

**A Dream Derailed?: the English-speaking Caribbean Diaspora in  
Revolutionary Cuba**

by

Andrea Queeley

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
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This manuscript has been read and accepted for  
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## **Abstract**

A Dream Derailed?: The English-Speaking Caribbean Diaspora in Revolutionary Cuba

by

Andrea Queeley

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This dissertation describes and analyzes the evolution of English-speaking Caribbean identity in Cuba. In seeking to explain why Cubans of English-speaking Caribbean descent moved to revitalize their ethnic institutions during the Special Period, it (1) evaluates the characteristics and social position of the English-speaking Caribbean communities prior to the Revolution, (2) explores the impact of the Revolution on individuals and communities, in particular their experience of social mobility and participation in revolutionary struggle, and (3) focuses on their experience during the Special Period in examining the relationship between cultural narratives among black immigrants and their descendants and shifting levels of social inequality.

Using interviews with people of English-speaking Caribbean descent, archival and secondary sources, and participant observation in eastern Cuba, this research investigates how people who lay claim to this identity have negotiated the economic and political terrain of revolutionary Cuba. It argues that, across time, people of English-

speaking Caribbean descent have used “civilized blackness” to challenge ideologies of black inferiority that justify racial marginalization and exclusion. In addition, they have responded to social inequality and anti-black discrimination through participating in radical collective struggles for social justice. This research indicates that strategies have been evident in the revitalization of ethnic institutions by people of English-speaking Caribbean descent during the Special Period. It also suggests that black immigrant dreams of “a better life” have been derailed by the rising social inequalities in post-Cold War Cuba.

## **Dedication and Acknowledgments**

I dedicate this to Nana, Ann Elizabeth “May” Daley, who left her home to make a life in this place: to bear and raise six children, learn of her parents’ deaths by telegram, build strong friendships, bury her husband, and live long enough to leave the memory of her voice, laughter, attitude, and adoration with me, her youngest grandchild. Her courage, independence, and all around fierceness have been an inspiration to me on this journey.

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*Y ya.*

Tengo  
(1964)

by Nicolás Guillén

Cuando me veo y toco  
Yo, Juan sin Nada no más ayer,

y hoy Juan con Todo,  
y hoy con todo  
vuelvo los ojos, miro,  
me veo y toco  
y me pregunto cómo ha podido ser.

Tengo, vamos a ver,  
Tengo el gusto de andar por mi país,

dueño de cuanto hay en él,  
mirando bien de cerca lo que antes  
no tuve ni podía tener.

Zafra puedo decir,  
monte puedo decir,  
ciudad puedo decir,  
ejército decir,  
ya míos para siempre y tuyos, nuestros,  
y un ancho resplandor  
de rayo, estrella, flor.

Tengo, vamos a ver,  
tengo el gusto de ir  
yo, campesino, obrero, gente simple  
tengo el gusto de ir  
(es un ejemplo)  
a un banco y hablar con el administrador,  
no en inglés,  
no en señor,  
sino decirle compañero como se dice en español.

Tengo, vamos a ver,  
que siendo un Negro  
nadie me puede detener  
a la puerta de un dancing o de un bar.  
O bien en la carpeta de un hotel

I Have

When I see and touch myself  
Me, who yesterday was no more than  
John without Anything,  
and today am John with Everything,  
and today with everything,  
I turn my eyes around, I look,  
I see and touch myself  
and I ask myself how it can be.

I have, let's see,  
I have the pleasure of walking  
through my country,  
owner of everything that is in it,  
looking up close at what before  
I didn't have nor could I have.

Harvest, I can say,  
mountain I can say,  
city I can say,  
army [I can] say,  
now mine forever and yours, ours,  
and a wide brilliance  
of ray, star, flower.

I have, let's see,  
I have the pleasure to go  
me, a peasant, worker, simple person  
I have the pleasure to go  
(it's an example)  
to a bank and talk to the manager,  
not in English,  
not in sir,  
but to say to him compañero as is  
said in Spanish.

I have, let's see,  
that being a black man  
no one can stop me  
at the door of a dance hall or a bar.  
Or even at the desk of a hotel

gritarme que no hay pieza,  
una minima pieza y no una pieza colossal,  
  
una pequeña pieza donde yo pueda descansar.

shouting that there is no room,  
a tiny room, not a room that's  
immense,  
a small room where I could rest.

Tengo, vamos a ver,  
que no hay guardia rural  
que me agarre y me encierre en un cuartel,  
  
ni me arranque y me arroje de mi tierra  
  
al medio del camino real.

I have, let's see,  
that there is no rural guard  
that can hold me and lock me in a  
jail cell,  
or pick me up and throw me off of  
my land  
onto the middle of the royal road.

Tengo que como tengo la tierra tengo el mar,  
  
no country  
no jailáif,  
no tennis y no yatch,  
sino de playa en playa y ola en ola,  
  
gigante azul abierto democrático:  
en fin, el mar.

I have that I have the land I have the  
sea,  
not country club  
not 'hi-life',  
not tennis and not yatch,  
but beach in beach and wave in  
wave,  
giant blue open democratic:  
in short, the sea.

Tengo, vamos a ver,  
que ya aprendí a leer,  
a contar,  
tengo que ya aprendí a escribir  
y a pensar  
y a reír.  
Tengo que ya tengo  
Donde trabajar  
y ganar  
lo que me tengo que comer.  
Tengo, vamos a ver,  
tengo lo que tenía que tener.

I have, let's see,  
I now learned to read,  
to count,  
I have now learned to write  
and to think  
and to laugh.  
I have what I now have  
a place to work  
and to earn  
what I have to eat.  
I have, let's see,  
I have what I had to have.

*“I don’t perform Nicolás Guillén’s poem “Tengo” (I Have) anymore, because I think “I Have” is the sum of what was achieved in this country for the blacks, for the poor, and which has now been lost. I have said that when “I Have” can again in all honesty be performed, then we shall have achieved again what we had by the late 60s, which were years of poverty but equality...When you’re poor but equal you have the right to the same spiritual and material enrichment.”*

**-Alden Knight, famous Cuban actor of Jamaican descent**  
*(as quoted in Pérez-Sarduy and Stubbs 2000:114)*

**'Tengo'**  
(2001)

by Hermanos de Causa, a Cuban rap group  
(as quoted in *Fernandes 2006: 98*)

Tengo una raza oscura y discriminada,  
Tengo una jornada que me exige, no da nada,

Tengo tantas cosas que no puedo ni tocarlas,

Tengo instalaciones que no puedo ni pisarlas,

Tengo libertad entre parentésis de hierro,

Tengo tantos provechos sin derechos que a  
mí encierro,

Tengo tantas cosas sin tener lo que he tenido.

**I Have**

I have a dark and discriminated race,  
I have a workday that demands and  
gives nothing,

I have so many things that I can't  
even touch them,

I have facilities I can't even set foot  
in,

I have liberty between parentheses of  
iron,

I have so many benefits without  
rights that I'm imprisoned,

I have so many things without  
having what I had.

*A Dream Deferred*  
(1951)

By Langston Hughes

*What happens to a dream deferred?*

*Does it dry up  
Like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore---  
And then run?*

*Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over---  
Like a syrupy sweet?*

*Maybe it just sags  
Like a heavy load.*

*Or does it explode?*

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION: PROBLEM, POPULATION, METHODOLOGY

#### *Genesis of the Project*

In 1996, I traveled to Cuba for the first time, encouraged by a friend and co-worker who had been intimately involved in Latin American revolutionary political struggles in the '80s. For her, Cuba was the dream of social justice and cultural vitality realized. She held a leadership position in the Venceremos Brigade, one of the oldest groups that organizes work brigades to travel to Cuba, and spoke lovingly about a people whose ethos was informed by communalism, mutuality, respect and equality. I remember her telling me about emulation, the labor practice based on collectivism whereby the workers performed not for material reward but for the gratification that comes from contributing to the Revolution and being an exemplary revolutionary worker. "It's the revolutionary ideal that they compete with, not each other. They share everything, not because they have to, but because they can't enjoy what they have while others go without," I recall her saying. Needless to say, as a young Black woman searching for utopia, I was moved and decided to at least visit before packing my bags and relocating to help build the revolution.

That first time, I found what I was looking for and, some would argue, what the Cuban government wanted me to find: people who felt valued and included as full members of their society. As the first line of a popular revolutionary song I memorized while

attempting to cut weeds in a cane field proclaims, ‘*Cuba, que linda es Cuba*’.<sup>1</sup> As one would expect, in the subsequent trips I have taken, both with the Brigade and as a researcher, a more complicated picture has come into view, one that is fraught with the contradictions and inconsistencies that make human beings interesting and, if not always beautiful, then certainly worthy subjects of study.

One of the experiences that left me intrigued and somewhat dazzled that first time was the night *La Cinta*, a calypso group comprised of descendants of Anglophone Caribbean immigrants, performed as part of the entertainment segment of the Brigade’s full itinerary. Prior to the show, I approached an older black man getting a drink at the kiosk that provided café in the morning and *mojitos* at night. I greeted him in Spanish and was taken aback when he responded to me in Jamaican accented English. He was the director of *La Cinta* and proceeded to tell me about the migration of Jamaicans, Barbadians, and people from other English-speaking Caribbean islands, a journey depicted in Gloria Rolando’s ‘*Los Hijos de Baraguá*’, a film that we screened later that night (Rolando 1996).

Very soon after our meeting, the director launched into what I now refer to as a ‘narrative of social mobility’. He was a man of humble beginnings yet, ‘*gracias a la Revolución*’ (‘thanks to the Revolution’), all of his children were professionals. Two of his daughters were nurses and he didn’t have to pay ‘*ni un peso*’ (‘not a cent’) for their education. As the granddaughter of immigrants whose destiny brought them from Montserrat to the

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Cuba, how beautiful is Cuba’ is the first line of the refrain of this song that was taught to *brigadistas* by our Cuban hosts. Incidentally, the second line is ‘*Quien lo defiende la quiere más*’/‘He who defends her, loves her more’, reminding all that proclaiming and claiming Cuba’s beauty is not without its price.

United States rather than Cuba, and a college graduate attempting to pay off loans on a modest salary, this interaction struck a particularly personal cord. I had been won over by the apparent sincerity with which revolutionary society valued social and economic equality as well as by the close identification with and affection that Cubans of African descent had for their country. Those I came across seemed to experience a sense of belonging that sensitized me to the weight of my own alienation. I began to fantasize about who and what I would be if my grandparents had boarded a different ship.

A few years and semesters of graduate school later, this experience had worked its way into my researcher's consciousness. In the process of studying more about the lives of my Cuban counterparts, I came across a 2001 newsletter written by a Jamaican Cuban living in Florida. In an appeal for financial and moral support in the wake of the country's economic crisis, the author stated, "Other national and ethnic groupings in Cuba--- Spaniards, Arabs, Jews, Chinese---have established solidarity life-lines with their co-nationals and co-ethnics. Black West Indians do not have and desperately need a similar life-line" (Jones 2001a). Most obviously, this statement indicates that transnational ties based in ethnic and, as the appeal goes on to illustrate, racial affiliation are a potential resource to alleviate the economic hardships Cubans have faced in the wake of the economic crisis initiated by the collapse of the Soviet Union euphemistically declared 'El Período Especial en Tiempo de Paz' (The Special Period in Peacetime).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Exacerbating the consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union and eastern European socialism that began in 1989, the United States responded by tightening the embargo, contributing to a wartime atmosphere in which Cuba was under siege. Cubans experienced immediate material deprivation and political isolation.

However, it also calls into question notions of Cuban nationality based upon cultural homogeneity and the extent to which particular groups were (and were not) incorporated into the Cuban nation. More importantly for my interests, given the literature on some black immigrants in the United States opting to emphasize their ethnic identity in the context of racism and discrimination, I wondered whether Jones' call and the revival of English-speaking Caribbean institutions indicated a heightening of ethnic identification by black Cubans of English-speaking Caribbean descent and, if so, was this in response to the island's rising economic and racial inequality? Moreover, how were processes of class and status stratification implicated in the evolution of West Indian ethnic identity in Cuba? How different would understandings of English-speaking Caribbean immigrant mobilization of ethnic identity be if the Cuban revolutionary experience were taken into account?

### ***West Indian Cubans: A Dream Derailed?***

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Cuba became a destination point for the hundreds of thousands of workers fleeing the Anglophone Caribbean colonies in search of higher wages and greater opportunities. Though many of the migrants returned to their islands of origin or else followed U.S. capital to the next location, some remained in Cuba, hoping to make "a better life" for themselves and their families. Sparked by Jones' plea for racial and ethnic solidarity made in the contemporary context of economic crisis, one of the questions that initially motivated this study concerned the extent to which this desire has been fulfilled for the descendants of those immigrants in revolutionary Cuba. The answer to that question is of course wholly dependent upon how this 'better life' was and

is now envisioned and it is from Cuba's present circumstances with all of its contradictions, polarizations, and insecurity that Cubans of English-speaking descent interpret their individual and collective experience.

Central to this experience has been the 1959 Cuban Revolution. The Revolution is **the** defining moment of 20<sup>th</sup> century Cuban history as it completely restructured the nation's political and economic foundation, radically transforming daily life for all Cubans.

During the course of this research, I found that my 1996 encounter with the director of *La Cinta* who spoke of his children becoming professionals thanks to the Revolution actually foreshadowed discussions I would have with other Anglophone Caribbean Cubans of the first and second generation. They too highlighted the experience of upward mobility through the Revolution as people of African descent. Even for those who did not draw immediate attention to this shift in status, the fact of mobility was evident in their own occupational histories and/or those of their immediate family members.

In this dissertation, I am using the case of Cubans of English-speaking Caribbean origin and their recent mobilization of ethnicity to examine the relationships between culture or cultural narratives, black immigrant social mobility and political activism, and structural change. I will argue that, across time, people of English-speaking Caribbean origin engage in a politics of ambivalence in relation to the Cuban nation and revolutionary society. The predominant ambivalence stems from the often-contradictory impact that shifts in Cuba's economic and political terrain have had on this population.<sup>3</sup> My research

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<sup>3</sup> Though this term appears in the work of Michael Peletz (1996) in reference to gender relations in Malay society, Saidiya Hartman, in her study of black subjectivity in nineteenth century America, establishes

demonstrates that, in navigating these shifts, they have relied upon structural or systemic advantage, political activism, as well as constructs of West Indian respectability similarly employed by English-speaking Caribbean immigrants across time and space.

At the same time that I problematize notions of English-speaking Caribbean respectability and point to the benefits gained by the Revolution to challenge arguments that privilege cultural rather than structural explanations for immigrant success or failure, I examine the limitations of the structural changes implemented by the revolution. In particular, I suggest that the revolution's failure to address certain mechanisms of racism dominant in the pre-Revolutionary period contributed to the perpetuation of racism. Chief among these is the discrimination against middle class people of African descent, an issue that would become more pressing as the Revolution bolstered to number of black professionals. With the advent of the Special Period, black Cubans regardless of family origin, cultural claims, and social location are at a disadvantage in relation to their white(r) counterparts. I am arguing that the case of English-speaking Caribbean immigrants in Cuba ultimately illustrates the ways in which the intensification and expansion of the penetration of corporate capital in the post-Cold War world work in conjunction with local social inequalities. In this instance, this has been accomplished by sharpening the teeth of Cuban racism, which had been neutralized yet perpetuated in revolutionary Cuba.

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ambivalence and duality to be recurrent themes in the negotiation of contradictory social experiences. Though her focus is on the period of slavery and emancipation, her "Just as the peculiar and ambivalent articulation of the chattel status of the enslaved black and the assertion of his rights under the law, however limited, had created a notion of black personhood came to characterize this humanity, so, too, the advent of freedom and the equality of rights conferred to blacks a status no less ambivalent" (1997: 117).

### *Legacies of the Past Through the Lens of the Present*

Whether focused upon the economic, political, or social facets of Anglophone Caribbean immigrant experience in Cuba, previous research on this population has confined itself to the pre-revolutionary era (Bryan, 2001; Carr, 1998; Derrick, 2001; Espronceda Amor, 1999; Alvarez Estévez, 1988; Giovannetti, 2001; Knight, 1985; McCleod, 2000; Pérez de la Riva, 1975; Sánchez, 1988; Wynter, 2001; Lewis, 1988). The one anthropological account of this segment of the English-speaking Caribbean Diaspora of which I am aware does not go beyond 1959 in its investigation of ethnic identity formation by Jamaican and Barbadian immigrants (Charlton, 2005).<sup>4</sup> These studies have been invaluable in providing information on the demographics of the immigrants, their status and significance within the international capitalist economy, their community organizations, political activism, position within early twentieth century Cuban social hierarchies, and dynamics around their racial, ethnic, and national identity. However, they leave one with the impression that, with the 1959 Revolution, members of these communities left the country or were integrated into the black Cuban population. The process by which either occurred, in addition to other fates that they might have met, are left uninterrogated.

Furthermore, journalists and filmmakers have treated the Anglophone Caribbean presence as quaint or as a compelling and important element of the history of black Cuba with little contemporary significance (Bauza 2002; Rolando 1996; Sporn 2000). Any cultural distinction that exists or is constructed is represented as a fleeting vestige of history that must be noted before it disappears entirely. At the same time, research on

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<sup>4</sup> Indeed, my research follows up on that of Charlton (2005) who identified but did not completely fulfill her objective to explore the processes and conditions that led to recreate and sustain their ethnic identity, as she did not explore the period after 1959 in detail (8).

black Cubans in revolutionary society does not distinguish those of English-speaking Caribbean descent (Booth 1976; de la Fuente 2001a; Duarte 1997; Fernández Robaina 1990; Moore 1988). Given these silences, the revitalization of English-speaking Caribbean institutions and establishment of new ethnic associations that occurred in the 1990s appears to be somewhat of a mystery. Similar to Shalini Puri's (2003) question regarding how theories of diaspora and globalization might change if migration within the Caribbean region were taken into account, this inquiry considers how understandings of race and the black Cuban experience, areas that have gained considerable attention both within and outside of Cuba since the advent of the Special Period, might be broadened when the lives of those black Cubans who claim English-speaking Caribbean origin are included in the analysis. The current study is in part an effort to not only attend to the diversity of black subjectivities, but also to illuminate the conditions under which this diversity is asserted.

To explain the content, processes and conditions of the revitalization of English-speaking Caribbean institutions during the Special Period, this study seeks to: (1) evaluate the characteristics and social position of the English-speaking Caribbean communities prior to the Revolution, (2) explore the impact of the Revolution on individuals and communities, in particular their participation in revolutionary struggle and society, and (3) examine their experiences during the Special Period, considering the relationship between these experiences and national and global political, economic, and social transformations. The dissertation relies upon historical information on pre-revolutionary Cuba, debates about English-speaking Caribbean immigration, and the establishment of

ethnic communities in order to provide critical contextual data. However, with its focus on the revolutionary period, it is more concerned with the ways in which the telling of the past illuminate present predicaments and how this small segment of the Cuban population might serve as a lens through which to evaluate aspects of the revolutionary process and the social consequences of Cuba's insertion into the market.

One of the main concerns of this research is how people of Anglophone Caribbean origin, as black subjects, interpreted and negotiated Cuba's socio-racial-economic hierarchy in each of the three moments that are of interest; namely, the pre-revolutionary era, the earlier revolutionary period, and the current moment that has been defined by the collapse of the Soviet Union and socialist transition. Historical research indicates that Cubans of African descent leveraged the ideology of racial democracy, which emphasizes national rather than racial identity and denies the presence of racism, as a way to fight discrimination (Ferrer 1999; de la Fuente 1998). After the 1959 Revolution, official discourse claimed that the problem of racism had been solved with the elimination of class inequality and thus any discussion of racism was taboo. Similar to the pre-revolutionary period, acknowledging discrimination or engaging in collective struggle against it was considered divisive and unpatriotic and thus harshly sanctioned (Helg 1995; Booth 1976; Moore 1988). However, the revolution brought about significant changes in the economic manifestations of racial hierarchy and thus the consequences of persistent racism were less grave. With the advent of the economic crisis and Cuba's turn toward market relations as a means of survival, Cubans of African descent have been

subjected to increasing racialized inequality (de la Fuente 2001b; McGarrity and Cárdenas 1995; Pisani 1992; Fernandes 2006).

Understandably, black immigrants did not rely on pre-Revolutionary Cuba's racial ideology for protection against racial discrimination and its economic consequences, as this ideology was rooted in the preeminence of nationalism. Rather, they turned to black nationalism in the form of the Garvey Movement, trade unionism, and their status as British subjects to buffer them from the harsh social environment (Charlton 2005; Giovannetti 2001; Lewis 1988; McCleod 2000; Carr 1998). Again, what occurred after the 1959 Revolution with regard to the extent and nature of either their social, economic, political, and cultural integration in Cuba or maintenance of a connection with their islands of origin has not previously been explored.

Research among English-speaking Caribbean immigrants and their descendants in the United States, Canada, and Britain indicates that multiple factors influence patterns of racial and ethnic identification as well as the maintenance of connections to the "homeland". For instance, the presence and status of other black groups, gender, class status, generation, residential segregation, and experience of interpersonal racism have all been found to be significant in shaping immigrant social and political identity (Hintzen 2001; Foner 1998; Rogers 2001; Waters 2001; Foner 2001). However, the majority of research on Caribbean immigrants concerns those who travel to metropolitan centers

rather than those who engage in intra-Caribbean migration.<sup>5</sup> This dissertation is, in part, an effort to address this bias.

Among the few studies that focus on South-South migration, those examining the English-speaking Caribbean presence in Latin America have offered a particularly useful comparison to the Cuban case. Gordon's (1998) study of Nicaragua's Creoles<sup>6</sup>, for instance, is one that traces the relationship between identification and politics in the context of a society that underwent a popular revolution, though clearly not one that, like the Cuban Revolution, was sustained. Though Gordon does not advocate for the notion of an endlessly contingent, fragmented African Diasporic history and identity,<sup>7</sup> he argues that Creoles have multiple, contradictory narratives of their identity that have generated a complex pattern of political behavior and consciousness over time. For instance, during the Sandinista Revolution, Creoles employed what Gordon calls ethnic populism and Anglo ideology—two disparate identity-based interpretive strategies—to interpret the revolutionary process (205).

