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NATIONALISM AND CIVIL RIGHTS IN CUBA: A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE, 1930-1960

By
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For most of the twentieth century U.S. history and Cuban history have been closely interconnected. African-Americans and Afro-Cubans in particular share common bonds of struggle for civil rights and equality in their respective countries. But individuals are products of their environments and African-Americans and Cubans shaped distinct civil rights platforms in accordance with their national, political and social institutions. African-Americans and Cubans learned to respond to their political systems through a series of historical experiences that reaped success or failure over time. Cuba's Hispanic colonial heritage that recognized *miscegenation* and *mestizaje* provided a different mode of action than African Americans who lived for most of their history under a segregated U.S. system.¹ This essay will examine the Cuban struggle for social, economic, political and cultural equality from 1930-1960, while comparing those events with the civil rights struggle in the United States during the same period.

Citizen's rights, to be sure, are uniquely national, if not constitutional constructions. According to Hegel, "right" in society is that which the law wills. Those rights, defined by the state, theoretically represent the collective views of the individuals who rule the nation.² Civil Rights which often refer to freedom from discrimination based on nationality, race, gender, religious liberty, as well as immunity from brutality must be scrutinized within a national framework. Members of particular nations define civil rights as the rights of citizens to pursue civil liberties within that nation. United States Civil Rights, for example, are based on a constitution dating back to 1789, and which continues to be redefined for inclusively. Part of the U.S. Civil Rights Movements was bent on redefining and re-elaborating on issues that would include African-Americans in the citizen's phrase "We the people."³

Owing to the historically weak Constitution in Cuban history and its political and economic underdevelopment, what Cubans have come to expect as their rights as citizens have tended to take on a nationalist focus. Moreover, while nationalism in the African-American community often meant black nationalism and implied racial solidarity, self sufficiency, black capitalism, and often separatism, among Afro-Cubans, nationalism was a patriotic call to bring all Cubans of all races together in pursuit of sovereignty, often against foreign threats. To this end, Cubans passed several nationalist laws which would shape Afro-Cubans' civil rights drive. In 1910, the Cuban Senate passed the Morúa Amendment to an Electoral Reform Law which prohibited the

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organization of political parties based on one race only. The subsequent race war that followed in 1912 was an aberration in post-abolition history.⁴

Cubans found a variety of non-political ways to pursue economic and social rights and to attain social mobility. In 1918, José Armando Pla explicated options available to Afro-Cubans. First, there was the individualist approach in which educated Afro-Cubans could attain high levels of achievement despite the obstacles of society; second, the collective approach called for Afro-Cubans to join together to affect the political process; third, politically influential men, such as Martín Morúa Delgado argued that blacks should associate themselves with established political parties, promoting their interests within the party system.⁵

Two decades after the race wars and the passage of the Morúa Law, the collective option was limited to cultural and non-political activities which would not challenge the state. Moreover these options must be understood in terms of the new generation of Afro-Cubans. The Cuban Republic had just come of age. Created in 1902, by the 1930's, a new generation born after independence became increasingly interested in national sovereignty and advancement. Patriotism and nationalism ignited the passions of Cubans of all backgrounds, motivating them to seek solutions to pressing problems. Race relations, while important, was not paramount to their nationalist agenda. Cubans had other pressing matters: economic, political and social development, cultural production and education, and imperialism and sovereignty. To ascertain the extent to which nationalism affected race consciousness and civil rights movements, it is first important to consider the relationship between nationalism and patriotism.

Leonard W. Dodd provides an appropriate definition. Nationalism he argues derives from patriotism. More than love of country, patriotism is a

conscious conviction of a person that his own welfare and that of a significant group to which he belongs are dependent upon the preservation or expansion (or both) of the power and culture of his society.⁶

Patriotism allows for an intimate relationship between citizen and *patria*, or country. While nationalism may derive from an association with the *patria*, that association may not necessarily be positive. Nationhood, moreover, may be associated with either the *patria chica* (your immediate community, as in ethnic, religious or local) or the *patria grande* (the wider broader community as in country or state).

According to Carl Friedrich, a nation is a sizable population or group of persons which is politically independent, cohesive in its patterns of communication, and internally legitimate. It is an organization joined together by psychological bonds, created for practical, political, social and economic reasons. National cohesion relies on nationalism for the promotion of common goals which may lead to corresponding demands and actions. Many nations can exist within one country.⁷

In the case of colonial societies such as Cuba, nationalism became a necessary part of the decolonialization process and in the creation of a patriotic identification with a newly independent homeland or *patria*. In the process of decolonization, Cuban nationalists, in general, forged a patriotism which endeavored to bring the diverse members of the society together on common grounds.⁸ Nationalism of this patriotic type engendered a feeling of cohesiveness among its people, a sense of being part of a patriotic community.⁹

In societies made up of diverse social groupings, patriotism or identification with country may also take on a negative connotation if the individual feels barred from pursuing his or her well-being by law or social convention. Moreover, a given group of individuals who do not identify with the dominant culture, may develop its own ethnic or social nationalism as a negative response to patriotism. This was the case for African-Americans in the United States. U.S. mainstream nationalism often defined the United States of America as a land of European immigrants. State policy relegated the original inhabitants to reservation systems and African-Americans, living mostly in the South, lived segregated from whites. Despite the "separate but equal" rhetoric, segregation meant that African-Americans were second class citizens.¹⁰

Jim Crow laws which forced segregation and limited political power of blacks emerged in the late nineteenth century when states gained higher autonomy and endured until the 1960s. In many areas in the southern United States, African-Americans maintained some political control of their own communities, but their efforts at reform were severely restricted by the presence of white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), lynching and other types of terrorism. Segregation may have ensured black participation and control of some African-American neighborhoods, but it also meant that African-American political power was always secondary to whites since they controlled state laws.

African-Americans living under segregation were hard pressed to promote nationalism of the patriotic type, given their status in society. Association with the *patria chica*, the black community, took priority over the larger national community, the *patria grande*. Although many African-Americans continued to serve patriotic duties in the military and other national institutions, African-American intellectuals forged a cohesive mentality, often termed black nationalism.

