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Masking Hispanic Racism: A Cuban Case Study

Miguel A. De La Torre

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I am a recovering racist, a product of two race-constructed societies. Exilic Cubans see themselves as white and the Island’s inhabitants as mostly black. A major issue which will arise in a post-Castro Cuba is intra-Cuban race relations, an issue mostly ignored because of the myth proclaiming Cubans as non-racists. I propose to debunk this myth. Any serious discourse on intra-Cuban reconciliation must unmask the hidden tension existing between seemingly white Exilic Cuba and black Resident Cuba.

Gender, race and class oppressions do not exist in isolated compartments, nor are they separate categories of repression. They are created in the space where they interact and conflict with each other, a space I will call machismo. The understanding of machismo requires a full consideration of sexism, heterosexism, racism, ethnocentrism and classism. All forms of oppression are identical in their attempt to domesticate the Other. The sexist, who sees women playing a lesser productive role than men, transfers upon the non-elite male Other effeminate characteristics, placing him in a feminine space for “easy
mounting.” Their subjugation (not just in body) establishes the selfhood of the macho.

Race is not a biological factor differentiating humans, rather, it is a social construction whose function is the oppression of the Object-Other for the benefit of the Subject. Racism against the Cuban’s Others, Amerindians, Africans, Chinese and any combination thereof, is normalized by the social structures of both Resident and Exilic Cubans. Because domination of a group of people by another is usually conducted by the males of the dominant culture, it becomes crucial to understand the construction of this domination as seen through the eyes of the oppressor. Our patriarchal structure projects unto my “darker” Other the position occupied by women regardless of the Other’s gender. For this reason, it is valid to explore Cuban racism as a form of machismo. Although an examination of racism toward the Taíno and Asian aspects of our culture would prove profitable, this article will solely concentrate on African oppression.

Cuba’s African population was constructed as non-machos and designated to serve those with power and privilege. By 1524, as Diego Columbus’ term as viceroy came to an end, there were more African slaves in the Caribbean than Taínos. The end of Amerindian enslavement in Cuba ushered in African slavery. By examining the differences between Cuban and North American slavery, I propose to debunk the construction of Cuban racism and show how it is a manifestation of machismo. But before demonstrating how the engendering of black Cuban bodies constitutes machismo, I will first briefly review history from the underside of the African experience. Then I will investigate how Cuban blacks are constructed. And finally I will unmask the historical hoax of denying the existence of Cuban racism. By exploring what was and is done to black and/or bi-racial Cubans, we expose one aspect of the underlying tension preventing reconciliation between today’s Resident and Exilic Cubans.

Initially, few African slaves inhabited the Island, due to Cuba’s lack of precious metals and a stagnant economy. But by the 1640s, a sociopolitical change took place as semi-feudal settlements in Cuba gave way to plantation agriculture. It was upon sugar that Cuba was constructed. It was because of sugar, that liberation was denied. The expansion of sugar production propelled the rapid growth of the slave labor in the colony and the rise of capitalism in Spain. Hence, slavery occurred in the peripheral economy due to the development of capital-

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2 Although African culture was introduced to Cuba through slavery, it must be remembered that African roots first impacted Iberian culture in 711 C.E. with the Moorish invasion of Spain by both East and North Africans.
ism in the European center. By the 1830s, Cuba, the "jewel of the Spanish crown," had become the largest single producer of cane sugar in the world.

Slave labor and its accompanying white racism in Cuba created profit for the elite. After the Haitian revolution, planters turned Cuba into the world's sugar bowl. These actions turned planters into princes with titles of nobility. Prior to the 1790s, the English grew rich through the slave trade. But England's abolition of the slave trade led to the creation of direct La Habana-Africa-La Habana routes, allowing the merchants of La Habana to accumulate wealth by filling the void as slave traders. Since Cuba's economy was dependent on slaves, this insured the loyalty of sugar oligarchies to the Crown during the early wars of national independence, lest they jeopardize their privileged positions.3 These wars failed due to the revolutionaries' inability to overcome the privileged oligarchies who remained militarily, psychologically and economically dependent on Spain.

Legal slavery ended in the Caribbean when Cuba abolished slavery in 1886; however, abolition did not mean an end to racism or exploitation. Under "freedom" former slaves were hired only during peak seasons, and left to themselves during el tiempo muerto (the dead time—off-peak seasons lasting from June through November). Slavery, the source of labor for sugar-producers, was replaced with the rural proletarization of black Cubans. For Montejo, a former slave, life remained the same. He was still confined to the plantation, lived like an animal in

3See Aline Helg, Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886–1912 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995) 49–56, 80–9. Cuban racism was created in an atmosphere of fear and insecurity. After the Haitian Revolution, white Haitian exiles brought to Cuba their passepied, contredanse, powdered wig, Parisian dress and stories of rape, murder, looting and destruction, sufficiently scaring Cuban planters into tightening controls for nearly a hundred years. Spain skillfully used the memory of the Haitian Revolution to frighten white Cubans into loyalty to the Crown. Every revolt against Spaniard rule was presented as the start of a race war. "Remember Haiti" became an effective rallying cry against Cuba's attempt to liberate herself from Spain. Independence would leave white Cuba unprotected from black Cuba, threatening its property, security and white women. La Guerra Chiquita (the Little War), the 1879 premature War for Independence, was interpreted by the Spaniards as the start of a race war led by black gangs of Haitian origins roving through Oriente. Whites feared a divided Cuba with a white west and a black east that would lead to civil war culminating with a Haitian-style black dictatorship. The outbreak of the war for independence in 1895 was also labeled by Spain as a race war. Antonio Cánovas del Castillo, prime minister of Spain during Cuba's war for independence said:

The fact that this insurrection threatens Cuba with all the evils of Haiti and Santo Domingo, and with the triumph of the colored people and perpetual wars of races, virtually obligates the whites in Cuba to side with Spain.
the *barracón* and submitted to the white master. Thus, he wrote, "Some plantations were still the way they were under slavery; the owners still thought they owned the blacks."  