Though it does not focus primarily on political behavior, this dissertation does look at shifts in ethnic identification through distinct political and economic periods. It is an inquiry into the dynamics of race and identity in Cuba such that there could be a

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<sup>5</sup> Puri reports that, in the course of conducting research for her work on hybridity, she found that less than a third of the three hundred texts on Caribbean migration located during her database search concerned intra-Caribbean migration. This was true in spite of the fact that, from Emancipation to 1940, intra-Caribbean migration outnumbered that between the margin and metropole (2003: 2).

<sup>6</sup> In the Nicaraguan case, Creole is used to refer to those descendants of enslaved Africans brought to Central America by British planters in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as well as early 20<sup>th</sup> century British West Indian immigrants and their Nicaraguan born children.

<sup>7</sup> As he states, "...identities are generally lived as fixed and periodically provide a standpoint for the deployment of temporally centered identity politics" (31).

revitalization of English-speaking Caribbean institutions and identity over 70 years after the bulk of immigrants arrived in Cuba. Similar to Gordon, I found at least two narratives of Anglophone Caribbean Cuban experience. In one, they represent themselves as adhering to a politics of respectability in which concerns for social propriety, discipline, and economic stability and/or mobility are most pronounced, while in the other they occupy a radical stance against racism and class discrimination through collective action. This finding indicates that people of English-speaking Caribbean origin in Cuba can be counted among other members of the African diaspora whose experience appears to be characterized by cultural dualism.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, these narratives are related in that assertions of respectability, while problematically rooted in a Eurocentric, colonial model that reinforces social hierarchy according to Peter Wilson's thoroughly critiqued 1973 formulation, are an effort to challenge the discourse of black inferiority that legitimizes systematic discrimination and exclusion. English-speaking Caribbean immigrants in Cuba developed insular communities in which institutions and characteristics associated with respectability were prominent in representations of the collective. In the primary schools, churches, mutual aid societies, recreational organizations, and lodges that they established, immigrants who were in fact rooting themselves in a foreign and, at times, hostile land affirmed their identification as "civilized" blacks and, I argue, defended themselves against the common accusations of primitiveness, savagery and disease (see Naranjo Orovio and Garcia

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<sup>8</sup> See Sutton's 1974 critique of Wilson's formulation of respectability in which she refers to W.E.B. DuBois' theory of double consciousness and Melville Herskovits' theory of socialized ambivalence as examples of two early articulations of the coexistence of counterposed sets of values or beliefs among people of African descent in the United States and Caribbean, respectively.

Gonzalez 1996, Naranjo Orovio 1997, and McCleod 1998 for early twentieth century anti-black immigrant discourse in Cuba; for descriptions of English-speaking Caribbean institutions, see Espronceda Amor 1999; Chailloux et al 2001; Derrick 2001).

However, the assertion of a cultural identity informed by a civilizational paradigm is problematic because, at the same time that it challenges racial exclusion based upon their association with “Britishness”, it bars them entry into the circle of “civilization” as blackness is constitutively situated outside of “civilized modernity” and justifies their exclusion from the modern national space (Hintzen 2003). I am critical of this strategic wielding of respectability not only because it relies upon civilizational discourse, but also, and perhaps more importantly, because it emphasizes culture and values in explanations of social hierarchy and exclusionary practices. Indeed, when analyzed over time, what the Cuban case demonstrates is that systemic transformation through resource distribution (that was first more, and now less, equitable) rather than respectability or any other cultural value has far greater influence on the establishment and significance of social boundaries.

### ***Methodology: Cities, Sites, Sources, and Subjects***

I both pursued and arrived upon these questions by conducting fieldwork in the eastern cities of Santiago and Guantánamo, Cuba between 2001 and 2005. I traveled back and forth to Cuba, spending a total of eight months over four separate research trips. In both 2001 and 2005, I stayed for one month, while my 2003 and 2004 trips were each 3 months in duration. I conducted a total of 40 semi-structured interviews with Cubans of

English-speaking origin who lived in Santiago and Guantánamo (see Appendix A).<sup>9</sup> In the course of the research, the transnational character of participants' family and social networks led me to explore the option of expanding the study to include Cubans of West Indian descent living in the United States. Though I ultimately decided against this, I did contact and interview six individuals living in Florida and New York. Though the West Indian descendant Cuban immigrants I spoke with in depth are not formally part of the study, I consider these informal and semi-formal interviews, conducted in New York and during the two trips I took to Florida in 2004 where four of them lived, to have contributed to my knowledge of this population.

Santiago is a city of rolling hills that sits on a large bay and is surrounded by several mountain ranges including the Sierra Maestra, from which Fidel and his rebel army fought against Batista's army from 1956-1959. Indeed, the massive bronze statue of Antonio Maceo, the black Cuban hero and martyr of the independence wars, that sits at the entrance of the city is a monument not only to the man, but also to the central role that the city and region have played in national liberation struggles. Santiago is on that bay that at least 130,000 English-speaking Caribbean immigrants disembarked in the first two and a half decades of the twentieth century to either remain in the city, settling in the neighborhoods of Tivoli, Mariana de la Torre, Carretera del Morro, and Trocha, or travel to the more rural areas in which the *centrales*<sup>10</sup> were located. Santiago, formerly distinguished as the capital of Oriente Province and now the capital of Santiago province,

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<sup>9</sup> See Bernard 1995 for description of semi-structured interview methodology.

<sup>10</sup> *Centrales* refers to the agricultural complex that dominated post-colonial Cuban sugar production. Given the instability in the price of sugar, investors in the sugar industry, primarily from the United States, developed and expanded the *central* system, as it was large, modernized, heavily mechanized, and more efficient, thus making the investment more profitable (see Dye 1998).

is Cuba's second largest city with a population of 494,337 (as of 2004) and the site of the University of Oriente, which has hosted thousands of students from several Caribbean and African countries. Known to be the darker side of the island due to the greater concentration of people of African descent,<sup>11</sup> it is geographically, demographically, and culturally oriented toward the Caribbean.

The city of Guantánamo lies east of Santiago and, with a population of 208,000, is significantly smaller—and hotter—than Santiago. Capital of the second poorest province in Cuba, it is about a 40-minute drive from the infamous U.S. Naval Base. While English-speaking Caribbean immigrants worked in the *centrales* surrounding the city, its primary significance for this community was as an internal migration destination point during the late 1930s and 1940s when the U.S. military was recruiting laborers for its expansion of the Guantánamo Naval Base. The presence of the Naval Base had a tremendous impact on the economy and social dynamics of the area as Guantánamo and surrounding towns such as Boquerón and Caimanera developed to meet the needs of U.S. servicemen and civilian workers. British West Indians and their Cuban born children worked on the railroads, in the brothels and bars, and as laundresses, cooks, and skilled craftsmen, having a significant cultural influence on Guantánamo (Derrick 2001).

The importance of the Naval Base for the residents of Guantánamo persisted through the early period of the revolution. Guantánamo was one of the stages upon which the drama between the United States and Cuba played itself out in the early '60s and workers on the

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<sup>11</sup> Though not broken down by region, according to the 2002 Census, Cuba's population by race is 65.08% blanco, 24.86% mestizo/mulato, and 10.08% Negro. Given the notorious underestimation of black Latin Americans, these figures are quite questionable.

Base and residents of the city were often caught in between the conflict as the Naval Base constitutes U.S. soil and the issue of border crossing has been a contentious one. In the contemporary period, families who have members who worked on the Base are perceived to be better off in the dollar economy as they have access to a pension in U.S. dollars. Guantánamo attracts few tourists, its dozen or so hotels and *casas particulares*<sup>12</sup> primarily serving those travelers who might be stopping over on their way to Baracoa, a tremendously popular tourist destination. Guantánamo is the home of the British West Indian Welfare Center (BWIWC), which was founded in 1945 and is one of the few English-speaking Caribbean cultural centers on the island that has endured throughout the revolutionary period. This is one of the primary institutions that the children and grandchildren have sought to revive in the Special Period.

While there are sizable communities of English-speaking Caribbean settlement in other areas of the island (most notably in the more northern Oriente cities of Banes and Manatí, the northeastern cities of Baraguá and Camagüey, both in the province of Camagüey, and on Havana), this study focuses on Santiago and Guantánamo for several reasons. First of all, there is a significant bias in literature on Cuba as the eastern side of the island is often neglected such that knowledge professing to be about Cuba is more accurately about Havana. Secondly, Oriente was the entry point for most immigrants. Third, I confronted logistical constraints in doing research in Cuba, particularly anthropological rather than strictly historical research (to be expanded upon below), such that traveling to and embedding myself within other English-speaking Caribbean communities was not

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<sup>12</sup> Roughly translating as ‘guest houses’, these are typically rooms in people’s homes that have been fixed up to accommodate foreigners who pay in foreign currency and/or, as of 2005, *pesos convertibles*, Cuban currency that is equivalent to a U.S. dollar.

feasible.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, this would have multiplied contextual differences of the population such as urban/rural and capital/periphery.

An hour apart by road, the English-speaking Caribbean communities of Santiago and Guantánamo have historically been closely linked through familial and employment connections. Both are urban areas that attracted immigrants with the inclination and skills to permanently leave an agricultural setting. Though Santiago is a major city with considerably more resources in general, particularly with the recent development of tourism, the presence of the Naval Base in Guantánamo and its role as a source of stable, relatively well-remunerated employment for people of English-speaking Caribbean descent tempers this distinction. At the same time, the different positions that these cities occupy in Cuba's economic hierarchy have proven to be revealing of regional dynamics in the contemporary period.

Another important factor of the sites of this study is the interest in English-speaking Caribbean identity that emerged in the early '90s. In Guantánamo, a group of young professionals educated in the revolution founded the Young People's Department as a branch of the BWIWC, the mutual aid society and cultural institution that was established in 1945. At around the same time, people of English-speaking Caribbean descent in Santiago founded an association called the Blue Mountain Association, named after the Blue Mountain of Jamaica, a mountain range that they believe is connected to Cuba's Sierra Maestra. During the mid-90s, the membership of these two organizations rose to

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<sup>13</sup> For a study of racial and ethnic identity that focuses on the historical experience on Jamaican and Barbadian immigrants throughout the island, see Charlton 2005.

approximately one thousand combined. While this study is not one of institutions per se, the presence of these organizations is evidence of the revitalization of ethnicity during a period of national crisis; their development and trajectories inform understandings of the navigation of Cuba's shifting social and economic landscape.

Though I made several trips to Guantánamo in order to do archival research, make and develop contacts, and conduct interviews, I considered Santiago de Cuba to be my base and thus most of the participant observation data is derived from that setting. During my first two trips to Santiago, I stayed in *casas particulares*, while the last two I resided primarily in a family home in one of the historically Anglophone Caribbean immigrant neighborhoods. During each trip to Guantánamo, I stayed in private homes, one home was that of a family of Jamaican origin and the other a black Cuban woman not of Anglophone Caribbean origin. Given that the presence of foreigners is a politically charged issue and subject to regulation, the process by which I acquired housing as an outsider is itself informative of the social and economic field upon which Cubans, descendants and non-descendants alike, tread. Thus, as a way of highlighting certain key facets of everyday life and introducing the reader to a cross section of those who peopled the social world in which I acted as a participant observer, I will briefly describe the more specific sites into which I ventured.

### **Mujeres**

I arrived in Santiago one afternoon in August with a few important names but quite predictably without luggage after having missed a connecting flight in Montego Bay and being re-routed through Havana. Three were those of academics who might be interested

in my project, one was that of a hotel found on the internet, and one was that of *Mujeres del Mar*, the *casa particular* where a young woman I met on the plane planned to stay. With a name like ‘Women of the Sea’, accommodations that were a fraction of the price of the hotel (\$12/night as opposed to \$45), and a location in the center of the city, after spending one night in the two star hotel where at least some of the guests were Cuban, I resolved to stay at *Mujeres del Mar* and sleep in a windowless room with unreliable air conditioning in the hottest month in what I thought was Cuba’s hottest city until I went to Guantánamo.

Occupying the rear section of a two-story edifice that sat across the street from the colonial-style municipal office building, which was painted a sharp white with trim the blue of Cuba’s flag’s five stripes, *Mujeres del Mar* had been created out the second floor apartment of a white Cuban family. The apartment’s two bedrooms had been converted into guest rooms for tourists and Claudia, Flavio, and their teenaged son, Alejandro, lived in a small attic-like space that was above the kitchen and bathroom and accessible by a ladder. All of the rooms faced a narrow hallway/balcony that sat on top of what was essentially the roof of the floor below. Claudia and Flavio both had jobs in addition to maintaining the business and thus hired Lidia, a wiry mestiza in her early 40s who became a close friend and informant, to perform the domestic chores and general hospitality services of the *casa particular*. Claudia held a mid-level position at a museum and Flavio used a motorcycle he bought with money he made while in Spain to taxi

people around the city.<sup>14</sup> They shared the floor with another family—one member of which was a mestiza *jinetera*<sup>15</sup> and mother of a three-year old son who had been jailed several times for prostitution. Thus, after climbing the marble stairs of a dark, wide stairwell and entering the first wooden door, one had to pass entrances to their dwelling areas and bathroom before arriving at a white door anointed with the blue triangle sticker under which read the word ‘*ARRENDAMIENTO*’ (‘RENTAL’). This signified that the apartment owners were legally permitted to rent rooms.

Claudia and her family were among the very few contacts I had with white Cubans in Santiago, particularly those who had no affiliation with the university. Through our interactions and, later, the information and perspective that Lidia provided, I began to glean a sense of some of the challenges faced by all Cubans and how these challenges differ according to racial identity.<sup>16</sup> Claudia’s family came to Santiago after the triumph of the revolution, acquiring their house, which was valued for its prime location at the center of the city. Her husband was from a middle class family and his mother still lived in the family home located in Vista Alegre, the most affluent neighborhood prior to the revolution. The *casa particular* business technically belonged to one of Claudia’s sisters who was caring for a terminally ill husband and young child. The youngest sister had her hopes set on being invited to Canada by her married Canadian ‘boyfriend’ who worked as a photographer.

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<sup>14</sup> *Motos* are one of the more expensive forms of transportation, charging 10 pesos a ride as compared to the *guaguas* (buses), *camionetas*, *camiones*, and *coches* that charge one peso and under. See below for a fuller description of the transportation system.

<sup>15</sup> *Jinetera/o* means ‘rider’ and is used to describe those who make money off of foreigners, most often sex workers or street hustlers.

<sup>16</sup> For another example of this, see Sujatha Fernandes’ (2006) description and analysis of her experiences living with a white and black family during her field research trips in Havana (104-5).

It was during my first few days at this *casa particular*, *Mujeres del Mar*, that I met two Cubans who would prove to be my link into another social world of Santiago: that of the *rasta modas*.<sup>17</sup> The encounter occurred one evening while I was walking down the street with a black American woman who was also traveling. We were on our way to Parque Céspedes from an area called ‘The Boulevard’ where there is a small ‘park’ surrounded by a dollar store, bank, church, and a few restaurants, one of which was an ice cream parlor that sold small cartons of ice cream for \$.50. I heard someone behind me ask me a question and when I turned around to hear more clearly, there were two young black men with short dreadlocks. They wanted to know if the ice cream was in *moneda nacional*, another name for the Cuban peso. When I responded, they apologized, saying they thought that we were Cuban. We began to talk and continued this conversation at Parque Céspedes where we would meet off and on throughout my subsequent years of field research. My friendships with Miguel and Samuel and association with their crew of friends, most of whom were *rasta modas* and all of whom were young black and mulatto men, exposed me to a reportedly marginalized segment of Cuban society.

### **Casa Santiaguera**

Located around a perilous corner from *Mujeres del Mar* and two slickly paved sidewalk blocks down one of Santiago’s main streets in the direction of the Alameda, the avenue adjacent to the bay, was *Casa Santiaguera*. Based on the connections that I made with the Watsons, a family of English-speaking Caribbean descent, during my previous trip, I was

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<sup>17</sup> Rasta moda refers to the young men of African descent who grow dreadlocks but are not Rastafari. I found various motivations among them for growing locks, including trying to attract foreign tourists interested in a more exotic appearance and asserting a non-conformist black identity.

able to secure a good rate for long-term stay. Marta, the mulata daughter-in-law of the *casa particular's* proprietor, was the close childhood friend of Melvina, a first generation Jamaican Cuban who was a former president of the English-speaking Caribbean association in Santiago and who was to become one of my closest friends and informants.<sup>18</sup> The proprietor was Elena, a mulata her 70s—though she was infamous for never revealing her true age. She was a retired teacher from a more rural area outside of Santiago and had participated in the revolution's literacy campaign.

As *Casa Santiaguera* was the home of a close friend of a key informant, my stay there allowed me to incorporate myself into the extended network of that family. This network is founded on familial, friendship, and/or collegial ties but maintained through reciprocity as is demonstrated by the way in which Melvina “shared” me among her network. As a foreigner in need of certain services, I was a resource and it would have been a violation of social norms if Melvina had not done so. I needed something from her, i.e. information and contacts and therefore was obliged to offer something in exchange; she would have been accused of selfishness had she not spread whatever it was that I gave.

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<sup>18</sup> According to Melvina, Marta's black mother, once found pregnant as a result of a relationship with the son of the coffee plantation owner for whom she worked, was sent away from the plantation to Santiago where she found work as a domestic. In this narrative, Marta's parents' relationship was much like the sexually exploitative relationships between black women and white men that abounded during the slavery period. Melvina characterized Marta's mother as servile, believing that her daughter Marta was better than she because Marta was half white; interestingly, Melvina attributed Marta's inability to stand up to her mother-in-law Elena to Marta's own mother's subservience. However, according to Marta, her mother was in love with her father and when he left for Spain when Marta was a child, her mother never recovered from her broken heart. This is but one of the many instances where the “truth” of a particular situation is less informative than the way that individuals represent it. Conflicting representations provide insight into social dynamics, past and present, and such daily interactions with Cubans of diverse origins were a rich source of ethnographic material.

One example of Melvina's sharing me as a resource was arranging my stay at Marta's *casa particular*, thus guaranteeing a reliable source of dollar income for the house over a period of months in addition to providing the possibility of gifts and assistance that I might offer. Another example was Melvina's referring me to Rocío, her close friend who offered to give me one-on-one conversation classes for \$12/week and proved to be another rich source of ethnographic data. Rocío is the daughter of Spanish immigrants whose family participated heavily in the clandestine movement during the revolution. As a reward, they received a house in Vista Alegre where she still lives with her husband, a professional who, at the top of his field, makes 700 pesos a month. Rocío is a retired professional and former colleague of Melvina's who, according to Melvina, advocated for her to be promoted in an environment where people of color are routinely denied better positions. Based on this, Melvina told me that, "she is a good person even though she is white."

At the same time that I was able to tap into this network of extended households, as a guest in a *casa particular* rather than a home, I was able to remain somewhat autonomous and develop the connections that I began during the previous trip, some of those being with people who were not considered respectable in the eyes of my professional informants. For instance, Lidia, who still worked as a domestic at *Mujeres del Mar* and the young *rasta modas* clearly occupied a different status than the professors, doctors, and other educated people of English-speaking Caribbean descent whom I recruited for the study. Spending time in their homes and in *their* social networks, attending social events, planning and participating in celebrations, visiting their workplaces, and

accompanying them on errands provided numerous opportunities for observation of and dialogue about daily life in Cuba. Also, during my 2003 stay I developed ties with a group of young people from the English-speaking Caribbean who were studying at the University of Oriente and provided me with a unique perspective on Cuban social relations.

### **Calle Casa**

Upon leaving Santiago after my second fieldwork trip, Melvina invited me to stay in her home during my next stay. By that time, the major construction that they had begun when I left would be complete and they would be ready to have a houseguest for an extended period of time. I had been told that foreigners were prohibited from staying in private homes, and thus I had my doubts about how this would work out, but Melvina insisted that she would take care of it and there was nothing that I should do ahead of time. When I arrived in Santiago that May, she and her daughter met me at the airport and we went directly to her house on *Calle Casa* in Tivoli, a traditionally West Indian neighborhood in Santiago, where I could spot an ackee tree, the national fruit of Jamaica, in a clearing two doors down.

Painted a warm rosy pink and made of *placa*, though it was originally a wooden structure, the house was built by Melvina's father in the 1930s but then rebuilt in the late '40s. In its most recently remodeled version, it had four bedrooms, a large kitchen, a dining room, living room, and sitting room; Melvina's brother was also building an addition onto the roof that would house his bedroom, kitchen, sitting room and workshop. The house's sizable backyard, where there were chickens, ducks and, at one point, a litter

of kittens in addition to tamarind and avocado trees, was an ideal place to seek relief from the heat and have quiet conversation. It was also where we hung freshly washed laundry on the clotheslines to dry.

The day after my arrival, Melvina announced to me that we needed to go to the immigration office so that they will know that I am staying in their house. She was sure to bring her mother's Jamaican passport and her own *carnet*,<sup>19</sup> repeating that she knew what she was allowed to do in this country and that she does everything according to the laws. At the immigration office, I didn't say a lot, was told that I needed to go to the bank and buy \$40 stamps that would authorize me to stay on a family visa.<sup>20</sup> I did so, received authorization, and settled into my space as a member of a professional Jamaican Cuban household. In this role, I participated in domestic chores, helped with the marketing, learned how to make *pru oriental*,<sup>21</sup> gave and received advice, commented on the *novelas* as well as the weekly movies, cared for Melvina's 95-year old Jamaican mother, observed the development of Melvina's 26-year old daughter's relationship with a 70-year old foreigner, partook in celebrations of all sorts, interacted with neighbors and friends, and asked a lot of questions.

The following year, the plan was the same but the law, in addition to the location of the immigration office, had changed. It had been moved to one of the grand houses in Vista

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<sup>19</sup> This is the identity card that all Cubans receive at the age of 12 and generally carry around with them all of the time.

<sup>20</sup> In Cuba, there is a system whereby visitors buy stamps for different denominations that are affixed to their visa and signify authorization for different lengths of stay. For instance, if one has a 30-day tourist visa, it can be renewed for another 30 days, but one has to buy a \$25 stamp to do so.

<sup>21</sup> This is a drink particular to the eastern side of the country and is made from boiling various roots.

Alegre. I recall that, as we approached this new and improved setting, I saw a long line of people coming from the back yard and a shorter line of people on the porch, waiting to enter what was perhaps once the foyer or sitting room. Foreigners—as well as Cubans with foreigners—formed a line that came out of the front door, while Cubans without foreigners were sent around back. I could not but note the parallel to the segregation era United States when workers and black people had to enter a house through the kitchen in the back. Ironically, I immediately knew which line to go to: it was the one with older white men and women accompanied by younger, more attractive men and women of color.