Black nationalism emerged in many varieties from racial solidarity, cultural, economic and political support to Pan-Africanism and separatism. In the 1930s, African-Americans spoke of solidarity to insure jobs and opportunities for the community. In 1933, James Weldon Johnson went so far as to publish a Negro National Anthem.¹¹ Chicago and other major cities witnessed mass demonstrations by African-Americans calling for more jobs in white owned businesses as well as a militant support of black enterprises, endorsing a policy which many called black capitalism.¹² U.S. black nationalist extremists called for a return to Africa, in the case of Garveyism or supported Benjamin J. Davis' desire for a separate state within the Deep South of the United States.¹³

In Cuba the pervasive power and importance of patriotic nationalism stymied ethnic or social nationalism of any kind. Afro-Cubans avoided black nationalism at all costs. The Morua Law of 1910 which prohibited one race political organizations, and the Race War of 1912 are partly responsible, but a wider psychological influence was also at work.¹⁴ The Hispanic corporate philosophy which had engendered a hierarchial social class, with racial overtones, created a complex social hierarchy that allowed some Afro-Cubans social mobility.

Unlike in the United States where the one drop law makes an individual "black," historically, mulattos in Cuba constituted a separate and distinct class with rights and privileges far superior to that of the black slaves, but not as many as the whites. Thus many Afro-Cubans attained substantial social mobility. This division which enabled

social mobility among Afro-Cubans before abolition prohibited the consolidation of black and mulatto consciousness in the twentieth century. While technically the mulatto was the progeny of a black and a white, *mulato* constituted a class concept rather than strictly a racial one. By the 1930s, many Afro-Cubans had attained prominent positions in Cuban national life. Nicolás Guillén, for example, attained recognition for his poetry. Morúa Delgado, Fulgencio Batista and others were Afro-Cubans. The small, socially mobile Afro-Cuban middle class and their subsequent identification as "Cuban first" seem to indicate that race in and of itself was not a barrier to social mobility and achievement in national life as in the United States.

From the late 1920s to 1950s, Afro-Cuban advocates promoted an integrated nationalism, avoiding separatist rhetoric. Thus when Jamaican born Marcus Garvey proposed separation as a solution to racial conflict in the Americas, Cubans hardly took notice.¹⁵ While Cubans dismissed Garvey as impractical, Garvey's associations attracted the attention of millions of African-Americans and West Indians, including some migrants to Cuba. Afro-Cubans did not want to form a separatist movement, much less return to Africa. Instead they saw a closer association with non-political organizations which promoted cultural and economic enhancement.¹⁶ Garvey had been an adamant capitalist whose ideas reflected the sentiments of many African-Americans. His black nationalism emphasized the fact that the present American capitalist system would never reserve a proper place for Africans. African-Americans had to forge an independent black capitalist base.¹⁷

Nationalism among African-Americans and Afro-Cubans affected how Cubans and African-Americans saw their role in their nations. While Cubans joined together on nationalist grounds to fight against concrete national reforms such as U.S. imperialism, the abrogation of the Platt Amendment, which gave the United States the right to intervene in Cuban affairs, the creation of labor reform and the institutionalization of a national Constitution, African-Americans pursued strong Civil Rights dialogue with the state calling for more participation in all walks of life. Already the United States had become the greatest economic and political power in the West and African-Americans had contributed to that feat and thus were demanding that they partake in its spoils.

Despite these differences, neither North Americans nor Cubans had succeeded in eradicating racism, yet sense of nationhood and official white response to racist incidents determined each community's response to discrimination and exclusionary practices. For many white North Americans, racism was simply patriotic. Law scholar Mary L. Dudziak argues that desegregation only received widespread attention in the United States after World War II, because of the embarrassing image that it gave of the country which was fighting injustice abroad. Indeed, the American media promoted an image that prejudice was un-American.¹⁸ The war tended to silence criticism, but bigotry continued as did African-American protest. World War II pointed out the contradiction in fighting for democracy abroad and not having its full benefits at home. In fact, according to the U.S. embassy in Moscow, "race relations" in the United States became a principal Soviet theme employed to criticize the United States.¹⁹ Consequently, civil rights reform received mass support after World War II, culminating in the Voting Rights Act under Lyndon Johnson in 1965.²⁰ Yet many

southern whites, continued to argue that segregation was an intrinsic part of the American way of life and dismantling it would undermine national values.²¹

In Cuba, however, racism was distinctly unpatriotic. No Cuban public official would dare endorse any type of prejudice. On the contrary, nationalists spoke publicly of reform and enhancing the system. Salvador García Agüero demanded that Cubans be accountable for unpatriotic actions, urging the government to follow up on its anti-discrimination laws of the 1940 Constitution and impose fines for those who broke anti-discriminatory laws. Agüero and nationalists like him mandated sanctions and laws, but realized that laws alone would not ameliorate the problems. Education and national discourse would enhance interaction among Cubans.²²

Afro-Cubans worked closely with other Cubans in shaping Cuban nationalism and raising consciousness. Fernando Ortiz, a prominent white Cuban, became so well regarded by Cubans that many dubbed him "The Father of Afro-Cuban Studies." Born in Havana, Ortiz was an avid patriot and nationalist. From 1930-1950, he passionately studied African elements in Cuba. By that time, he had already published seminal works on the African contribution to Cuban society.²³ His *El Engaño de las razas* (1945) and *Los bailes y el teatro de los negros en el Folklore de Cuba* (1951) are considered classics.²⁴

In his 1947 book *Cuban Counterpoint* he explained his theories of transculturation, a term which refers to the complex process of cultural change from contact between peoples of different cultures. African transculturation, he believed, was crucial to the formation of Cuban culture.²⁵ Ortiz's work was more than academic. He was responsible for the foundation of the Instituto Afro cubano and the publication, *Estudios Afro cubanos* (1937-1946), a journal for the dissemination of Afro-Cuban life. He was also a contributor to a series of other publications which aimed at promoting good race relations among Cubans. Ortiz and many other white Cubans were instrumental in shaping Cuban consciousness between 1930 and 1960, while stressing the historical importance of Afro-Cubans to national culture.²⁶ Cubans lauded Afro-Cuban heroes as national icons rather than black ones. In the formation of nationalism, positive contribution of all individuals edified the nation and instilled all Cubans with a sense of pride. In the United States dynamics were different. Even though many African-Americans worked closely with progressive whites in the United States, black nationalism discouraged whites from taking such high profile roles such as Ortiz'.

