

# Racism at the Seat of Power

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If we heard that an armed guy fired upon someone from a distance of 20 meters, we'd think he had committed a terrible crime; but, if later someone clarifies for us that he was part of a firing squad, would we still feel the same way?

You have to listen before you judge. My father was one of the “Cuban Revolution’s” exemplary men. On July 26, 1953, he participated in the attack on the Moncada barracks and served a brief prison sentence along with Fidel Castro on the former Isle of Pines. He was pardoned by then President and dictator Fulgencio Batista, lived as an exile in Mexico, sailed on the Granma boat expedition, disembarked on Las Coloradas beach, and went into the Sierra Maestra. He ended up commanding the Third Eastern Front’s troops, left the force as a commander, and was one of the Republic of Cuba’s Vice Presidents till his dying day. Who could ever imagine that someone with a record like that would become a relevant figure because he was black, and discriminated against for being black.

I know very well who my father was. It is not my intention to stir resentment or frustration, but rather to uncover the racism and ra-

cial discrimination that like ideology, controls the halls of a government that defines itself as humanitarian and revolutionary. Of course, I want to assure the reader that delving into history dispassionately can be quite shocking and revealing: it is like falling from high heaven without a parachute, and smashing into the ground.

Juan José Almeida Bosque was born in Havana, and because blacks in Cuba have always been segregated—first in slave barracks and later in marginalized ghettos—he was not brought up in a real residential district, but rather in Poey, a poor, outlying neighborhood where being a tough guy is not only the purvue of gang members. Many of these nobodies also just want to survive.

People are a reflection of everything around us. The Yoruba religion was important to my father’s natural environment. When he was nine, surrounded by Santería priests and babalawos, yubonas and batá drumbeats, he received the orisha Agayú, who represents the world’s force and is Chango’s father, while tied to a royal palm. This was genetically created for a climate of pain; of course, humans are not orishas, but

he was filled with an inborn, musical vocation that marked him.

I am much too close and too impassioned about my father to maintain my objectivity. Many tales and stories have been told since Moncada, the Sierra, and even the time before and after the Revolution's effervescence—but not about the Modelo Prison on the Isle of Pines. When they are imprisoned, humans reflect and release many of their worst demons. This explains why racism was employed at this institution, to mark difference. During their prison terms, those who had attacked a barracks were allowed visitors. Family members

of white prisoners spent the night in Nueva Gerona. This was suggested by Fidel, commented on by Raúl, and it was at the home of Jesús Montané that they stayed. Yet, the families of black convicts slept like cockroaches on benches, or on the floor of the church at which the honorable Father Guillermo Sardiñas officiated.

Every time I look back, I recall a beloved person who one day made me promise that I would not be like him—but that's another story. I feel it would be unjust to not mention that appointments or assignments have been nothing more than a punishment for many.