Once seen, Melvina and I were told that the only people who can stay in houses on a family visa are spouses, parents, children and siblings. All others can stay up to 72 hours while waiting for a response about whether they can get special permission, but after that, they had to stay in a hotel or casa particular. Days could be spent and meals could be eaten in a private home, but I could not officially stay overnight.

When we broke the news to family and friends, the general consensus was that this was a move on the part of the Cuban government to increase revenue from accommodations for foreigners given that, in November of the previous year, the Bush administration had passed several laws restricting the flow of resources to Cubans, including prohibiting Cuban Americans from traveling to Cuba more than once every three years. One of many times that I was caught in the crossfire of U.S.-Cuba relations, I opted to make arrangements with Elena, the proprietor of *Casa Santiaguera*, in which I paid her for the

room so that *Casa Santiaguera* was my official residence, but *Calle Casa* was where I spent most of my time. Through this situation as well as many others, I learned how, in Cuba, bending the rules is the rule of thumb.

**Guantánamo: Amorcita's and La Prima Hermana<sup>22</sup>**

It was in the process of securing housing during my first trip to Guantánamo that I first came into contact with Cuba's underground housing market. Melvina had escorted me to the city during carnival, promising that we could stay with her family there. As it turned out, there was no room for us but one of her cousins who was visiting from Jamaica had a friend, a white Cuban man, who offered to provide us with housing. He was intent upon charging us \$20 per night to stay on the floor of a room in his house—definitely not a legal *casa particular*— and there was a heated debate between Melvina, her cousin, and the friend over his attempt to take advantage of me. She later explained that he was doing this in part because he was intent upon raising money to “buy” a house in Havana. In order to move, he had to sell his house in Guantánamo and Melvina's cousin was considering buying it. Melvina explained to me that this was a very risky enterprise as its illegality left you with no recourse if one party was to back out of the deal and/or abscond with the funds. In addition, if the government discovered the way in which you acquired your house, it could be confiscated.

In subsequent trips to Guantánamo, I stayed with either Amorcita, a brown-skinned, slight woman in her early 50s who is the sister of a close family friend of the Watsons, or Pamela, the *prima hermana* of Patricia, a Jamaican Guantanamera who left Cuba in 1970,

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<sup>22</sup> This term means ‘first cousin’.

lived in New York, and with whom I had become acquainted. Amorcita is a single, childless retired militante<sup>23</sup> living on a pension of less than 200 pesos a month and, though struggling economically, she expressed gratitude for the revolution as it had improved her family's standard of living. Her brother was a professional working in Havana and she had worked as a municipal level bureaucrat. Beautiful antique furniture crowded her small two-bedroom apartment, an ironic contrast to the empty spaces that occupied her refrigerator.

Located on the bottom floor of an apartment building complex that was new when the revolution trained her mother as a tobacco worker and awarded them a home, Amoricita had shared the apartment with her mother who passed away nearly two years prior to our first meeting. Amorcita suffered considerably from this loss, as she and her mother had been extremely close; though neighbors frequently checked in on her and interacted with her, Amorcita found living alone in the apartment without her mother's company nearly unbearable. Indeed, Melvina often sent with me medications for emotional distress to give to Amorcita, who did not have the means to procure them herself.

Pamela's home was considerably larger and peopled by family members, but also marked by grief. She lived with her male partner, daughter, grandson, severely handicapped son, William, and mother Mabel, the daughter of Jamaican immigrants whose first husband and father of her children was from Jamaica. Mabel's second husband had suffered a heart attack and died in the house seven years earlier. While in this household, I also participated in marketing, attended social activities at the Centre, in the homes of other

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<sup>23</sup> This term refers to Party members who can occupy various positions in government.

descendants, and during carnival, and spent hours in conversation with members of this extended social network. Indeed, in 2004, I had the opportunity to speak in more depth with Patricia who was visiting from New York, thus contributing to the extent to which my research is influenced by the transnational nature of this population.

### **The Observing Participant**

As a participant-observer in these communities and among these individuals I have briefly described here, I took part in activities both mundane and irregular. For instance, in addition to navigating the markets and shops in order to procure daily necessities, I attended events that were periodic such as birthday celebrations, *rasta moda* house parties, excursions and gatherings of young people from Melvina's daughters church group, rumbas frequently held in the *barrios marginales*<sup>24</sup>, dances and activities sponsored by an organization of *danzoneros*<sup>25</sup> to which one of my older informants belonged, and various concerts and recitals that featured anything from *rap cubano* to classical music. In terms of annual celebrations, I participated in carnival and the Festival of Fire also known as the Caribbean festival, which is a celebration and affirmation of the connection between Cuba and other Caribbean countries.

The content of the interviews that I conducted was necessarily impacted by my observations as I took part in the daily lives of the cities in which my research participants lived. The major questions were directed towards gathering information about: the interviewee's English-speaking Caribbean family such as time of arrival,

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<sup>24</sup> Term used for neighborhoods on the outskirts of the city that are disproportionately affected by water and electricity shortages and populated by people of more African descent.

<sup>25</sup> People who dance danzon, a style of dance primarily performed by older Cubans.

island of origin, and occupation; individual, familial, and community responses to and experiences in the revolution; and the impact of the Special Period and Cuba's transition. Through the course of the research, different sub-topics emerged that ranged from attitudes about race and the experience of blackness in Cuban society across time to the generational gap to the role of women in English-speaking Caribbean communities. As such, I not only adjusted the line of questioning depending upon the individual informant's particular background, interests, and openness, but also made additions and deletions with the emergence of particular themes.

### **The Sample**

As can be gleaned from the preceding passages, the data from this research are derived from a range of sources due to the relationships that I developed with non-West Indian Cubans and West Indian Cubans alike. Indeed, as I formed connections with West Indian Cubans living in the United States, the source of the data is not strictly confined to the island either. However, all of my semi-structured interviews and the majority of my unstructured interviews were among Cubans of English-speaking Caribbean descent who had never left the island. Excluding the six individuals who immigrated to the United States, there were 40 participants in this study.<sup>26</sup> As I re-interviewed several participants either because they were community leaders or I realized that I wanted to extend the depth and breadth of the previous interview, I actually conducted a total of 55 semi-formal interviews. Thirteen people included in the sample participated exclusively in informal interviews while the remaining 27 provided data through a combination of informal and semi-formal interviews. I interviewed six participants twice and three

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<sup>26</sup> See Appendix A.

participants on three or more occasions. Two of these participants were former presidents of English-speaking Caribbean associations and thus one of their interviews was focused solely on institutional history and their experience as leaders in the communities.

Twenty-three participants were female and 17 were male. Twenty participants lived in Santiago, nineteen in Guantánamo, and one was in Santiago for a festival but lived further north in Camagüey. Nine of the participants either had family in the other city and/or had themselves lived there. Four of the participants had immigrated to Cuba as children, two from Jamaica, one from St. Lucia, and one from Panama with Jamaican parents. Eighteen were the among the first generation of at least one side of their family to be born in Cuba, 15 had at least one grandparent from the English-speaking Caribbean, and three participants' great grandparents were immigrants (two of these had immigrant grandparents who married first generation West Indian Cubans). Included in the known countries of origin were Jamaica, Barbados, St. Kitts and Nevis, Montserrat, St. Lucia, Panama, St. Vincent, Grenada, St. Martin, and St. Thomas.

Regarding the age range of research participants, twenty-three were in their early 50s to late 60s, five in their 70s, six over 80, and six in their mid 20s to mid 30s. Thus, numerically, the largest percentage of the data comes from individuals who were pre-adolescents and teenagers in 1959 and thus came of age during the Cuban Revolution. Thirteen of the study's informants were working adults at the time of the Batista dictatorship; of those in their eighties and nineties, two were limited in their lucidity, able to recall basic facts and communicate certain themes, and one's mental status deteriorated

over the time of my study. The last group was comprised of people who were adolescents and young adults when the Special Period began.

In terms of education and occupation, of the six people over 80, one had been a laundress and a housewife, one a housewife, one a laborer, one a teacher, one an unskilled laborer who first worked on the Base then eventually became a construction foreman, and one a shoemaker who continues to practice his trade. None of them received a formal education beyond primary school. The same was true for most of those participants in their 70s.

One male participant in his 70s was unskilled but received training through the revolution and taught English in school. All but one of the men over 70 had worked on the Naval Base at some point in their lives. Of the four women in their 70s, one taught English before the revolution and now works as a seamstress, one was a trained artisan but was primarily a homemaker, and two were housewives. A significant difference in education and occupation occurs with the next group. Of the twenty-three participants who came of age during the early years of the revolution, twenty-three of them were educated beyond the high school level, counting among them teachers, professors, doctors, an engineer, technicians, a musician, a veterinarian, an accountant, and a professional athlete and trainer. Of the six who are in their twenties and early thirties, one is a college graduate and teaches English, one received technical and musical training but works as a store clerk and occasionally a musician, one is in school to become a podiatrist, one immigrated to Jamaica where she is studying English, one is a counselor for disabled children, and one has just returned to night school in the hopes of getting an advanced degree.

I used snowball sampling to recruit these participants. During my initial research trip, through the contacts I was making in academic circles, I was given the number of the former president of the now defunct English-speaking Caribbean descendant association in Santiago. After meeting and spending time with her, she then mentioned other people that I could talk to both in Santiago and Guantánamo, many of whom in turn introduced me to additional participants. I also followed up on referrals given to me by one of the Jamaican Cuban immigrants I interviewed informally while in New York.

The most apparent bias of this method of sampling is that I was only able to interview those people whose roots in the English-speaking Caribbean were known by other community members. Thus, those people who might have had a parent, grandparent or great grandparent who migrated to Cuba, but who perhaps detached themselves from their origins and assimilated into Cuban society, were not part of this study.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, my findings cannot be generalized to all people of English-speaking Caribbean descent in Cuba. Furthermore, while having the former association president as a main referral source was beneficial in terms of identifying potential subjects, it tends to skew the data toward those who were affiliated with and/or participated in the association.

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<sup>27</sup> In the very first stages of formulating this project, I considered scouring the phone books for English surnames and blindly calling people asking if they would be willing to participate in this study. However, after discussing this with others who had done research in Cuba and were more familiar with the social climate, I decided that such methods would not yield positive results in such a tightly controlled environment. Furthermore, due to intermarriage, there are many people who are of English-speaking Caribbean descent but lack an English surname.

The other segment of the population that was summarily excluded from this study by virtue of the sites I chose to conduct research was that composed of people who remained in rural areas. Santiago, the municipality, is the second most populous city in Cuba and is the capital of Oriente. Guantánamo is the capital of the province by the same name and, though less populous and with fewer resources than Santiago, it is by no means rural. While historical data indicate that English-speaking Caribbean immigrants gravitated toward urban environments, particularly compared to their Haitian counterparts, most were initially agriculturally based. They lived and worked in and around large plantations owned by U.S. corporations and this is where their communities were initially planted. Due to the range of skills that they possessed as a group and the development of the Naval Base, both topics discussed in later chapters, they had an opportunity to migrate to and establish themselves in urban areas. This study thus has an urban bias and accounts of the lives of those elsewhere on the island, who quite possibly could have maintained their Anglophone Caribbean cultural practices due to greater isolation, are not included in the data presented here.

### **Language**

Of the 40 participants, 14 were conversant in English, with seven being or having been English teachers and 22 having grown up in English-only households. The interviews were either exclusively or primarily in Spanish as even those who knew how to speak English seemed to be more comfortable in Spanish. In a few instances, I ascertained this in the course of an interview that began in English, but either the interviewee switched to Spanish or, seeing them struggle to articulate themselves, I realized that my Spanish was more developed than their English and so I would begin to speak Spanish.

There were certain phrases and words that people tended to say in English, as well as circumstances under which they would switch to English. For instance, those who received their primary education in English recalled such things as the names of teachers as ‘Ms.’ or ‘Mr. So-and-so’, greetings and pleasantries, prayers and hymns in English. Also, in recounting information about their origins, their family composition and early experiences in Cuba, they would communicate in English. The words of certain foods associated with the Anglophone Caribbean such as ackee, breadfruit, bun, soursop and candy, as well as rituals or religious events such as Nine Night, Christmas, and Harvest were in English. Also, phrases that they recalled hearing growing up such as ‘Cuban people are hell’ tended to pepper conversations about life in English-speaking Caribbean communities.

What I found to be a more interesting use of English was when people began speaking in English when they were discussing things that they did not want to be understood and/or overheard. My first experience of this code switching was during my 2001 trip to Santiago and as I was just beginning to become friendly with the Watsons. I was with another black woman from the United States who had befriended a male dancer who accompanied us on a visit to their home. In the course of the conversation, it came up that he had invited us to a *bembe* (African-Cuban religious celebration) in one of the less reputable neighborhoods in the city. We were all seated in the living room, and with him right there sipping *limonada* (‘lemonade’) in his denim overalls *sin camisa* (‘without a

shirt'), our hostess switched to English and asked, without changing her facial expression, "where did you meet this man?"

The more frequent situations in which English was used as a way to make information accessible to fewer ears, actual or imagined, occurred when the speaker was discussing something considered to be taboo. Indeed, the switch to English became a signal that more private information was being shared. An example of this occurred during an informal interview with Mabel, a first generation woman in her '70s who seemed particularly disgusted with the state of economic affairs in the country. We were outside in her yard and as she was showing me her water tank, plants, and chickens, she abruptly began speaking in English as she recounted a story about a farmer who was jailed for slaughtering his own cow for his family's own use.<sup>28</sup> The interaction had a sort of clandestine tone to it, as did many others in which the switch to English occurred as the speaker began overtly or even indirectly criticizing the government. It is not that such criticisms were never articulated in Spanish, but when they were in English, they took on a more serious tone.

Aside from the use of English, there are three other issues of language that need to be noted. One concerns translation and the need to be aware of the fact that the same word can have different connotations. For instance, the term '*racismo*' in Cuba generally refers to institutional discrimination on the basis of race; thus, when a Cuban says that there is no racism, s/he is often saying that the basis upon which the state—and therefore all

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<sup>28</sup> With the advent of the Special Period, Cuba instituted a special measure that prohibited the owners of certain livestock, cow for instance, from slaughtering their animals either for their own consumption or for the purpose of selling the meat. This livestock is regarded as property of the state.

public society—can deny access has been eliminated. The other is the importance that tone and more physical aspects of language have in Cuban Spanish. Cubans are famous for the brilliant, creative way in which they play with language as a tool of communication. At one point in my attempt to understand race and how attitudes about it are communicated in a society that is invested in seeing itself as anti-racist, I wanted to know what the Cuban word was for ‘nigger’. I found that it was the expression, tone and context in which a person says ‘*negro*’ that clued me to the possibility that they were saying ‘nigger’. For instance, when someone refers to a rumba or a *bembe* as ‘*una cosa de negros*’ (literally, ‘a thing for blacks’), if their tone is dismissive and/or there is a subtle shift in their facial expression as if they’ve just gotten a whiff of rotting meat, the ‘*negros*’ is derogatory.<sup>29</sup>

The third concerns the various terms used to refer to people from the English-speaking Caribbean and their descendants in Cuba and those that I use in this work. Although people came from all over the Anglophone Caribbean to Cuba, the majority came from Jamaica and thus they are often referred to as ‘*los jamaicanos*’. People with family from other islands would be sure to remind me that they were not Jamaican, that this was just the word used to describe all of them. Other terms used in reference to immigrants and those in their communities who might have been born in Cuba but lived in that Anglophone Caribbean world were ‘*los ingleses*’ and ‘*los anglófonos*’. I did not often encounter ‘West Indian’ aside from the ‘British West Indian Cultural Centre’, the

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<sup>29</sup> In one of Hay’s (2006) informants’ group discussions, one woman makes the point that *negra* is different coming from a black person than a white Cuban, supporting this argument (68). It is also important to note that *negro/a* and *negrito/a* are used as terms of endearment by and toward people of all racialized phenotypes, further demonstrating the multiple meanings of racial terminology.

association founded in 1946 in Guantánamo. I most often employ this term in the text when referring to people who were of the colonial period and when I want to convey a certain adherence to British cultural traditions.

The term '*los pichones*' ('little birds') refers exclusively to the first generation born in Cuba and can be applied to children of immigrants from any background.<sup>30</sup>

'*Descendientes*' is a term that people used to refer to anyone who has Anglophone Caribbean ancestry. While these are all rather straight forward, there is some dispute about the connotation of the term '*jamaiquino*', which some used interchangeably with or in the same way that others would use '*jamaicano*'. When I asked how this term came about or what its significance was, it was explained that '*jamaiquino*' was apparently a derogatory word that Cubans gave the Anglophone Caribbean immigrants. Interestingly, through time, for some people this term no longer carries a negative connotation. In this text, I use all terms, with the exception of '*jamaiquino*' and 'West Indian', interchangeably.

### **Documents**

With regard to the archival research, I conducted research in the Latin American Collection at the University of Florida, Gainesville, the Elvira Cape Library's special collections in Santiago, the Santiago municipal archive, the West Indian Cultural Centre

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<sup>30</sup> For instance, Graciela Chailloux 2001 writes, "What was important for those who remained was the fact that they now constituted families of 'pichones'—children of immigrants. These families were usually large and known as the Caribbean Cubans" (51). Here is yet another term. Though I did infrequently hear them referred to as '*los caribeños*', I don't recall ever hearing them referred to as '*cubanos caribeños*'.

in Guantánamo, lodge documents, and the files of past association presidents, including documents concerning the contemporary revitalization that some people were kind enough to share. I mined these sources for any information that would assist me in reconstructing the social and material lives of the immigrants and their families. As such, I reviewed census data, correspondence from the *centrales* on which they worked, by-laws and meeting minutes from the associations that they established, government records concerning control or management of these associations, and personal family records that included passports, birth and death certificates, photographs, letters, articles, fraternity lodge booklets, awards and certificates, and any information chronicling the experience on the Naval Base.

This archival information further contributed to my understanding of the social world into which most of my research participants were born. One of the questions about the direction of this research concerned the inclusion of rich historical data that is such a critical part of this Cuban branch of the Anglophone Caribbean diaspora. The larger context of the migration and establishment in Cuba really had to become background to my project and much of the historical data in this dissertation is derived from secondary sources. Though family history is where many of my discussions with research participants began, it is not often where they ended as recalling the past often lent itself to comparison with the more recent past as well as the present. As much of the work done on this population has been historical, I was sure to focus on and incorporate any data that helped me to understand their relationship to the revolutionary movement and post-'59 society. Fortunately, some of the municipal archival material and more of the

personal records contained data from the late '50s and early '60s, and allowed me to glimpse into one of the most significant transitions in the individual and collective lives of research participants.

### ***Methodological Reflections and Researcher Positionality***

There were several advantages and disadvantages to traveling back and forth to Cuba over a four-year period. I found that the departures and months that passed between trips did result in a loss of momentum. At the same time, particularly because I kept in contact with key informants through letters, phone calls, and electronic mail, my returns and general consistency constituted displays of sincerity, facilitating trust and intimacy. Similar to those researchers who are able to spend several uninterrupted months in the field, my presence, though clearly an anomaly in the larger scheme of things, became somewhat commonplace. I was more akin to a visiting cousin than an adopted daughter. Though undoubtedly the latter is more of an insider, sometimes people will reveal things to outsiders that they refrain from sharing with one another. Though impossible to substantiate, I often wondered if this was likely the case during my research.

One of the primary disadvantages of taking multiple trips was the interruption in my developing optimum facility with Cuban Spanish and its many colloquialisms. Though I lived in Spain, traveled in Latin America, and studied Spanish for six consecutive years and took additional Spanish language and Latin American literature and history courses, Cuba was my first experience of immersion in Caribbean Spanish. I am quite certain that remaining in Cuba for a year uninterrupted would certainly have moved me further along

the continuum from competency to mastery. However, it is difficult to assess the consequence that this would have had on my research findings or access to information.

The other drawback to this way of conducting field research was the energy that I needed to expend in making the arrangements on four separate occasions. This was due in large part to the hostile atmosphere that characterizes U.S.-Cuba relations. As a U.S. citizen, one needs a license from the U.S. government to travel to Cuba for the specific period of time and purpose for which one desires to stay in the country. Though I was able to travel under a license held by my university, this license only allowed for stays of one month, after which time it had to be renewed. On the Cuban side, one needs a special visa authorizing a stay beyond the 30 days with one option to renew for another 30 days, amounting to a maximum two months allowed on a tourist visa. As I could not purchase a plane ticket with a return date beyond the 30 days allowed by the visa, I also had to adjust my return flight accordingly. After several attempts to obtain a student visa prior to entering the island in 2003, I could no longer delay my trip and resolved to pursue the visa with the help of the University of Oriente's foreign student office while in Cuba. Though I was able to establish a guarded affiliation with the university, acquiring an advisor and paying matriculation fees, this student visa would never materialize in spite of assurances to the contrary.

As fate would have it, a few weeks and several frustrated visits to this office later, the news reported that several diplomats had been expelled from the Cuban Mission in New York and the Cuban Interests Section in Washington DC. I could not help but wonder

whether this, in addition to the Cuban policy that only the University of Havana was authorized to host students from the United States, had anything to do with the silence around my visa. With the financial assistance of my department and generosity of friends who were conducting research in nearby Haiti, I was able to fly to Port au Prince just before my 60-day deadline, spend a week in Haiti, then return to Cuba on a new visa.

Unfortunately, this was not to be the last time that my field research was to get caught in the crossfire of the diplomatic disaster that is U.S.-Cuba relations. As a student in the CUNY system conducting research in Cuba, I was able to use the license granted to the CUNY-Caribbean Exchange Program. However, in the fated election year of 2004, there were sweeping changes in U.S. laws regarding relations with Cuba. In addition to prohibiting Cuban Americans from traveling to visit family in Cuba more often than once every three years, restricting the definition of family to parents, grandparents, children, and siblings, and limiting the amount of money and goods that can be sent to or brought into the country, there were new regulations regarding institutional licenses to travel. CUNY-Caribbean Exchange had to renew their license and though it was ultimately reissued, under more restrictive stipulations of course, this caused me to have to postpone one of my 2004 trips.