In Cuba, white and blacks condemned acts of racism and discrimination together. The lynching of Justo Proyer, a black field worker in Trinidad, Cuba caused activists to rail against such behavior which they perceived to be anti-social and un-Cuban.²⁷ Even conservatives criticized discrimination against Cuban blacks. The Havana Yacht Club, for example, came under attack for denying entrance to black Panamanian athletes.²⁸ Tomas Leon Castañeda also called for integration, renouncing all racism and exclusionary behavior.²⁹ In 1937, a mixed group of progressive individuals founded the National Association Against Racist Discrimination. They declared racism illegal, un-Cuban, and a national threat. Many whites and blacks pointed out that without each other they could not edify the national community. Blacks had been deposited in a different economic position, but through social reintegration whites and blacks had to accommodate one another free of conflict.³⁰

Although the Cuban government officially denounced discrimination on several occasions, Afro-Cubans continued to be excluded from beaches, social clubs, parks, schools and political parties as late as the 1950s. Cubans insisted that racism was a class problem and that through further education it could be eliminated without creating animosity. In this light, Afro-Cuban attempts to organize exclusively along racial lines met with opposition. Many Cubans saw such attempts as counterproductive and as negative as white prejudice. Thus, when Enrique Andreu attempted to create a Federation of Societies of Color, other Afro-Cubans criticized him. Gustavo Urrutía, for example, claimed that such associations should be formed on the basis of their character and not their color. Above all, he did not want Cuba to become a dual society of blacks and whites as in the United States. For many Cubans, racial affirmation did not mean that blacks should be proud of being of African descent, but rather that they should not feel ashamed of it.³¹ Several professional associations also opposed Portuondo Calá's proposition for the foundation of a federation of black organizations. Club Atenas, an Afro-Cuban social and business association, reported that the Club took "pride" in its goals of fraternity and Cuban affirmation and the promotion of a unified system inspired by the ideas of Juan Gualberto Gómez.³²

Many blamed U.S. imperialism for instituting racism in Republican Cuba by following exclusionary policies that were practiced in the United States.³³ Cubans spoke out against American presence on Cuban soil as well as U.S. policy towards African-Americans. Cubans of all races criticized U.S. segregation throughout the 1930s and 1940s.³⁴ During Tomás Estrada Palma's presidency from 1902-1906, many of the white fighters in the liberation forces were appointed to important administrative positions of the Republic. The state denied such appointments to blacks. Quintín Banderas, a general in the Cuban army, for example, was offered a position as postman.³⁵

In this light, Hermínio Portell Vilá, Professor of American History at the University of Havana, doubted that the United States' "Good Neighbor Policy" could promote democracy abroad while it ignored the plight of the African-Americans at home.³⁶ Cubans kept well-informed of U.S. activities. The 1955 murder of Emmett Till, a 14 year old black youth from Chicago who made a journey south to Greenwood, Mississippi was met by Cuban outrage. Till was beaten because he supposedly whistled at a white woman, and his body was tossed into the Tallahatchie River. Guillén dedicated a poem to the young American, expressing Afro-Cuban solidarity and frustration.³⁷

Gustavo Urrutía best explained the differences between racism in the United States and Cuba:

There is a fundamental ethical difference between the Yankee preoccupation and the Cuban preoccupation. The Yankee considers his anti-black preoccupation legitimate and cultivates it openly; the Cuban repudiates it as illegitimate and tries to overcome it while technically condemning it.³⁸

Urrutía himself pointed out that Jim Crow laws, in the final analysis, increased solidarity among African-Americans which would later be used against white society.³⁹

Cuba's labor leader Lázaro Peña also compared racism in the United States to Cuba, emphasizing that although Cuban racism did not function officially as it did in the United States, there was a "private school of thought [that] did not [want] blacks to work in certain jobs."⁴⁰ Martha Dodd, an American journalist in Havana confirmed this when she wrote that many Afro-Cubans seemed to tolerate racist behavior within

limits since they are afraid of causing a commotion.⁴¹ Indeed many Cubans denied that there was racism at all on the island since several laws were put into effect to prevent discrimination during the period. The Constitution of 1940, for example, explicitly stated the illegality of discrimination based on race. Yet the laws were quite distinct from the harsh reality. Afro-Cubans still faced exclusion from beaches, social clubs, parks, schools and political parties as late as the 1950s.

Afro-Cubans did not cease to point out the problems within Cuban society, but more often than not the Afro-Cuban's positive contribution rather than discrimination became the focus of discourse on race. Laureano López Garrido claimed that many Afro-Cubans triumphed against the odds and had maintained their commitment to the nation. While indicting discrimination in both the United States and Cuba, in the same breath, the writer reported that he was happy with the progress in Cuba. After all, many Cubans, blacks as well as whites, attempted to balance the struggle between the desire for national affirmation and integration with many types of social discrimination and marginalization due to colonialization.⁴² Entralgo, another Afro-Cuban spokesman in the 1940s, reminded Afro-Cubans that they were in a far better position than their counterparts in the North. He too believed in the necessity of national unity.⁴³

Cuban patriotism shaped the cultural focus of Afro-Cuban consciousness. Mutual desire for continued integration minimized public racial conflict. Unlike the United States, Cubans did not have to overcome an archaic social order such as segregation which had shaped the national consciousness of many Americans for decades. But Afro-Cubans did promote self-sufficiency.