Throughout Cuban history, whenever the indigenous black population threatened to exceed the white population, a process known as *blanqueamiento* (whiting) occurred whereby land was freely given to white Spaniard families who would leave Spain and come to live on the Island. Characteristic of Spanish colonial policy was the constant and steady emigration of poor whites from Spain. Martí stands out among late-nineteenth-century thinkers who rejected *blanqueamiento*.

Martí went further than any of his white contemporaries in affirming the equality of the races. He became a non-black voice who identified with the oppressed blacks. He attempted to die to his "whiteness" in order to create *Cuba Libre*, free from racist social structures, and his response to slavery was forceful. In an era where most whites believed in the inferiority of blacks, Martí continuously stated that racism was a "sin against humanity." In the articles *Basta* (Enough) and *Mi raza* (My Race), he proposes that there is no such thing as race.

Although Martí cannot be considered a postmodern thinker, he does view race as a social construction which allows one group to oppress another. Calling race categories *razas de librería* (bookstore races), he refused to make a connection between inferiority and slavery, for as he points out, "blue-eyed, blond-haired Gauls were sold as slaves in the Roman marketplace." Similar to Gates, Martí insisted that race clas-

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5 Yet, according to Abel, a Latin American historian, Martí's early writings present *mestizaje* in a negative stereotype. He believed that Spanish American heritage was disparaged by the passive resignation of Amerindians and the absence of a work ethic among Spaniards. This view evolved into a somewhat positive stereotype where Latin America benefitted from the Spaniard's courage and determination and the Amerindian patience and generosity. See Christopher Abel, "Martí, Latin America and Spain," *José Martí: Revolutionary Democrat*, ed. Christopher Abel and Nissa Torrents (London: Athlone, 1986) 144.

6 Martí fought racial injustice throughout his life. While in New York, he helped Serra, an Afro-Cuban, form *La Liga*, an organization dedicated to the education and advancement of Exilic Cuban blacks. Among this society of outcasts, and many like it, Martí attempted to create a revolution. Martí converted his reflections into praxis. Racists defaming Maceo accused him of planning to establish a black republic. Martí insisted Maceo be general of the Cuban army of liberation, a post Maceo earned over and above any other contemporary soldier. Martí did not fall into the trap of solely praising Maceo for his actions. He wrote "Maceo’s mind is as powerful as his arm," a quality which prevailing racism denied to blacks. Furthermore, Martí’s revolutionary document *Manifesto* is the only document of its kind in the western Hemisphere mentioning blacks as a positive force for society.
sifications are entirely artificial constructions. To be Cuban meant más que blanco, más que mulato, más que negro (more than being white, more than being a mulatto, more than being black).

Later generations of Cuban whites would take this definition to claim that no racism existed, for if there is no race then there can be no racism. But undermining his own work, Martí's views included forms of evolutionism. In his notes for a projected book, La raza negra, he insisted blacks must rise to the levels of whites through both education and intermarriage. He spoke of a "savage element" in blacks that prevented them from fully participating in civilized culture. With time, Martí thought, blacks would embrace Western culture and reject their African heritage. Unfortunately, these comments were cited by Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz in order to continue the very racism Martí fought so hard to eliminate.

Ortiz capitalized on the black's "savage element" in his observation of the polarization of Cuban society. In his work Contra punteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar (Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar), he expresses the normative gaze of white Cuba. For Cuba's white supremacy, the existing polarity can be termed as "the Cuban counterpoint," where

Tobacco and sugar contradict each other in economics and in the social. Even rigid moralists have taken them under consideration in the course of their history, viewing one with mistrust and the other with favor.

According to Ortiz, sugar was introduced to the Americas by Christopher Columbus during his second voyage; likewise Columbus introduced tobacco to Europe. In reality, it was not until 1523 when La Casa de la Contratación of Seville provided the financial backing needed to transplant the sugar industry from its base in the Canary Islands to Cuba. Half of the Cuban Island, like sugar, is sweet, refined, odorless and white. The other half, like tobacco, is raw, pungent, bitter, aromatic and dark. Tobacco requires constant care, sugar can look after itself. Tobacco poisons, sugar nourishes. Within the spiraling smoke of a good Cuban cigar exists something revolutionary. The tobacco's consuming anarchical flames protest oppression. Sugar, on the other hand, contains neither rebellion nor resentment. It is calm, quiet, beyond suspicion. Sugar is the work of the gods, a scientific gift of civilization. Tobacco is of the devil, a magic gift of the savage world.

