

Explanation

A talk delivered during the Afro-Cuban Hour on the C.M.C.F. radio station. (1935).

Gustavo E. Urrutia

Among my intelligent and good friends that do not have an inferiority complex, more than one has come to me asking if I intend to stimulate, maintain, or expunge “ñañiguismo” and witchcraft with these radio broadcasts by playing African drums and songs. In essence and with all its importance, this is the question: Should we stimulate the African tradition or should we eradicate it?

There may be other people asking themselves the same question with identical honesty. Therefore, I wish to offer all of them a simple, clear, and plain answer. We should not forcedly encourage nor destroy Africanism. What we should do is get to know it and explain it.

African ancestry, as it exists in the modern culture of the slavist America, is deeply mixed with Spanish, Portuguese, French, English, Dutch, or Indian. Therefore, it is important to become familiar with the African factor, at least as much as we make an effort to become familiar with other factors of American people, for example, the Spanish factor in Cuba, the French factor in Haiti, English factor in the United States and Jamaica, and Portuguese factor in Brazil.

The black segment of the Cuban people tends to be insidiously attributed to savage and barbaric ancestry. Also, it is the Afro-Cuban who is embarrassed or coerced with supposed legacies of inferiority and degrading racial stigmas. For the same reason, the

Afro-Cuban is the one whose best interest is to know with scientific certainty, disseminate, and explain the religious, moral, and artistic values of his/her black grandparents. In contrast, those who have nothing to envy in terms of morality or spiritual refinement from their white grandparents, have been generously contributing to the white culture, which has not had the courage to find out, recognize, and appreciate the contributions to their ancestry until recently.

At this point, there is a pedantry and wickedness to brand African music and rituals as savage, retrograde and brutalizing in Cuba. For example, a radio political commentator embarked upon insults against the Afro-Cuban music that was played there, amongst other music, to refute concepts emitted in the coalition meeting of Central Park. If there is something to regret, it is, if anything, the bad intention and supine ignorance of the absent speaker or those who inspire such idiocy. Counteracting such fabrication, refuting the lies, rectifying the errors, and overlooking the ignorance... In one word, Illustrating, is the social and public service that those of us who are cooperating in this Afro-Cuban radio hour are providing. We have already explicitly said it in our inaugural talk. However, we will repeat it as many times as necessary so that our mission is well understood.

Next Saturday, our dear friend, Colonel Lino Dou, will come to honor the C.M.C.F. microphone with a talk about the origin, meaning and purpose of “ñañiguismo” in Africa and Cuba. Lino Duo will bring together exquisite historical and literary cultures to provide a service to our general culture. Again, this will vindicate respect and considerations for an African institution whose morality and altruism has nothing to learn from freemasonry or any religion in spite of all the defects and

abominations that have been attributed to “ñañiguismo”. Atrocities were also attributed to freemasonry in other times.

We want to make clear that this does not mean we desire to foster “ñañiguismo” and Santeria, just as we would not foster freemasonry or any religious fanaticism. It would be a clumsy anachronism. We are not in a period of secret societies or great religious fervor. One must approach our machinist and idealist civilization with a technical culture that is still in diapers or infancy stage in Cuba. We will approach our civilization mostly through public classrooms rather than through private rooms. Overall, the Afro-Cuban should be eminently superior in technical and university disciplines, with the purpose of nullifying and overcoming anti-black prejudice obstacles.

I also want to underline the truth that neither black nor white Cubans can consider themselves perfectly knowledgeable and cultured if they ignore the cultural and moral exquisites of the African origin that runs through their blood or spirit. I insist that there is no integrity in blacks or whites that, by malice or ignorance, attribute a stigma, such as lack of culture and racial barbarism, to the Afro-Cuban for incidents or crimes that are known to any race, although more known to the Spanish white race.

In summary, we do not foster or destroy the African “ñañiguismo” and Santeria. We limit ourselves to present them and explain them as social and religious phenomena that exist between us. These are phenomena that are not degrading but moral and that cannot be uprooted from our customs and habits by a decree.

There is no atmosphere that would reanimate those institutions and ideas. But, we want to tell those who still practice them that they should not be embarrassed by them. And, to the “colored” who do not know them, we say

that they too have nothing to be embarrassed about. They are institutions as cultured and moral as those of their white grandfathers. Only they are different.

They are current realities, but if they did not exist, we would explain them with equal interest, as all historical elements are explained. Even after they are extinguished, they continue to have an influence on the material and spiritual life of the people.

Finally, we explain the “ñañiguismo” and Santeria in order for blacks to learn to reject the African influenced taboo and the racist coaction that consists of keeping them continuously embarrassed of their black grandfathers. We work so the majority of blacks can regain their self-esteem. The Afro-Cuban that sincerely lives embarrassed of a racial inheritance that, in reality deserves as much consideration as the Spanish, or any others, is more of a slave, more ignorant and unhappy than his African progenitors.

We are in need of the western and modern culture to live together and defend ourselves of the dangers of our ambit. We also need correct knowledge of African history and culture, just as we need of the Spanish, Roman, and Greek cultures.

I repeat that citizens of a Negroid country that only knows the white branch of its town cannot consider themselves perfectly knowledgeable. The wise European investigators speak of the excellence of the African culture better than I, and they are divulging this excellence in the Old Continent to perfect whites’ secular knowledge. Those of us, who feel it more closely, should know and better respect the black culture.

This is what I postulate; let us vindicate again our own esteem. Let us know ourselves better to like ourselves more and to make ourselves more likeable.