

Real Unity

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Pressured by a social and intellectual movement that from the ranks of the democratic opposition has dismantled each one of the Cuban regime's pseudo-integrationist pantomimes and skirmishes, its specialists on things black, with Mr. Miguel Barnet at their lead, are clamoring for the spiritual and unitary construction of the Cuban nation.

What is needed is to lay the blame for the evils of the racism we endure today: on slavery and its legacy, colonization, a republic mediated by its generals and doctors and—why not—the greatest cause of all our troubles—our ever-convenient enemy to the north, who malevolently permitted the Independent Party of Color to register, to contribute to the lack of unity of the “forces that in Cuba fought for social justice” [sic]. Which forces were fighting for social justice at that time, if not that very same Party?

There were speeches at the centennial celebration of the Independents of Color's massacre and, although late, there has been an attempt to publicly vindicate a race that is still suffering from the very same shortcomings, abuses and manipulations it did more than a

century ago, after more than fifty years of socialist revolution.

More than half the time that has passed since the massacre has been during the post-revolutionary period. What has been achieved? Blacks are the social group most repressed by the police, because the PNR (National Revolutionary Police) school recruits are taught that most criminals have dark skin; blacks continue to be a minority in leadership positions at universities and in employment with access to convertible currency. On the other hand, they are overrepresented at prisons, or Havana tenement yards, or projects, and in marginal neighborhoods all around the country.

The country's white leadership, which inherited its power from white slavers who later became white patriots, white republicans, white socialists, have not changed the state of things at all—partly because it does not interest them, partly because it is not convenient for them, and partly because deep down within they are as racist as their predecessors.

The paternalistic, “tough guy” attitude, the call for unity that is really a call for the subjugation of a race, and the acceptance of

an evil pre-destiny—in which whites are still the masters, although they are now called “comrade manager”—are premises that allow us to identify Cuba’s current, social reality with that of a hundred years ago. Seeing an old photograph of Evaristo Estenoz’s bloody cadaver surrounded by members of the era’s army brings to mind scenes from the southern United States, when the Ku Klux Klan had its way. Only the hoods are missing today.

When the Cuban authorities pursue and repress anti-racist, non-governmental organizations like the *Juan Gualberto Gómez Movement for Racial Integration*, the *Citizens’ Committee for Racial Integration* (CIR) and the *Citizens’ Observatory against Racial Discrimination*, they always commit the same crime as occurred when the *Independent Party of Color* was declared illegal under the government of José Miguel Gómez. When officers from the Department of State Security block access to CIR headquarters, they are emulating the officers and soldiers of postcolonial, republican Cuba who massacred the Independents of Color, in 1912.

Barnet forgot to mention that none other than then Colonel José Francisco Martí y Zayas Bazán was a member of General José de Jesús Monteagudo’s troop. A plaque in his honor was unveiled at the Center for Martí Studies the very same year of this painful anniversary. If there is going to be talk of concrete actions that will fortify the concept of national unity, it might be a good idea to rethink the poorly thought out idea of the plaque, and once again plunge the Apostle’s unworthy son back into the oblivion from which he should never have emerged. It would also be helpful to tear down the statue of racist and assassin José Miguel Gómez from its place on the Avenue of the Presidents, and melt it down to create another to Evarist Estenoz, founder of the most advanced, turn-of-the-century, political

project—the Independent Party of Color. This would serve as a symbol of the contributions of blacks to the construction of Cuban nationality.

There will be no dearth of those who will defend keeping the disgraceful statue, for which purpose they will offer numerous reasons, but not confess their racism. Yet, we citizens who aspire to a democratic Cuba must be firm in our demands. Vindication requires historical reparation—and the statue is nuisance. It is offensive.

Yet, removing a plaque and a statue would be only one measure against a kind of public ridicule that could eventually be overcome with a bit of good will and decency. What is difficult is that one hundred years later, the Cuban State guarantees, e.g., equal opportunities in the diplomatic corps, something the Independents of Color asked for as only one of their many programmatic demands back in the early twentieth century. Given what we just saw at the swearing in ceremony of the most recent, 32 Cuban ambassadors, on July 17, 2012, before the Monument to José Martí, the group could easily pass for European diplomats wearing *guayabera* shirts.

At a time when we are commemorating the centennial of the massacre, everything is just as it was at the beginning, even if the governing elite beats its breast proclaiming victory over the multi-headed Hydra of institutional, cultural, economic, ethnic, religious and work-related racism.

Unity with no respect for diversity in all its manifestations, even regarding ideas, is not democracy; a desired unity without freedom is the imposition of a superior will that subjects and suffocates all the rest. The lowest on the scale are absorbed and stop having a voice, which is how whites speak for blacks on black issues, while blacks listen and acquiesce.