7 Fernando Ortiz, "Martí y las razas," Vida y pensamiento de Martí, II, 346.
8 Idem, Contra punteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar (La Habana: Dirección de Publicaciones Universidad Central de Las Villas, 1963) 1–2.
9 Ibid., 5–15, 46.
Tobacco does not change color, it is born black and dies with the color of its race. Sugar changes color, it is born brown and whitens itself; it is syrupy mulatta that being blackish is abandoned to popular taste; later it is bleached and refined so that it can pass for white, travel the whole world, reach all mouths, and bring a better price, climbing to dominating categories of the social ladder.  

Those who write Cuban history reconstruct it so as to blame Africans for their numerous massacres. These massacres over real and alleged revolts and conspiracies occurred in 1792, 1793, 1795, 1814, 1844, and 1912. After the war for independence an attempt was made by the Cuban-African community to reclaim their machismo. By 1910, black mambises (Cubans who fought for independence) were mobilizing to petition the government for their rightful share. Fighting for Cuba Libre, les dio ala a los negros (made blacks uppity). The creation of El Partido Independiente de Color (The Independent Party of Color) served as the political vehicle to force the government to seriously consider its rhetoric of racial equality and provide equal opportunities in power, employment, and services. Instead, el partido was outlawed. Blacks

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10 Ibid., 7.

11 The 1844 massacre known as the Conspiracy of La Escalera (The Ladder, the principal implement to which slave suspects were bound) and remembered as the Year of the Lash resulted in the torture, execution, imprisonment, and banishment of hundreds of free and enslaved blacks. The preemptive massacre decimated the economic and intellectual leadership of Cuba's blacks. To keep blacks in their place, new legislation was created to dramatically restrict the rights of Afro-Cubans and prevent their upward mobility. Historians disagree in interpreting this episode of Cuban history. Some say it was a preempted revolution along the lines of Haiti's, others say it was a Machiavellian fabrication initiated by the government to justify repressive measures. A complete discussion of this episode of Cuban history can be found in Robert L. Paquette, Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1988).

12 Mambises, from the African word mambi, is the offspring of an ape and a vulture, a derogatory term given to revolutionaries (regardless of skin color) by the Spaniards. Yet, this slur became a name of honor. Today in Miami, one of the most ultra-conservative radio stations, owned and operated by whites, is called Radio Mambi.

13 El Partido Independiente de Color did not advocate black separatism. Rather, it called for integration, specifically the elimination of racial discrimination, equal access to government jobs and an end to the blanqueamiento policies. By the end of the Spanish-American War, 50 percent of the rebel army and 40 percent of the officers were of African decent. Most lost their land to foreign investors and white criollo entrepreneurs. These former soldiers formed el partido to pressure the government in establishing justice. In effect, el partido threatened hierarchical power structures based on race and class, and as such, was perceived as dangerous to the Republic. In 1910, el partido was outlawed by a bill presented by the only black senator of Congress, Morúa.
were indiscriminately rounded up, jailed or killed. For a black person to question the white government was sufficient grounds for death. Even if the person was fortunate enough to escape brutal treatment, the knowledge that violence could arbitrarily occur again pervaded the relationship between blacks and whites.

Blacks openly protested in 1912, immediately leading the white elites to label the protest as a “race war” between “white civilization” and “black barbarism.” The 1912 “race war” is generally ignored in the official re-membering called Cuban history. Yet thousands of black Cubans, mostly unarmed, were deliberately butchered by white Cubans, mostly for “resisting arrest” (a Latin American euphemism for the assassination of captured prisoners). This was not a race war. It was a race massacre. No trace of the rumored uprising could be found, no cache of arms was ever discovered, no demonstration occurred outside of Oriente, no white woman was ever raped or cannibalized (contrary to newspaper accounts), and no destruction of valuable property occurred. Yet, thousands of white Cuban volunteers were given arms and paid by the government to rove across the nation putting down the revolt in any way possible. Suárez, a witness to the massacre wrote:

All the bitterness, all the hatred, all the ancestral prejudice of the white race against the black, were let loose. While the machine guns of the government troops were mowing down thousands of colored men, not alone those in arms, but the peaceful inhabitants of towns and villages . . . the larger cities and even in the Capital of the Republic: white men armed to the teeth went about ordering any and every black man to withdraw from the streets and public places on pain of death, and the mere color of his skin was sufficient reason to send a man to prison on the charge of rebellion.

The “success” of the massacre resulted in settling the black question for the remainder of this century. The massacre of Afro-Cubans who challenged those with power and privilege annihilated future social protest by terrifying the surviving blacks into conformity. The Cuban world view became once again white because the black voice was effectively silenced. Viewing history from the underside reveals racism as an inherent part of Cuban history, existing prior to and after the 1959 revolution. In a curious way, the Cuban construction of “black” bodies differs significantly from its construction in the United States. For example, Cubans “see” Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. as white,
Jesse Jackson as mulatto and Sidney Poitier as black. In the United States, a two-tier construction of race exists, “white” or “black.” The “one-drop rule” constructs all non-whites as black. Most countries of Latin America have a three-tiered or multi-tiered construction of race. It consists of white, mestizo (blended) and black. Cuba, unlike other Hispanic countries, perpetuated the mid-nineteenth century Spaniard notion of clase de color (class of color). Like the United States we construct a two-tiered racial system, white and black. But Chinese (and Amerindians) are categorized as white while negros (blacks) include pardos (mulatos) and morenos (blacks). Unlike North America, we decide who is negro by the “visible” genotype, not by the “one-drop rule.” Visible African ancestry includes, but is not limited to skin color, facial features (nose and lip size) and hair texture (possessing pelo malo, “bad hair”). When possible, such features were best kept hidden. For example, blacks were routinely arrested by the Ministry of the Interior of the Castro regime if they appeared in public with their hair styled naturally. These arrests ended after 1972 when Angela Davis, with her hair in an “Afro,” visited the Island as Castro’s guest.

