their goal to give a voice to the blacks who have had the common experience of being in discriminatory situations because of the color of their skin or have been neglected in their aspirations. While it remains to be seen what space the group will be given in terms of the government, the group has recently written letters to government officials outlining their goals and requesting attention to the matters listed in the group’s official documents.

The organizations dedicated to the issue of racism have indeed advanced the dialogue regarding racial disparities and discrimination, yet they also represent only a small sector of



the island, the intelligentsia. Membership has not been extended to the general public, and although they are welcome, ordinary citizens are generally not present during their forums. It can also be speculated that the group receives the support (or tolerance) that they do from the state because their grievances have not been widely publicized and they have not grown into a large-scale organization. One of the scholars who write on racial discrimination in Cuba expressed a similar concern for the effectiveness of scholarship and debate:

What happens in Cuba, and all over, is that we get frustrated as scientists because above all, when we produce these studies we meet with party officials because we are trying to get them to become familiar with our results and what we are doing on a daily basis on this matter. But they don't care to read any of it, study the results or take any kind of action. There are a million things that can be done but it's not in our hands. We can continue to work and debate and make small community contributions but the results are very small. There needs to be a policy that addresses the problems of race and changes how our children are educated.

Many of those that organize in Cuba express the sentiment that the revolutionary government is in a unique position to create policy that can attack this problem directly, as they have done with many other social problems. Nonetheless, the dialogue among this small group of actors continues with the hope that eventually there will be some action taken. It is difficult to overstate the importance of the freedom of an organization to make such claims while remaining within the revolutionary framework. Prior to the Special Period and the subsequent political opening, a group making such declarations did not, and could not exist. These organizations are not only a vehicle for dialogue and action but serve as a voice for the Afro-Cuban communities. As one of its leaders shared with me,

You ask me what I want? And I know that there are black people that agree with me. What I want is to empower. How are we going to organize the participation and the empowerment of the black population? The rest doesn't interest me. When I go to the Central Committee I don't want the black person to be the one at the door or the one serving tea. When I go to an office I want black people to be there too. I want to see that, the companies, the ministries. We have to empower each other because that is the only thing in the path towards community strength. Power won't be given to anyone.

The elites that are part of this black counter-public speak for an underrepresented space, advocating for a sector of the population that has been previously subsumed into other spaces. At the start of the revolution, various sectors were given representation in order to communicate their needs and work to improve conditions within their own communities. The Confederation of Cuban Workers, The Federation of Cuban Women, The Federation of Cuban Students, etc. all represent sectors of the population which have specific needs, purposes and demands. Afro-Cubans have all been members within each federation, but have not been given an outlet for the pursuit of their own progress as a group. While it is difficult to obtain evidence regarding possible discrimination against blacks within the state federations, any claims based on racial identity are stifled. Therefore, while no organization can represent all of the black community, these groups are communicating a new voice and lifting the silence regarding race.

### *Hip Hop*

The musical pioneers of racial expression in Cuba can be found within the hip hop movement. Rappers have taken on racism and black consciousness in their songs, their activism and in their appearance as well. Those that are part of the movement are representative of all races, but the majority are black, and the music, while not racially exclusive, is considered in Cuba, as in the rest of the world, as black music. Rappers also recognize a certain responsibility to express many of the social ills that Cubans are experiencing and hip hop in Cuba embodies the early hip hop in the United States that served as a way to raise consciousness about such issues in its expression of blackness and the experience of poverty (Ards 2004). Cuban hip hop does not enjoy the following that U.S. hip hop has garnered throughout the world and is a small movement as compared to other

musical forms in Cuba that have national recognition such as salsa, rumba and now, reggaetón. Nonetheless, its presence as a strong critique of racial ideology in Cuba is a crucial one.

Hip hop in Cuba is unique in its position because it operates with the support of the state, yet often its lyrics contradict state ideologies, particularly regarding race. It is perhaps because of this that the state has tried to downplay the draw of hip hop among blacks.

Although hip hop is seen as a black cultural form in Cuba, state support of the music can lead to a different characterization. In honor of the Rap Festival in Havana in 2003, the state newspaper, Granma, wrote a piece titled, *Todo sea por el mestizaje* (Everything will be for *mestizaje*), which read, “The main possibilities that Cuban rap opens up deal with the self-recognition of mestizaje as a fundamental value.... It is not only about affirming an identity current, or the search for a last name that grants a letter of citizenship to an imported musical culture, but to think and feel rap from an integrative perspective, in tune with the true feeling of its universalization”. Here the state declares the goal of rap to represent Cuba’s racial mix, rather than issues of marginalization or something that is primarily black or Afro-Cuban.

The article goes on to say that, “if today we talk about Latin Jazz, it is because the meeting between that African-American musical complex with Cuban music was founded based on dialogue of borrowing and interrelationships. Soon, I am sure that we will talk about rap with the same force insofar as we know how to protect the diversity of our *mestizo* (mixed race) profile” (de la Hoz 2003). De la Hoz is explicitly moving away from blackness when discussing the image of hip hop and imposing the dominant ideology of Cuban mestizaje.

Despite these characterizations or the work of ideology to mute black affirmation, hip hop continues to be a musical form that both expresses and attracts black consciousness.

State support of rap is through the Agencia Cubana de Rap (The Cuban Rap Agency), created in 2002 as an umbrella organization to promote and provide an official affiliation for rap groups on the island. The agency was created as rap gained more popularity and drew significant crowds for their concerts, and serves to support the movement and grant them space to flourish and perform. The role of the institution is important in that it provides a space and equipment to perform, a resource that is not only significant for the music's visibility but because without institutional affiliation or support, groups cannot perform or organize in public spaces. The agency currently is run by those that are involved directly with the movement however, its beginnings have been criticized heavily as its leadership was made up of people who had no previous knowledge of the music or the movement. The agency gives the space to groups to hold regular concerts, produce music and provide other support in the professionalization of these groups. Their annual event, the Hip Hop Symposium, is attended by rap groups and artists from all over the island and hosts international participants as well. The symposium is made up of workshops, panels and performances and with the new leadership, also holds a workshop on racism and other issues of race and identity. The race workshop in particular, gives participants a chance to both hear activists speak about racism and identity in Cuba and discuss it through stories and commentaries on the issue. The workshop serves as a space to share opinions and increase awareness among the symposium's participants. In addition to those who work with the hip hop movement, artists are invited that work on racial issues and the two concepts, rap and race, are closely linked throughout the symposium.

What is unique and surprising about many of the hip hop artists is their collaboration with many of the academics that are currently involved with racial issues. In many of the

debates that I attended on racism among academics and activists, hip hop rappers and producers were also in attendance to both listen, and to speak on their role in creating dialogue and awareness about race. In this sense they are very much in tune to the challenges that the possibility of racial policy confronts in the face of racial democracy. Thus, their message is a clearly a political one, as communicated by a hip hop artist:

First, I am. After being me I project myself. I recognize myself as Cuban. I'm Cuban, very much Cuban. But I am very much black. And I'm black first in order to be Cuban. Racial democracy definitely affects consciousness. It also has to do a bit with the opportunities that came at the start of the revolution – black people experienced a betterment of their lives. So many like my parents see through the eyes of the revolution. I understand that. I also am very revolutionary. But perhaps we are more critical when it comes to analyzing certain things. Because I think that being a revolutionary and passionate does not mean being blind. The revolution is a process and you have to revise every day so that .....Cubanness has been affected.

