

## IN MEMORY OF GUSTAVO E. URRUTIA (1881-1958)

*Gustavo E. Urrutia was born in 1881, from a family of freed blacks. He studied architecture and practiced it until 1928. From that moment on, he began a productive career in journalism that led to his analysis of the social and cultural problems of the black person in Cuba. He died in 1958.*

# Points of View of the New Black\*

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Gustavo E. Urrutia



La Habana, Cuba.

I am here waiting with my notes, and there is nothing more than one excuse, ladies and gentlemen: the importance of the issue, the urgent need to call attention to the points of view of the New Black inside the general picture of the Cuban problematic, with regard to the complicated issue of our interracial relations. What better place and opportunity for this discussion than the one so kindly offered to me by the Center of Studies of the National Institute of Foresight and Social Reforms and its audience, which is so used to mental discipline?

Allow me to say that the problem of our interracial relations comes purged of all passionate vibration to this eminent tribune, over which the taboo of the semi-patriotic sensibility weighed for far too long. This problem has been reduced to a rigorous intellectual scheme, as any social problems that are the subjects of study in this illustrious Institute that today honors me with hospitality.

Well, it is certain that I have always maintained the racial issue in the intellectual plane, stripped of all trace of resentment in the tribune, the press, and the most intimate part of my mind. This is not denying that the racist issue in and of itself is solidified with emotional imponderables like all social problems and the majority of human relations. At the same time, these racial issues do not tend to be cause, but effect. They are subordinated to a series of remote and unstoppable imperatives that are products of the historic evolution and the law of human progress, its successive evolution toward the future. The imperatives definitely govern over the willpower of men and towns. Further, they modify the causes and effects in order to adjust them to the objective conditions of a present time in perennial evolution.

In order to fruitfully analyze the imperatives of our races' problems, which are predominant and superhuman due to their fatalist essence, we should cast aside all of the passionate elements that are opaque and perturbing and assume an attitude truly intellectual, philosophical, and technical, assisted by the modern social sciences. This dispassionate and reflective attitude is, precisely, the one that the New Black has adopted to confront interracial relations problems. This attitude helps create the New Black's mental autonomy, belligerence, serenity of spirit and spiritual immunity from negro-phobia and the flattery of negro-philia. From there, finally, comes their optimistic vision of a near future in which the racial problem ceases to exist because it has no reason to be. A future where racial prejudice is as absurd and incompatible as slavery of the black man would be today in the current social economic regimen.

Before continuing, we must correctly define what is the "New Black"? What is this type of "New Deal"? The New Black is the afro Cuban – male or female, young or old – who has concluded that the current demo-liberalism is inept to correct the socioeconomic subordination and underestimation of the people of color that our history of the slave owning colony left us. This regime is incapable of overcoming the dramatic disadvantages that the Cuban proletariat and middle class live, to which colored people mostly belong.

The New Black has freed him/herself from the inferiority complex imposed on him/her by the slave owners. They do not ask for social and economic equality due them because of their ancestors' enormous historical contribution to forming Cuba and the Republic. In exchange, they have acquired a perfect knowledge of honorable contribu-

tions made by their ancestors. As a result, they feel fully worthy of fairness in the past, present, and in the broader, grand scheme that the future holds for all of us progressive Cubans. This knowledge is not only of what they have meant and mean to his country, but also knowledge of what the black African represents in the historical progress of the West and the international equilibrium of world peace and, thus, the survival of western civilization.

The New Black is not the one that abides by the diverse definitions that white friends or enemies have given the black person. However, as any rational and cultured being would do, the New Black define themselves and have a definition of others.

The New Black is the Afro-Cuban that studies race problems with clinical eyes and philosophical mind. Their minds are exempt from a genuine black racism even if it were only a reflection of white racism and as a result of this one. I hope I can explain in this exposure, as I have in the press, my reason for believing that the black American, and particularly the black Cuban, lacks powerful motives to feel racist.