While black nationalism in the United States meant support for African-American businesses in the United States, aversion to black nationalism in Cuba did not mean lack of support for Afro-Cuban enterprises. In fact, Afro-Cuban consciousness from the 1930s to the middle 1950s flourished. Afro-Cubans supported limited black capitalism, nationalistic development and anti-Americanism. Afro-Cubans criticized U.S. involvement in Cuban affairs, and state practices that enhanced national sovereignty such as the abrogation of the Platt Amendment. One Afro-Cuban reported that "in spite of everything, an intimate yearning seems to palpitate in the chest of every Cuban because the republic was consolidated on May 20, 1935."⁴⁴

Conservatives and liberals alike called for the integration of blacks into national parties. Liberals in particular attracted a substantial amount of Afro-Cuban support. Many flocked to the Liberal Party. After the fall of President Machado in 1933, Afro-Cubans also supported the Revolutionary Cuban Party (The Authentic Party) throughout the 1930s and 1940s.⁴⁵ The abrogation of the Platt Amendment had spurred a period of optimism which affected Afro-Cubans as it did other Cubans. Neither nationalism nor political turmoil prohibited black consciousness, rather it shaped it. Afro-Cuban consciousness emerged, but as a function of Cuban patriotism. Afro-Cubans promoted confidence and self-sufficiency in their communities under the motto "black capitalism without segregation." Black consciousness meant a celebration of blackness as an integral part of the Cuban nation which was built with co-operation between blacks and whites in Cuba.

Afro-Cuban leaders aimed to improve the relations between blacks and whites as well as the guidance of blacks along the path of productive activities in two phases: the promotion of economic capital accumulation and the acquisition of culture, broadly

defined. Gustavo Urrutía, chief editor of "Ideales de una Raza" in the 1930s, continued his campaign in the 1940s under a *Diario de la Marina* column entitled "Harmonies," in which he promoted national edification as well as black pride.⁴⁶

The spiritual consolidation of blacks and whites which was essential to the progress of the *patria* would include all aspects of Cuban life including commerce. While Afro-Cubans praised their African-American counterparts for their ability to thrive within the U.S., Afro-Cubans did not want the existence of two distinct cultures and economies in competition with one another as they saw in the North. Afro-Cubans viewed involvement in commerce and capital accumulation as, nonetheless, essential, since they believed that the potential for security was economic first. Belisario Heureaux, a contributor to the column, went as far to suggest that the first move should be acquisition of land by the native Cuban and especially by the native Cuban of color.⁴⁷

Many Afro-Cuban leaders made explicit connections with Cuba's neocolonial position and black poverty. Dr. Mora Gastón y Varona contended that the proletarianization of blacks was part of a larger impoverishment of Cubans in the face of Yankee and other foreign capital usurpation. He saw Cuban wealth in the hand of foreigners.⁴⁸ Afro-Cuban leaders saw their role as awakening the consciousness of white Cubans as well as elevating the cultural and economic status of blacks, while stressing racial cooperation in the face of foreign domination.⁴⁹

Despite the social problems, Afro-Cuban leaders made it a policy to focus on positive experiences; they promoted the philosophy of self-help. While they were concerned with the independence of Cuba, in the post-1933 period, they focused largely on economic independence for the black community in Cuba as a national duty. They proposed self-help measures. By publishing directories of blacks, Afro-Cuban social associations, hoped to bolster black businesses. The Cuban nation always served as the point of reference, however. Simultaneously, they saw their role as the reinstatement of black culture to its rightful place in the Cuban nation.

In the 1930s, Afro-Cubans associated with Club Atenas reported that Cuba's foreign dominated economy was ruining the nation. They resented the fact that major industries were in the hands of foreigners and that many of the workers were foreigners as well. Many in the Afro-Cuban community constantly called for nationalization of the Cuban economy. Thus, they applauded enthusiastically the 50% labor law passed by President Prío in the 1940s. As early as 1931, however, R.M. Valdés had called for "Cubans first!" He indicated that in all countries with advanced legislation, there were laws that protected the native worker but that in Cuba this was not the case.⁵⁰

In 1947, *Ebony* magazine praised Cuba's Lázaro Peña as "the most powerful Negro labor leader of his time." While announcing that workers had fared well under his leadership and that many rich Cubans believed it was he who ran the country, the magazine charged that "Peña is the consummate politician and were it not for race would become President."⁵¹ Yet *Ebony's* interview with Peña underscored the nationalist focus of most Afro-Cubans. Accused of being a communist, Peña, while not denying it, stressed that he was interested in the Cuban worker first and foremost, pledging to enforce the anti-racial discrimination laws announced in the 1940 Constitution.⁵²

Peña became a friend to many African-Americans because of his criticism of the American Federation of Labor, (AFL) which had attempted to influence labor in Cuba

through the American embassy, because "its notorious Jim Crow policy is known to Cubans, and this will eliminate the AFL from serious consideration by Cuban labor."⁵³ Afro-Cubans would eventually and consistently call for change through peaceful means, rather than through mass protest,⁵⁴ distancing themselves from political extremism. In the 1940s, Urrutia espoused liberal democracy as the most secure path to improve Afro-Cubans and the nation. Despite his personal opposition to the right wing groups, he dedicated a column to speak out against the terrorist attacks aimed at that group. At the same time, he believed that neither the extreme right nor the communists would benefit Afro-Cubans.⁵⁵ Urrutia wanted Cuba to be first, and that meant a nation for all natives.⁵⁶

Black intellectuals in the vanguard of the community promoted economic self-sufficiency and education. Although they did not overlook the problems of the system and the obstacles to Afro-Cubans, they believed the burden and responsibility resided in the black community which had sufficient opportunities available for self-empowerment. Furthermore, it was imperative for them to be willing to work closely with the white community for the continual construction of the *patria*.⁵⁷

Middle class black cultural organizations and professional associations such as Club Atenas promoted black consciousness, education, and Afro-Cuban capitalism in a non-belligerent atmosphere within the black community. Founded in Havana in 1917 by sixty eight members who were mostly engineers, lawyers, students, and journalists, the Club aimed to reflect the cultural, political and spiritual goals of blacks, and to provide a forum for the appreciation and encouragement of their achievements. While they mobilized blacks around crucial issues such as immigration, discrimination and jobs, it was important for the Club to educate Cubans on the Afro-Cuban contribution to the national community.⁵⁸

The Club promoted better relations between sectors of the Afro-Cuban community and whites. Concomitantly, they pursued a policy that can best be described as community capitalism. While many Afro-Cuban leaders called for blacks to get involved in commerce, through newspapers such as *Atenas*, the official bulletin of the Club Atenas, Afro-Cubans promoted business interests. Included in the newspaper were personal classified ads as well as a general directory of businesses presumably owned by Afro-Cubans. Their businesses ranged from medical consulting and law offices to decorators and construction establishments.⁵⁹

