

Manipulations and Forgetfulness

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The subject of race is still not being discussed in a way dynamic enough to produce concrete solutions. We cannot get beyond the obstacle of ambiguous rhetoric, despite the fact that the government initiatives to supposedly end the problem have proliferated in recent years. It would not be untoward to say that the topics of many symposia and conferences where the issue and its consequences are discussed, and proposals are made to correct these errors, end up in a drawer or marginally applied.

There are many reasons to believe there is minimal interest, that it is relegated to academia, and that there is little serious commitment to really end a phenomenon with an uncanny capacity for mimesis. With all the other everyday problems that burden a large part of the population, regardless their ethnic origin and other important socio-cultural factors, racial prejudices in Cuba transpire without notice. There has always been a tendency to minimize the impact of people's open attitudes, if not hatred, or conditioned acceptance of black people. This is the predominant situation in a context in which it appears racism will increase even more. Blacks are still second-rate citizens, only good for folkloric expressions, basic work and sexual fetishes. The destiny of black women is just about the

same. Even if one can't be categorical about either description, it is important to highlight that such is the rule that defines the behavior of a significant part of the white population in Cuba.

Willful forgetfulness and questionable efforts to overcome the existing barriers have both cemented a polarized situation that at some point could reach critical proportions, which would made difficult the construction of a post-totalitarian republic. This problem will affect the immediate future: keeping the bitterest, race conflicts outside the media's focus is not synonymous with their having been overcome. Unfortunately, this obfuscation of reality has contributed and continues contributing to consolidating a false reality and perception about how Cuba actually is.

One very useful fact is all I need to substantiate the opinions I have herein expressed. It's not the only one, of course, but it exposes the priorities of those in power. Financial help, media coverage and even the ability to earn benefits or privileges via approved legislation are examples of the governmental CENESEX's [National Center for Sexual Education] achievements. The current President's daughter, Mariela Castro Espín, directs it. If one compares the institutional energy and import this agency devotes to sexual di-

versity to that which is spent on eliminating racism, one would see exactly what the political elite's interests were.

Racism, which some still employ incredible arguments to deny, keeps gaining new psychological ground. Younger generations have grown up not knowing about the genesis and evolution of a problem that is obvious at the national level. This lack of knowledge about the essence of this 400-year old, inherited and antagonistic situation is what young people imitate and guide themselves by, attitudes and advice that often exacerbate and multiply the rejection of 'others' because of their skin color.

There is no guarantee of receiving a proper education regarding this issue in the home, school or neighborhood. These environments almost always provide the raw material for maintaining a distorted perspective about this unfinished chapter of a revolution that promised to eliminate this scourge. We need for the difficulties surrounding the complex coexistence of whites, *mestizos* and blacks get beyond ambiguity and start being the subject of radio and television programs, newspaper columns and whatever media possible, so that this very necessary, deep debate can produce tangible results.

While there has been no public redress of the gay and lesbian situation, and I don't think there'll be one so long as those in power are the some people who ordered a laundry

list of punishments for them decades back, they could hold multiple marches led by Mariela Castro and rest assured that many of their demands would finally be approved by government.

Blacks are waiting for the amount of attention the government decides to pay them to increase. That way they could air their concerns in an atmosphere in which their voices would cease being whispers and enter the noisy realm of triumphalism and sacred liberating promises. At this time, however, the likelihood of being considered a thief, irresponsible, dissolutely useless, a drug addict or cretin, or other equally alarming things, is much greater for a black person than for a white one. The stigma against lacks goes even further. Having dark skin and being a homosexual is an explosive combination. The disdain in this case can be almost bestial: "They don't deserve to live. If it were up to me, I'd hang them with nylon cord right now. It's not enough for them to be black." This is what a white citizen said when two black transvestites passed him. No attitude could be more like that of the KKK.

Luckily, this is not what the majority feels and thinks in Cuba. It would be difficult for racism in Cuba to reach those extremes. Nevertheless, we should sound the alarm. It's better to avoid such a situation, lest we have to later regret scenes that dwell in the minds of those who would prefer to see all blacks in prison or in a coffin.