Through this quote, one of the members of the hip hop movement recognizes that in order to be politically effective, one has to be both critical and racially conscious. Here, much like in the United States, racial consciousness is connected to political ideology and how one views the role of race in relation to blacks as a group (Dawson 1994). The notion of prioritizing racial identity over national identity is not a common one, however, it is one that may have growing popularity, particularly among the hip hop movement and its supporters.

Hip hop's role as a voice for black identity has a similar role to hip hop in other parts of the world in its contribution to battle black invisibility. On hip hop in the United States, Bakari Kitwana (2004) writes, "rap marked a turning point, a shift from practically no public voice for young Blacks – or at best an extremely marginalized one – to black youth culture as the rage in mainstream popular culture (27)." Black Cuban artists have the task to bring light to the presence of blacks, their continued marginalization, pride in their culture and the importance of consciousness. The artists navigate a sensitive political terrain but express themselves as revolutionaries wanting to expand the national image and the national

discussion on identity. In their treatment of black identity they are essentially pushing a discourse that seeks black inclusion. The invisibility that black cultural expression and historical contribution has in the dominant Cuban narrative extends to the colloquial image of race as well. Rappers are not so much trying to fight against racism as they are pushing the discussion of racism and the relevance of black identity. Even more than being placed in an inferior position, blacks are often left out completely and issues of race do not arise (Mills 1998). As such, black issues remain invisible and as rappers uncover these issues, they are raising consciousness among blacks. As Tricia Rose (1994) argues in *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, the process of creating a counter-narrative for hip hop is, “about a carving out of more social space, more identity space. This is critical to political organizing. It’s critical to political consciousness (314).” At a hip hop concert in Cuba the typical audience is a young, black audience that follows the music, not just for music’s sake, but as a political statement as well. As the artists make statements about black pride, the audience raises their fists in the air and identifies with the message. In this way, rappers are creating a consciousness among a critical group of Cubans. As the associate director of the Cuban Rap Agency expressed,

There were people talking about the issue of racism before the rap movement. But what happened is that no one had ever said the things that the rap movement did in the way that we did. And no one had been as effective in communicating this issue. Academics have done work on this but it stays in a very small circle of intellectuals. The rapper talks to the people the way the people understand it. We speak the language of the street. We learned from these intellectuals, but then we translated it for everyone else. Now there are more people talking about the problem, mostly young people. When the exchange began with the hip hop movement and the young people it was like we were educating people, making them literate.

Although hip hop in Cuba has not reached the popularity that it has in the U.S., it has reached a core group of young people that are responding to their message of black

pride and unity. Their following evidences a need among the black communities of Cuba to both speak about the black experience and challenge the dominant ideologies regarding race in Cuba.

By becoming part of the Cuban Rap Agency, Cuban hip hop groups have negotiated (or have been granted) an official space, although they still occupy a marginalized cultural position. Despite the support of the state, blacks still are not part of the public sphere because they are not recognized as a cleavage within the Cuban nation that may have a special set or sets of interests. They are not afforded the space that women are afforded because any racial affirmation has been dismissed as divisive in the past. Therefore, what hip hop and other artists are doing is carving a space not only for the black voice, but for black existence. They argue for the relevance of the black voice as opposed to just the Cuban voice. They challenge notions that have always been dominant within the public sphere and in this way serve to change the discourse (Pough 2004; Neal 2004; Pardue 2008). They are representative of the break in the silence of the issue so they are negotiating a new place within these dominant channels by saying that it is necessary to talk about blackness, debate about it and reaffirm it. Elites that are writing about and debating racial issues will not succeed as the current system exists in getting their message to the masses and thus hip hop artists are occupying a privileged space. In addition to their shows, groups have begun to appear on television recently, albeit sporadically. A hip hop music video for the song, “Los Pelos” or “The Hairs” for example was shown on Cuban state television for the first time in 2010. The song says,

Hair loose  
There's no perm  
I realized for what?  
If I wasn't born that way

The man who loves me will accept me how I am  
I carry afro in my blood  
Wherever I go  
My naturalness breaks the norms of beauty  
Don't come at me saying I need to look more refined  
Or you have to iron your hair to look more feminine  
NO, my codes determine  
Chorus: Celebrate the hair, let the dreadlocks grow, whether they like it or not

It should be noted that such a message has never appeared on Cuban state television and although its presence may have been an isolated choice by television personnel (Rodriguez 2010), it does not discount the importance of what the video represents – a chasm with mainstream programming and rhetoric. As Derek Pardue (2008) writes, “hip hop is a process of developing often for the first time, and empowered sense of self..... a radical break from a dominant logic, that is the system. In this manner, hip hop is a discourse of hegemonic critique (27).” Many of these groups see it as their responsibility to bring this dialogue out into the open and although they describe themselves as revolutionaries, they also acknowledge the lack of attention the government has given this issue. In an interview with World Focus (2009), the hip hop group Anónimo Consejo expressed that,

The social and political connotation that the content of hip hop carries, that confrontation within our society can bother or offend some. But I believe that there are things that have to be faced and stated no matter how uncomfortable.

They go on to say that,

We're protesting this because something is happening. Sometimes people hide it saying that in Cuba there's no racism, in Cuba there is racial prejudice but as people we have suffered racism in our lives, we've been discriminated against for being black, we've been entered places and we aren't attended to, or in the street the police bother us, more than they would a white person because of our way of walking, talking and dressing.

The group Anónimo Consejo is one of the first to talk publicly about the Independent Party of Color in Cuba and their themes are centered on the black experience and black affirmation.



Hip hop promotes an image and form of expression that acts counter to what is accepted in the mainstream not only through music, but through other cultural markers as well (Rose 1994). In Cuba hair, dress and overall image express a certain kind of message that is not new to hip hop, but is new to Cuba. The use of the afro and dreadlocks and clothing that is unique to hip hop all speak to the message of blackness, something that is not widely celebrated as an acceptable image. As Sujatha Fernandes (2006) writes, “For Cuban rappers these styles are also a way of exhibiting their cross-national identifications, of asserting a collective sense of black identity in contrast to the racially integrative program of the Cuban state (128). Yet more than that, donning markers of blackness in Cuba is a risk, in that it makes you a target of negativity and anti-black stereotypes. As one young black male Cuban said,

Black expressions, a beard, an afro, dreadlocks, you see a little bit more of that because of the artists, but it is still looked at negatively here. When I first started wearing an afro people would stare at me and call me crazy on the street. When I get on the bus, people look at me strangely.

Many blacks express their politics through dress and more so, through hair. Afros and dreadlocks are a marker of black politics and Diasporic solidarity, even as these styles are marginalized, stereotyped and targeted by authorities such as police. Thus, it’s not only an expression of blackness, it’s a direct affront to the norms of Cuban society. Blacks, through their appearance take social risks that are both purposeful and political.