The de-Africanization of Cuban culture drew support from negros finos (refined blacks) and blacks who passed for whites. Negros finos represented upwardly mobile blacks who, seeing themselves as whites, attempted to escape segregation within Cuba’s power structures by cultural assimilation. Light-skinned black Cubans with few African features could legally pass for white by breaking kinship ties, marrying

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16 For my entire life I have been told by my fellow Latina/os that I was “white.” Thus, I saw myself in the mirror as a white, middle class Hispanic macho. When I left Miami and took a job teaching Spanish at a Kentucky college I decided to test my students on pronouncing colors in Spanish by pointing at an item and asking the students in Spanish “What color is this?” After pointing to several items throughout the room soliciting numerous different responses, I realized I had yet to ask a question where the answer would be blanco, white. Not finding anything white in the room I pointed to my skin and asked, “What color is this?” To my surprise, the class in unison responded, “moreno (brown).” At that moment I realized the dominant culture saw me as brown while I saw myself as white. Regardless of my skin pigmentation, the dominant culture classifies me as non-white because I spoke Spanish. Without knowing it, I became a “cross-dresser” between two different constructions of race. While in Miami, Exilic Cubans as a whole see themselves as being white, not yet realizing that to the dominant culture we are brown. To the dominant culture, white Cubans, unless totally assimilated (no accent, right clothes, Eurocentric demeanor), are seen as “mongrels,” “so-called whites,” or “honorary whites.”

17 Originally, Cubans used moreno to refer to emancipated blacks (unlike the rest of the Americas, Cuba developed a large segment of “free” blacks) and negro for enslaved blacks. Negro de nación meant the slave was born in Africa. Likewise, pardo referred to liberated mestizos while mulato meant a biracial person subjected to servitude.
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strategically, learning socially acceptable behavior and legitimizing their desired status by judicious bribes intended to correct "official"
documents. Money in Cuba has always been able to "whiten" people,
at least up to a point. For example, Cuba's military dictator in the
1950s, Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar (nicknamed el mulato lindo, the dar-
ling mulatto boy) claimed to be white, even though he was of Afro-
Chinese descent. He was the second most powerful man on the Island
(after the United States Ambassador) but was rejected by Cuba's white
upper-class who (black)balled his application to Cuba's most elite so-
cial club, the Havana Yacht Club.

Cuban racism is rooted in the belief that we are not racist, even
though the primary criterion of social classification is color. Our first
response to the accusation of racism is its denial. We may quote the
Venezuelan proverb Aquí todos somos café con leche; unos más café, otros
más leche (Here we are coffee and milk; some more coffee, other more
milk). Yet leche has access to employment, state services, power, wealth
and privilege, while café is disenfranchised. Leche is rich, civilized, in-
telligent and modern, while café is poor, savage, ignorant and primi-
tive. The lighter the café, the closer to becoming a macho. Such popular
slogans, constructed to describe the Americas' multi-culturalism, mask
an indigenous racism.

While white Cubans "re-cognized" the presence of nonwhites,
people of color had to shape their behavior according to white expecta-
tions, unable to assert their own culture. Café con leche's hidden
agenda is to whiten the Africans. As Fanon points out, "Not only must
the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white
man." According to Sathler and Nascimento:

Whether it be mestizaje, cosmic race, harmony of races, or racial miscegena-
tion, there is always the assumption that a pure type will be the organic re-
sult of such a mixture. The result of such a mixture is an acceptable
"whiter" ethnic group that, by definition, excludes Natives and Africans.

18 As of July 1998, Exilic Cubans can purchase a white Celia Cruz doll. This
white-skinned, long blonde hair doll of the "Queen of Salsa" is a reconstruction of
the black Exilic Cuban. This doll helps to teach future generations of Exilic Cubans
that our music is indeed white.

19 Martínez-Alier's study on Cuba's racial attitudes concludes legal and social
discrimination increased with time rather than diminished. See Verena Martínez-
Alier, Marriage, Class and Color in Nineteenth-Century Cuba: A Study of Racial Attitudes

20 Fanon, Black Skin White Masks, 110.

21 Josué A. Sathler and Amós Nascimento, "Black Masks on White Faces: Lib-
eration Theology and the Quest for Syncretism in the Brazilian Context," Liberation
Theologies, Postmodernity, and the Americas, ed. by David Batstone, Eduardo Mendieta,
José Vasconcelos, the Mexican philosopher and statesman, is credited with constructing the utopian concept of The Cosmic Race as a way of combating the prevalent positivism of his time which advocated the destruction of Mexican culture because of the belief in the evolutionary superiority of Anglos. While we Hispanic theologians celebrate the defense of Latin American culture over against Eurocentrism, we need to recognize that philosophers like Vasconcelos still upheld positivism’s hierarchical view on race.