The New Black, in the end, is the Afro-Cuban that has stopped regarding his white co-citizen as an elder brother. They see the racist, white Cuban as a free and malevolent brother, harboring no anger or bitterness but having the necessary reserves to counteract the white brother's noxious influence. They love the progressive and revolutionary white man, that is, revolutionary in the noblest sense of the word, as a twin brother and a companion in the struggle for the national and human rights.

This is the New Black, the one that has already emerged from the confusion in which his/her race and the rest of the popular Cuban masses were submerged with the fail-

ure of our revolutions. In addition, these New Black have again become oriented by convincing themselves that not even the genuine liberal democracy can guarantee a collective economic and social justice, as a result of its eminently individualistic and plutocratic essence. This New Black have also oriented themselves toward the promotion of a form of socialism—leftist in the majority of individuals—that is compatible with our idiosyncrasy and the reality of our international relations.

Has the New Black become vain because of this new way of thinking? Have we created the New Conceited instead of the New Black? Do they believe that they are the owner and master of the only truth? Were they bred by dissolution or, at least, by public perturbation? Do they belittle the ancient black person, their contemporary, whites of other days or even of this time? Are they intransigent, imperious or rebels?

Certainly not! They are nurtured by the history and live overcome by the scientific and philosophical authentic humility. They know that they owe their civil and political liberty to imperatives of the historic evolution of western economy and politics, and not to generosities and regrets. However, they evaluate the merit of the abolitionists and the fraternal integrity of the genuinely revolutionary whites. They deny this virtue to prior and current pseudo-revolutionaries. They recognize the legacy of the white and black cultures, and feel admiration for the efforts accomplished by their black ancestors, even in the most adverse circumstances, to elevate them to the level of enlightenment and culture which they enjoy today.

The New Black know that, deep inside, they are not but the most recent aspect of the noble, edifying, patriotic and fraternal spirit of the Afro-Cuban. At the same time, howev-

er, they understand that they currently find themselves in a period of mental and political reform. This is why we tend to hear them think out loud and see them as being controversial; this is also why they try to explain themselves. With that being said, they are persuaded to believe that our national problems, including the racial one, cannot be resolved alone by the black or white man.

During the time that they think through and review their ideas, they strive to submit them to the general criterion, which they would have to count on in the end for the great work of collective advancement, completely Cuban, in which they are engaged. It is because of his attitude that I am here tonight, striving to expose their mentality and to sustain their points of view. I am ready to answer any questions (if they are not of great erudition).

Although the Afro-Cuban does not have any foundations of foreign lineage to feel racist, that does not signify a lamentable lapse of logic. In spite of aspiring to erase all racial discrimination, they begin by placing themselves as black, by creating a specific mental autonomy. Such an attitude obeys the fact that, in reality, the black person is racially and injuriously differentiated economically and socially. They need, by infallible mode, to deeply know and be their own conscience. They need to know their position inside the Cuban problematic in order to form a suitable criterion and determine the way to contribute to resolve it and solve the specific issue of his racial delay.

They need to confront their criterion with that of the renovating whites, and reconciling both criterions to only integrate a philosophical, executive, and reclaimed one. I have said more than once that, to reach racial indifference where discrimination exists, it is necessary to begin by making

those differences concrete and by defining them with the object of eliminating them. It is not about erasing the biological differences, but about making them innocuous. Yet, this process of previous and transitory racial conscience is one of the most difficult tests for the very delicate mission of the New Black, unless, in some part, they readily have the solutions of social justice that float in the environment of the world. On the other hand, it would be least convenient for blacks to become corrupted by racism.

By the New Black being owners of their own values to mobilize them in favor of the community, they initiate this process of spiritual auto-determination by defining themselves. Finding what they mean to the world and to Cuba.

#### NOTES

\*- *Islas* will publish the second part of this conference in its next issue.