### *Conclusion*

As I walked the streets of Havana asking people to fill out a survey on black identity and consciousness in Cuba, it was clear that often political pressures controlled people’s actions far more than their attitudes on race. Many times I was met with skepticism by

Cubans who did not want to be involved in any study that had to do with race. Yet for all of those that agreed to fill out the survey despite their initial hesitation, at the end of the survey they were all extremely eager to continue to discuss the topic. The survey, for many, had opened a Pandora's box regarding an issue that holds critical importance to people, but is not brought into the open and is not welcome as a topic of discussion. Respondents wanted more space to express their opinions, most discussed the issue more in depth after filling out the survey and many thanked me for doing this work and asking them these questions about what race means to them as black people. One woman, at the end of the survey, smiled at me and my colleague and said, "*de aquí pa'l cielo.*" We asked her to clarify what she meant and she said, *nosotros los negros, vamos de aquí pa'l cielo.*<sup>61</sup> Through not only the survey data, but the experience of how the survey was received by so many, it was clear to me that black consciousness has a strong presence in Cuba that cannot be discounted. The lack of political action and the seeming apathy for the subject stems not from a lack of salience of identity for blacks, but from government restrictions and ideology that has stymied the growth of black political thought in Cuba.

This chapter argues that black consciousness and ideological production does not only develop in elite circles but is present throughout black communities among ordinary citizens. While some elites may be better positioned to debate and address these issues amongst each other, the same attitudes and counter-ideologies that they debate, run through private conversations among nonelites as well. As Melissa Harris-Lacewell (2004) argues, ideology should not be wrested from ordinary citizens. The work of elites in public spaces and the expression of nonelites in private spaces together form to build black political

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<sup>61</sup> This passage can be translated as, "we black people, we're going from here to the sky."

thought in Cuba that often produces ideas and expresses experiences that directly challenge the dominant racial ideology in Cuba. If given a space, both public and private representations of black consciousness have the potential to combat the dominant ideology that seeks to stifle them in order to bring attention to structural racism in Cuba. In his book *Racial Conditions*, Howard Winant (1994) writes that the “liberation of racial identity is as much a part of the struggle against racism as the elimination of racial discrimination and inequality. That liberation will involve a revisioning of racial politics and a transformation of racial difference.” (169) The veil that was lifted at the onset of the Special Period in Cuba contributed to the revisioning of racial politics in Cuba and as racial consciousness continues to develop and blacks are freed from the silence regarding racial expression, the importance of race will be difficult to ignore. There is an audience waiting to join the debates that many elites have put forth and if these elites are given a larger space to increase their visibility, many blacks will identify with the message of black consciousness and the need for solutions to the problem of racism in Cuba. Black consciousness in Cuba will serve as the starting point in assessing blacks’ societal position and will determine the potential for change.

## CONCLUSION

The influence that racial ideology has on racial attitudes and racial consciousness in Cuba is shown throughout this project to be significant. Racial democracy ideology in Cuba combines with socialist ideology to form a powerful racial ideology that is distinct to other Latin American societies that operate under the ideology of racial democracy. Throughout the decades of the revolution, Fidel Castro and the Cuban government have united belief in the revolution to belief in racial democracy and as a result, support of the revolution often correlates with the notion that racism is not a considerable problem in Cuba. State rhetoric and policy have promoted national identity and unity as supreme over racial identity, while claiming to have solved the problem of racism through socialist policies. The state also created an institutional framework that did not allow for the proliferation of alternate racial ideologies or information, barred the creation of any institution or organization that addressed race, and by creating institutions that addressed the needs of women, youth, etc. created the philosophy that race was not a cleavage that mattered in revolutionary Cuba.

### *Cuban Racial Ideology*

The start of the Cuban Revolution brought high levels of economic equality, which also created levels of racial equality that had not been seen in Cuban history. By dismantling informal segregation and increasing equality of opportunity for nonwhites, the Cuban

government could claim that Cuba was a racial democracy more than any other country in the hemisphere at the time. This was particularly true because of the anti-racist philosophy that was created so that those who considered themselves to be revolutionary could not exhibit racist attitudes or conduct discriminatory practices. Racism, both individual and structural, was deemed a thing of the past and any policy enacted to prevent racial inequality was considered unnecessary. As a result, black representation, in high government positions, the media and in managerial positions in Cuba remained low throughout the decades of the revolutionary regime. The lack of action to address racism in Cuba left the advances for nonwhites at the onset of the revolution vulnerable.

The economic crisis revealed these vulnerabilities and racial inequality became visible. Racial ideology promoted by the government remained true to its foundation but because of increasing racial inequality, the Cuban government began to change their rhetoric to reflect the changes in Cuban society. Race was addressed still as a remnant from the past, but disparities in housing and black representation in government was addressed as something that should be tackled. This shift in rhetoric represented the changing role of race in Cuba but without any policy to accompany it, did not constitute any change in the dominant ideology that racism is not a problem in Cuba. In other words, racial ideology in Cuba did not experience any tactical shift and retained its components from the start of the revolution.

The effect of racial ideology at the individual level is nuanced, but it has a strong influence that causes it to shape all Cuban's views of race, albeit in different degrees. Most people see that there is racism in Cuba. Whether they define that racism as individual acts, vestiges from Cuban society before the revolution, or structural racism depends on the

individual. Belief in the revolutionary government's accuracy in explaining Cuban racial realities depends highly on their views of the revolution as well as racial consciousness. At the same time, racial consciousness and partial adherence to the dominant racial ideology can occur together. There are a number of people in Cuba who believe in the revolution and thus do not believe that it can produce racial inequalities or a racist structure, but even these people will acknowledge that there are whites with racial prejudice. Conversely, there are blacks that possess a strong concept of racial consciousness and reject much of the elements of racial democracy by recognizing a racist structure and the need for an aggressive policy to open up opportunities for blacks and combat racial inequality. Nonetheless, those that possess such consciousness are influenced by racial democracy in some way. Most often this influence comes in people's definitions of racism as an individual phenomenon that cannot be attributed to government action or lack of action on the issue. It is this component of the ideology that largely maintains its survival. If racist attitudes only manifest with certain individuals, attention or awareness on the issue remains nonpolitical and even unnecessary.

### *Black Consciousness*

Despite the power of racial ideology and revolutionary ideals, a significant group of blacks that were surveyed and interviewed express dissenting and/or alternative ideologies that correspond to the existence of racial discrimination and inequality. The economic crisis changed Cuban society dramatically as the economy collapsed causing levels of economic inequality and poverty to increase. Afro-Cubans were hit particularly hard, largely due to the racial component of hiring in the lucrative emergent sector and their lack of access to remittances. During the Special Period employment discrimination became visible, racial profiling by the police increased, and blacks were regularly excluded from tourist spaces.

Discrimination became a much more common experience among blacks and consequently, the policies and reforms of the Special Period increased the salience of race for blacks markedly. The increase in the saliency of race and experience with discrimination make the effects of the Special Period particularly important for racial consciousness among blacks. What it means to be black in Cuba changed for many during the Special Period and out of these changes arose common experiences that were connected to race. Nonetheless, the survey sample shows that many of those that grew up during the Special Period still do adhere to revolutionary ideology regarding race.