Lois Ann Lorentzen, and Dwight N. Hopkins (London: Routledge, 1997) 103. Among Cubans, the need to whiten Africans becomes the basis for developing racial reforms. According to Entralgo, sociologist, proponent of a Cuban version of eugenics and chairperson of the 1959 Movimiento de Orientación e Integración Nacional (Movement of National Orientation and Integration), a cause and effect relationship exists between “mulattoization” and national integration. He applauds the rape of African women by their white masters as the necessary cause of bettering Africans, allowing integration into white Cuba. José Elias Entralgo, in La liberacion étnica cubana (La Habana: Imprenta de la Universidad de la Habana, 1953) as quoted by Carlos Moore, Castro, the Blacks, and Africa (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California, 1988) said: “The day . . . when a white slave master first had intercourse with a slave Negress in the bush or in the barracon was the most luminous for mankind . . . A vivifying transfusion took place that engendered a fertile and plastic symbiosis. From such miscegenation was to emerge new physical attributes and ascending psychic and moral virtues” (47). Cuba’s blacks like blacks throughout the Antilles, have learned to self-impose the gaze of dominant white eyes, a gaze requiring blacks to whiten themselves. Fanon describes this phenomenon in Black Skin White Masks where he wrote:

I still know people born in Dahomey or the Congo who pretend to be natives of the Antilles . . . [and] Antilles Negroes, who are annoyed when they are suspected of being [African]. This is because the Antilles’ Negro is more “civilized” than the African, that is, he is closer to the white man; and this difference prevails not only in back streets and on the boulevards but also in public service and the army . . . It [becomes] essential to avoid falling back into the pit of niggerhood, and every woman in the Antilles, whether in a casual flirtation or in a serious affair, is determined to select the least black of men (25–6, 47).

Choosing the least black of men is elucidated by Mörner. Women from an “inferior” race prefer concubinage with a man of the “superior” race as opposed to marriage with a member of their own race. See Magnus Mörner, Race Mixture in the History of Latin America (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967) 67–8. A self-imposed prerequisite is the attempt to marry a lighter person so as to perform la limpieza de sangre (the washing of the blood). This phraseology indicated a metaphysical notion of blood being a vehicle toward lineage equality. For most of the first half of the nineteenth century parents, concern with the socioeconomic consequences of their “white” child marrying a person of darker complexion, argued in terms of limpieza de sangre. Pursuing racial endogamy, parents felt a marriage across racial barriers degraded the family’s reputation and contaminated the metaphysical purity of blood. See Martinez-Alier, 15–9. Originally, limpieza de sangre had nothing to do with skin color. Rather, it referred to religious contamination, specifically from Judaism and Islam. See Paquette, Sugar is Made with Blood, 112.
Cuba's prized myth of racial equality contains two components. First, it credits the masters for the abolition of slavery. Thus, slave owners are somehow redeemed from the sin of slavery and the slaves rendered dependent upon their masters' generosity. The second component of thought asserts that racial equality was achieved in the military forces while fighting against Spain. Martí hoped the shared struggle of the liberating army would eliminate racial discrimination and serve as a catalyst for the entire Cuban society. White Cubans maintain, quite forcefully, that Marti's hope became a reality.

This myth of racial equality was validated through the appointment of a few blacks to positions of prestige. Maceo, Cuba's greatest general, became "proof" that racism had ceased to exist in Cuba. White Cubans excused themselves from restitution for slave exploitation, branded any organization protesting racial discrimination as itself a racist group, vilified black consciousness as a threat to national unity and portrayed Cuban whites as superior to Anglos, living the abomination of Jim Crow.

Our Cuban racism is somehow humanized by comparing it with the racism of the United States. Thus, when white Cubans came to Jim Crow's Miami in 1959, we found a racially segregated system. We reminded Anglos that since 1887 no one could be excluded in Cuba from public service for racial reasons. By 1889 in Cuba discrimination in theaters was disallowed and blacks could not be barred from cafés and

22 In reality, Cuba's refusal to abolish slavery during the first war for independence was a calculated strategy to gain the political support of planters from the West whose livelihoods depended on slaves.

23 Larger numbers of black Cubans died in the struggle for independence than did whites. If they were equal in military services, then over-representation in fighting for Cuba Libre could be ignored and the proportional rewards of military victory denied. After the war they believed they earned socio-political recognition and a right to participate in the constructing patria. Black Cuban general Quintín Bandera, who bravely fought for independence attempted to get employment in a "free" Cuba. His white counterparts attained government jobs and positions as rural officers. He was denied a government job as a janitor. When his money expired he attempted to elicit help from President Estrada Palma. The president denied him an audience. He eventually joined a group to protest the fraudulent re-election of Estrada Palma. He was murdered by the rural guard who mutilated his body. Helg, Our Rightful Share, 16, 105-6, 120.

24 For example, Juan Gualberto Gómez, a black politician (never elected to Congress) advocated the nation's views on race relations. Before claiming equal access to public employment, blacks first needed to become civilized through education. Martín Morúa Delgado, the only black Cuban elected senator, was responsible for sponsoring legislation outlawing black political parties. Both men served in the Constituent Assembly proving civilized blacks could rise to national prominence.