Though the aggravation and constant uncertainty resulting from such circumstances complicated the research process, it was a source of commiseration between my research participants and me. For instance, in 2005, when I paid a visit to Teresa, a first generation Jamaican Cuban spiritist, her first words to me were “How did you escape from that

man?”! It took me a minute and some additional explaining on her part for me to understand that she was referring to Bush and not a domineering boyfriend she mistakenly believed me to have. We followed this clarification by talking politics and exchanging information about the latest atrocities committed by the US against the poor people of the world. Teresa defended Fidel and the Revolution, emphasizing Cuba’s internationalism. She actually asked me about Angela Davis and we talked about the assassination of leaders in Latin America and Africa who tried to stand up to the United States in the name of *el pueblo* (‘the people’). There was a mixture of pride and amusement in her face when she said that “they” hadn’t gotten Fidel in 46 years. Many a conversation began like this one, with discussions of ‘*los métodos de Bush*’<sup>31</sup> and how it is that I was able to travel to Cuba in the first place. Indeed, each trip was a sort of triumph over all of the bureaucratic mechanisms that exist to prevent the information exchange and human connection that my presence made possible. To a certain extent, the obstacles were something over which to bond with my subjects.

However, my identity as not simply a foreigner, but a U.S. citizen, did not always or perhaps even often gain me entrée into people’s lives as a co-conspirator against government-imposed restrictions. It seemed to be first and foremost a source of curiosity, an opportunity to refute or verify their beliefs about life in the United States. It must be understood that these beliefs have developed in a context where the United States is a looming presence in the lives of those who call Cuba their home. This is due in part to history, geography, ideology, and/or some combination of the three. From its constant

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<sup>31</sup> Literally, this means ‘Bush’s methods’ and referred to the new legislation that tightened the U.S. embargo the summer prior to the 2004 election.

mention in the media to the U.S. films that are aired on television every week to the reports of relatives living in the United States, it is nearly impossible to expel the neighbor to the north from Cuban consciousness. Thus, I frequently found myself in conversation with people who, once they got the usual pleasantries out of the way, seemed eager to get to the business of finding out whether IT is as wealthy, as expensive, as isolating, as racist, as violent, as modern, as free as they heard, hoped or feared. Even when those questions remained unarticulated, I had the sense that the less bold were studying me as if something in the way I held my head or received their generosity would provide a clue. I was the observed participant as much as participant observer.

Part of what made me an ideal informant was that I am a brown-skinned woman of mixed African-American and African-Caribbean descent. The fact that I am single, have dreadlocks, don't eat meat aside from fish, and am educated were the most concrete facets of my identity that seemed to have bearing on the ways that I was inserted into the research families and communities. While it is difficult to determine exactly how my demographic and personal traits came to bear upon the data that I gained access to, I can briefly comment upon certain telling interactions and the general sense that I developed over time. First, it is important to mention that the same characteristic often has opposite effects on different people. So, for instance, while having locks and certain dietary habits might have mitigated my foreignness for Rasta participants, it may have heightened my difference for those who follow a more mainstream lifestyle.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Indeed, my hair was an instrument of research in and of itself, but that is material for another dissertation.

Though without question, my being a woman had a pronounced impact on my overall experience in the field, I would hazard to guess that it is my blackness combined with my being educated and '*educada*' (this roughly translates to 'well-mannered') that was more salient in the kinds of information to which I did and did not have access. Something that was repeated to me on several different occasions was the belief that white people held racist views of black people, regardless of how they may present themselves. It was assumed that I, as a black woman, understood this and could participate in conversations about experiences of racial discrimination. At the same time, many of those who had uncritical praise for the Revolution wanted to emphasize to me the absence of racism in Cuban society (read: as compared to U.S. society). Of course, had I not been open to those conversations, or if I was of the opinion that racism did not exist or had little influence over people's life chances, the extent to which people shared their experiences might have been different.

### ***Organization***

The dissertation is organized into five main chapters. Chapter Two provides some background information about the migration, the immigrants, and the social contexts from which they came and into which they entered. Using archival data as well as accounts of research participants concerning their knowledge and perceptions of the status of immigrant communities from the English-speaking Caribbean, it explores the positional of British West Indian immigrants in early twentieth century Cuba. This chapter illustrates the historical foundations of the two narratives of Anglophone

Caribbean experience in Cuba: namely, that of the socially mobile, respectable immigrant and that of the disenfranchised worker in pursuit of social justice.

This is followed by an exploration of the processes of social mobility through the revolutionary period that is the subject of Chapter Three. According to one narrative, Anglophone Caribbean immigrants in Cuba were able to get out of cutting cane and use their skills to get better jobs within the sugar cane industry and/or leave the plantation all together. Some of them were able to access economic stability and even social mobility through work at the Naval Base and using their skills in the trades to build a life for themselves that allowed for some measure of autonomy. Their communities were still relatively poor but they pooled their resources, achieved a certain level of stability and were able to establish churches, lodges, English schools, and social clubs. According to this narrative, with the triumph of the Revolution, they were in an ideal position to catapult themselves into professional status.

Having dedicated Chapter Three to the issue of social mobility and its relationship to identity, Chapter Four demonstrates that black immigrant aspirations are not confined to the economic sphere. They have also been moved by the call for justice and, as such, have agitated for equality both in the pre-Revolutionary and revolutionary periods, from Garveyism to building socialism. I focus on participants' memories of and involvement in the Revolution to argue that, while they are the inheritors of bourgeois liberalism and notions of British cultural superiority, their involvement in radical political action is evidence of their inclusion in the legacy of black emancipatory projects.

Chapter Five examines how people of English-speaking Caribbean origin have constructed and positioned their cultural identity as a means to mediate racial inequality. It explores the extent to which claims to a superior blackness are an attempt to determine the conditions upon which people of African descent are included in the nation while the adoption of an African Diasporic consciousness is a move to establish oneself outside of the nation. Chapter Five is also concerned with the external economic and political circumstances in which certain facets of and attention to the diversity of black subjectivities become highlighted or significant.

These questions are examined further in Chapter Six, which focuses on the economic and social dynamics of Cuba's Special Period. Providing some background to the national economic crisis that gripped Cuba in the early 1990s, Chapter Six relies upon ethnographic data to analyze the impact of the Special Period on people's daily lives, particularly people of more African descent. Situating the revitalization of institutions and the accompanying representations of "West Indianness" temporally, it moves to consider the extent to which the renewed interest in English-speaking Caribbean origin is one response to the economic, social and psychological crisis of the Special Period.

The Conclusion will review the main findings of the research: (1) There are at least two related narratives of English-speaking Caribbean origin, one that resembles a politics of respectability and another that speaks to social activism. The assertion of respectable blackness, however problematic, is a means of challenging predominant racist attitudes

and practices through defining the terms of inclusion into the nation. (2) People of English-speaking Caribbean origin historically had an ambivalent relationship to the Cuban nation. The persistence of racism in revolutionary society, particularly as it manifests itself in the lives of more successful black people, contributed to this ambivalence. (3) The resurgence of ethnic institutions during the Special Period is an indication that market oriented reforms exacerbate underlying fissures in the post-colonial social landscape, placing the dream of social and economic justice further out of reach. The Conclusion will interrogate the significance of the waning force of the English-speaking Caribbean resurgence in the contexts of Cuba's halting reforms and the concrete and ideological tensions between social support and individual gain that play themselves out at the level of local interaction, national policy, and global imperatives. It will then consider the extent to which the current turn against neo-liberal reform and U.S dominance in Latin America signals the birth of a viable option to current polarities.

## CHAPTER TWO

### IN SEARCH OF FERTILE SOIL: ENGLISH-SPEAKING CARIBBEAN MIGRATION, MOBILITY, AND COMMUNITY BEFORE THE REVOLUTION

*The objective [of the British West Indian Welfare Centre] was to help and offer protection in their capacity as foreigners. At that time, the economic and social situation here in Cuba was very hard. The dream that they came here looking for they did not find in reality and what they found was an economic situation that was very difficult... On the one hand, these immigrants had a difficult situation in their countries. They were poor, mostly agricultural workers... [and] land in these islands is volcanic land, they weren't islands with fertile land or anything like that and so land out of which they could get anything was little, there was very little space for agriculture... at that time, there wasn't tourism like now, which is the main livelihood of the islands, so life was very hard, very hard. Cuba, among the Caribbean islands, was a jewel, a pearl in the years '10, '12, '14. With the invasion of the Americans there came the sugar companies, the United Fruit Company and more centrales so they sent for laborers, they needed a large labor force. These people, in their islands, heard that, in Cuba, there were jobs and the opportunity to make money. It was propaganda really. Many of them had left right from Panama where they worked constructing the canal and when this was over, they hadn't really found what it was that they were looking for there. They didn't want to go back to their country so they came to Cuba, looking... the situation in their islands, the little possibility for development, the lack of resources, the misery in which they lived, and the talk that they heard about Cuba, this stimulated the migration to Cuba... [They had] false illusions. Yes, some people found jobs because the sugar industry was developing and there were jobs in the centrales... [and] in Guantánamo there was also development in the railroad... so in a certain way, there were some sources for jobs, which is not to say that there were some great resources, but there were jobs that would sustain oneself, to survive. On the one hand, they didn't find what they were looking for, but neither... it's to say that they were an adventurous people so though they came to find one thing, they didn't find it but were ashamed to return empty-handed so they started to have the hope that tomorrow it could be better, that they could get it and for this many stayed here. Some left, but a good part stayed in Cuba and integrated themselves into the work life here, into the agro-industrial field, part agricultural and part industrial. And they established themselves. Faced with the small possibility of returning home with money, they accepted their new situation and began their families and lives here in Cuba.<sup>33</sup>*

The purpose of this chapter is two-fold. First, it is dedicated to characterizing the migration and situating the immigrants in the social and cultural world from which they

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<sup>33</sup> Author interview with Edward, August 11, 2004, Guantánamo, Cuba.

came and into which they settled. Second, in examining the world of the immigrants and the communities that they created, it analyzes the relationship between the achievement of economic security and/or social mobility and a British West Indian identity in the period prior to the Revolution. Narratives of Anglophone Caribbean experience emerge from particular economic, social, and political circumstances that not only changed over time but also varied depending upon one's particular placement within the hierarchy of the community. Ultimately, this chapter seeks to illustrate how social inequality, particularly as it manifested in the lives of people of more African descent, in the English-speaking Caribbean and in Cuba, has driven both narratives of respectability and radicalism.

As can be gleaned from the interview excerpt above, people of English-speaking Caribbean origin occupied an ambiguous position in the social structure of early twentieth-century Cuba. While they were by no means privileged, their ability to speak English and status as British subjects separated them from other immigrants and black groups in a context of North American dominance. Furthermore, there were those among them who were able to leverage particular skills in order to secure a more favorable status. One of the issues that quickly came to the fore in investigating English-speaking Caribbean migration to Cuba and the early experiences of immigrants in the recently formed republic was the distinctions that existed within and between various social groups. Recent literature on Caribbean migration to Cuba addresses the differences in the Haitian and Anglophone Caribbean experience (McLeod 1998; Giovannetti 2001; Espronceda 1999) and the points of conflict and convergence between immigrant and

native workers has also been the subject of interest (Carr 1998; Estévez 1988; Estévez Rivero, 2003).

However, differences among English-speaking Caribbean immigrants<sup>34</sup> and processes of stratification within the group remain unclear. My research suggests that these divisions are important in understanding the distinct narratives that emerge from Anglophone Caribbean experiences and the dynamics of the revitalization of ethnicity in the contemporary period. Furthermore, the social hierarchies that existed and/or developed within the immigrant population in the pre-revolutionary period might also come to bear upon the extent to which conclusions about their self-perception and self-promotion as British might be applied to the entire immigrant population (Charlton 2005; Giovannetti 2001; Carr 1998).

### ***British West Indian Immigration and Settlement in Cuba***

#### **Frustrated Freedom in the British West Indies**

The oft given explanations for the flight of people from the English-speaking Caribbean include high unemployment and underemployment caused by the contraction of the sugar industry, a shortage of job opportunities, generally low wages, and population pressure, particularly in Barbados (Marshall 1985; Knight 1985; Chomsky 1996). Related to the development of industrial capitalism, the severe contraction of the sugar industry in the mid-19th century, a process that was accelerated by the British Sugar Duties Act of 1846,

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<sup>34</sup> A notable exception is Giovannetti (2001) who effectively addresses differences between migration from the eastern Caribbean and that from Jamaica.

which eliminated the guarantee of a British market for Caribbean sugar, resulted in a shortage of adequate opportunities to support a life not marked by destitution. Even with the availability of land for rental or sale due to the dramatic reduction in the number of British Antillean sugar estates from around 2200 in 1838 to 800 in 1900, the plummeting prices of sugar and general unreliability of the market for tropical raw materials limited the profitability of agriculture. Indeed, remaining estates complained of labor shortages, not simply because the former enslaved were unwilling to work on the plantations, preferring to be producers themselves, but because the wages offered were so low (Knight 1985).

While the opportunity for black people to achieve a greater level of self-determination through land ownership created a peasantry substantial enough to reconfigure the social structure, this route to mobility quickly narrowed through various efforts to wrest land from squatters and undermine attempts to buy land (Scarano 1989). Moreover, the importation of Asian laborers, imposition of taxation, implementation of debt peonage, high cost of basic commodities, and the deeply entrenched color/class hierarchy seriously compromised the hoped for impact of emancipation (Newton 1984; Rose 2002; Welch 2002; Mintz 1974). The formerly enslaved responded to this onslaught of opposition to their survival in various ways, the most obvious one, given the subject of this dissertation, being migration abroad. However, they also migrated to urban areas in large numbers, diversified agricultural production as well as individual skills that were particularly valuable in urban environments, engaged in collective action such as rioting and revolts, and strategized to acquire land and education (Carter 2002; Moore and

Johnson 2004; Newton 1984). Here, I will pay particular attention to the issues of land and education as they relate to the shifts in social hierarchies as well as the escalating frustrations of those who migrated.

### **Stratification: Land and Education, Color and Culture**

Interestingly, one of the most significant changes in the post-emancipation period was the growth in numbers and prosperity of a middle stratum that was not exclusively from the colored population. In Jamaica, where approximately 75 percent of the immigrants to Cuba originated, land was acquired by freedmen in three ways: squatting, individual purchase, and as members of newly established church communities (Mintz 1974). In the immediate post-emancipation period, leaders of the Baptist and Methodist missionary churches began to buy ruined estates with the intention of resettling parishioners as independent peasants in church communities.<sup>35</sup> Church leaders viewed this as an opportunity to provide greater rewards to those Africans who fully committed themselves to western Christianity by living in such communities, having officially rejected African spiritual practices as uncivilized and savage. According to Mintz, people from these church-founded free villages were likely to be more literate, thrifty, closer to and dependant upon organized Christian churches, and composed of monogamous families than the rest of the freedman population (1974: 171). As will be discussed throughout this dissertation, nearly a century and half later, these qualities are used to describe West Indian immigrants to Cuba by their descendants.

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<sup>35</sup> This was known as the 'free village movement' in Jamaica (Mintz 1960:160).

This slight expansion of the middle stratum in post-emancipation society was also due to the upward mobility of some members of the black majority through teaching in elementary schools—something that did not require a secondary school education. Education, also articulated by research participants and reported in the literature to be a value of those who migrated to Cuba, was closely linked to social ‘betterment’. After emancipation, it was the religious institutions that argued for popular education in the form of compulsory religious instruction. The Negro Education Grant, part of emancipation legislation, was supposed to support this; however, the funds were inadequate to educate the majority of the population at even a primary level (Gordon 1963). This situation worsened after 1845 when the British government ceased to grant money for education to the West Indies and did not do so again until the passage of a half- century (Campbell 2002: 294).<sup>36</sup>

The failure to create a literate British West Indian population was also evident in the general inaccessibility of secondary school education, which made education, in addition to access to land, a basis of stratification. Secondary education, available after 1871, was not an option for the majority because most received a poor primary education and therefore could not pass into secondary school based on their performance. For those exceptional students, there were fees involved and grants available for only a very few (Gordon 1963:93). However, when the children of industrious yet uneducated or poorly educated people were able to win a place in secondary school, they had the opportunity to

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<sup>36</sup> The colonial government was responsible for allocating some of its funds to education and, between 1865-85 a system of payment for results was instituted. In response to criticisms of inefficiency, grants were given based on students’ performance in reading, writing, and arithmetic, in certain other subject information, and on teacher effectiveness in the areas of discipline and management (Gordon 1963: 79). This resulted in even lower salaries and poorer instruction.

acquire the language and culture necessary to enter the middle class (Brereton 1989: 90). As anything beyond primary school was overwhelmingly for the white and colored middle classes, less than one percent of children in this age group (Gordon: 239, 266),<sup>37</sup> this was the language and culture of members of these dominant classes. Thus, though land and education were accessible to a greater proportion of blacks than during slavery, they continued to be a mechanism by which British West Indian societies were stratified by color and previous condition of servitude.

Such social mobility was inextricably linked to culture, understood as behavior and values, as well as color. As Moore and Johnson (2004) note that, in the Jamaican case, the mainstream, stable, functioning cultural matrix of the black majority was targeted by the alternative, dominant socio-cultural religious and moral order based upon British imperial ideologies and middle-class Victorian ideas (xiii). Even as the middle strata grew, and grew darker, the values and vision remained the same, particularly among those who were influential members of the communities (James, 1973; Garvey 1973; Brereton 1989). According to dominant ideology (not to be confused with popular ideology), economic and social progress was linked to respectability, “a value complex emphasizing the cultivation of education, thrift, industry, self-sufficiency via land ownership, moderate Christian living, community uplift, the constitution of family through legal marriage and related gendered expectations, and leadership by the educated middle classes” (Thomas 2004: 5).

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<sup>37</sup> Of this group who had access to a secondary education, aside from the minute number who won scholarships to study medicine or law abroad, most became white-collar workers in government or commercial offices.

While social values such as discipline and thrift, and the state of poverty in which most West Indians lived were by no means mutually exclusive, much like social mobility and dark skin, they tended to work against each other. The color/class hierarchy as well as the post-emancipation shifts that were dictated by the growth of industrial capitalism created tremendous frustration. As “attempts by the masses to conform to elite and middle-class standards inevitably fail, partly because West Indian society offers little opportunity to realize these standards, partly because it is in the self-interest of local elites to bar lower-class access (Lowenthal 1973: 12),” those who were indeed willing to conform but just didn’t have the luck to be rewarded for it would have been among those who migrated. They would enter their port of destination with the belief that hard work, sacrifice, moderation, and a chance at obtaining education would bolster them into middle class status. What I am arguing is that this element, though not necessarily numerically dominant, has come to dominate representations of the English-speaking Caribbean population in Cuba.

### ***Escape to Cuba: Land of Upheaval and Opportunity***

#### **Cuba at War and U.S. Intervention**

The Cuba to which English-speaking Caribbean immigrants migrated had recently emerged from thirty years of wars fought for the conjoined issues of anti-colonialism and emancipation. During the final year and a half of the War of Independence, which lasted from 1895 to 1898), Cuba became the stage for the Spanish-American War, marking the beginning of the fateful relationship between the United States and Cuba in which the

United States became the dominant economic, political, and cultural presence in Cuba until the 1959 Revolution. In what essentially amounted to a changing of the guard between Spain and the United States, the latter first went about violating its own government's amendment,<sup>38</sup> establishing a provisional government that turned over the reins only after Cubans were successfully coerced into agreeing to the Platt Amendment, which was passed in 1901. This amendment to the Cuban constitution legally sealed the U.S. hijacking of Cuban independence, putting limits on Cuba's ability to enter into agreements with foreign powers and manage its own economy, in addition to giving the U.S the right to intervene militarily whenever it saw fit and to hold title to and maintain land used for a naval base.

One of the reasons that the United States was able to intervene and become a dominant force in Cuba was that Cubans, in fighting for their independence from Spain, had been internally divided regarding the route to and character of this independence. Much of the dissent revolved around national identity and the position of people of African descent in the emergent republic. At the same time that Cubans promoted notions of racelessness and racial democracy, the African presence continued to be associated with savagery, black power was undermined, and fears about Cuba being Africanized and therefore lost to the circle of civilized nations abounded (Helg 1995; de la Fuente 2001). As we shall see, both this issue of national racial identity and U.S. dominance were central to the English-speaking Caribbean experience in Cuba.

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<sup>38</sup> The Teller amendment of 1898 proclaims that "the US government would disclaim any 'disposition or interest to exercise sovereignty, jurisdiction or control over the island except for the pacification thereof and assert its determination, when that is accomplished, to leave the government and the control of the island to its people'" (Thomas 1998: 376).

Though the United States had substantial investments in Cuba prior to the end of the Independence War, this economic interest skyrocketed during the period of the ‘pseudo-Republic’ when North American businesses and civilians alike took economic advantage of a Cuba reeling from thirty years of war. At the turn of the century, Cuban property owners without capital, income or collateral were forced to sell their land far below its value, creating tremendous opportunities for thousands of Americans (as well as Spaniards) who wanted to escape hard times in their homelands brought on by an economic crisis of the late 1890s (Pérez 1995: 134). North American settlers established farms and businesses, sought jobs in the booming public works activity aimed at rebuilding and expanding the country’s infrastructure,<sup>39</sup> and pursued investment opportunities. The sugar industry was the primary target of U.S. investment such that by 1908, the entire northern coast of Oriente was owned by North American sugar corporations and within twenty-five years of the founding of the republic, the most salient feature of the Cuban economy was the U.S. dominance of sugar production (Pérez 1999: 221).

### **Assault on Black Power**

*“In general the relations between Americans and Spaniards in Cuba were excellent, while those between Cubans and Americans were almost invariably bad. General Young*

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<sup>39</sup> North Americans went about building roads, bridges, highways, a trolley system, parks, pavilions, sports stadiums, power and plumbing systems, and railroads, all of which involved builders, contractors, architects, engineers, lawyers, bankers, materials, and capital—all provided by the U.S. Pérez (1999) argues that this transformation of public space and daily living had a greater impact than the U.S.’s political relationship with Cuba at the turn of the century. He says, “The larger significance of the North American intervention, and certainly the enduring consequences of this presence, had less to do with political relationships than with social realignments. It was embedded in the ways in which U.S. normative systems and moral hierarchies worked their way into everyday life, primarily in the form of a vast cultural transfer, one that was facilitated by the great material impoverishment of Cubans in 1898” (115).

*was found speaking of Calixto García's army as 'a lot of degenerates, absolutely devoid of honour or gratitude. They are no more capable of self government than the savages.' Montejo thought that the 'Americans didn't like the Negroes much. They used to shout "nigger nigger" and burst out laughing.' Spanish officers in contrast were greeted as chivalrous brothers in arms...*" (Thomas 1998: 410).