Black political thought in Cuba is characterized by everyday conversations and racial recognition that point to blacks' relative position in society as well as their life chances. The increased role of racism is correlated to an increased feeling of racial solidarity that challenges the dominant racial ideology. Moreover, the political opening that was created during the crisis brought scholarly works on race, elite organizations that openly debated the question of racism and inequality in Cuba as well as the rise in artistic and musical production that addressed the topics of race and racial consciousness. The role of black consciousness and spaces that promote it, such as hip hop, are vital for an examination of racial ideology in Cuba and what its effects are. How blacks perceive race and how they perceive the ideology that is espoused by the state lends insight into what constitutes black thought.

#### *The Future of Racial Politics in Cuba*

Although all blacks do not possess a strong racial consciousness and many accept the dominant racial ideology as truth, this does not diminish the importance of those that do. As Michael Hanchard argues (2006), "black political thought, like most forms of political

thought, often presents a vision of political community or of the world at large that generates little or no support at the moment of its initial presentation” (8). Hanchard cites the urgency of the civil rights movement that led the black liberation struggle based on ideas that were “not popularly held.” In the case of Cuba, someone that considers black agency to be exclusionary, or even racist as some have expressed, may not agree with the ideas of activists and intellectuals leading the discussion on race in Cuba. What may unite disparate ideologies among blacks is the similarity of their grievances. In my interviews with some that expressed concerns that a black organization would be racist, issues of representation and equality of opportunity were of equal concern to those that favored racial organization or mobilization. The future of racial politics in Cuba lies in the ability of leaders to communicate these ideas publicly within a revolutionary framework and create spaces for these conversations to leave the home and enter into the national debate. Whether the space will be granted depends on the willingness of the Cuban government to give race new consideration.

The recent increase in black officials in the top organs of Cuban government and the slight increase in attention to racial issues introduces issues of descriptive versus substantive representation. In an interview with a top racial scholar in Cuba, he stated that he did not believe in higher black representation in government if that representation would reinforce the racial status quo. Survey results showed that an overwhelming majority of respondents believed that increased representation in government by blacks was important. It is unclear whether these respondents thought that black presence in government is important only symbolically as descriptive representation or if substantively, they believed that something would change for blacks as a result of black presence. Will these officials have any effect on



policy making efforts or attention to racial issues? An answer to such an inquiry would be speculative, but history would suggest that under the current authoritarian regime, racial politics will not experience a sharp change. Government officials do not have any commitment to a particular constituency or community and even in the face of economic crisis and a sharp increase in visible racism on the island, the dominant ideology remained the same. Changes that have occurred thus far, increase in representation in the Central Committee, an event commemorating the centennial of the Independientes de Color, and a slight opening of artistic and scholarly expression are largely symbolic and do not suggest a change in policy on race. Moreover, high ranking members of government and the Communist Party have a commitment to represent the dominant racial ideology.

Brazil offers an interesting comparison to Cuba in that great policy strides have been made to increase racial equality and debunk the myth of racial democracy. In Brazil, democratization coupled with an increase in black representation in national government led to a change in racial policy almost immediately. Within slightly over a decade, the black movement gained traction, black representatives created a black political caucus and plans for affirmative action policies were under way (da Silva Martins et al 2004). The black movement in Brazil was successful in putting pressure on the government to enact policies focused on reducing racial inequality but the movement still has not been able to convince many black Brazilians that race should be a basis for organization (Caldwell 2007; Telles 2004). A lesson of the black movement in Brazil may be that because ideology is strong enough to lessen the saliency of race for many nonwhites, an organization that is created to ensure civil rights and battle racism would be more successful in Cuba than a black movement. For many, the idea of organizing around race does not follow, and those that do

believe in the necessity of a black movement may be equally served by an anti-racism organization that put pressure on the government and examined racial inequality and racist practices in Cuba.

In sum, the Cuban Revolution made great strides for blacks in the early years of the regime and as a result are still supported by many blacks. It also allowed for the revolution to be seen as the vehicle towards combating racial problems, trivializing current evidence of racism. Nonetheless, the lack of attention to race in a direct manner allowed for racism to continue to operate subtly throughout the first three decades of the revolution and visibly following the fall of the Soviet Union. In the end, the situation for blacks and for mulattoes has suffered considerably due to the economic crisis. There are sectors that blacks cannot compete in, they are not proportionally represented in Cuban society and are subject to discriminatory treatment. Growing racial consciousness because of these new realities could lead to serious challenges to Cuban racial democracy in the future, but without direct policy action or mobilization by subordinate groups, the racial status quo will remain.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

Part of the data for this paper, reported particularly in chapter 3, consists of a survey taken from March to October of 2008 and in April and May of 2009 in the city of Havana. The surveys were conducted in the city of Havana by me with assistance from a black Cuban colleague. The survey was conducted among black Cubans to analyze the components of black identity and black consciousness. We surveyed 409 respondents ranging in age from 14 to 78, and in educational levels from the completion of primary school to post-graduates. Sample sizes for each question ranged from 393 to 409. The respondents were all black Cubans identified by a dual process. First, they were identified by myself and my colleague by phenotype and according to the Cuban racial schema and then after we approached them, they were self-identified. My colleague and I discussed each respondent before approaching them to ensure that we were in agreement about whether the person would be considered black<sup>62</sup> by Cuban racial standards. Although mulattoes are also Afro-descendants, this survey focuses only on those that identify as black and are considered black in Cuba and not mulatto. Using Cuba's racial classification system, mulatto represents a separate racial category, both formally and informally, and was not subsumed into the black category, as would be the case in the United States. Each respondent was asked if they identified as black

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<sup>62</sup> I use the term black to describe persons that would be considered black or in some cases mulatto by Cuban standards. The category of mulatto includes both those of very light skin and those of darker skin and there is not a definitive line separating dark mulattoes and blacks of lighter brown skin. Thus, while someone may be considered mulatto or *moro*, a term to describe dark-skinned mulattoes, they are likely to identify with blackness as well. While the respondents we approached are considered black in Cuba, we did survey those of mixed race heritage, who may be considered mulatto with darker skin, who confirmed that they identified as black.

before completing the survey. The questions in the survey used the term black in the first person and thus could not be filled out by someone who did not identify as such.<sup>63</sup>

Due to political restrictions, logistical constraints, and the sensitivity of race in Cuba, a strictly random sample was not possible to obtain. Conducting an all-black sample creates additional difficulties for a systematic random selection of respondents for a survey conducted in person. The inability to access racial data from the Cuban census makes it impossible to know the extent to which indicators for factors such as education, age, and occupation among blacks differ from overall census numbers for Havana that include all races. Data for the 2002 Census is not made available for black Cubans alone, and thus, the demographics in my sample have to be compared with Census data of all races. See Tables 1, 2 & 3 for a comparison of survey respondents and Cuban Census data. Gender and levels of schooling are reported for all of Cuba and age distribution is reported for Havana only. The gender distribution of my sample closely matches that of the 2002 Census. My survey oversamples university students. This leads to a higher level of education when compared to national education levels and a younger sample when compared to statistics on age in Havana.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Research in other Latin American countries has found that often racial self-identification does not match with interviewer identification primarily due to nonwhites identifying as lighter than they may be identified by others (Telles 2004). My finding in Cuba is that there is a high level of agreement with self-identification and interviewer identification in that those considered to be black in Cuba self-identify as such. In my implementation of the survey we only received 4 denials to complete the survey because someone who we identified as black identified as mulatto. Moreover, Sawyer (2006) found in his study of racial identification in Cuba that there was significant agreement with both interviewer and self-identification not only among blacks, but all races.

