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Growing Afro-Cuban Civil Rights Movement

For most of the 20th century, United States history and Cuban history have been closely aligned. In particular, African Americans and Afro-Cubans share the common bonds of a struggle for civil rights and equality in our respective countries. Hundreds have fought and died in both countries for fundamental issues—freedom, respect, dignity, and economic and social equality.

So, it is not surprising that some are speculating that Cuba is on the verge of a viable “Civil Rights Movement.” Yet, what is the basis for this speculation?

Although there have been black Cubans throughout Cuba’s history who have spoken out against racial discrimination, today there are many noteworthy civil activists and organizations working peacefully on behalf of greater racial integration—and the list is growing. In present and past issues, *ISLAS* has published many articles on such individuals and organizations, like Guillermo Fariñas, Dr. Darsi Ferrer, Orlando Zapata Tamayo, and the *Citizens’ Committee for Racial Integration* (CIR), to name just a few.

In addition, due largely to many of these civil activists, Cuba’s fight for freedom and improved race relations has captured the attention of many in the international community. In the U.S., we see the “Ladies in White” on our televisions, as they march down a Havana street, only to be harassed by Cuban police. In the United States, thousands gather in Miami on Calle Ocho in solidarity for these ladies’ plight. In our newspapers, we read about the death of Orlando Zapata Tamayo after his 86-day hunger strike. Prior to that, Afro-Brazilians and African Americans joined the international outcry against the unjust imprisonment of Dr. Darsi Ferrer.

As a product of the African-American Civil Rights Movement (1955-1968), I recall acts of non-violent protest and civil disobedience that produced crisis situations between activists and government authorities. Forms of protest and/or civil disobedience included boycotts such as the successful Montgomery Bus Boycott, in Alabama (1955-1956); “sit-ins” such as the very influential one in Greensboro, in North Carolina (1960); marches, such as the one from Selma to Montgomery, also in Alabama (1965); and a wide range of other non-violent activities. While successful in furthering our cause, these nonviolent activities were met with violence from white oppressors. Activists faced being water hosed down, beaten by police and the public, and attacked during sit-ins.

Are we witnessing the birth of Cuba’s Civil Rights era? Only the Afro-Cuban community can decide. But if and when they make that choice, they need to know that the Afro-Cuban Alliance and *ISLAS* stand with them, and we will do our part to ensure that the world hears and sees your struggle. Many have already paid a great price while struggling to achieve racial dignity, economic and political self-sufficiency, and freedom from oppression. Let us never forget that.

Freedom is never free!