Though Hugh Thomas is an imperial apologist,<sup>40</sup> his historical research from which the above quote is drawn well explains both the lines of imperial allegiance and their racist underpinnings that amounted to the further subjugation of an ostensibly independent Cuba. While all of this economic development was underway, projecting the image of progress and civilization so coveted by Cuban elites, white foreigners continued to hold sway in the political and economic life of a nation that many had sacrificed everything to wrest from Spain. Relations between Cuba and Spain had continued such that 40 percent of urban property and thousands of businesses were in the hands of Spaniards who were recruited to work and settle in Cuba by the hundreds of thousands (Naranjo Orovio 1997: 37). Many of them left poverty in Spain to become successful businessmen, achieving the Cuban American dream.<sup>41</sup> Enjoying white colonial privilege, Spaniards, even those who were loyalist or loyalist sympathizers and thus were *against* independence, were given preference over Cubans of color and even came to dominate all of the expanding sectors of labor.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> He considers Spanish rule in Cuba as an overall success because it created a "Spanish type society in Cuba" and race relations there were less tense than in the Anglo-Saxon societies of America, which in his view, was home to "mild yet undeniable racism" (418).

<sup>41</sup> For instance, Ana Julia Jatar-Hausmann (1999) writes of her grandfather's process of social mobility, "Don Cruz had left poverty in the Canary Islands almost a half century ago. At fifteen years of age he arrived in Cuba looking for a land of opportunities, and he had found it. Without a university degree, he saw his four children graduate at the University of Havana. He had worked his way up from delivering groceries in a small town, to owning and managing a nice hotel in Havana" (2).

<sup>42</sup> "Except as musicians, Spaniards exceeded the number of Afro-Cubans in all professional occupations. ...Even in the distribution of public jobs, with salaries paid by the Cuban state, Spaniards were in a good position compared with blacks; in 1907 there were 20 Spanish government officials (compared with 9 Afro-Cubans), and 377 Spanish male teachers (compared with 113 Afro-Cubans); Spaniards were on a par with Afro-Cubans as firemen, and only as policemen and soldiers were they less numerous than Afro-

Cubans of color were by and large being systematically excluded from economic opportunities and subjected to the segregationist practices U.S. occupation forces legitimized and expanded upon on the basis of the ideology of scientific racism (de la Fuente 2001a: 40). One of the United State's first tasks in subduing the Cuban population was to disband the Revolutionary Army, which had a relatively remarkable level of racial equality, leaving Afro-Cuban fighters powerless and jobless as those appointed to government positions were pro-American conservatives from white elite and middle class backgrounds (Helg 1995: 94; also see Ferrer 1999 on racial politics in the Revolutionary Army). Indeed, people of color, the poor, and nationalists were underrepresented in any positions of authority such as those in the police force and rural guard where applicants had to be literate, have the money to provide their own uniform and horse, and have recommendations from elite pro-North American Cubans (Helg 1995: 96).<sup>43</sup> This, in addition to the protection of Spanish properties, the retention of Spaniards in public offices, and the promotion of Spanish immigration indicates that the most salient factor influencing Afro-Cubans' condition was not simply their identity as Cubans in a period of foreign domination, but their race in an epoch of triumphant white domination.

The tremendous injustice perpetrated against the black heroes of the revolutionary wars and black people in general when the United States began its occupation of Cuba would

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Cubans (13 percent [of the force were Spanish compared to 21 percent Afro-Cuban)...Because the received preference in some trades, Spaniards strengthened the colonial Spanish-controlled guilds, which included few white Cubans and often turned away Afro-Cubans (Helg 1995:110).

<sup>43</sup> According to the census of 1899, only 24 percent of Afro-Cubans could read and write compared to 44 percent of white Cubans—by 1907, the rate increased to 45 percent for blacks and 58 percent for whites; 198 men of color were registered as having a post-secondary education compared to 8,629 whites (Helg 1995: 129).

not have been possible had white Cubans, military and civilians alike, not been adverse to (or, in the least, ambivalent about) the notion of racial equality and justice. Those U.S. soldiers, government officials, missionaries and fortune hunters who were steeped in notions of black inhumanity and believed it their task to civilize all Cubans were effective because they encountered a society that had a wealth of discriminatory practices upon which to build.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the post-independence social landscape in which people of color had limited or no access to education, particularly beyond primary school, were excluded from jobs in the military, commerce and the professions,<sup>45</sup> and were socially undesirable, was disturbingly similar to the pre-independence terrain. People of color were socially segregated, subjected to imprisonment and physical brutality, and relegated to manual and service jobs such as day laborers, construction workers, gardeners, maids, laundresses, cooks, etc. In further efforts to strengthen white privilege and assert white supremacy, African cultural practices were denigrated, African religions and their practitioners were vilified and persecuted, and black culture rather than white racism was held responsible for black people's inferior social position.

The wide participation and prominence of blacks in positions of authority in the revolutionary wars had brought about the anticipation of radical social change in which old social relationships would be transformed. Though personal experience of actual upward mobility in the military was limited, the tacit agreement that blacks' decisive

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<sup>44</sup> While this has been the subject of some debate in Cuban historiography as is evident from the contrasting way in which Ferrer and Helg frame Cuban racial politics, the events of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries do not support the notion that the U.S. somehow corrupted a people committed to racial equality and justice.

<sup>45</sup> In 1907, 7 percent of government administrative jobs went to Afro-Cubans and all of these were minor jobs such as janitor, messenger, and clerical worker. Out of 8,238 policemen and soldiers enlisted, 21 percent were Afro-Cuban, all in lower ranks. Afro-Cubans represented 439 of 5,964 teachers, 9 out of 205 government officials, 9 out of 1,240 physicians and surgeons, and 4 out of 1,347 lawyers (Helg 1995:100).

contribution in the war would be recognized and proportionately rewarded after independence led to “Afro-Cubans’ *expectations* regarding their position in the *future* [to] increase dramatically” (Helg 1995:12). It was this expectation of justice and the experience of white betrayal on the part of conservatives and liberals alike that led black veterans to begin organizing and eventually form the first black political party in the hemisphere, the *Partido Independiente de Color*, in 1908.

In May of 1912, the *Independientes* staged an armed protest sparked by their exclusion from participation in electoral politics. Some historians portray this as an uprising, others as a show of force meant to antagonize government and still others as a protest (Helg 1994; de la Fuente 2001a; Thomas 1998). The propaganda of the time billed it as a black rebellion in which people of color were setting about randomly slaughtering whites and taking over land. The Cuban government responded by rallying its military, rural guards, and militia, giving them *carte blanche* to terrorize black inhabitants of Oriente province, murdering anywhere between 3,000-6,000 fellow Cubans. The United States sent in around 500 marines to protect North American property, stimulating Cuban resentment and providing more justification for brutality. Among the consequences of this demonstration of white domination were an increase in racial tensions that was particularly visible in the conflicts over social space and the stimulation of Spanish immigration for the purpose of white colonization (de la Fuente 2001: 78; Naranjo Orovio 1997: 39).

The formation of the *Partido Independiente de Color* and the massacre of the black population that took place in 1912 are emblematic of race relations in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Cuba and are critical events that impacted the world into which immigrants to Cuba entered. It was a world divided, where people had struggled to transform the myth of racial equality into a reality through, among other things, refusing to acquiesce to white power. The *Independientes* clearly belong to a tradition in which black resistance is a key to resisting other forms of social injustice. At the same time that their platform insisted upon an end to racially discriminatory practices in employment, social spaces, education, and immigration, included in their demands were measures that benefited ordinary Cubans regardless of color.<sup>46</sup> In spite of the widespread benefit that such changes would bring, the party was met with opposition from its inception, charged with racism and accused of putting race before the Cuban nation. This charge would prove to endure into the contemporary revolutionary period when identifying and discussing racism would be taboo and considered a threat to national unity.

### **Race, Immigration and Building the Cuban Nation**

Like many other nations born out of genocide, plantation slavery, colonialism, and white supremacy, Cuba maintained a national racial ideology that professed racial equality and tended to deny or else minimize systemic anti-black racism and its social consequences across political and economic regimes (de la Fuente 2001; Helg 1996). Instances of the social inclusion and/or material success of some people of African descent were used to

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<sup>46</sup> Among these demands were an increase in compulsory free education from 8 to 14 years old, free technical, secondary and university education, state control of private schools, abolition of the death penalty, reform of the judicial and penitentiary systems, establishment of an eight-hour work day and a system that gave Cubans priority in employment, and the distribution of national lands to Cubans (Helg 1995: 147).

substantiate a claim to racial equality rather than to exemplify the complexity of power and the workings of racial hierarchy. Indeed, the policy of *adelantar la raza*<sup>47</sup> and *blanqueamiento* or whitening, has been characterized as a means by which people of African descent can ‘elevate’ themselves: elevation through negation.

In the post-slavery period, the practice of whitening manifested itself at the national level in the area of immigration. With the influx of U.S. capital and plans for economic expansion, the problem of labor inevitably arose. The Spaniards entering the country, with the exception of those from the Canary Islands, didn’t work in agriculture (Naranjo Orovio 1997: 68). Although there is some dispute about whether the native Cuban population was significantly devastated as to require the importation of foreign workers, or if it was the case that the problem was not locating sufficient labor but locating labor that was sufficiently exploitable, the solution sought by U.S. interests was to import Caribbean laborers.

The presence of these ‘undesirable aliens’ was a tremendously contentious issue in both political and popular circles. Cubans were engaged in a furiously passionate struggle over their emerging national identity and at the heart of this battle lay race and its accompanying band of cultural signifiers. Like other new nations of the Americas, Cuba’s racial composition was viewed as the determining factor of its fate. ‘Barbados or Canada?’: was Cuba going to be black or white, savage and backward or civilized and modern (Chomsky, 2000)? European immigration was the solution to this quandary and

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<sup>47</sup> This translates as advancing or improving the race. It is a term and process that has both phenotypic and cultural/behavioral connotations and one that is most times obscured by less pernicious, euphemistic labels such as ‘miscegenation’ and ‘intermarriage’.

the importation of black workers from other Caribbean islands directly sabotaged efforts to whiten the island and thus signaled to some the miscarriage of a modern Cuba.<sup>48</sup> But the interests of the Cuban and U.S. capitalists who needed a voluminous supply of highly exploitable, mobile labor combined with the conditions on the other Caribbean islands in comparison to those in Cuba guaranteed such a workforce and resulted in the legal and illegal migration of hundreds of thousands of people (Petras 1988; Harpelle 1993 ; Wynter 2001).

### ***Migration and the Cuban Context***

#### **Demographic Considerations**

There are several demographic considerations regarding British West Indian migration to Cuba that are relevant to understanding the role that Cuba has played in the lives of these immigrants as well as their part in the ever-unfolding drama of the Cuban nation and society. Among these considerations are the geographic and social origins of the immigrants, their work experience and skills, the ebbs and flows of the migration, destinations and early settlement patterns within Cuba, and some of the problems in statistical data available regarding this population. Even though Cuba kept some of the best migration statistics in Latin America, it is extremely difficult if not impossible to calculate the exact number of immigrants who arrived in Cuba from the English-speaking

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<sup>48</sup> Around a million immigrants entered Cuba between 1902 and 1925, 600,000 stayed and 60 percent were from Spain. The other 40 percent were Jews from central and eastern Europe, Syrians, Lebanese, Palestinians, Chinese, North Americans, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and other Antilleans. Spanish immigrants, with the possible exception of those from the Canary Islands, did not go to Cuba to perform agricultural labor (Alvarez Estévez 1988:4).

Caribbean and were a part of “a migratory field that expanded to include new sites of economic dynamism as the decades wore on” (Putnam 2002: 11).

One reason for this, as Juan Pérez de la Riva points out, lies in the very definition of ‘immigrant’ used by the immigration authorities. They defined immigrant as “all persons arriving at the port with a third class ticket who did not have the sum of thirty dollars at the time of disembarkation” (1975: 75). Thus, those who traveled as passengers but planned to look for work in Cuba were not counted; or, perhaps, as Pérez de la Riva points out, may have been counted twice. Also, people traveled back and forth, were twice migrants and thus did not come directly from their island of origin,<sup>49</sup> were hired and brought in directly by contractors whose companies kept and held records of worker entry and exit,<sup>50</sup> and there were many who entered the country illegally,<sup>51</sup> all contributing to the inaccuracy of the numbers of people who migrated to and settled in Cuba.

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<sup>49</sup> “According to the available immigration data, between 1913-1924, more than 5,673 British Caribbean islanders traveled to Cuba from countries such as Panama, Costa Rica, and British Honduras. If one counts those classified as “English” as part of the West Indians, the number rises to 6,708 migrants. 3,571 came from Panama, 1,249 from Costa Rica, 1,717 from Central America, and 172 from British Honduras. Together with these groups, a total of 619 migrants categorized as Central Americans entered Cuba in 1919 and 1920...between 1915 and 1921, a total of 7,711 Jamaicans went [to Cuba] from outside Jamaica...from the United States...the Dutch Antilles...Hawaii...[and] the Dominican Republic” (Giovannetti:48).

<sup>50</sup> Puerto Padre is an example of this as it was under the control of the Chaparra and Delicias Sugar Mill and was the point through which laborers as well as the sugar they produced were moved. This activity was on the periphery of the sphere of Cuban authority and thus, for instance, the fact that laborers from the eastern Caribbean rather than from Jamaica dominated the British West Indian labor force entering Puerto Padre might not have been recorded in national records. Indeed, even in the company records, this group was referred to as ‘English’ as distinct from ‘Jamaican’ (Giovannetti: 51).

<sup>51</sup> McCleod 2000 reports finding one source that estimated that 12,000 African Caribbean immigrants entered Cuba clandestinely in 1910 alone (44). Similarly, Derrick (2001) found that the United Fruit Company recruited illegal laborers to work in Banes, Las Tunas, and Camagüey (32). Espronceda (1999) also notes that there was a significant presence of illegal immigrants throughout the period. Though it is believed that more Haitians entered illegally than Jamaicans, it has been estimated that, combined, there was one illegal immigrant for every two to three documented immigrants (49).

However, demographers and historians of this period estimate that, between 1898 and 1938, more than 140,000 British West Indians entered Cuba, the majority of them being males from Jamaica<sup>52</sup> (Pérez de la Riva, 1975; Alvarez Estévez, 1988; Wynter 2001; McCleod 2000<sup>53</sup>; Giovannetti 2001).<sup>54</sup> The entry points in Cuba for Jamaican immigrants were Oriente in the east and Camagüey, the adjacent province that stretched toward the center of the country. Though the numerical dominance of Jamaicans is an important characteristic of the migration as is indicated by the persistent use of the terms '*jamaicanos*' to refer to all migrants, it must not obscure the presence of the other islanders. For instance, "in 1926, the British Consulate in Santiago de Cuba reported to the Colonial Secretary in Kingston that along with 75,000 Jamaican migrants, there were 8,000 from Barbados, 2,000 from Grenada, 1,500 from Trinidad, 1,500 from St. Vincent, 500 from Antigua, 500 from St. Kitts, and 1,000 from St. Lucia and Martinique: in all at least 15,000 eastern Caribbean islanders" (Giovannetti 2001: 50). Between 1913 and 1923, about 75 percent of the immigrants came from Jamaica and the majority of the 25 percent remaining came from Barbados (Charlton 2005: 33). However, immigrants hailed from throughout the colonies and, depending on time period and specific location, those from the smaller islands could be a dominant numerical presence. Furthermore, the immigrants arrived in Cuba through a variety of routes and from different social and economic as well as geographical locations, unified by their desire to improve their life chances and the belief that Cuba may provide opportunities with which to do so.

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<sup>52</sup> The Jamaican population (in Jamaica) was 831,383 in 1911 and was only around 850,000 ten years later, suggesting a significant drain of the population through migration [to Cuba as well as the United States and other Latin American locations] (Wynter: 263).

<sup>53</sup> His figures from 1912 and 1931 indicate that around 116,000 British West Indians traveled to Cuba (McCleod, 2000:55).

<sup>54</sup> 1919 census data indicates that Jamaicans constituted 5.5 percent of the 339,082 foreigners in Cuba (11.7 percent of the total population) while 6.7 percent were categorized as born in the 'West Indies, excluding Porto Rico and Jamaica' (1919 Cuban census).

Mining the general migration statistics, it becomes clear that this was a period of great movement from all over the world to Cuba. It also reveals the extent to which the British West Indian presence was felt in Cuba at different moments changed during a forty-year period that was characterized by surges and lulls in migration and returns.<sup>55</sup> “According to Cuban government statistics, of the estimated 1.29 million immigrants who entered Cuba between 1902 and 1935, 781,311 (or 60 percent) were from Spain and 311,216 (or 24 percent) were from Haiti and the British West Indies” (McCleod, 2000:17). Between 1908 and 1911, 13,685 Antilleans came to Cuba, constituting the second largest migrant group in Cuba after the Spaniards, but this was prior to the real migration boom. Indeed, over half of the total migrants of the first three decades of the twentieth century entered between 1916 and 1920 due to the conditions created by World War I (Giovannetti 2001: 43). Just as with the outbreak of the Haitian Revolution that shifted the burden of world sugar production onto Cuba, the suspension of European beet sugar production due to the war led to a sugar boom and thus an increased demand for labor. While they certainly never superseded the Spanish immigrant population, the concentrated influx of laborers during this time period certainly must have had bearing on the social climate and experiences of the migrants.

Furthermore, the regional distribution of the foreign population is a critical part of understanding the social and cultural spheres in which immigrants negotiated their needs and created communities. In 1907, during the earlier phase of the migration, about half of

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<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Pérez de la Riva makes the point that, due to U.S. dominance, the North American model of immigration and settlement was inappropriately applied to this Caribbean population whose migrations were often followed by returns (1975: 75)

the Spanish-born were in urban areas and only 16 percent lived in the eastern part of the country (McCleod 2000: 41). The majority of Caribbean migrants entered through the port of Santiago de Cuba and remained in Oriente, the eastern province of the island where the population had been more decimated by the independence wars. Indeed, British West Indians constituted one in ten inhabitants of the region by 1931. The demographic picture is complicated when one considers not only that the Antillean immigrants were initially concentrated in the eastern provinces, but also in rural areas. Thus, their small population relative to Spaniards was not necessarily reflected at the local level.

The figures on British West Indian migration also don't speak to the foreign *black* presence of which these migrants were a part. Though there were many distinctions, the most important being language, between the British West Indians and the Haitians who entered the island during this period, they were perceived to belong to a larger mass of 'undesirable aliens'.<sup>56</sup> Within this group were all individuals categorized as 'of color', though national or racial composition of this population is difficult to ascertain from formal documents. For instance, the 1931 and 1943 censuses do provide data categorizing the foreign born population according to 'whites' and 'color', but there is no further breakdown based on origin of those foreigner classified as 'color'. Thus, the 153,846 foreigners of color living in Cuba at the time of the 1931 census refer to Jamaicans, Barbadians, Haitians, eastern Caribbean islanders and Africans.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> McCleod (2000) notes that between 1912-1931, 183,000 Haitians entered Cuba compared to 116,000 British West Indians (57).

<sup>57</sup> 1943 census (736).

Also unknown is the basis upon which the categories ‘white’ and ‘color’ are assigned. One source that provides a glimpse of the color of the immigrants is the municipal marriage records. For instance, the city of Santiago recorded the color (white, black or mulatto) of ‘Jamaicans’ who had civil marriages between 1901 and 1956. According to this data, there were 119 black-black unions, 19 black-mulatto, 35 mulatto-mulatto, 14 black-white, 9 white-white, and one white-mulatto. There are several issues that this data brings up. One is that some of the Jamaican born whites were actually children of white Cuban parents who fled to Jamaica during the war for independence, had children there and then returned in the early part of the century. The other issue, which is of course part of the larger debate about the Caribbean color/class hierarchy, is that other ‘Jamaicans’ categorized as ‘white’ might actually have been perceived as members of the brown middle strata in Jamaica.<sup>58</sup> While, by all accounts, the majority of the British West Indians who migrated to Cuba were categorized as ‘black’, the cases of ‘Jamaicans’ classified as ‘white’ or ‘mulatto’ certainly bring up interesting questions about the stratification of the population, issues that will be developed throughout this study and involve the occupational and educational profiles of the migrants.

### **Literacy and Skills**

There is contradictory evidence regarding the literacy of immigrants from the Anglophone Caribbean. According to secondary sources as well as research participants, their literacy was a feature that distinguished them from Haitians and Cuban laborers

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<sup>58</sup> A conflict of categorization actually occurred in the course of my research when one of my participants who was born in Jamaica and migrated to join her Jamaican grandmother identified her grandmother as ‘white’. When I mentioned this to another participant, she said that she wasn’t ‘white’, just very fair-skinned. My evaluation of her racial background based on photographs agrees with the latter interpretation.

(Carr, 1998). Immigration statistics indicate that, between 1912 and 1929, the illiteracy rate for Haitian immigrants arriving to Cuba was 84.4 percent as compared to 9.3 percent of British West Indians (McCleod 2000: 82).<sup>59</sup> According to the census of 1899, 24 percent of Afro-Cubans could read and write compared to 44 percent of white Cubans—by 1907, the rate increased to 45 percent for blacks and 58 percent for whites (Helg 1995:129). By 1919, the rate of blacks and native whites seemed to have stabilized as 44.8 percent of the ‘colored’ population of Oriente, 76.6 percent of foreign whites and 57.6 percent of native whites could read and write (‘Analysis of this Census of Population’, Cuba 1919 Census, 370).<sup>60</sup>

Given the wide failure in the British West Indies to produce a literate population, the fact that *90.7 percent* of the immigrants who entered Cuba legally between 1912 and 1929 claimed to be literate is puzzling. It is possible that those who migrated legally were disproportionately from that middle stratum that was able to obtain some primary education, however inadequate. It could also be that, in comparison to Haitians, they were considered literate. Indeed, a stark contrast with their native and foreign racial counterparts, even if it might be distorted or inaccurate, might explain enduring perception of people from the English-speaking Caribbean as being educated and better able to move out of agricultural work. A third possibility is that their ability to understand English, the language of the foreign power dominant in Cuba, has been conflated with

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<sup>59</sup> There is a discrepancy between this and the figures in the published conference proceedings of a presentation by Chailloux, Edward and Whitney (2001). Here, they state that 85 percent of West Indians were illiterate and, in a table entitled ‘Migration from Jamaica’, 9,275 (7 percent) out of 120,972 migrants are categorized as literate.