<sup>64</sup> Education levels for Havana only were not available and thus national statistics were used. There may be reason to believe that education levels may be higher for residents in the capital than they would be in the country as a whole.

According to the 2002 Census, the racial makeup in Cuba is 65% white, 24% mulatto or mestizo, 10% black and 1% other (See Table 5). Several authors have called into question the accuracy of the Census numbers on race suggesting that the black and mestizo population is much higher than 35% (Moore 1988; Adams 2004). During a trip to Cuba in 2003, I came upon many conversations among scholars and activists regarding what they considered a whitening of Cuba's racial makeup by the Census collectors. A person's race is determined by the data collector and not by self-identification, which may account for a whitening of the population. The same is true for identification cards where a person's race is also listed.<sup>65</sup> While it cannot be determined if the Census is a project that is purposefully whitening the national racial makeup, just from observation throughout the island it is doubtful that 65% of the population is white.

The surveys were conducted in person and survey respondents were chosen randomly. My colleague and I chose various neighborhoods of Havana representing different socioeconomic levels, the University of Havana as well as places of employment. The surveys that were collected in neighborhoods were done in Vedado, Buena Vista, Cayo Hueso, Ataréz, Habana Vieja, La Lisa, and Playa. These neighborhoods were chosen for their diversity in both racial make-up and socioeconomic conditions. Cayo Hueso, Buena Vista and Ataréz are three majority black neighborhoods which are considered to be marginal neighborhoods with lower living conditions than other Havana neighborhoods. Vedado and Playa are racially mixed neighborhoods but are mostly white with better living conditions, and Habana Vieja and La Lisa are racially mixed neighborhoods with medium living conditions. The surveys that were conducted of university students were done on the

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<sup>65</sup> When I received a state ID card as a temporary resident in Cuba, a woman came and filled out the information regarding phenotype, eye and hair color without asking me anything about my own identification.

University of Havana's campus and respondents were approached randomly. Surveys conducted outside of neighborhoods and the university were done in places of employment and were distributed among all levels of employees from those of lower status such as maintenance and cleaning staff to those in professional and managerial positions to ensure that all levels of education were represented.

A survey conducted by someone from the United States, particularly on a politically sensitive issue, has the potential to affect survey respondents' answers. Respondents may be less candid or even wary of answering certain questions. Moreover, Cubans may be less likely to consider filling out a survey if they know that it is being conducted by a scholar from the United States. Contact with someone from the United States, especially in an official capacity, can bring negative repercussions to Cubans. To avoid this issue, when conducting surveys my Cuban colleague would approach all respondents with me but would be the only person that would conduct initial communication. Although I appear to be Cuban, my accent would have suggested that I am a foreigner and could have affected both our response rates and the actual answers in the survey. Once the survey was completed and respondents had questions, both my colleague and I talked freely to them. As a result, we had only five people reject filling out the survey and another nine who filled it out, but chose neutral as all of their answers. These nine surveys are not included in the sample. Four out of the five that chose not to participate in the survey said that they did not want to and one said that they were not educated enough to fill it out.

Respondents were given a written survey which first asked general information including gender, age, occupation, and level of schooling. This part of the survey also included a question that asked whether respondents had an experience with discrimination,

with a choice of yes or no. There were 44.8% of respondents who responded yes to an experience of discrimination and 55.2% answered that they did not. If they answered yes, they were asked to explain the experience in more detail. Following the initial part of the survey, respondents were given a set of twenty-five questions to be answered with a scale from one to five. The numbers corresponded to the answers, Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The questions were designed to analyze various components of racial identity and were modeled after a survey conducted at the University of Michigan which has been employed to test multidimensional models of racial identity among U.S. blacks (Sellers et al 1998). The survey was modified and some questions were added and others were omitted to correspond to the racial realities in Cuba. For example, questions were left out that dealt with racial separatism, questions that are specific to the United States and its political system, institutions and culture, and U.S. racial classifications and minority groups. As a result, the groupings of questions that the original survey created were not the same groupings that are used for this survey. The full text of the English and Spanish survey follows below.

Table 12. Gender Distribution of Survey Respondents

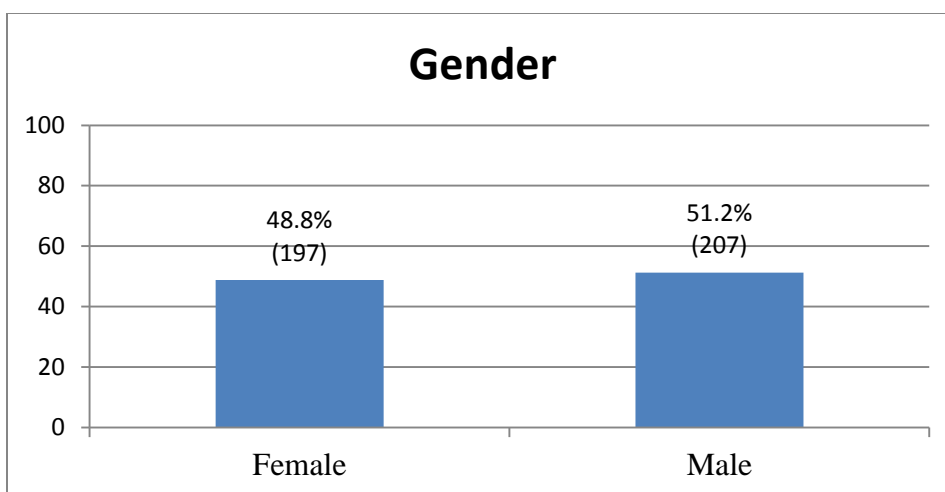
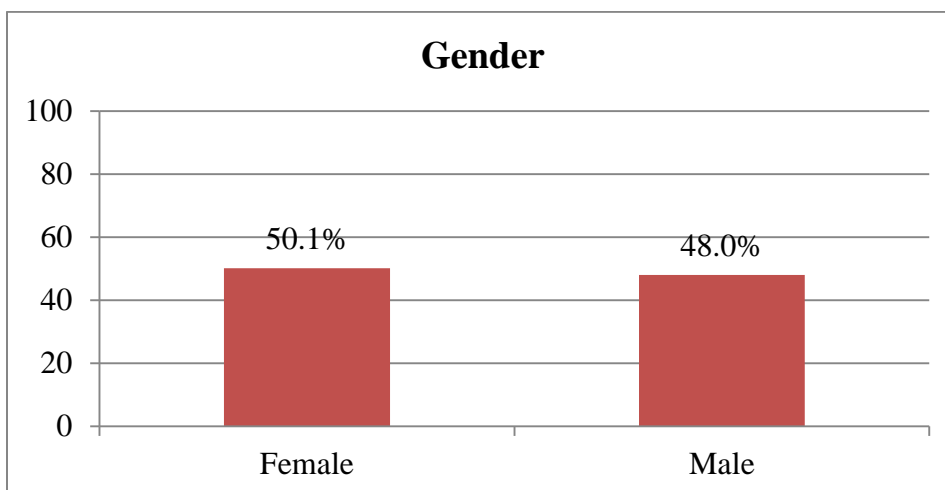


