

# Racial Cuba: Where are We...Still?

Eroisis González Suárez  
Civic activist  
Havana, Cuba

The black community's problems in Cuba have yet to be resolved. It has never been identified as a group with its own, individual, specific problems, which would have made working directly on their issues much easier. Discrimination first, and then silent integration, have kept black Cubans from having a direct policy for resolving their social situation.

In 1962, the Cuban government decisively declared the race issue resolved, thus racial policies were based on thwarting the development of new racist propensities, without ever referring to the problem. Yet, the truth is that neither the Independence Wars or the Republic solved the race issue, and the 1959 revolution did even less.

The race-free society that the government envisioned in the early 1960s was a failure. Instead, the scourge survived and increased, due to official silence about it. In addition, even more racist stereotypes and ideology emerged in a society that was still far from being racially egalitarian.

The government elite's silence was unable to halt racism in fertile, private spaces, and it was this racism that began to impact and influence social relations among friends, neighbors, workmates and family members—which reinforced stereotypes. Violence, noisiness, vulgarity and social disorder are attributed to Cuba's African descendants.

One cannot think about the oppression experienced by African descendants in a racist society as if it were a list of charges, just because the charge now is different, this time due to their behavior or low cultural level. Undoubtedly, there are a percentage of black men and women who are culturally and intellectually prepared to fight and follow a path to the very same dignity afforded white men and women. Yet, despite the fact that they are equally educated and able, it is extremely difficult for those whose skin is black to get the opportunity to demonstrate their aptitude and knowledge. This is because the reality of racial prejudice eats away at their Cubanness and undermines their efforts. It makes their efforts futile and weighs them down. Given their urgent need to subsist, in the best of cases this causes Cuba's African descendants of both sexes to descend to the lowest social levels in order to support themselves by undertaking the crudest, saddest and least paid work. The worse case scenario has them getting involved in illegal activities from prostitution to black marketing.

The integration of black Cubans into society has been slow. The greatest number of principal, Army positions, and even government ones, are occupied by white Cubans; the number of black college students at our universities is still low when compared to that of white students. However, there is no doubt



*Afro-descendants in a decaying building*

that even fifty years after the triumph of the Cuban revolution blacks number highest in construction jobs, manual labor, and in the island's prison population.

There is an urgent need for the subject of race in Cuba to be dealt with seriously and consistently. There need to be open spaces in which we can seriously discuss the topic, which will allow us to raise consciousness about this scourge. We need not only the citizenry's will in this matter, but also the government's. We need for actions to be taken that will minimize racism. The governing elite needs to adopt urgent measures to reverse increasing racial ten-

sion and prevent racial inequality from reaching a critical level in the future.

Racial perceptions continue to have an adverse affect on social relations, but the governing elite has chosen to ignore this situation. What we urgently need is the will of good Cubans and government action to address the race problem in a civilized but energetic manner. It is nearly impossible to easily erase an entire life under this scourge, but it is time to create equality for all, and for justice not to depend on skin color, but rather on people's rights and qualities. All of us must contribute to this—blacks and whites.