25 Helg, Our Rightful Share, 16, 106.
In that same year black children were accepted in state schools on the same basis as whites. Unlike Miami, blacks did not need to sit in the back of the bus or drink from different water fountains. This superficial comparison to Cuba’s racial ethos concluded by assuming that racism existed in the United States but not Cuba.26

We also maintained Iberian slavery was somehow more benevolent. Our blindness to our own racism caused Cuban racial reforms to be conducted through paternalistic prisms. Blacks became “the children” of the country, needing guidance. This erasure of race is true for the present Exilic Cuban community where blacks simply “do not exist” in the eyes of the emerging middle class, as well as in the Resident Cuban community where census information on race has been “lost” lest they show their lack of representation in the upper levels of the Cuban political hierarchy.27

During the early 1920s, Bernardo Ruiz Suárez, a black Cuban, traveled to the United States to investigate the myth that Cuban racism was more benign than North America’s. He agreed that North American racism was more salient. In the United States, the power structures openly incorporated inequality, while Cuba hid its inequalities behind the illusion of a color-blind society. Yet Suárez believed that the North American black church would eventually provide spiritual resistance to Jim Crow’s cruelty, spurring the African-American community into action, a prediction which came true forty years later in the Civil Rights Revolution. Black Cuba did not have its own Christian churches to

26 Growing up among Exilic Cubans in this country during its turbulent Civil Rights Revolution, I recall white Cuban adults debating the “African-American question.” They insisted the Cuban black was more civilized and refined than the North American black, due mostly to their integration into Cuban culture and the lack of racism in Cuba. One adult maintained that the sweetness of the black Cuban can be seen on their countenance, unlike the hatred visible in the eyes of the North American black.

27 In 1983 the census information was released for the first time since the Revolution. According to the regime, 66 percent are white, 21.9 percent are mulattos and 12 percent are black. Defining race where light-skinned blacks and Chinese are classified as white skewed the data. A popular joke when the census information was released was asking, “Where are the rest of the blacks?” The response: In Angola (referring to the then-Cuban military presence there). Even if these numbers were accurate, they still reflect people of color under-represented within the government’s power structures. During this time only four of the fourteen-man Political Bureau of the Cuban Communist Party’s Central Committee, sixteen of the 146 members of the Central Committee and, 35 percent of the 481 deputies of the National Assembly of People’s Power were of African descent. No blacks could be found in the all-white Joint Chiefs of Staff, nor possessing the rank of general or admiral, even though the vast majority of the infantry stationed in Angola and Ethiopia was black. See Moore, 333–5.
serve as sacred spaces from whence to assert a distinct identity and a legitimizing ethos. Suárez believed therefore, that Cuban blacks did not have the political possibilities available to African-Americans in the United States.28

If white Cubans admit to the existence of racism, we pass it off as a product of the United States’ influence. No doubt as Cuba became politically and economically dependant on the United States, racial tension was aggravated. However, we hide our racist complicity by blaming North America. Esteban Montejo, born a slave in Cuba and witness to the United States’ invasion, is a voice from the underside of Cuban history. He agrees the racist influence of the United States upon Cuba was real. While constructing the Cuban Republic, Montejo observed: “The Americans came out with this theory that if you give Negro power and educate him, he’ll turn round and harm the whites. So they segregated the Negroes completely.”29 Yet, he refuses to place total blame upon the North Americans. He continues: “The rest of the Cubans kept quiet and did nothing. . . . Later everyone said that the Americans were the real villains. I agree, they were the biggest ones, but remember that the white Creoles were just as guilty, because they let themselves be buggered about on their own soil, all of them, from colonels down to cleaners.”30

In reality, the United States’ occupation became an excuse for Cuba’s whites to strengthen their own, long inherited racist structures. Blacks were told to be silent and show unity so that the North Americans would quickly depart. Yet after their departure, nothing was done to address the conditions of black Cubans. Lourdes Casal, a black Cuban professor of psychology and a poet wrote:

It is the opinion of this writer that Cuban home-grown racism, with the “improvements” added to it by the strong U.S. penetration during Republican times, was more virulent and insidious than most writers on the issues have been willing to admit. The normative system of values at the core of the definition of nationhood was egalitarian, and integrationist but the practices were blatantly racist.31

We refuse to lay claim to our own, most racial proverb, Juntos pero no revueltos; cada cosa en su lugar (Together but not scrambled, everything in its place).” Blaming the United States does not absolve Exilic

28 Suárez, The Color Question, 1–35.
30 Ibid.
Cuban racism. So also, Resident Cubans are not absolved by constructing racism as a residual effect of the former bourgeoisies.

Castro always answers questions concerning race in a typical Cuban fashion, by comparing it to the United States, and suggesting the latter is worse than the former. But Carlos Franqui, a personal friend of Fidel Castro who served as the former propaganda chief of the Movimiento 26 de Julio, says of Castro's racial myopia:

> In all conscience, based on the knowledge I have of Fidel on a personal basis, I must say that Fidel Castro is not a discriminator in a segregationist sense. He is not the type of person who would discriminate against a black man just because his skin is black. By the same token, I do not believe Fidel to be a machista in the sense that he would discriminate against a woman because she is female, or against a Chinese because he is Chinese. That is not where Fidel's problem lies. Fidel's limitation—great limitation!—is in incapacity to understand what it has meant and contin-

32 Skillfully portraying the realities of Jim Crow segregation provided anti-imperialist ammunition for the world stage and support against an expected United States' military intervention. Moore in Castro, the Blacks, and Africa, documents the capitalization of North American racism to muster moral support for Cuba while ignoring inter-Cuban racism. Malcolm X succinctly appraised the situation: "I know that not even in Cuba have the whites let the black man get to the top (187)." Other African-Americans with similar views included Stokely Carmichael, Rap Brown, Eldridge Cleaver, and Robert Williams. They accused Castro's Cuba of prevailing racism. During a January 23, 1959, interview at a foreign press conference, Castro, according to Moore, reiterated the standard white Cuban response to racism: "In Cuba we do not have the same problem as, for example, in the South of the United States. There is racial discrimination in Cuba, but to a much lesser degree. We feel that our Revolution will help eliminate those prejudices that remain latent" (Ibid., 15).