Table 13. Gender Distribution in Cuba



Source: Cuban Office of National Statistics, 2009



Table 14. Age Distribution of Survey Respondents

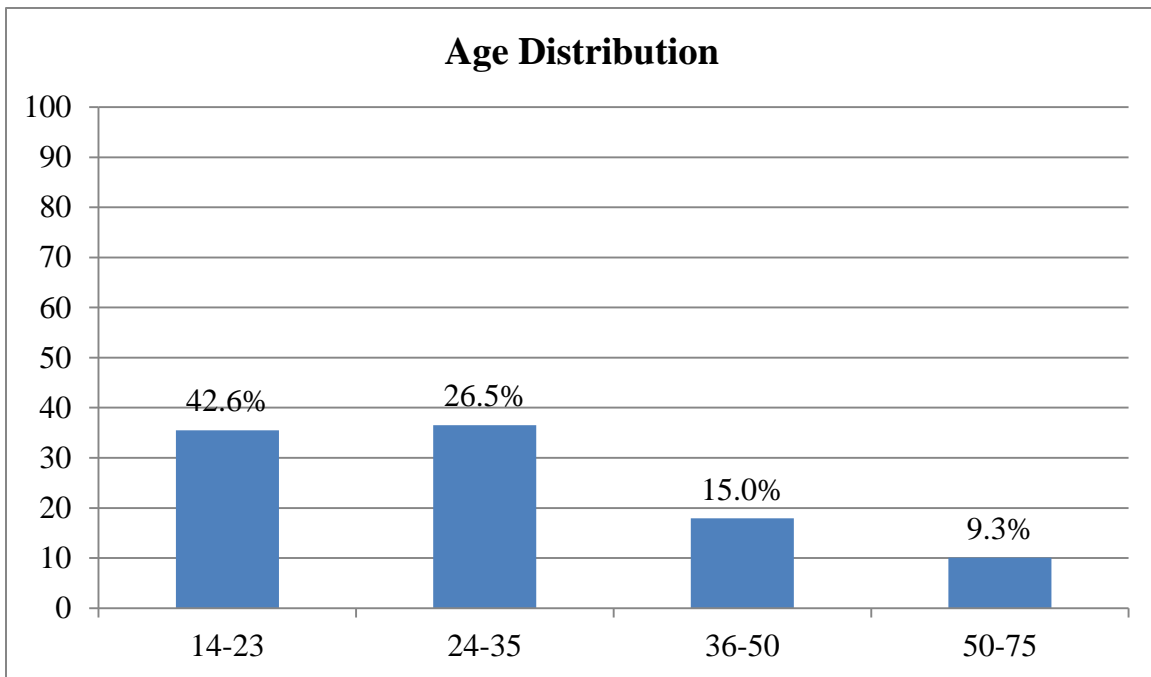
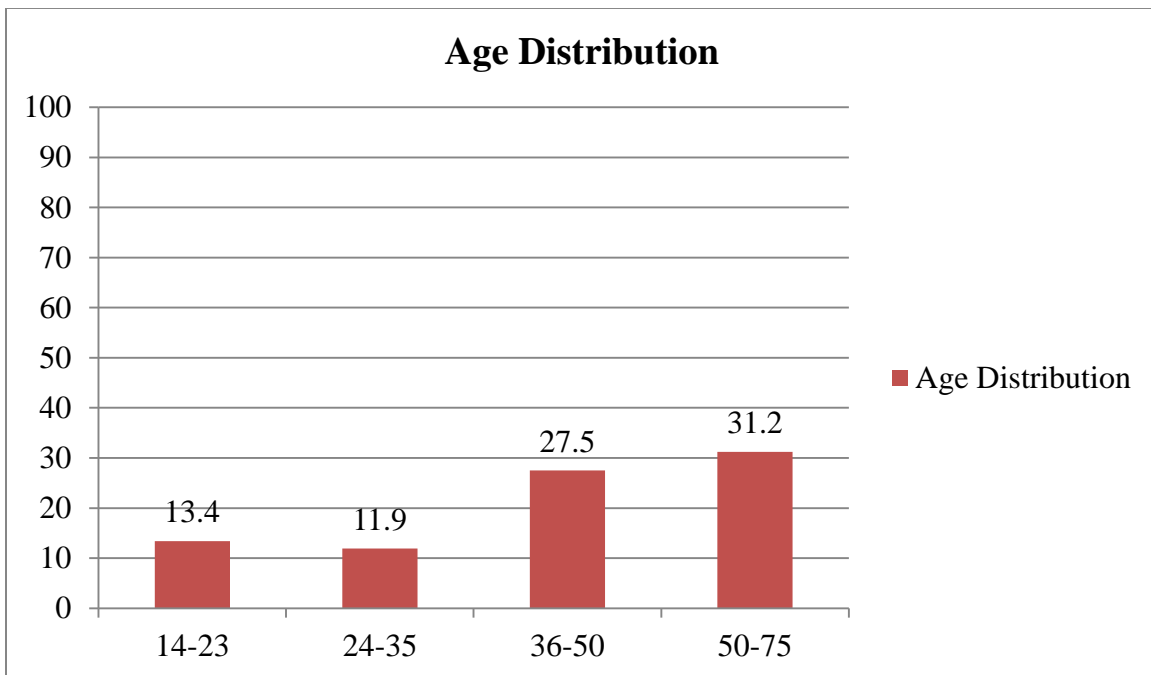