<sup>60</sup> As there are no reliable comparable statistical data on the literacy rates of foreign blacks, secondary source reports of their higher rates of literacy rates are based upon what people declared upon entering Cuba.

literacy and education. Thus, how literacy was defined and what these relatively high literacy rates reveal about the segments of the population from which the immigrants emerged remains in question.

British West Indian immigrants were also recognized as having greater proportions of semi-skilled laborers among them. In addition to the approximately 20,000 to 25,000 sugar workers and 25,000 domestic servants, there were a reported 15,000 British West Indians working as skilled tradesmen in 1930 (Carr 1998; McCleod 2000). Of those who immigrated between 1912-1923, 15.1 percent claimed training in the trades as compared to 3.5 percent of Haitians (McCleod 2000:86). With regards to those who migrated from Jamaica between 1912-1923, of the 93,342 people who migrated, 15,713 were artisans, 126 were professionals, 73,438 were ‘others’ (includes day laborers, farm laborers and domestic workers) and 4,065 were listed as ‘no occupation’ (includes women and children). From 1918-1923, there were 58,453 day laborers, 3,402 farm laborers, and 4,222 domestics reported to have migrated (Wynter 2001: 255-6). Of the 12,465 artisans who entered Cuba between 1918-1923 there were 7,772 dressmakers, 1,287 carpenters, 1,136 tailors, 553 painters, 578 mechanics, 403 shoemakers, 361 masons, 179 bakers, and 132 blacksmiths (ibid: 257). This data indicates that, though the lion’s share of migrants identified themselves as unskilled laborers heading for the fields and kitchens of a more economically viable destination, there were skilled laborers among them who might have begun on better footing than their fellow sojourners.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> This will be discussed in more depth in the section on occupation and social mobility.

### **Other Considerations of the Migration Data**

One of the problems in determining the economic and social position of the migrants, who most often have been treated as a homogenous mass of contract laborers but who were certainly more diverse, is that the issue of immigration was extremely political. This meant that the reported occupation did not necessarily describe the individual's capacity with any reliability. For instance, the Cuban government generally wanted reassurances that the laborers were not going to remain in Cuba to be a financial and genetic burden on the population. This created a somewhat paradoxical situation in that workers had to prove that they were only there for the harvest season at the same time that they were encouraged to construct themselves as self-sufficient and able to come up with return passage. Similarly, someone who was contracted by a sugar company but perhaps had knowledge of a trade might declare himself to be an agricultural laborer rather than a blacksmith as it was their experience in cane fields that was relevant to their employer.

The question of the economic status and social position of immigrants could theoretically be illuminated by looking at the requirements to enter the country. For instance, it might be assumed that those who could pay the passage to Cuba and present \$30 in hand, as was the case in Jamaica, would not come from the poorest segments of the population; or, alternatively, that those who were contract laborers brought in by companies that paid their fees were from among the more destitute. However, this information on entry requirements is unreliable for various reasons. For one, the law regarding the \$30 was not enforced until 1924; second, people often pooled together money for the passage of one family or community member, and third, many who were in reality contract laborers paid

their own fare and signed the contract upon entry in order to get around government regulation of contract labor (Wynter 2001: 261). Furthermore, there were different arrangements depending upon time and place. In a document reproduced by Sharon Marshall, who researched Barbadian immigrants between 1900-1935, Barbadian immigrants were advised that, in order to enter Cuba, they had to have \$15 and their Treasury Department would match that amount to make the \$30 required by law. This also states that minors needed to have written permission from their guardian, but the story of one of the immigrants that she interviewed testified to the fact that this was not enforced as he left for Cuba against his mother's wishes (Marshall 2001: 21).

Another consideration that complicates ascertaining the particular resources of British West Indian immigrants is that the laws and regulations regarding immigration differed throughout the British colonies and thus had an impact on which social groups had greater access to migration. This would ultimately influence the patterns of stratification among those who settled in Cuba. For instance, in Jamaica, "in order to slow immigration the government of Jamaica refused to license recruiting agents to operate in the country. This forced Jamaicans to emigrate at their own expense, but drew from a wider pool of people than might have been the case if the same laborers were recruited each year" (Wynter 2001: 263). In contrast, as Giovannetti's research indicates, the smaller islands like Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis were sources of contract labor supply sought out and brought to Cuba directly by particular sugar companies. This raises the question as to whether or not those immigrants from small islands were more likely to

have fewer skills than those from Jamaica, or if perhaps those small islanders who remained in Cuba were able to stay because they were the exception to this rule.

In summary, though the numerical presence of this population is somewhat underestimated for several reasons, the records indicate that approximately 140,000 migrants entered Cuba from all of the British West Indies between 1898 and 1938. Most of them entered through and remained in eastern Cuba, working as agricultural and/or skilled laborers, their knowledge of English being the most useful skill that they possessed due to the dominant U.S. economic presence on the island. There is some conflicting evidence regarding the literacy of those who came to Cuba, however the advantage that they had on account of language and association with the British Empire compared to Haitian immigrants, the other black immigrant group in Cuba, and Cuban laborers is largely uncontested.

### **From the Frying Pan into the Fire?**

Though Edward, the former president of the British West Indian Welfare Centre quoted at the beginning of this chapter, was particularly passionate about his roots and generally quite loquacious, other research participants concurred with his basic understanding that their family members moved to Cuba to look for a better life because there were more economic opportunities in Cuba than in their own islands. When asked if this better life was indeed what they found, the children and grandchildren of the immigrants whom I interviewed respond in the negative. Their understanding of early twentieth century Cuba is that it was mined with challenges to the survival of black immigrants and even those

who achieved some measure of stability or even prosperity did so in spite of the obstacles of race and class discrimination and the precariousness implicit in being a black foreigner.

Indeed, the world that Caribbean immigrants walked into was in many ways a hostile one and the dreams that they came in search of fulfilling were ever elusive. In spite of the fact that wages, when given, tended to be higher than those received in their islands of origin,<sup>62</sup> immigrants still had to endure harsh conditions. These included low and inconsistent wages, artificially inflated prices, media campaigns portraying them as dangerous savages, brutality and imprisonment by Cuban police and rural guards, ridicule and harassment by the Cuban peasantry, and abuse at the hands of managers intent upon reducing them to slave status. Though black men were entitled to vote and thus politicians at least took Black Cubans into consideration as a decisive voting block, black foreigners had no leverage within the political system. The only recourse for English-speaking Caribbean immigrants was to appeal to the British Consul as subjects of the Empire. Apart from this largely inadequate protection, they had no formal defense against Cuba's deeply entrenched fear of black foreigners, a fear that had bloody consequences for people of African descent, native and foreign, on more than one occasion (de la Fuente 2001; Chomsky 2000; Naranjo Orovio 1997; Helg 1995; Giovannetti 2000).

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<sup>62</sup> Bryan (2001), citing Franklin Knight's 1985 article as well as the *Jamaica Gazette*, makes the point that folklore about working for a dollar a day in the Spanish Caribbean versus the 1.5 shillings in Jamaica was misleading because (1) it was often more than a dollar a day, consular reports in Santiago indicate that Jamaican cane cutters earned \$2.00, \$2.50, and \$3.00 a day prior to the 1921 depression, and declined to \$1.50 a day, still above the \$1; (2) wages fluctuated between 1900-1938 and this irregularity meant that immigrants had no guarantee of sustained earnings; and (3) the 1.5 shillings per day is artificially low because it was the average for field laborers and did not take the higher wages of artisans into account (70).

Not only were black immigrants held responsible for the economic crisis gripping the nation in the 20s and early 30s,<sup>63</sup> but also, in the minds of some, they were associated with and blamed for any revolt or disorder that took place (Giovannetti 2000:74). This was so particularly if the unrest had to do with black Cubans' asserting their right to full citizenship within the political sphere. The Liberal Revolt of 1917 during which time anywhere from 14 to 50 British West Indians were executed and many more beaten, robbed, and humiliated was a particularly vivid example of the revival of the racial fears that had led to and clearly persisted after the 1912 massacre. Thus, for some, their dream turned into a nightmare as they were maligned, beaten, jailed, deported, and even murdered.

Economic exploitation at the hands of North Americans and Cubans, wealthy and middle class alike was widespread. In agricultural settings, this exploitation often occurred through coercion and shows of force. In her review of migrants' letters received in Jamaica, Wynter found that accounts of companies preventing workers from leaving by taking their passports, stopping trains that picked up workers wanting to leave the estate, and setting out patrols that abused and returned anyone found leaving were not uncommon (2001: 170). She also unearthed reports of Jamaicans being brutally beaten by rural guards upon refusing to cut sugar cane and being subjected to raids during which their private property was confiscated were also found. Estate owners used rural guards to eject workers from plantations when they demanded their wages. Indeed, one of the most

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<sup>63</sup> The sugar crisis of 1921 was followed by the economic depression of the late '20s and early '30s in which real income decreased 80 percent, unemployment rose to 50 percent of the labor force and the sugar cane crop of 1933 lasted 67 days, half of that in 1926. The salary for farming, when paid, was twenty cents a day until nightfall. The can of coffee collected paid 5 cents, often in kind (Chailloux 2001:55).

blatant economic offenses and common grievances of laborers was nonpayment of wages. On many estates, a system in which workers received vouchers instead of cash forced workers to purchase goods at the estate store or cash them at the company store at a 20 percent loss (193, 197). Even outside of the estates, they often encountered economic injustice as shopkeepers would charge Jamaicans one and a half (and Haitians twice) as much as the regular price for goods and services (Giovannetti: 114).

There was also widespread social injustice in the form of racial segregation. The United Fruit Company, great outpost of American empire that it was, was notorious for implementing a Jim Crow system among its laborers and in its towns (Bourgeois 1989; Purcell 1993; Pérez 1999; Newton 1984; Chomsky 1996). In this arrangement, rigid occupational and social hierarchies were racially stratified.<sup>64</sup> In Cuba, an estimated 27,000 people lived on United Fruit property alone where housing, transportation, shopping, and recreation, as well as basic necessities like food and water, were provided and thus controlled by the 'Company'. These words of a retired mill worker in Mayarí in eastern Cuba characterize the racially and nationally segregated environment of the *central* and the pervasive ideological constructs that legitimized this organization of the work force:

I started work in 1913 when I was fifteen years old. They let me work because they thought I was Spanish; they preferred the Jamaicans because they spoke English, or the Spanish; the Cubans, you see, weren't obedient.

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<sup>64</sup> For instance, on Costa Rican plantations prior to 1930, the local positions were divided as follows: whites exclusively occupied division manager, superintendent, professional staff, and section overseer positions. Some whites were also independent planters, but this was a stratum to which coloreds also had access. Blacks and coloreds could be clerks, locomotive operators, construction and maintenance foremen, station masters, conductors, piece-job foremen, timekeepers, and semi-skilled laborers such as mechanics. Hispanics, though sometimes on the tier of station masters, conductors, etc., were primarily used for unskilled jobs such as planting, cutting, carrying, digging, and road repair (Purcell 1993:34).

Cubans couldn't even work here at first... Later, when I started work as an operator of the evaporation tanks, there was racial discrimination; you had to be white to be in that department... The blacks lived in one area, called "Brooklyn" and the Americans in another, called "Washington". The head of the *central* lived in a two-story house, him and his wife and nine Jamaican servants, two cars with two chauffeurs. When the house needed repairs, the workmen had to take off their shoes before they entered and put on rubber slippers, and be quiet; you weren't supposed to talk" (Cannon 1981: 211).

George Braga owned eight sugar plantations in Cuba on which some 40,000 people lived; this included Chaparra which "consisted of nearly six hundred homes, churches, six schools, one hotel, three movie theatres, a Masonic lodge, a dry cleaners, a telegraph and post office, a pharmacy, a dental clinic, and a company hospital" (Pérez 1999:222). The American zones of these towns were attempts to replicate life in the United States and thus they were areas where the parasitic relationship between capital and labor were cast in stark relief. Such comfort and cleanliness in the tropics was maintained—in both an abstract and quite immediate way given the high proportion of domestic workers among the immigrant population—through the impoverishment of workers. In order to maintain such an illusion, wages had to be kept low and the Cubans who were opposed to foreign labor had to be controlled.

Thus, immigrants were frequently trapped between a native population that resented their presence, accusing them of taking jobs and threatening to beat them if they worked, and a managerial class representing big business that would punish them for not working and fail to compensate them adequately for their labor (Giovannetti 2001:123). They exercised the option to seek the protection of diplomatic representatives, mobilizing their identity as British subjects and affiliation to a global center of power in order to combat

such abuses (Charlton 2005). Unfortunately, more often than not, these representatives failed to make the abuses suffered by these black British subjects a priority. While being English speakers generally gave Anglophone Caribbean immigrants access to jobs that were unavailable to native Cubans and other black foreigners, their blackness, foreignness, and class position meant that they were vulnerable and subject to economic and social insecurity.

### ***The World That They Created***

#### **Casting Seeds**

In part a response to this vulnerability and in part a consequence of the impulse for cultural reproduction, the immigrants, some 65,000 of whom remained in Cuba after 1933, founded and developed their own institutions.<sup>65</sup> Mutual aid societies, churches, schools, fraternal lodges, Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) chapters, and recreational centers sprouted up throughout the island from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These institutions acted as mediators between the immigrants and the authorities as well as vehicles through which they created community. Though many immigrants intended to go home some day, in the mean time, their children needed to be educated, their spiritual and social needs met, and their rights and dignity as workers, as black people, and as human beings had to be protected.

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<sup>65</sup> This is a rough estimate of the number of people who did not return to their islands of origin or move on to some other destination based upon census data. Charlton (2005) estimates that 30,000 remained after 1940.

The institutions of the Anglophone Caribbean immigrants provide a window into the experiences, values, and beliefs of this population and an indication of to what it is that Cuban descendants who set about revitalizing these institutions refer in their mission to ‘rescue their roots’. Confined within the pages of marriage and baptismal records, meeting minutes and pamphlets, as well as photographs of families, coworkers, and events is a record of the ‘official’ legacy. Such documents declare what particular members of the community found noteworthy, wanted to record and had the resources with which to do so. Order, self-improvement, financial responsibility, and Christian morality are among the characteristics most strongly represented. While the theme of respectability is omnipresent in written as well as oral records, there are also indications that immigrants were actively engaged in challenging race and class discrimination in ways that did not include assertions of a respectable blackness.

### **Family**

For Anglophone Caribbean Cubans, connection to their origins is fundamentally through family. I began many a conversation and most interviews with questions about the family who migrated to Cuba. When people learned that I was interested in the experiences of *anglófonos* and *descendientes* in Cuba, those who had documents and photographs, brought them out to share with me their foreignness. From the pre-Revolutionary period, there were old black and white, mostly studio photographs of stone faced patriarchs dressed in suits, either standing next to their new bride or seated and surrounded by the children who would come from a legal union. Others, sepia colored and crumbling, featuring determined-looking women, sometimes with young children at their sides and

on their laps, document the family before their passage. One wedding photograph features the bride, three bridesmaids—gloved hands clutching bouquets and necks adorned with pearls—and three flower girls seated on the studio floor with their hands folded across their laps, and the groom, in tuxedo and sparking white gloves. I was amazed by how closely the groom and his son Purcival, one of my research participants, resemble each other, and by how dimly the bride appears in Iris, the 95-year old Jamaican immigrant who became totally blind and increasingly frail over the period of my fieldwork.

The three facets of immigrant family life that I will briefly discuss here concern endogamy, the presence of women, and gender roles. Unfortunately, I don't have reliable data regarding the marital status of participants' immigrant fore parents, though four of the original immigrants in the study had indeed been legally married. Of the first and second generation interviewees, all who had children had been married. Two participants who specifically referred to unmarried partners in their family history were Carlitos, who was also one of the four participants who responded that his parents and/or grandparents worked exclusively in agriculture, and Esperanza.

Carlitos' maternal and paternal grandparents migrated from Jamaica in the 20s, the former living and working on a central outside of Santiago. While he used the word "marriage"<sup>66</sup> to describe his immigrant grandparents' union, when talking about his own mother's experience and relationships, he recounted a different pattern. He said:

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<sup>66</sup> This does not necessarily indicate legal marriage.

She worked washing and ironing. Before, most of the *jamaiquinos*, the blacks, washed and ironed and that was all that there was for them. My mother got together with the men just long enough to get pregnant and then they split so she raised us alone and we never went hungry. My mother was very proud and took care of all of us, when someone offered to buy her children toys, she refused this help, saying that she had money to provide for them and didn't need anyone to do so. I didn't have to clean shoes or ask anything from anyone, my mother always gave us money.<sup>67</sup>

### Esperanza

E: My mother was born in Jamaica, in St. Ann's, and was raised there. She settled in Banes. My aunt, the sister of [my mother's] mother, brought her to Banes and so my mother was raised here but born there... So my aunt is the one who raised her. From there, after this time, my mother worked in the Naval Base.

A: And what job did she have in the Base?

E: Domestic.

A: A lot of the Jamaican women were domestics...

E: Almost all...there, she met my father, my father was from England, his last name was --- and he had family in Jamaica.

A: So he was Jamaican but lived in England?

E: He was born in England...my mother raised me with her last name, I was born here in Cuba, I learned English from them...we spoke English in the house and they raised me and my mother worked over there [on the Base] and after that she worked---for 15 years and she met my step father, the father of my sister.

A: And what job did they have, your father and stepfather?

E: My father was an office clerk [said in English, she begins speaking in English] and my stepfather, he was a fireman.

A: Oh, was he Cuban [in Spanish]?

E: [Spanish] He was a descendant of Barbados. All of these people immigrated and came to Cuba because Cuba gave this idea that they could [do better].

A: So they had this dream of bettering their lives....

E: Yes, and many did better their lives, those who knew how to take advantage. I can't say anything more of my father because he left. Of my stepfather, he worked until the triumph of the revolution and when the revolution triumphed in January, he died in January but the upbringing that we received, they sent us to an English school because the aunt who raised my mother had a school here...

Other indications of multiple partners were the cases of Deunes' grandmother who had a child with a Cuban, then a Grenadian immigrant. He did not know whether or not they were legally married. Melvina's paternal grandmother, who left Melvina's father in

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<sup>67</sup> Author interview with Carlitos, July 30, 2004, Santiago de Cuba.

Jamaica married a younger man, also from Jamaica, whom she met in Cuba. Indeed, hers was one of the wedding photos that I was shown.

One of the main sources for archival data on family formation comes from civil and church marriage records. In her comparative study of Haitian and Jamaican families in Cuba, Espronceda (1999) finds high rates of endogamy among the Jamaican population and argues that this obstructed integration into Cuban society.<sup>68</sup> Of the civil marriages between immigrants in Santiago, 77 percent prior to 1940 were between immigrants of the same nationality.<sup>69</sup> Records from the All Saints' Episcopal Church in Guantánamo indicate the dominant presence of British West Indians in this church as 88 percent (185 out of 210) of the marriages performed between 1902 and 1940 were between two people from the British West Indies (McCleod: 178). Given that 185 over 38 years is a small number, it also suggests that legal marriage sanctioned by the Church was not a numerically dominant form of partnering.

While this data provides important information regarding the race/color and national identity of individuals getting married, this bias toward legalized marriage reflects an exclusion that is potentially quite significant. Common law marriage, consensual unions and cohabitation are the more dominant forms of heterosexual coupling among the African Caribbean masses (Barrow 1998; Smith 1996). Yet, there is little record of the

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<sup>68</sup> She also finds that there was a tendency for Jamaicans to marry within their group and often this came to include immigrants from other English-speaking islands; furthermore, as with Haitians, it was common for immigrants to marry the Cuban-born offspring of earlier waves of immigrants (62).

<sup>69</sup> After 1940, the year in which the new constitution dictated that everyone born in Cuba had Cuban nationality regardless of the origin of their parents, it is difficult to ascertain whether or not those people categorized as 'Cuban' are the children of Anglophone Caribbean immigrants born in Cuba and raised in the immigrant enclave. Indeed, this was the case in many of the families with whom I came into contact.

details of such arrangements; indeed, it is in this way that those who do not conform to dominant practices have been erased from the historical record. The only archival indication that I found of consensual unions was in the minutes of a fraternal lodge in Santiago that rejected a man's application for membership based on the fact that he was not legally married to the woman with whom he lived. This suggests that such institutions played a role in enforcing a particular moral order based upon the respectability paradigm discussed in the previous section. Furthermore, given this bias, it can only be concluded that endogamy was high amongst those legally married, although, it is quite possible that those who did not pursue legal marriage also followed a similar pattern of mate selection.

The tendency of West Indian immigrants and their children to marry—and perhaps simply find partners—within the group can be attributed to a range of factors and influenced by certain conditions and motivations. Espronceda asserts that the geographical isolation and social marginalization in addition to greater adherence to tradition of the rural population contribute to endogamy and retention of a distinct cultural identity. Daily exposure to thousands of people from different origins would be characteristic of those immigrants both in and from an urban environment. Thus, she argues, the closer one is to the countryside, spatially as well as experientially, the more resistant one is to integration. While this might be accurate, it is also the case that maintaining Anglophone Caribbean culture, most notably English fluency, was critical to their material survival. English was not only the dominant language of home and the language of the most powerful empire on earth at the time, it was the language of opportunity and losing the ability to speak it would place subsequent generations at a

disadvantage. Those who were or aspired to be economically mobile, most of whom were in, if not from, urban areas, certainly understood this. As such, they would have encouraged if not enforced endogamous unions.

In looking at labor migration and endogamy rates, the question of the presence of women is clearly central. Immigration documents reveal that the percentage of Anglophone Caribbean females entering Cuba was 19.3 percent in 1913, 18.5 percent in 1914, 14.8 percent in 1916, 15.5 percent in 1917, 13.9 percent in 1920, 22.5 percent in 1921, 26.6 percent in 1923, and to 47.7 percent in 1926 (Espronceda 1999: 48).<sup>70</sup> This amounts to 22,915 women in these eight years alone. If by chance women were more likely than men to remain on the island and not underrepresented among illegal entrants, the gender imbalance generally associated with such labor migrations would be significantly mitigated. Of the participants in this study who were not original migrants (even these three were either accompanied by or coming to join a mother or grandmother), all could trace their connection to an English-speaking Caribbean island through a female immigrant who either came with a male partner or met one while in Cuba.