Despite these measures of support, official economic segregation was met with disapproval. Both Enrique Andreu, who called for collective action of blacks without relying on white support,⁶⁰ and Portuondo Calá's proposition for the foundation of a federation of black organizations seemed anti-white and therefore unpatriotic.⁶¹ Andreu's motivations were in keeping with a more adamant black nationalism.⁶²

While some Afro-Cubans pursued community capitalism before the 1959 Revolution, others believed that capitalism in its present form had exploited both blacks and poor whites. The present system would have to be transformed in order to create a *patria* free of discrimination. Thus Afro-Cubans joined the communist party in the hope that the eventual success of communism would eradicate the capitalist world system and usher in a period of equality. Nicolás Guillén, Cuba's poet laureate, for example, joined the Communist Party in 1935.⁶³ Francisco Calderío (Blas Roca) joined the party

as early as 1929 and was in charge of the party's section in Oriente, the province which was predominantly and traditionally black.

Afro-Cubans, such as Guillén and Blas Roca, saw the contradiction in the rhetoric and participation of the Cuban upper classes who spoke out against racial discrimination while at the same time attended social bourgeois clubs that often denied entrance to Afro-Cubans.⁶⁴ Progressive white and black intellectuals around the country stressed the marriage of blacks to the socialist cause as an arm against economic and capitalistic oppression.⁶⁵ But even the Afro-Cuban communists, at the time, attempted to work within the system until Fulgencio Batista's dictatorship turned increasingly oppressive in the late 1950s.

Economic debates ranked high on Cuban Civil Rights advocates' agendas. Afro-Cubans and progressive whites in Cuba pursued three tactics: (1) a call for continued national integration, (2) rights for Cubans over foreigners and (3) equal opportunity and self-sufficiency. Interestingly, they viewed the affluence of some African-Americans as indicative of what they could gain, but without segregation.⁶⁶ Civil rights for Cubans meant equal treatment under the law and the right to work free of discrimination. Thus the 1933 law that mandated that fifty percent of the Cuban labor force in all Cuban industries was met by Afro-Cuban cheers.⁶⁷ Aimed at promoting respect among blacks and mulattos as well as instilling working class values and educating whites on the importance of economic co-operation, advocates called for the definite, total integration of the Afro-Cubans in all of Cuban life.

Cuban civil rights activists promoted Afro-Cuban self sufficiency in the economic realm, while resisting any vestiges of segregation. Urrutia, the editor of "Ideales de una Raza," saw the role of the leaders of the black community as the betterment of relations between blacks and whites as well as the guidance of blacks along the path of productive activities in two phases: the promotion of economic capital accumulation and the acquisition of culture, broadly defined.⁶⁸ Afro-Cubans and their allies wanted to avoid the existence of two distinct cultures in competition with one another as they saw in the United States. Leaders encouraged Afro-Cubans to become involved in commerce and capital accumulation, since they believed that the potential for salvation was first economic then cultural. Belisario Heureaux suggested that blacks acquire land, and he pushed for their participation in all industries from commerce to agriculture.⁶⁹

Belisario Heureaux also saw the problems of national consolidation related directly to the economic problems of the black family. As evidence, he cited the deplorable conditions of the rural black families who tended to migrate to the cities in larger numbers compared to their white counterparts. He echoed the belief that true independence was economic self-sufficiency first. Afro-Cuban leaders encouraged their community to action and dialogue through newspapers and discussions, but often drew little mass mobilization.⁷⁰ The Cuban state received little criticism. As "state" was often equated with nation, Cubans blamed the United States for many of its ills.

In the United States, civil rights activists defied state policies despite the progressive gains from the 1930s onward. During Franklin Delano Roosevelt's presidency, Civil Rights activists praised many aspects of the "New Deal Policy," which afforded African-Americans several benefits. Organizations such as the Civilian Conservation Corps (C.C.C.) and the Works Project Administration (W.P.A.) provided opportunities

for the working and middle classes. In other areas, however, Roosevelt's policies were at best ambivalent.⁷¹ While African-Americans regarded the AFL as a racist institution, the relationship between the Congress of Industrial Organizations (C.I.O.) and Civil Rights activists was clarified during this period with the establishment of their Committee to Abolish Racial Discrimination under the leadership of James B. Carey.⁷²

In the 1940s, Afro-American A. Philip Randolph organized union marches to end discrimination in the war industries, resulting in Executive Order 8802 and the Fair Employment Practices Committee to examine discrimination on June 25, 1941.⁷³ The 1950s saw grass roots boycotts of white owned businesses that subscribed to segregation. These boycotts led the way for the economic power that blacks had as a group, setting the stage for an empowering Civil Rights Movement, which gained impetus with the *Brown versus Board of Education* decision of 1954.

The Civil Rights Movement in the United States was a mass based movement with support cutting across regional and class lines. In Cuba mass participation was community based. National mass support often surfaced in cultural celebrations. Organizing conferences and libraries to encourage research on issues of black culture, they invariably focused on race issues within a comparative framework with the United States.⁷⁴

Nonetheless on economic rights Cubans and African-Americans had much in common. Although in the United States, some African-Americans became affluent despite segregation, the Civil Rights campaign advocated economic advancement for the African-American masses. In Cuba, underdevelopment had afforded Afro-Cubans little room for socioeconomic mobility. But this was the case for many whites as well. Political uncertainty and repression discouraged mass protest. Yet, economic conditions for Afro-Cubans remained central to their struggle. The pervasive poverty among Cubans, regardless of race, brought Cubans of all backgrounds together in ways impossible in the United States. Despite the political chaos, political participation on all levels was never officially restricted by race. Political isolation and repression in Cuba, although present, was based on ideology. Education and economic resources afforded Cubans of all ethnic background a degree of flexibility. Nonetheless, throughout this period the percentage of elected black officials was disproportionately low.