Table 15. Age Distribution of Residents of Havana, Cuba



Source: National Office of Cuban Statistics, 2009

Table 16. Level of Schooling of Survey Respondents

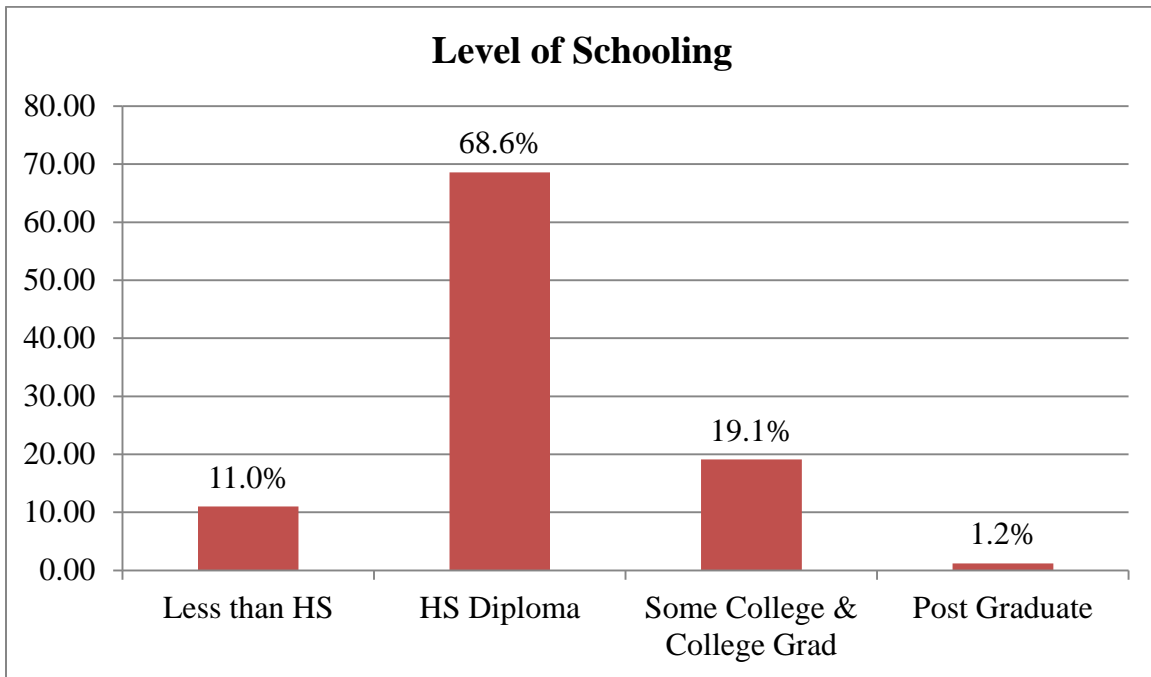
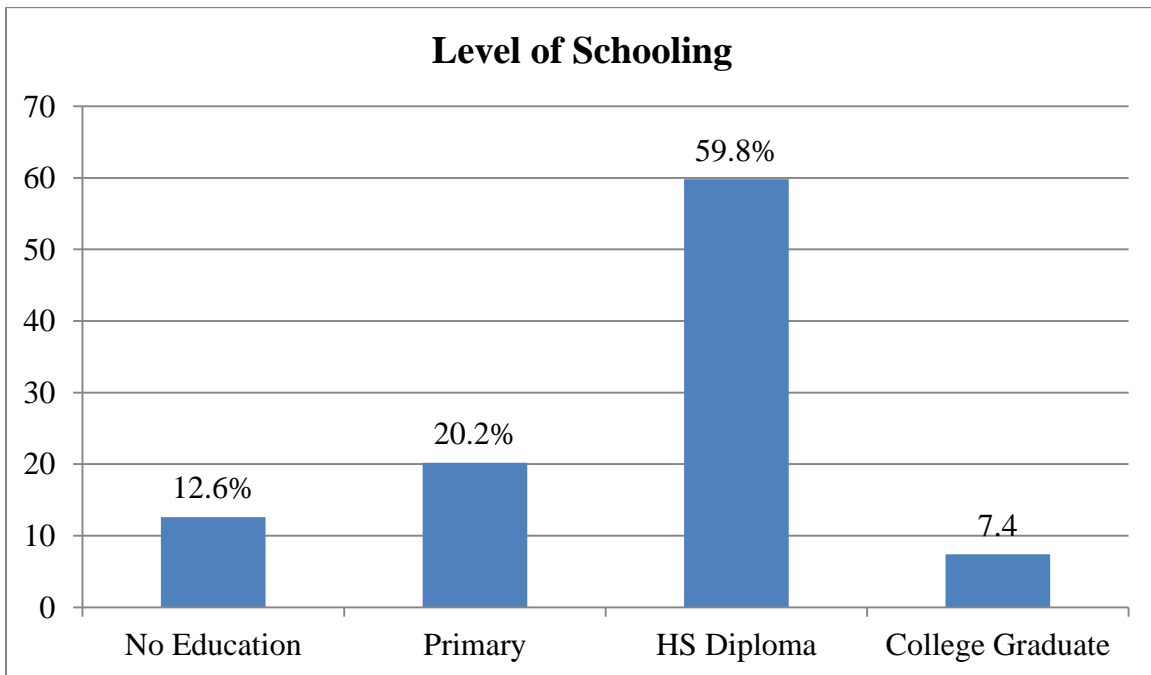


Table 17. Completed Level of Schooling for Cubans over the age of 11



Source: Cuban Census, 2002

Table 18. Occupations of survey respondents

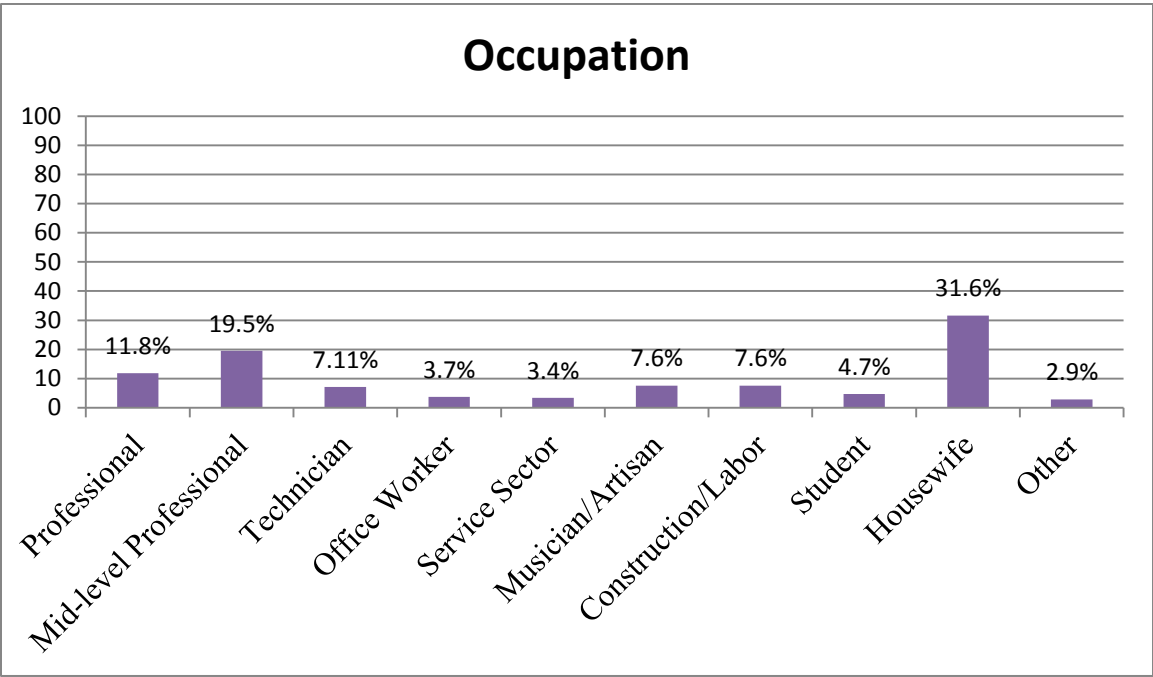
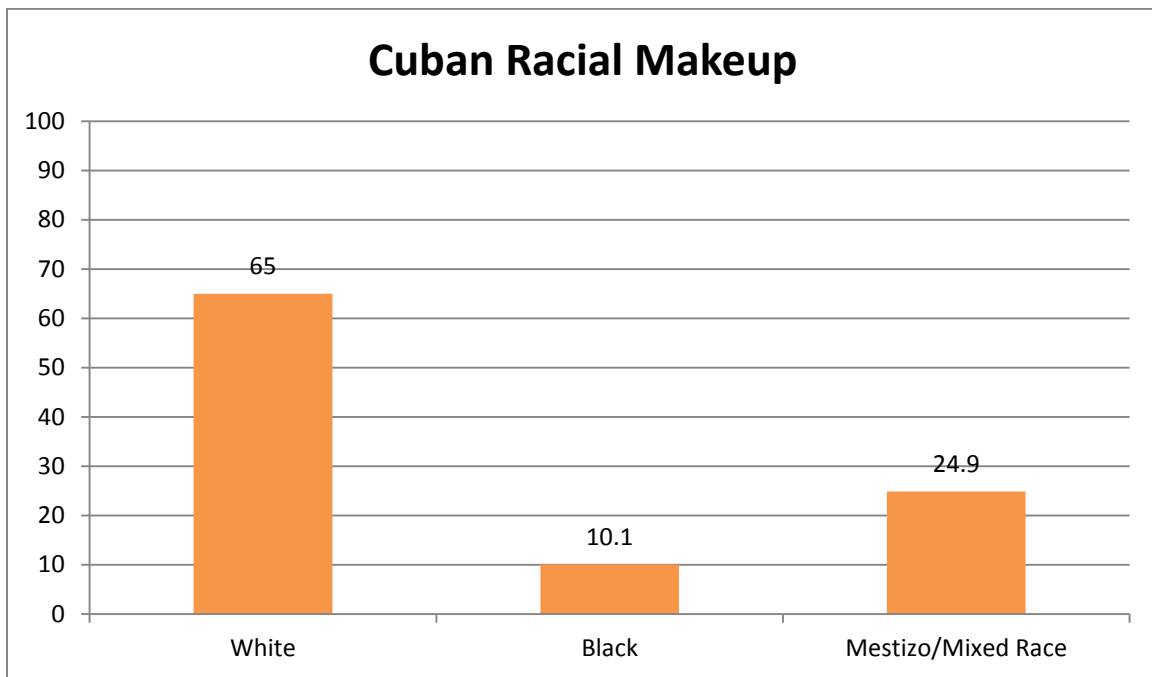