For Castro, the only legitimate claims black Cubans could make or had made dealt with labor discrimination, educational restriction and segregationist offenses. Once eliminated, racism will cease to exist. However Castro totally ignored the ethno-political and psycho-cultural ramifications of Cuba's white supremacy as manifested in socio-political structures of power. Castro's white liberal paternalism, committed to integration, refused to allow questions about racism outside of the official rubrics, establishing the boundaries of discourse. All discourse and decisions concerning race took place among whites on top of the political hierarchy with no input from those at the grassroots most affected by the discourse. Yet, even the minor step of remedial racial segregation was met by white Cubans with the slogan, "Neither Black, nor Red." According to early pro-Castro black intellectuals, the white backlash forced the Revolution to retreat in the face of confrontational Cuban white supremacy. In the minds of the fidelistas, the Revolution established social equality, giving blacks the right to work, be educated, enjoy the beaches and be free from racial discrimination. It would take twenty-seven more years (February 1986) before Cuban racism would again be addressed by Resident Cubans. See Moore, Castro, the Blacks, and Africa 15–28, 41, 187, 254–62.
ues to mean to be black in Cuba. He is equally incapable of understanding what it means to be a worker, to be a peasant, or to be a woman! And this has to do with a profound problem of bourgeois and petit-bourgeois revolutionaries who entertain a deeply paternalistic outlook on revolution. It is the problem of those who, having neither emerged from nor lived among the people, come into positions of leadership and nonetheless believe themselves capable of really identifying with the ordinary man.33

This Castro "limitation" is not limited to Castro. The whole Cuban community, both Resident and Exilic, suffers a similar "limitation." We white Cuban people suffer from what Moore calls "a paternalistic superiority complex."34

Undergirding the construction of race is the perception that blacks are non-machos.35 Quoting various anthropologists of his time (i.e., Klemm), Ortiz classifies humans into two groups: active or masculine, and passive or feminine. Using morphology, he decided that African skulls reveal feminine characteristics.36 Machismo manifested as racism can be observed in the comments of the nineteenth-century Cuban theologian José Augustín Caballero, who wrote, "In the absence of black females with whom to marry, all blacks [become] masturbators, sinners and sodomites" (italics mine).37 Until emancipation, the plantation

33 Ibid., 37–8. For Castro, racism only existed in Cuba prior to the 1959 Revolution.
34 Ibid. The legacy of feudal Spain developed into the encomiendas with a patrón (protector)/ward relationship. The protector paternalistically civilized the wards entrusted to him. This relationship transferred to the master/slave relationship on the plantation where the slave identity was constructed through her/his identification with the patrón, the protector. The abolition of slavery did not abolish this father/child (macho/non-macho) relationship.
35 In spite of machismo positioning the black man as a woman, it must be noted that within Cuban African culture, sexism also is prevalent. Ibos girls are taught to obey and serve men while boys learn to look down at their mothers. The machista ethos of the abakuá only allow intercourse if the man is on top and is the only one who is active. Enrique Sosa, El carabali (La Habana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1984) 50–1; and Manuel Martínez Casanova and Nery Gómez Abréu, La sociedad secreta abakuá (Santa Clara: Universidad Central de Las Villas, n.d.) 16–17. The bantú uses the word "man" to solely apply to the members of their nation. All other Africans are not men. See Fernando Ortiz, El engaño de las razas (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1975) 37.
36 Ortiz, El engaño, 60, 88.
37 José Agustín Caballero y Rodríguez de la Barra, "Exposición relativa al matrimonio entre esclavos y otros asuntos relacionados con la población de la isla, así como algunos aspectos de la vida sexual de los esclavos," C. M. Morales no. 9 (La Habana: Biblioteca Nacional José Martí); quoted in Ian Lumsden, Machos, Maricones and Gays: Cuba and Homosexuality (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996) 50.
ratio of males to females was 2:1, with some plantations imbalances reaching 4:1. Usually, black women lived in the cities and towns. Hence, slave quarters, known as barracónes, consisted solely of men, creating the reputation of their non-macho roles as voiced by Caballero.

Blacks, it was claimed, could be strong as mules, but they could not be men for they lacked the means of proving their manhood. The reality of Cuba's plantations made it impossible for black men to carry out their "masculine" responsibility of providing for or protecting their family. Yet, for the black man to willingly place himself in the female position was also unacceptable. In 1902, during a wave of arrests of black Cubans on suspicion of practicing African-based religions, several from the Abakuá society were executed for alleged homosexual activities. Skewed sex ratios made black males the targets of the white master who as bugarrones could rape them. The wives and children of the male slave were also understood to be the master's playthings.