From English teachers to domestic workers to the active members and leadership of English-speaking Caribbean institutions, women were a strong presence in community life and family a critical institution in the maintenance of a distinct English-speaking

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<sup>70</sup> These percentages indicate not only a substantial increase over time, but also a contrast to the percentage of Haitian immigrants who were female.

Caribbean identity.<sup>71</sup> Family histories were peppered with memories of accompanying grandmothers visiting other immigrant women's homes, of special and everyday family meals cooked by *jamaicanas* who worked in other people's kitchens, of strict teachers in English schools, and of women in the community who cared for children whose parents could not. Indeed, one of the characteristics of immigrant families that emerged is the importance of the extended family as well as of those women in the community who took care of and passed on survival skills to younger members.

Two such cases were Smith and Caridad. After Smith's parents came to Cuba, his mother became mentally ill and could no longer care for him. Of his experience he says,

My parents came from Jamaica, from St. Catherine in Jamaica, and they came to Cuba and had me. My mother, when I was four years old, went crazy and they took her to Mason [an insane asylum] and she died there. So, my father raised me...I lived with [a teacher], here in Santiago. Her name was Ms. Daly. From there, I went with Ms. Johnson, another teacher. Then from there I went to Ms. Watts. They were English teachers. I was boarded, I didn't have siblings and my father left me with her so she could take care of me since he worked in the fields...So, the teachers were the ones who took care of me and my father paid them...[they were] strict, very strict! And gave blows like crazy! That Ms. Johnson wasn't easy...After this, at almost 12 years old, my father got together with a Jamaican woman and I went to live with them."<sup>72</sup>

Caridad's parents were also unable to care for her. She was placed in the care of her aunt and uncle who mistreated her. As a result, she spent the majority of her time in Melvina's house, being cared for by Iris who taught her how to sew. Of this she says, "I didn't want to learn, I had no interest in it. I was young. But, Iris kept telling me that I need to learn so I did." As Caridad's primary source of income since the Revolution has been through

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<sup>71</sup> Espronceda observes that the widespread transmission of cultural traditions and traits was reinforced through the family socialization process and is indicated by the strength with which they retained their language, sense of unity, and connection to their motherland as expressions of their identity (1999: 71).

<sup>72</sup> Author interview with Smith, June 29, 2004, Santiago de Cuba.

her sewing, she remains grateful to Iris for teaching her this skill: “Thank God Iris made me learn to sew. If not...this is how I survive.”

### **English Schools**

The importance placed on language and basic literacy is evident in the proliferation of private English primary schools in the British West Indian communities attended by children brought to or born in Cuba. Perhaps due to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century failed campaign for universal primary school education in the British West Indies, establishing schools was a priority for the immigrants.<sup>73</sup> Though it was beyond the scope of this research to pursue data specifically documenting the establishment of English schools, oral testimonies reflect the predominance of these institutions in immigrant communities.<sup>74</sup> In interviewing those in the first and second generation about their early experiences, the names of the notoriously strict school teachers were among the first recollections.

These schools existed both independently of other English-speaking Caribbean organizations and within them such as was the case with the British West Indian Cultural Centre’s school.<sup>75</sup> The instructors were both men and women, a few of whom it seems had been trained to be teachers, such as was the case with Eugenia’s grandmother, but

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<sup>73</sup> While the value of education is part of the value matrix of respectability associated with people from the Anglophone Caribbean, it was apparently important to black Cubans as well. Cuban public schools were open to students of color and the attendance and literacy rates of Black Cubans increased significantly during the teens and twenties. Indeed, the racial gap in literacy for the island nearly disappeared by 1931, but it was at this point that public school registration sharply declined and the number of segregated private schools rose (de la Fuente 2001a: 141).

<sup>74</sup> This is corroborated by accounts of immigrant communities in other Latin American countries such as Panama, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica.

<sup>75</sup> Espronceda found that these schools existed within various institutions such as the Catalina lodge and the All Saints’ Episcopal Church in Guantánamo.

most were simply passing on the information that they had themselves learned in their island of origin. Indeed, given the predominance of the pupil teacher model in the British Caribbean and the difficulty of accessing secondary education, it is likely that many of the teachers who were such dominant figures in the lives and memories of first generation West Indian Cubans had little education beyond primary school themselves.

All of the first generation participants who were school age prior to 1959 attended English primary schools. The importance of being able to communicate in English cannot be overstated as not only did this connect children to their families, but also, with the U.S. and British economic presence, gave them an advantage in a competitive labor market. Thus, it was not only receiving an education, but an education in English that was critical to the immigrants. Furthermore, by maintaining their own educational institutions, they did not have to confront the racial discrimination that permeated the Cuban public schools where students of color were barred from activities that involved representing the school in public events and were consistently given lower grades than whites (de la Fuente 2001a: 148).

### **The Church**

The Church was a dominant fixture in the lives of immigrants and their descendants from a young age. British West Indians accounted for 80 percent (825) of the baptisms performed at All Saints' Episcopal Church between 1906 and 1929. Of the 42 Episcopal congregations in Cuba in 1924, more than half had British West Indian congregations, There was also church activity in the rural areas among *braceros*, though there was more

reliance on lay preachers due to the greater instability of the population (McCleod 2000:179).

The choice of a church has implications for the sort of life and identities that the immigrants either came from or else wanted to create for themselves in Cuba. Though there were a variety of Churches, including the Pentecostal and Seventh Day Adventist Churches, British West Indians gravitated toward three Protestant churches: Episcopal, Baptist and Methodist (Giovannetti 2001: 194).<sup>76</sup> The Episcopal Church was the church of upwardly mobile in the British Caribbean colonies and its proliferation among immigrants in Cuba is indicative of two things: the aspirations toward middle-class respectability of the mainstream and the legacy of North American Protestant missionaries who found West Indians rather than Cubans to be the beneficiaries of their civilizing mission in Cuba. An active church life was integral to ‘betterment’ as spiritual uplift was intertwined with social and economic mobility.

At the same time that participants perceive or directly recall that the Church and Christianity were prominent in the lives of English-speaking Caribbean communities, when asked about African religious practices, only two people responded definitively that this people of English-speaking Caribbean origin did not participate in non-Christian-based religious activities. One, Josefina, was a devout Christian and the other, Pablo, appeared to be invested in the narrative of respectability. Others talked about the

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<sup>76</sup> In the case of Guantánamo, Espronceda (1999) found that the most important church was the All Saints’ Episcopal Church that held mass only in English until the end of the 70s, but also notes that the Catholic Church that disappeared in the 20s and the Pentecostal Church of God were part of the community’s religious landscape.

coexistence of certain African-based practices at home and being active in Church. Thus, while African religious traditions are constructed as the antithesis of progress and civilization in the matrix of respectability, most participants do not deny the integration of certain practices in their daily life.<sup>77</sup>

#### **Mutual Aid Societies, Associations, and Lodges**<sup>78</sup>

In explaining why and how English-speaking Caribbean descendants began to revitalize their cultural institutions during the most severe moment of the Special Period, Melvina and Edward, both former presidents of organizations, described the urgency about which they came together to provide each other support, in the tradition of *los anglófonos*. “It was beautiful,” Melvina recalled, “there was one person in charge of all of the descendants in their neighborhood and they had to report to [the leadership] who lived there. On holidays, we brought baskets of personal items and some food to the elders and, if they were sick, we visited them and tried to get them what they needed. Everyone in the association contributed so we helped each other.” Edward described similar efforts to provide support to others of English-speaking Caribbean origin, admiring the dedication that those who came before him had to taking care of their own, particularly in times of duress. For instance, upon the death of a brother from the lodge, it is the duty of the other members to sit with the body and provide material and emotional support to the family.

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<sup>77</sup> The extent to which these practices might be evidence of Cubanization given the strong presence of African religions in Cuba, rather than the dominance or maintenance of African-based religious practices of English-speaking Caribbean immigrants remains to be seen.

<sup>78</sup> See Appendix B for list of associations.

One of the most important tenets and functions of the institutional infrastructure of the British West Indian immigrant communities was mutual aid. Collectivity was one response to structural vulnerability and thus the immigrants pooled their resources, believing that this gave them a better chance of withstanding the economic and social brutality of their environment. While distinct mutual aid societies sprung up throughout the immigrant communities, the activities of other associations, such as the lodges and churches, indicate that mutual aid was an important function of most if not all organizations. In times of illness, death, or financial crisis it was the duty of the directorate of one's association, the brothers of one's lodge, or the members of the church to collect money or use available funds for burials, to help out the families of the deceased, and pay for medicines, legal fees, and other expenses.

There were numerous organizations of this type throughout the island and, aside from their mention in interviews of descendents and work on this population,<sup>79</sup> information from the provincial archives in Santiago<sup>80</sup> provides a sketch of their character and function. There were documents on what seemed to be a random smattering of organizations that were active in Oriente, which included the current provinces of Santiago and Guantánamo, anywhere between the beginning of the century to 1961. The most common records kept by these organizations concerned their founding members,

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<sup>79</sup> For instance, in the case of Guantánamo, Espronceda (1999) mentions a number of lodges: "La Catalina" (1906), "Gran Orden Odd Fellows" (1907), "Shepherd Lodge" (1920), "Forester", "Good Samaritan", "Fisherman", "Mount Herb Temple", "Sol Star", "Gran Orden Unida de Mecánicos Independientes", "Star of Galilea", "El Ojo de Dios" y una "Cámara de Mujeres Capítulo de Reinas No. 1, where the majority of its founders came from St. James parish in Jamaica. She also mentions mutual aid societies such as Good Will (disband in 1958, originally the Self-Help Society founded in 1920), Eureka, and The Young People Fellowship Society founded by Harold Francis with the intention of providing educational and cultural activities for the children of Antilleans such as the Concert for Children.

<sup>80</sup> Source: "Indización del Fondo Gobierno Provincial de Oriente: Documentación Relacionada con Jamaica y su Metrópoli".

their constitution or bylaws, which at times included an exhaustive number of rules and articles, basic accounting information, member occupations, and correspondence.<sup>81</sup>

#### **The British West Indian Welfare Centre**

The tumult of the '20s, with the precipitous decline in sugar prices that followed the war time boom in the industry referred to as Dance of the Millions, witnessed a decline in immigration to Cuba as well as an increase in internal migration as West Indians searched for better conditions. The most pronounced movement was to Guantánamo where the U.S. Naval Base offered stable employment with higher wages for those able to secure a job there and the community consolidated itself into an important ethnic group.

According to Jorge Derrick, president of the British West Indian Cultural Centre in Guantánamo and grandson of a prominent community leader, “favorable for these new comers was the fact that in [the] region there were prosperous families of British West Indians that had an acceptable level of organization expressed through the foundation of Churches, associations and lodge” (2001: 33).<sup>82</sup> Though there were and continue to be English-speaking Caribbean organizations throughout the country, relative economic stability of the immigrants due to employment on the Base contributed to the strength of the institutional infrastructure in Guantánamo.

The financial activities of the organizations are a sound indication of the economic prosperity, or lack thereof, and social hierarchy that existed in the different communities.

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<sup>81</sup> Indeed, the most interesting correspondence is actually that received from the Cuban authorities in the late '50s and early '60s as it essentially documents the deliberate dissolution of the associations both during the Batista regime's desperate decline and the first years of the Revolution.

<sup>82</sup> Derrick lists the institutions in Guantánamo as follows: Churches: The All Saints Episcopal Church, The Saint Thomas The Apostle American Catholic Church, The Church of God; Lodges: Catalina, Mechanic, Star of Galilee, Star of Judea, Order of Forester, Mount of Arat; Societies or Associations: Goodwill Society, Eureka Club, British West Indian Welfare Centre; English Schools: Mr. Jackson's School, Ms. Anderson's School, Ms. Odein's School, The Centre's School (36).

For instance, the British West Indian Welfare Centre of Guantánamo, officially founded in 1945 but operating since 1941, was able to develop stronger roots in Cuba in part because so many of its members were employed by the Naval Base and thus were relatively stable and economically secure. Edmund Skelton, the Centre's founder, was a well-educated Jamaican man and a member of the elite cadre of community leaders in Guantánamo. He had migrated to Cuba with his family by way of Panama and New York and was actually studying medicine in the United States when his father died and the family moved to Banes and then to Guantánamo, where he got a job on the U.S. Naval Base. In response to the apparent need for an umbrella organization that would benefit a substantial proportion of the population, the Centre harnessed and directed the community's growing resources and stability. Under the watchful eye of the Union Jack (the British flag hung prominently in the Centre), immigrants were officially registered and in return for their monthly dues, received various services.

Not only did the Centre act as a mediator between the immigrants and Cuban local authorities and the British diplomatic apparatus, but it also maintained a primary school and provided medical consultations and legal advisement. It was the epicenter of social activities, hosting wedding receptions and celebrations ranging from Christmas and Easter to Emancipation to Queen Elizabeth's Coronation. Furthermore, as with other associations throughout the island, there is evidence of on-going connections with other people from the English-speaking Caribbean world. For instance, they received visitors from a parallel institution in Boston, hosted a reception for a cricket team from Jamaica,

provided disaster relief after a hurricane in Montserrat, and even donated money for the building of a hospital in Jamaica.<sup>83</sup>

Indeed, this hospital project, initiated in 1955, reflects both the thinking on their part that they may return to Jamaica in their later years and need quality medical facilities, and the increasing prosperity of at least a segment of the community.<sup>84</sup> While there were manual laborers and domestic workers on and off the Base, the membership and leadership of the Center was dominated by semi-skilled workers employed by the Naval Base. The Center, along with the lodges and churches came to be the institutional pillars of the community. However, references to the defense of the race and similar sentiments that echo much of the discourse popularized by the Garvey Movement, which thrived among workers in Cuba, suggest that these institutions were also a collective effort to buffer themselves against the psychological and material impact of racial inequality. This overall vulnerability and insecurity was one of the forces behind the development of these local institutions, an act that simultaneously established Cuban roots and maintained a link to the social and political world outside of the island.

#### **UNIA and Labor Activism**

The belief in racial solidarity and black pride is embedded within community discourse and manifested itself in the proliferation of United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) chapters in Cuba. Cuba had at least fifty UNIA divisions, second only to the

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<sup>83</sup> In minutes from a 2-27-55 meeting at the Centre, they discussed having a meeting to choose “a fund scheme to make a donation to the building of a hospital for the Jamaica University where all British West Indians are concerned.”

<sup>84</sup> Minutes from meetings in the ‘50s reflect that they had the resources to pay \$550.00 for the installation of a sanitary pipe, toilets, and tile floor and to pay \$1000 (by installment) for property they were acquiring in addition to the \$22.00 in lawyer’s fees.

number in the United States, and Garveyism in Cuba continued to thrive into the late 1920s, after it had gone into decline in the United States (McCleod 2000:127). Though none of the participants in this research or their family members were active in the UNIA, Estévez Rivero's research on Garveyism in Santiago reveals that there were 150 founding members of Santiago's UNIA (2003: 71). Its mission was to, "promote the spirit of pride in the black race and love amongst members of the race, to help those in need, to promote Christian feelings, found universities, institutions, and secondary schools in order to improve the culture and education of black people, to create businesses and industries with the intention of carrying out commercial exchange between Africa and America" (ibid: 72).

The UNIA could not exist in a vacuum and needed to accommodate Cuba's social landscape. For instance, while not a ubiquitous strategy among UNIA chapters in Cuba, in some chapters, any racial reference in public was avoided due to the national resistance to organizing along racial lines in Cuba (Giovannetti 2001:196).<sup>85</sup> In some cases, the UNIA appeared under a different name in order to avoid persecution based on the illegality of race-based organizations. As Giovannetti notes, "In order to work in conformity with the Morúa Law in Cuba [which made race based organizations illegal], and the legacy of 1912, the UNIA registered with the Cuban government as the Universal Improvement Association and Communities League (UIA & CL), avoiding the words "Negro" and "African" from its original name. Furthermore, UNIA officials in Panama

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<sup>85</sup> According to documents in the Santiago provincial archives about the UNIA chapters in Banes, Guantánamo, Las Tunas and Holguin, the organization, which spanned from 1922-1961 in Banes, openly declared itself as "La Asociación Universal para el Adelanto de La Raza Negra" (The Universal Association for the Improvement of the Negro Race). Source: Materia: Sociedades Culturales, Legajo: 2452, Expediente 2,3,4,6,7

had been jailed for their activism and, consequently, there was a hesitance to be too confrontational with Cuban authorities (ibid:195).

Regardless of how it identified itself publicly or privately, the UNIA in Cuba did not regularly serve as a platform for any direct protest against racial discrimination experienced by its members, most of whom were British West Indian immigrants. In general, there was a lack of criticism of the Cuban government in the Negro World and by UNIA leaders outside of Cuba (Giovannetti 2001:198). Local leadership of the UNIA tended to consist primarily of artisans and skilled workers while the rank and file were mostly manual laborers (McCleod 2000:148).<sup>86</sup> They subscribed to an ideology of black empowerment and, in this context that meant economic self-sufficiency and called for the organization to buffer the vulnerability of its members.<sup>87</sup>

As we will see in Chapter Four, people of English-speaking Caribbean descent also resorted to cross-racial activism to improve their social condition through their involvement into labor movement during the late '20s and '30s. As Carr points out in his comparison of West Indians in Cuba and Costa Rica, factors such as a crisis in the political system that left an opening for more radical action, lower instances of land ownership and thus investment in mill production, and the relative maturity of the

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<sup>86</sup> The 1929 documents identify the leadership as skilled tradesmen, housewives and cooks. In 1935, there were 4 field workers among those in the trades or domestic service. Source: Materia: Sociedades Culturales, Legajo: 2452, Expediente 2,3,4,6,7.

<sup>87</sup> As Lewis notes, "the UNIA was to find itself largely a migrant forum in Cuba and, for that matter, in the other Latin American countries, a forum through which the cultural ties of the English-speaking Caribbean could be maintained, the economic problems of the migrants' marginal situation could be aired, addressed, and improved. In those forums an identity and unity of purpose and achievement would come gradually, and not without difficulty, to supercede narrow insular identities and petty rivalries over island size, and to provide a psychological bulwark against racial discrimination in the Eurocentric value-orientations of Latin American societies" (1988: 108).

Communist Party in Cuba diffused racial and ethnic divisions in the name of class solidarity (Carr 1998: 99). This is not to say that there weren't significant barriers to immigrant participation in labor unrest in Cuba, such as the ban on foreigners' holding leadership positions of unions as part of the 1933 50 percent Law,<sup>88</sup> but the specificities of the Cuban case were often more favorable than those in Costa Rica.

## ***Beyond the Field***

### **Occupational Stratification and Social Mobility**

*My grandmother, Mamá Gran, my father's mother was tall, proud and insisted on being the best dressed, that no one else would have on what she had on so she sent away for materials and had clothes made abroad. She used to say that she and my father didn't travel here with the others as workers in immigrant ships. They had passports because she felt she was above that. She also was against her son marrying my mother because my mother was too poor. Mamá Gran was a cook for folks in Vista Alegre but Abuelita, my mother's mom, who was humble, quiet, very sweet, like my mother, took in wash for a living.<sup>89</sup>*

*The immigrants came here looking for their fortune and all they found were coffee and sugar plantations, bad conditions in the barracones, and exploitation...and not just by the owners, but also by the smarter Jamaicans...the smarter ones took advantage of the poorer, less educated ones who relied on them for help with the British Consulate...they charged them a lot so they could make a profit... 'El vivo vive de los bobos' [the smart or cunning live off of fools].<sup>90</sup>*

The post-emancipation history of the formerly enslaved population has indicated a determination to escape confinement to plantation agriculture and the grossly unequal terms of this system. Freedom meant not being obliged by the force of the whip or that of hunger to labor for the exclusive wealth of another. As is evident from my informants' comments above, there were social divisions among the immigrants, primarily based

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<sup>88</sup> This law also mandated that fifty percent of the workforce in various enterprises and establishments had to be Cuban and was part of a larger effort during an economically depressed time to rid the country of immigrants, particularly those who were "undesirable".

<sup>89</sup> Author interview with Melvina, July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004, Santiago de Cuba.

<sup>90</sup> Author interview with Teresa, June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2005, Santiago de Cuba.

upon occupational status prior to their arrival as well as once working in Cuba, a status many were seeking to improve. Thus, while Anglophone Caribbean immigrants might have entered Cuba as cane cutters, their sights were set elsewhere both within and outside of the agricultural sector. As Carr states,

Jamaicans performed low status field work, but their higher literacy<sup>91</sup> and political *nous* earned them the respect of employers and, therefore, promotion to higher paying jobs...due to their “superior personal hygiene and education,” British West Indians and Puerto Ricans were frequently given the most highly prized jobs both in the sugar yards, or *bateyes* (where they were employed in skilled and semiskilled jobs such as sugar dryers, stevedores, and guards), and on the railroads (where they worked as mechanics and electricians). Large numbers of British West Indians, especially women, also worked as servants for the foreign managerial elite, where their English was much appreciated by overseas managers (1998b: 88).

Such labor stratification clearly implicates owners and managers in continuing the tradition of creating and/or using actual differences among workers in order to strategically divide and thereby further disempower the labor force.<sup>92</sup> However, it also provides a window into the ways in which Anglophone Caribbean immigrants participated in this system in order to move closer to their own version of freedom.

#### **Artisans: Origins and Options**

In addition to the approximately 20,000 to 25,000 sugar workers and 25,000 domestic servants, there were a reported 15,000 British West Indians working as skilled tradesmen in 1930 (Carr 1998; McCleod 2000). Historically, knowledge of a trade has been coveted as a route to achieving greater independence from the plantation and, during the mid-19th and early 20th century, shifts in the system of labor in the British Caribbean had a great

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<sup>91</sup> Again, this is highly debatable.

<sup>92</sup> See Andrews (2004) and Bourgois (1989) on purposeful division of labor force in Latin America.

impact on these artisans such that they might have been extremely motivated to join the migration stream to Latin America. In the system of pre-Emancipation occupational stratification, there were always a handful of skilled craftsmen who held a privileged position among slaves. They were an elite group who often worked more independently, had more opportunities to leave the plantation, and hire themselves out in an effort to buy their own freedom and the freedom of their family.<sup>93</sup> In Jamaica, the distinction between craftsmen and field workers assumed importance after Emancipation because the Apprenticeship Act distinguished among all occupations, and planters were to pay wages according to the skills and usefulness of each category of both artisans and field workers (Petras 1988: 46).