Table 19. Racial Makeup of Cuba



Source: National Office of Cuban Statistics, Census 2002

Havana Black Identity Survey – English Version

Occupation\_\_\_\_\_ Age\_\_\_\_\_ Gender\_\_\_\_\_  
Level of schooling\_\_\_\_\_

What conditions do you live in?

Do you have your own house? Your own car? How many people do you live with?

Do you live in: \_\_\_a house \_\_\_an apartment \_\_\_ a ciudadela<sup>66</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ other

Have you had opportunities for advancement in employment?

Schooling?

Explain:

Do you want to emigrate? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_No ¿Why or why not?

Have you had an experience with discrimination? \_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_No

If you responded yes, please explain:

Each question is measured on a scale of 1 to 5:

- 1 = Strongly Agree
- 2 = Agree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Disagree
- 5 = Strongly Disagree

*Choose One*

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. My social relations have a lot to do with the fact that I am black.                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. It is very important to me to teach my children the African cultural and spiritual heritage. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. It would be beneficial for blacks to marry whites.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. I feel good being with other black people.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Blacks are not always considered to be good by other people.                                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Being black is an important part of my self-image.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

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<sup>66</sup> A ciudadela or solar is one of the poorest forms of housing in Havana and can be loosely translated to tenements.

- |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 7. I am proud to be black.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. We blacks have made notable advances.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. The difficulties that blacks encounter because of racism affect me as an individual as well.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Socially, blacks should organize.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Blacks that support a black organization are just as racist as whites that exclude blacks.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Blacks should be aware of racism in Cuban society.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. We, blacks are respected by others.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Many consider blacks to be less efficient than whites.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. We, blacks are recognized as an important part of the culture and history of the country.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. For us it is very important to know the role that blacks have played in the history of our country.                                       | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. I reject the fact that I am black.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Many whites are distrustful in relationships with blacks.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Blacks and whites have more commonalities than differences.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. For me being black is more important than being Cuban.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. Blacks should appreciate whites as people and not as members of that race.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. I identify easily with other blacks.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. Blacks should continue to advance more and more to gain access and be visible in the different social and economic levels of the country. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. Black representation within the different levels of politics in the country is important.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. The African and Afro-Cuban ethical and cultural values have not been fully recognized by society.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Havana Black Identity Survey – Spanish and Original Version

Ocupación\_\_\_\_\_ Edad\_\_\_\_\_ Género\_\_\_\_\_  
Nivel de escolaridad\_\_\_\_\_

¿En qué condiciones vive usted?

¿Tiene casa propia?      ¿Carro propio?      ¿Con cuántas personas vive usted?

Vive en:    \_\_\_\_ una casa    \_\_\_\_ un edificio    \_\_\_\_ una ciudadela    \_\_\_\_ otro

¿Ha tenido oportunidades de superación del empleo?

¿Del estudio?

Explique:

¿Desea usted emigrar?    \_\_\_\_ Sí    \_\_\_\_ No    ¿Por qué?

¿Ha tenido usted una experiencia con discriminación?    \_\_\_\_ Sí    \_\_\_\_ No

Si respondió que sí, por favor explique:

Cada pregunta está calificada por una escala de 1 a 5:

1 = Categóricamente sí

2 = Sí

3 = Neutral

4 = No

5 = Categóricamente no

*Escoja uno*

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Mis relaciones tienen mucho que ver con el hecho de que soy negro/a.                                      | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Es muy importante para mí dar a conocer a mis hijos la herencia cultural y espiritual de origen africano. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Sería beneficioso para los negros el matrimonio con los blancos.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Me siento bien compartiendo con otros negros.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. No siempre los negros son considerados buenos por otra gente.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Ser negro/a es una parte importante de mi misma imagen.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Estoy orgulloso de ser negro/a.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Nosotros, los negros, hemos logrados notables avances.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9. Las dificultades que encuentran los negros por racismo me afectan a mí también.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Socialmente los negros debemos organizarnos.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Los negros simpatizantes de una organización de negros serían tan racistas como los blancos que excluyen a los negros.                         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Los negros deberían darse cuenta del racismo en la sociedad.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Nosotros, los negros somos respetados por los otros.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Muchos consideran que los negros no son tan eficientes como los blancos.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Nosotros, los negros estamos reconocidos como una parte importante de la cultura y de la historia del país.                                    | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Para nosotros es muy importante conocer el papel que ha jugado el negro en la historia de nuestro país.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Yo rechazo el hecho de ser negro/a.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Muchos blancos desconfían de sus relaciones con los negros.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Los negros y los blancos tienen más cosas en común que diferencias.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. Para mí, ser negro es más importante que ser cubano.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. Los negros debemos apreciar a los blancos como personas y no como miembros de esa raza.  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. Me identifico fácilmente con otros negros.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. Los negros y negras deberíamos superarnos cada vez más para acceder y estar visibles en los diferentes niveles sociales y económicos del país. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. Es importante la representación de negros y negras en los diferentes niveles políticos del país.   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. Los valores éticos y culturales de origen africano y afrocubano no han sido plenamente reconocidos por la sociedad.                            | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |





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