Paradoxically, while the African man is constructed as a non-macho, he is feared for the potential of asserting his machismo, particularly with white Cuban women. White women who succumb to the black man, it was thought, are not responsible for their actions because they were bewitched through African black magic. Thus, attraction becomes witchcraft and rape. Likewise, the seductive negra (Negrress) is held responsible for compromising the virtues of the white men. A popular Cuban saying was "there is no sweet tamarind fruit, nor a virgin mulatto girl." Fanon captures the white Caribbean's sentiments when he wrote:

As for the Negroes, they have tremendous sexual powers. What do you expect, with all the freedom they have in their jungles! They copulate at all times and in all places. They are really genital. They have so many

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38 Franklin W. Knight, Slave Society in Cuba During the Nineteenth Century (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1970) 76–8.
39 Helg, Our Righful Share, 108.
40 White Cubans constructed an illness that could only be cured by having sex with a black woman. Montejo, in A Runaway Slave, said:
There was one type of sickness the whites picked up, a sickness of the veins and male organs. It could only be got rid of with black women; if the man who had it slept with a Negress he was cured immediately (42).
42 Quoting Gunnar Myrdal, An American Dilemma, Ortiz shows how the myth of the black man's overly extended penis (when compared to the white man) and the white woman's small clitoris (when compared to the black woman) creates a need for precautions least the white woman be damaged, as well as spoiled. See Ortiz, El engaño, 87–8.
children that they cannot even count them. *Be careful, or they will flood us with little mulattoes* . . . One is no longer aware of the Negro but only of a penis; the Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis. *He is a penis.*

The African-Cuban may be a walking penis, but a penis that lacks potency. White Cubans project their own fears and forbidden desires upon the African-Cuban through a fixation with the black penis which threatens white civilization. The black penis is kept separate from power and privilege that come only to Cubans constructed as white. Casal documents this white Cuban fixation with the black penis in recounting oral history of blacks being hung on lamp posts by their genitals in the central plazas throughout Cuba during the 1912 massacre of blacks. The massacre was fueled by news reports of so-called black revolt leading to the rape of white women. This peculiar way of decorating the lamp posts perfectly express the sexual mythology created by Cuban white racism.

Today, Cuban blacks are concerned that national reconciliation Miami-style may reimpose silence. They fear any attempt by Exilic Cubans to radically change the present government in La Habana lest it creates a one-way empowerment of white Cubans once again. Our hope for intra-Cuban reconciliation must confront Cuban white supremacy. If not, national “reconciliation” would only be among white Cubans on both sides of the Florida Straits, excluding black Cubans. In contrast, Latino Theology must use a macro-structural analysis and call for the dismantling of systemic white racism and elitism constructed to oppress the descendants of Africans.

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43 Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 157–9, 170. Emphasis mine, Fanon continues by asking: “Is the lynching of the Negro not a sexual revenge? We know how much of sexuality there is in all cruelties, tortures, beatings. One has only to reread a few pages of Marquis de Sade to be easily convinced of the fact” (159).


45 Moore, *Castro, the Blacks, and Africa*. 
Resumen: El racismo hispano enmascarado: El caso cubano

Un asunto que saldrá en Cuba después de Castro es el problema de las relaciones entre las diferentes razas de los cubanos, una cuestión que ha sido por lo general ignorada porque hay un mito que dice que los cubanos no son racistas. Yo pongo este mito en cuestión. El género, la raza y los que están opuestos a las clases no existen dentro de compartimentos isolados, ni tampoco son categorías separadas de represión. Ellos están creados en un espacio donde trabajan y están en conflicto con el otro, yo llamaré a este espacio “el machismo.” Toda forma de opresión son identicas en su intento en la dominación del Otro. La persona sexista, que ve a la mujer como algo menos productiva que el hombre, traslada al hombre obscuro o pobre características efeminentes, así lo pone en un sitio femenino para poder darle un espacio fácil. La subyugación establece la identidad del macho.

El racismo contra el Otro de Cuba, indios americanos, africanos, chinos y cualquier otra combinación de esta gente, se normaliza entre las estructuras sociales de los residentes y de lo cubanos en exilio. La dominación de un grupo de personas por otro grupo usualmente se conduce entre los hombres de la cultura dominante, por eso es importante entender la construcción de esta dominación, tal como se ha está vista por los ojos del opresor. Nuestra estructura patriarcal proyecta a la Otra persona de color la posición ocupada por las mujeres, sin reparar el género del Otro. Por esta razón, es valido explorar el machismo de los cubanos como una forma de racismo.

En en examen de las diferencias entre la esclavitud de los cubanos y de los de America del Norte, yo les enseñaré la construcción del racismo Cubano y les demostraré la manifestación del machismo. Pero antes de mostrarle la causa del machismo entro los cubanos negros, presentaré un repaso de la historia de la parte de los de raza africana. Después, investigaré la construcción de los cubanos negros. Finalmente, les enseñaré el engano de rechazar la existencia del racismo entre los cubanos. Entre la exploración de lo que fué y de lo que se le ha hecho a los cubanos de raza negra o de raza mixta, revelamos un aspecto de la tensión que impide la reconciliación entre los residentes de Cuba de hoy en día y de los cubanos exilados.