Class and color differences may have inhibited the formation of a strong Afro-Cuban consciousness and a well defined Civil Rights Movement, but official policy allowed for individual participation in the community. Upwardly mobile Afro-Cubans continued to pursue numerous avenues to fight for their rights, including education. Since Cubans did not tolerate independent political approaches based on any one race, by the end of the 1950s, most Afro-Cubans became increasingly interested in national politics and the popular sectors. The influence of Morúa and Gómez were evident. Given Cuba's neocolonial status, mass organization had a national focus.

In the United States, the Civil Rights activists ascribed to diverse approaches as well. Some made individual contributions to their society, serving as role models for the community. Others supported organizations such as the N.A.A.C.P. and collective anti-violent movements symbolized by the Baptist preacher from Atlanta, Martin Luther King, Jr., but all were influenced by various degrees of black nationalism. The landmark *Brown versus Board of Education* decision in 1954 strengthened the Civil Rights Movement. The official Civil Rights Movement which eventually would be led

by Martin Luther King was shaped by black nationalism's racial solidarity, and the political and economic power that African-Americans as an interest group exercised.⁷⁵

Meanwhile in Cuba, national cultural discourse overshadowed discourse on race relations. Anti-Communism however never reached the levels in Cuba that it did in the United States. The abrogation of the Platt Amendment and the creation of the nationalistic 1940 Constitution made discrimination illegal and theoretically provided the framework for redress for Cubans. The political corporatist philosophy prohibited the formation of a grass roots-based movement, and many Afro-Cubans found ways of attaining security, well-being and equal opportunity in the system. In 1952, the *Sociedades de los Negros Cubanos* organized a national congress to discuss the role of the Cuban black in culture and society. They resolved to continue to fight discrimination. This was in the same year that General Fulgencio Batista, the mulatto President, began his dictatorship. While the African-American press took an interest in Batista as a Caribbean leader and a man of color, in Cuba, his racial background only served to support Cuban nationalists' contention that race in and of itself was not a barrier to public office.⁷⁶

Batista's policies turned Cubans away from him. The corruption, oppression, and limits on freedom that characterized the Batista regime mirrored Machado's practices two decades earlier. Afro-Cubans supported the 1959 Castro-led revolution with its promise of economic, social and political participation for all. The African-American press recognized Afro-Cuban support of Fidel Castro shortly after the Bay of Pigs fiasco of 1961.⁷⁷

Failure to reduce Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro's hold on Negro masses is listed among the main factors contributing to the defeat of recent invasion attempt.⁷⁸

Castro attracted mass support despite his dictatorial status because of his anti-bias policies. *Jet* further hailed the integration of the armed forces and added a personal commentary on Castro choosing to stay at a hotel in Harlem rather than at a New York City downtown hotel during his visit to New York.⁷⁹

The leftists, whether black or white, pointed out that real changes would not occur within the established capitalist system. They spoke eloquently of the new Cuban citizen free of class, race and sexual prejudice. The Cuban Communist Party advocated eradicating racial discrimination as a part of their campaign on the side of the masses against the bourgeoisie. According to Dr. Lourdes Casal, the *Partido Socialista Popular*, the Cuban Communist Party, had been more egalitarian than any concrete group of the 1940s and 1950s.⁸⁰

In the United States, the mass based black solidarity movements that emerged in the 1930s had developed a strong consciousness of their own by the late 1950s. Rather than an indictment of capitalism, black nationalism thrived because of capitalist opportunities. The Nation of Islam founded in the 1930s, for example, amassed a huge following by the end of the 1950s. Its leaders advocated complete separation, establishment of schools and business to promote black self-sufficiency and prohibited racial intermarriage.⁸¹ Even the pacifist Martin Luther King, Jr.'s approach would not have been successful without notions of black capitalism such as racial solidarity and African-American political and economic empowerment.

The new relationship in the 1960s was shaped by the events from 1930-1959. African-American activism born out of segregation engendered a mode of conduct distinct from that in Cuba. Civil Rights in the United States, in particular, received the enthusiasm and mass support from African-Americans precisely because of the history of segregation. On the other hand, capitalism benefited many African-Americans economically. The Cuban environment provided a nationalist umbrella opposed to imperialism and bent on integration under which a modest black community nationalism could develop, tempered by the struggle to resolve the neo-colonial status. Afro-Cuban association with the separatist wing of black nationalism never became viable. Lack of official segregation allowed Afro-Cubans to focus on community development and individual progress. Likewise, civil rights activists directed their criticism at individuals who practiced prejudice and discrimination, rather than the state.

African-Americans and Cubans struggled with discrimination based on race, born out of the Diaspora experience, and formulated their own responses based on the prevailing political climate. Protest is, after all, a function of economic, political, social and psychological security. It only occurs when the risks of protest outweigh the loss of that security.

NOTES

¹ For a historical treatment of the Catholic Church in Cuba see Juan Martín Leiseca, *Apuntes para la historia eclesiástica de Cuba* (Havana, 1938).

² Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York, 1956), p. 445.

³ In the post World War II era, African-Americans made Civil Rights a Human Rights issue, mainly through the United Nations Commission of Human Rights. Civil Rights must necessarily become Human Rights in an international forum. In October 1947, The N.A.A.C.P. filed a petition denouncing the treatment of African-Americans. In 1951, the Civil Rights Congress charged the United States of genocide against African-Americans under the newly created United Nations Assembly Convention on "The Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide."

⁴ In the 1910's, the Cuban Congress passed a law that barred the creation of political organization based on race alone. Partly in response to the formation of the racially motivated political party, the Independents of Color, Morúa also aimed to encourage the integration of Afro-Cubans into established political organizations. Aline Helg correctly illustrates that during the republican period, many Afro-Cubans continued to organize a struggle against Cuban racism. See Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Durham, North Carolina, 1995) 21 and 240-248.

⁵ Quoted in Tomás Fernández Robaina, *El Negro en Cuba* (La Habana, 1990).

⁶ Leonard W. Dobb, *Patriotism and Nationalism* (New Haven, 1964), p.6.

⁷ Carl J. Friedrich, "Nation Building," *Nation Building* Karl W. Deutsch and William J. Foltz, eds. (New York, 1963), 27-32.

⁸ Hermann Weilenmann, "The Interlocking of Nation and Personality Structure," *Nation Building*, Karl W. Deutsch and William J. Foltz, eds. (New York, 1963), pp. 33-35.

⁹ Passed in 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment which gave blacks the right to vote, but many southern states that did not ratify it. Under Reconstruction, the Republicans divided the states and instituted martial law, allowing voting blacks to flock to Lincoln's Republican Party, giving them clear political advantage. Many white supremacists prohibited the black vote through sabotage and terrorism. Literacy tests were also instituted to prohibit African-Americans from voting. After Reconstruction, however, states received greater autonomy and were allowed to institute their own electoral laws independent of the federal elections. For a good synopsis of Civil Rights during Reconstruction see Albert B. Blaustein and Robert L. Zangrando, *Civil Rights and the African-American* (Evanston, 1968) pp. 180-281.

¹⁰ James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way* (New York, 1933), pp 155.

¹¹ St. Claire Drake and Horace R. Clayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York, 1945), pp. 430-434.

¹² Benjamin J. Davis, Jr., *The Path to Negro Liberation* (New York, 1947), pp. 20-22.

¹³ The war was initiated by a group of disenfranchised Afro-Cubans who called themselves El Partido de los Independientes de Color who protested Republic policies which were disadvantageous to blacks. This led Morúa Delgado to create the law which prohibited parties based on one race. Two years later, Afro-Cubans took up arms as a protest against the law. Most of the Afro-Cubans involved in the uprising were killed.

¹⁴ Marcus Garvey (1885-1940) Jamaican born black pan-Africanist and black nationalist. He established the Negro Improvement Association which gained influence throughout the Americas. He is regarded as one of the principal black militant leaders in the post-World War I era.

¹⁵ During the first three decades of the twentieth century, Cuba received a steady flow of Jamaican migrants. This subject is the focus of Rolando Alvarez Estévez, *Azúcar e inmigración, 1900-1940* (Havana, 1988) and Franklin Knight, "Jamaican Migrants and the Cuban Sugar Industry, 1900-1934," in *Between Slavery and Free Labor: The Spanish Speaking Caribbean in the Nineteenth Century* Manuel Moreno Fraginals, Frank Moya Pons and Stanley L. Egerman (Baltimore, 1985), pp. 94-115.

¹⁶ Gustavo Urrutía, "Ideales de una raza," *Diario de la Marina* April 28, 1928. The N.A.A.C.P. was founded in 1910. Its predecessor was the Niagara Movement which met at Niagara Falls, Canada in 1905 under the direction of W.E.B. DuBois. In 1910 they became of the new organization the N.A.A.C.P. They were responsible for a publication *Crisis*, and were determined to work through the legal system in order to protect their rights.

¹⁷ John Henrick Clarke examines Garveyism in *Marcus Garvey and the Vision of Africa* (New York, 1974). Garvey's plan for African redemption coupled with his philosophy popularly known as "Back to Africa" accentuates the African-American mistrust of the state.

¹⁸ Mary L. Dudziak, "Desegregation and the Cold War Imperative," p. 70-74. Dudziak cites a number of public officials who criticized the Supreme Court's decision to desegregate including Governor Herman Tamm of Georgia who reportedly remarked that the decision "reduced our Constitution to a mere scrap of paper." Other remarks came from Georgia's Lieutenant Governor Marvin Griffin and South Carolina's governor James F. Byrnes.

¹⁹ Mary L. Dudziak, "Desegregation and the Cold War Imperative," *Stanford Law Review* (vol. 41:61): pp. 61-120.

²⁰ The Voting Rights Act of 1965 assigned federal examiners to oversee registration and observe voting in the Southern states (officially states from where discrimination complaints had arisen). Literacy tests were suspended in Alabama, Alaska, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Virginia and in designated counties of North Carolina. The Voting Rights Act indicated Congress' commitment to eradicate racial discrimination in voting.

²¹ W. Clark, "An Analysis of the Relationship Between Anti-Communism and Segregationist Thought in the Deep South 1946-1964" Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1976. Cited in Mary L. Dudziak, "Desegregation and the Cold War Imperative," *Stanford Law Review* (vol 41: 61): p. 75 note.

²² "La discriminación la ley y la trampa," *Fundamentos* 10, no. 95 (February 1950): 128-134. In *El Negro en Cuba*, Robaina uses Aguero's statement to foreshadow the need for a revolution as well as to justify the gains of the revolution.

²³ See *Hampa afro-cubano. Los negros esclavos: estudio sociológico y de derecho público* (La Habana, 1916) and *Los cabildos afrocubanos* (La Habana, 1921).

²⁴ *El engaño de las razas*. La Habana, 1945. A good review of this book is found in the *Hispanic American Historical Review* XXXVII, pp 343-344. For a critique of *Los bailes y el teatro de los negros en el folklore de Cuba*. Havana, 1951. See the *Hispanic American Historical Review* 1951 XXXII, p. 383-385 by Duvon C. Corbitt. *Contrapunto cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (La Habana, 1916).

²⁵ A review of the translation, *Cuban Counterpoint: tobacco and sugar* can be found in the *Hispanic American Historical Review* vol. 27 (Feb.-Nov. 1947): p. 528.

²⁶ Lino Pérez, "La raza negra no tiene de que se avergonzarse," "Ideales de una raza," *Diario de la Marina*, July 28, 1929, n.p.

²⁷ "La Asociación Adelante," *Adelante* I, no. I (June 1935): 19.

²⁸ "Pigmento y Civilidad," "Directrices," *Revista de Avance* 5, no. 45 (April 15, 1930): 97. Reprinted in Martín Casanovas, *Revista de Avance*, pp. 44-46.

³⁹ Ibid. Jim Crow Laws refer to the segregation laws instituted in the South from 1883 until the 1960's. In 1883, the Supreme Court declared the Civil Right's Act of 1875 unconstitutional. Segregation laws were sanctioned in all public places based on the separate but equal theory.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ "How Prejudice is Handled in Cuba," *Negro Digest* (October 1950) pp. 87-91.

⁴² Laureano López Garrido, "Homenaje a Capestany," *Atenas: Revista de Afirmación Cubana* II, no. 14 (June 1931): 12.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Tomás Fernández Robaina, *El negro en Cuba* (La Habana, Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1990). The lack of stability of Cuban parties, however, made it difficult for any one party to cultivate Afro-Cuban loyalty. In 1947, a group of Auténticos led by presidential candidate Eduardo Chibás split off from the Authentic Party and created the Cuban People's Party.

⁴⁶ Gustavo E. Urrutía, "Armonías," "Ideales de una Raza," *Diario de la Marina*, January 6, 1929, p. 6.

⁴⁷ Dr. Ramiro Guerra, "Hay que terminar," "Ideales de una Raza," *Diario de la Marina*, January 6, 1929, sec. III, p. 6.

⁴⁸ Dr. Ramón Mora y Varona, "La Cuestión Social" "Ideales de una Raza," *Diario de la Marina*, February 24, 1929, sec. III, p. 6.

⁴⁹ "Armonías," "Ideales de una raza," *Diario de la Marina*, January 20, 1929, sec. III, p. 6.

⁵⁰ R. M. Valdés Herrera, "Nacionalicemos a Cuba," *Atenas: Revista de Afirmación Cubana* II, no. 14 (June 1931), 3.

⁵¹ "Negro who could be President," *Ebony* (August 1947): pp. 32-35.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Gustavo E. Urrutía, "Armonías," *Diario de la Marina*, June 15, 1934, sec. I, 2.

⁵⁵ Gustavo E. Urrutía, "Armonías," *Diario de la Marina*, June 17, 1934, sec. I, 2.

⁵⁶ Gustavo E. Urrutía, "Armonías," *Diario de la Marina*, February 4, 1934, sec. I, 2.

⁵⁷ Pedro Marco "Tres Abrazos," "Ideales de una Raza," *Diario de la Marina*, January 13, 1929, sec. III, 6.

⁵⁸ *Atenas: Revista Mensual Ilustrada de Afirmación Cubana*, II no. 14 (June 1931): 1.

⁵⁹ *Atenas: Revista Mensual Ilustrada de Afirmación Cubana*, II no. 14 (June 1931): 1. A typical entry in the directory appeared as follows:

Dr. Pastor Reinoso Alfonso

Abogado y Notario Público de Martí

Matanzas

Bufetas: Garmendía num. 24, Máximo Gómez

Independencia s/n Martí

⁶⁰ "Armonías," "Ideales de una Raza," *Diario de Marina*, February 24, 1929, sec. III, p. 6. This was a response to the criticism by Urrutía that appeared in the column the week before.

⁶¹ Introduction to "Palabras" by P. Portuondo Calá, *Atenas: Revista de Afirmación Cubana* II, no. 14 (June 1931): 4. In the article Portuondo called once again for his federation which, in theory, was agreed to by members of societies all over the island, but which had not materialized.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Nicolás Guillén joined the Cuban Communist Party in 1935. In 1936, he was jailed for leftist activities, in particular participation in a "subversive journal." From 1940-1944, he dedicated himself to the Communist cause, becoming the party's candidate for his home province of Camaguey. His poetry is filled with dedications to Communist leaders around the world.

⁶⁴ Blas Roca, "El decreto sobre la discriminación racial," *Hoy*, La Habana, December 6, 1951, p. 2.

⁶⁵ José Muñoz Cota, "La canción de los negros," *Adelante* I, no. I (June 1935): 6. Included in one of the editions (IV, no. XXXIX) was a translation of Allison Davis, "The Negro Deserts His People." Rather than compare the blacks in the United States to them in Cuba, *Adelante* showed how the bourgeois class in both communities was willing to sell out to the dominant structures.

⁶⁶ *Atenas: Revista de Afirmación Cubana* II, no. 16-17 (August-September 1931): pp. 155-163.

⁶⁷ This was Decree #2583, "The Provisional Law for the Nationalization of Work" required that the work force of companies involved in the development of agriculture, industry or services was at least fifty

percent native. See Hortensia Pichardó, *Documentos Para La Historia de Cuba* vol. IV, part I (Havana, 1980); p. 93.

⁶⁸ Gustavo, E. Urrutía, "Armonía," "Ideales de una Raza," *Diario de la Marina*, January 6, 1929, p. 6.

⁶⁹ Dr. Ramiro Guerra, "Hay que terminar," "Ideales de una Raza," *Diario de la Marina*, January 6, 1929, sec. III, 6. Nicolás Guillén, "El camino de Harlem," "Ideales," *Diario de La Marina*, April 21, 1931. See also "El nuevo negro," "Ideales," *Diario de La Marina*, August 27, 1932.

⁷⁰ Belsario Heuraux, "Como Nos Ven," "Ideales de una Raza," *Diario de la Marina*, January 13, 1929, sec. III, 6.

⁷¹ For a good analysis of the relationship between African-Americans and Roosevelt See Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks* (New York, 1978).

⁷² The C.I.O. forged an alliance between white and black workers. The C.I.O.'s official policy on non-discrimination helped to shape the African-American agenda on economic concerns.

⁷³ Francis L. Broderick and August Meier, *Negro Protest Thought in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1964), p. 201-210. Albert B. Blaustein and Robert L. Zangrando, *Civil Rights and the African-American* (Evanston, 1968), pp. 356-358.

⁷⁴ "La Asociación Adelante," *Adelante* I, no. I (June 1935): 19.

⁷⁵ "Resolutions adopted by the Forty-Second Annual Convention of the N.A.A.C.P. at Atlanta, GA June 30, 1951," *The Crisis* 4 (1951), p. 452. Cited in Mary Dudziak, p. 76.

⁷⁶ "El Congreso de las Sociedades Negras," *Hoy*, February 24, 1952, p. 2.

⁷⁷ The Bay of Pigs was the botched U.S. invasion of Cuba on April 17, 1961. It was poorly planned and created great embarrassment for President Kennedy. Fidel Castro's forces emerged victoriously with pride in having defeated Yankee forces.

⁷⁸ "Castro's Anti-Bias Policies Key to Mass Appeal in Cuba," *Jet* (May 11, 1961): pp. 4-5.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Dr. Lourdes Casal, 14.

⁸¹ See for example Elijah Mohammed's "Separation of the So-Called Negroes from their Slavemaster's Children is a Must," in *Message to the Black Man* (Chicago, 1965), pp. 34-37.