Cuban immigration statistics for the 1916 to 1927 period document that 15.1 percent of all British West Indian entrants claimed prior training in trades such as carpentry and smithery as compared to only 3.5 percent of Haitian arrivals with non-agricultural experience. According to McCleod (2000), such experience in non-agricultural labor placed British West Indians in a favorable position in the Cuban labor market, facilitating their movement “out of the cane fields and into steadier, more remunerative occupations while in Cuba” (McCleod: 84). In one particular public works project in 1926, ordinary laborers were paid \$1.76/day while carpenters and bricklayers were paid \$3.00, and foremen \$3.52. That same year, the sugar industry paid cane cutters between \$0.90 and \$1.10 for each 2500 pounds of cane they cut and \$1.20 to \$1.50 per day to other types of

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<sup>93</sup> Worthy Park, a major estate that survived the 1800s in Jamaica, employed, for example, 17 craftsmen out of 248 laborers at the end of Apprenticeship. This ratio was probably typical of the larger estates of the time (Petras 1988: 46).

day laborers (Wynter: 160). Thus, there was a significant difference in remuneration between skilled and unskilled positions.

### **Domestic Service**

Not only did possessing English as a native language facilitate upward mobility within the agricultural sector, it also facilitated immigrants' movement from the rural areas to towns and cities where they found steady employment as domestic workers during the dead season. Of the legal immigrants who arrived in Cuba between 1916 and 1927, 16.7 percent—and probably much more than half of all female British West Indian arrivals—had worked as seamstresses or domestic servants before sailing to Cuba (McCleod: 84). By 1930, of the 65,000 immigrants from the Anglophone Caribbean living in Cuba, 25,000 or 38.5 percent of them were identified as domestic laborers: “The ability to speak English led many British Caribbean islanders into the service sector—as chauffeurs, cooks, gardeners, and school teachers—especially for North American families and upper- and middle-class Cubans who prized such language skills...British West Indian immigrants proved particularly adept at finding employment outside of the sugar sector and in urban areas which not only promised to be less arduous than cutting cane, but also provided a steady income during the *tiempo muerto*” (ibid: 94).

As the majority of the domestic jobs were considered to be women's work and English-speakers were preferred laborers, the growth in this sector that accompanied the influx of U.S. capital and personnel encouraged Anglophone Caribbean women to migrate, thus accounting for the greater gender parity relative to other immigrant laborers. While it is difficult to ascertain the educational and occupational background of those who

performed domestic service in Cuba and thus whether this work was generally a step up in pay or status from their work at home, there were certainly routes to mobility within the domestic sector. The positions ranged from women who took in laundry for military or company personnel to those who worked as maids, seamstresses, cooks, bakers, nannies or English teachers for wealthy families.

The latter positions were more desirable not only because taking in laundry was difficult, poorly compensated labor, but also because working for middle- and upper-class families gave workers access to a world in which their service was sometimes rewarded with household items that were discarded by their employers.<sup>94</sup> Such positions allowed women to achieve or maintain economic independence, and were sometimes indispensable in supporting their families, particularly during the dead season. As Giovannetti found in a 1934 report at the British Legation, “the male British Antilleans who left the rural plantations and moved to the towns to work as tailors and carpenters were “depending more often upon their womenfolk who work as laundresses or domestic servants” (2001: 60).

#### **‘Keeping the Wolf Away from the Door’<sup>95</sup>**

One of the lessons to be learned from the recent historiography on twentieth century Anglophone Caribbean immigration to Cuba with regard to labor patterns is the tendency

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<sup>94</sup> For instance, in one interview focused on women and gender, Melvina discussed how she accompanied her grandmother while she visited her friends, many of whom were single women who lived in *cuarterias*. She emphasized that these single rooms within larger courtyard-style houses were in really good condition because these women worked for Americans in Vista Alegre, had nice things, and were very elegant.

<sup>95</sup> Thanks to my father for using this expression when explaining to me why my Montserratian grandmother was reluctant to let him give up his paper route when he graduated high school and was going on to a local university. “In her mind, during those times,” he said, “you didn’t give up things, you always had to keep the wolf away from the door.” I think this captures the mindset of many people who survived the Great Depression, West Indian or not, and well explains the necessity of developing skills in multiple areas.

for immigrants to occupy positions that ranged in geographical and social location depending upon their skills, the time of year, and available opportunities. British West Indian immigrants, regardless of the advantage that they might have had relative to other poor workers, labored under severe economic and social constraints. What was as important in navigating this as being English-speaking and having knowledge of particular trades and experience working with multinational corporations was the occupational flexibility that the immigrants clearly manifested. Consistent with the theory of strategic flexibility (Carnegie 1985), which proposes that people from the Caribbean acquire multiple skills so that they are able to adapt successfully to a dynamic economic environment where the kinds of labor that are demanded frequently change, these immigrants were able to simultaneously occupy various positions both within and outside of the agricultural industry.

The laws allowing for the importation of foreign black laborers were aimed at facilitating particular corporations' acquisition of seasonally contracted unskilled laborers to cut sugar cane and return home after the *zafra*. However, the promise of greater opportunities drew people whose abilities allowed them to move beyond the field. Given the processes of proletarianization of the populations in the English-speaking islands from which the immigrants were drawn as well as the first hand accounts of migrants themselves and the monetary requirements for immigration, the labor pool were not necessarily the poorest of the poor in their home countries (Marshall 2001, Wynter 2001).

Those who migrated simply “desired betterment.” According to one of Wynter’s informants, “Most Jamaicans never cut cane, Haitians cut cane. I don’t say you may not find Jamaicans who cut cane, I wouldn’t rule that out, but generally speaking they worked in the fields, carpentry, skilled trades people generally... You can take what I tell you, Jamaicans did not go to Cuba to cut cane, no sir, they never go to cut cane, they worked in other fields... Jamaicans with nothing to do cut cane, but they did not leave Jamaica to do that... I know that because I met many of them there which I didn’t know them to be no cane cutters” (2001: 229). One of her Jamaican informants who did report cutting cane, also worked as a train conductor, sold fish part-time, and cut wood (*ibid*: 232). Another was a tailor who also worked full time at a sugar mill. The women did domestic work, sold homemade cakes, pastries, and other sweets, took in laundry, and worked as cooks.

Wynter’s accounts indicate that some cut cane, some didn’t, some cut cane during the harvest season and worked at their trade or performed other jobs on the plantation. The most likely scenario, based on the first hand accounts and secondary sources of what British West Indian immigrants did in Cuba and other destinations, it is likely that they had a range of skills and experienced varying degrees of success depending on a combination of skill, luck, political/social climate, networks, etc. Testimonies in Giovannetti’s work also indicate that immigrants had choices regarding whether or not to work cutting cane and such choices were essential to achieving any measure of social mobility. For instance, one man described how he didn’t go to Banes because he ““couldn’t manage” the cane cutting work and decided to work as a timekeeper in the one

sugar estate” (2001: 47). Another states that rather than cut cane, he worked in factories, cured sugar, sewed sacks, painted, and performed other kinds of labor. Those immigrants who were blacksmiths, masons, shoemakers, tailors, seamstresses, carpenters, mechanics, etc. had the option of working in the field and/or factory during the cutting season, occupying the few open positions during the *tiempo muerto* and practicing their trade depending upon the demand for their labor in either the rural or urban areas.

Not all workers were wholly dependent upon wage labor in the agro-industrial complexes and the income that they earned in independent employment such as practicing their trades contributed to their survival during the *tiempo muerto* and any success that they did achieve. Indeed, Wynter found that a surprising number of Jamaicans bought land in Camagüey and Oriente province with money that they either earned in Cuba or brought with them from their islands of origin and some built their own houses, renting out rooms to other immigrants. Although by no means a common phenomenon during the first third of the century, there were also those who started small commercial businesses in Cuba, again indicating that all Anglophone Caribbean immigrants were not confined to the cane fields and that their quest for “betterment” was not a completely frustrated one (Wynter 2001: 235).

The existence of some measure of economic stability and mobility by no means negated the overall vulnerability experienced by the population. Not only were they black foreigners, but also they, like the rest of Cuban society, were dependent upon the sugar industry, which was in turn dependent upon the world market. Though all were at

tremendous risk for becoming destitute when sugar prices took a precipitous fall after 1921, those immigrants who did not have the skills to diversify their income sources were clearly worse off. The growing Cuban nationalism and the ravages of the Depression proved people from the English-speaking Caribbean to still be a vulnerable sector of the labor force.

With the global economic crisis initiated by the 1929 crash of the Stock Market, the opportunities in Cuba dwindled and the resentment against immigrants, black and white, intensified and gained legal momentum. Some immigrants who were able took their families and moved on in search of better living conditions elsewhere. Others were subjected to the 50 percent Law passed in 1933 which demanded that fifty percent of the workforce be native born. This gave a hungry and disgruntled Cuban population license to throw immigrants off of their jobs and eventually hunt them down and round them up to be deported.<sup>96</sup>

Haitians who had continued to migrate to Cuba in large numbers during the 1920s suffered the brunt of this campaign to expunge Cuba of foreign laborers. The explanation for this has to do not only with their numerical strength and visibility, but also with their greater degree of undesirability- dire poverty, *vodun* and the Haitian Revolution having given them quite a reputation as desperate and dangerous blacks- and vulnerability relative to people from the English-speaking Caribbean (McCleod 1998). In addition to the at least partial protection provided by the British Consul, Anglophone Caribbean

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<sup>96</sup> Some of those from the English-speaking Caribbean lived in isolated immigrant communities, spoke broken Spanish and weren't considered culturally Cuban and were thus subjected to this treatment.

immigrants were able to advocate more successfully for their rights. Perhaps more importantly, their presence in urban areas and greater integration into the economy made them less vulnerable to xenophobic attacks. Those who remained suffered through harsh economic times as is evident in the meeting minutes of their institutions. However, the endurance of some paid off as the U.S. decision to expand the Guantánamo Naval Base at the outset of World War II proved to be an employment boom for Anglophone Caribbean immigrants and their Cuban born children.

### **Movin' on Up (40s and 50s): The Guantánamo Gold Rush**

One of the most significant migrations of the population was internal; with the war-time expansion of the Naval Base, English-speaking Caribbean workers moved to Guantánamo in search of better conditions. The following passage is one account of this internal movement and resulting social mobility.

Many of our faithful readers may remember through previous articles that I was born on a hot and humid summer morning, in the rigidly segregated, poverty ridden sugar plantation community of Banes, north eastern Cuba. Although my family were [*sic*] among the fortunate few in our community, we were by no means not an integral part of the overall picture; it was just less blatant, less painful. My grandfather-Pappy- had a year round, six days a week, \$0.50 per day job as an orderly in the United Fruit Company Hospital. My grandmother-Mami-worked as a cook from 6AM to 8PM, six days a week, at the home of one of the Big Bosses of the Co., for \$6.00 or \$7.00 dollars a month. For the few youngsters in our community that could afford not to go early off to the sugar harvesting, the only other option for improving themselves was by learning a "Trade." The most frequently available trade was as an auto mechanic, baker, tailor, musician, jeweler or barber...No other option was really available for people from our neighborhood...My recollection of my neighborhood is one of a very sad place. Many aspects that typified our community are still vivid in my mind. Whenever I would walk with my mother or grandparents to Union Church, we had to go over the "Gully" with its putrid effluence, contaminating the environment and spreading sickness and death...Illnesses and deaths was [*sic*] another hallmark of our neighborhood...My first awareness of WWII may have happened during our evening dinner, in which I heard my grandfather share with

us the horrific news coming out of the war zone...At the same time, most people in our community kept talking about the great news coming out of Guantánamo, where lots of jobs were being created by the huge expansion that was taking place at the United States Naval Base. Hundreds of unskilled workers, especially those who understood English, were being hired for a host of jobs. Many people in our community fit the required profile, which led to a massive human migration from tens of similar plantation communities in northern Oriente to Guantánamo in the south. It may have been either 1943 or 1944, very early in the morning, my mother, my brother and myself, left our modest home in La Guira, Banes and walked the dark trail to the train station and boarded a Gas Car at 5:30AM. Full of hopes, we were elated by the news that had been coming our way describing the better life that awaited us in Guantánamo...When we arrived at the home our grandfather had rented, we were thrilled, delighted with this cinderblock home with Spanish tile floor, electricity, running water and sewer. Albeit poorly equipped, healthcare and educational facilities were available. In less than 24 hours, our living conditions had improved a million percent...Those fortunate to be employed became “different” overnight. Their living standard rose 5, 10, 20 or more times compared to their cyclical plantation income, which was for most people reduced to 4 or 5 months and kept them in perennial debt with their employer (Jones 2001b).

As is illustrated by this passage, English-speaking immigrants from all over the island responded to the Naval Base’s call for workers experienced immediate upward mobility. Jobs at the Base were highly coveted as most were secure, relatively well-paying positions that provided a pension. Though some of the jobs available were for unskilled laborers such as restaurant, commissary and warehouse workers, the skilled tradesmen among the Anglophone Caribbean community were sought after to power the expansion of the Base. Thus, mechanics, blacksmiths, electricians, masons, etc. were needed and there were even opportunities for West Indians and their Cuban-born children to work in offices, retail stores selling expensive equipment such as cameras, and as managers of the recreational facilities. Although there were native non-West Indian Cubans working at the Base, and indeed the Base employed people from all over the budding North American empire, people of English-speaking Caribbean descent were a main source of labor. As Jones goes on to explain—and this was supported by other interviews—in order

to get onto the Base to be assessed for employment, workers needed a pass that could only be given by those already on the Base. Thus, hiring occurred through social networks and securing a job on the Base was dependent upon community ties.<sup>97</sup>

Constrained by the usual limitations of racism and classism but relieved from the confines of the *centrales* and Depression Era poverty, those who found employment on the Base began to invest heavily in the building of their communities. The Church, in particular All Saints Episcopal Church, the British West Indian Cultural Center ('the Center'),<sup>98</sup> and the fraternal lodges were the most prominent, stable institutions around which people of English-speaking Caribbean descent constructed their lives in Cuba. Serving the needs of a community that occupied an extremely peripheral place in the national body, these spaces were not only critical to the reproduction of Anglophone Caribbean culture, but also vehicles through which this racially and, in most cases, economically disenfranchised group could contest dominant representations of black people as uncivilized. Furthermore, these institutions connected the West Indians in Cuba to sister organizations in their islands of origin, the United States, and throughout the British Empire.

While the English-speaking Caribbean community thrived in Guantánamo due to its proximity to the Base, Santiago residents were also carried along in this wave of

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<sup>97</sup> As with most migrations, the impact of the movement of people and the increased access to resources was not confined to the destination or even departure areas. Incomes earned on the Base fed families living in Santiago and other surrounding cities and it is likely that workers sent money to family members in other parts of Cuba and the Caribbean who could not make the journey themselves.

<sup>98</sup> Though the Center was founded in 1945, similar mutual aid and recreational groups had existed prior to this and All Saints Episcopal Church, founded in 1905, as well as many of the lodges had been active since the early part of the century.

improved opportunity. With only an hour driving distance between the two cities and the maintenance of close family ties, the money earned on the Base could go directly into a household in Santiago. Some participants living in Santiago reported that they themselves or their family member who worked on the Base worked during the week and came home on weekends. Or else, they had a rotating schedule in which they worked and lived on the Base for a number of days and then were off for a number of days, during which time they were free to return to Santiago to spend time with their families. Also, because it was customary to assist extended family in need, particularly if one had stable employment, the parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, and sometimes cousins within and outside of the Guantánamo area benefited from resources (through salaries as well as discounted consumer goods available on the Base) of the Base workers. In this way, the prosperity that emerged was experienced in the surrounding areas and thus impacted the group as a whole, providing a boost to the established churches, schools, fraternal lodges, and recreational associations.

### **The Cuban “American Dream”**

With the stability and resources provided by the expansion of the U.S. Naval Base, more people of English-speaking Caribbean descent were able to move closer toward what could be considered to be a middle class lifestyle, the key to which is not only material comfort, but also the ability to plan for the future. The wooden houses that they built for their families in the late 30s or early 40s could be reconstructed with more durable materials, the ever-present entrepreneurial efforts- of which women participated in considerably- could be expanded, they could afford to save for a child’s higher education

in the hopes of having a professional in the family, and, of course, they could consume, bringing themselves both pleasure and status.

The story of one of the participants in my research illustrates the route to social mobility taken by many and the level of economic success achieved by some. His grandparents came to Cuba from Montserrat and St. Kitts, living and working in Banes, a town in the present day province of Camagüey. His grandfather worked as a carpenter while his grandmother was a homemaker with nine children. In 1941, his uncle left for Guantánamo and, once he secured employment at a photography store on the Base, sent for his other siblings one by one, the oldest males being the first to venture out. His grandfather remained employed on the Base until 1965 when he left for Jamaica. His father began working, eventually securing the position of golf course manager, exiling on the Base in 1970 and remaining in that position until he retired and moved to the Dominican Republic. In this position, he had access to wealthy North Americans who tipped well and availed him of other benefits associated with serving the elite. From this experience and his exposure to North American military personnel, specifically white men of privilege and power, his father proclaimed that he would never live in the United States, a pledge to which he remains faithful in spite of the opportunities he has had to relocate there.

With the money he made on the Base, he was able to buy land and build a house in a more affluent part of town while paying rent on the apartment his family lived in. He was also able to invest in a cock-fighting business, raising the animals and benefiting from the

winnings they earned. He had a quinceañera for his daughter in which he had special clothes made, cars rented, elaborate meals prepared in addition to celebrating for a month beforehand with food and a room full of drinks for neighbors and friends. He had plans for my informant, his son, and his eldest daughter. They were to be a lawyer and doctor respectively and, at the time of the Revolution, he was contributing money to an educational fund for that purpose. This family was living what I call the Cuban ‘American Dream’ in which the male breadwinner comfortably supports his wife who is a homemaker with impeccable taste and his children who feel their futures to be bright and whom he reminds that, unlike them, he was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth.

Another participant in this research tells a similar, though perhaps less ostentatious tale of upward mobility. Her parents both came to Cuba from Jamaica, her mother as the daughter of a more humble family whose father was a stable hand who came to Cuba with his boss and whose mother was a laundress who got paid a pittance to clean the dirty laundry of North Americans in Banes where the family lived until one brother got a job on the Naval Base and they moved to Guantánamo. Her father came to Cuba as a young adult with his mother who emphasized that she and her son traveled to Cuba separately from the common laborers. He first worked as a blacksmith and then found work on the Base. After meeting and marrying her mother, he moved the family to Santiago and built a wooden house in one of the Jamaican neighborhoods. He worked at the Base during the week, coming home on weekends with food, bags of clothes, shoes and toys for his children and the less fortunate neighbors. He owned a car and the house that he

eventually rebuilt with his earnings from the Base. His mother, who worked as a cook and baker for wealthy Cubans in Vista Alegre, also had a small business baking Jamaican sweets that she sold to West Indians and Cubans alike. He had his own shop in Santiago and could afford to take his family on excursions to various points of interest on the island. They entertained frequently, my informant's mother cooking large meals at a moment's notice for her domineering husband's company, and were always impeccably dressed. Indeed, her father always wore a suit and insisted on the children looking neat so that they wouldn't be disrespected.

This economic success did not go unnoticed by local Cubans who, particularly in the case of Guantánamos, were heavily influenced by the presence of the Anglophone Caribbean community. As living conditions in Guantánamo were difficult for those without access to the Base, and access was constrained by association and common 'ethnic' identity, "other citizens in Guantánamo with no such connection were left frustrated, segregated and bitter, with occasional frictions within the community" (Jonesb, 2001).

### ***Social Mobility and the Question of Culture***

An important part of pre-1959 social relations was the class divisions that existed within racial categories, divisions that were attributed to educational level, occupation, and income as well as 'decency' and 'culture'. Interestingly, the Afro-Cuban middle class used the same sort of language and concepts to differentiate themselves from the 'black masses' as British West Indians use to identify the differences between themselves and

Cubans as they “rejected their music, dance, and religion, and any outward or public display of what was associated with the African, and placed tremendous emphasis on gender roles, family stability and ‘decency’ ...this middle-class rhetoric of honor, virtue, and privacy was a defensive strategy against dominant conventions that denied the possibility of such attributes among blacks, their income and education notwithstanding” (Pérez 1995: 156).

As previously discussed, Anglophone Caribbean immigrants’ knowledge of English made them preferred workers for higher status jobs within the sector of the labor market reserved for black and poor labor. Furthermore, their status as subjects of the British crown provided them with some legal recourse if not protection from extreme abuse. However, their victimization itself in addition to the fact that this recourse was far from reliable and that any assistance that these black British subjects received was the result of great effort on their part exemplifies their marginalization as black subjects of the British Empire. Perhaps in part out of resentment toward this marginalization, perhaps out of an internalization of British colonial cultural practices, some Anglophone Caribbean immigrants in Cuba aligned themselves with Anglo culture and this association and/or characteristic is related to their achievement of social mobility in the pre-Revolutionary period.<sup>99</sup>

The cultural legacy of people from the English-speaking Caribbean included imprints of British colonialism of varying depths depending on island of origin, class and individual/familial idiosyncrasies. As the qualities or practices believed to be rooted in

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<sup>99</sup> Carr (1998) does point out that this use of ‘Britishness’ was strategic as is discussed in chapter five.

particular African ethnicities were largely maligned and disparaged, those that revealed the European influence on African peoples brought to the Caribbean were idealized and associated with progress and betterment. At the same time that the dominance of a white supremacist ideology is what renders blackness and Britishness mutually exclusive and relegates a black or African phenotype to an inferior position, it is also what can lead to the privileging of those who are thought to behave more like Europeans under certain circumstances.<sup>100</sup>

### ***Conclusion: Culture of Mobility?***

Faced with deeply entrenched Negrophobia and an anti-immigrant hostility that was particularly forceful against black foreigners<sup>101</sup>, many people of English-speaking Caribbean descent attempted to protect themselves within their insular communities by upholding the moral high ground upon which they, in their role as civilized Christian subjects, stood. Through both the documents that Anglophone Caribbean immigrants created to advocate for themselves with the British authorities and to record the daily life of their organizations and the oral testimonies of their children and grandchildren, respectability and Christian morality emerge as major underlying themes.

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<sup>100</sup> While their 'Britishness' by no means outweighed their blackness in the world of racial, cultural and national hierarchy, this dimension of their identity made them less foreign to the foreigners who dominated Cuba's economic, social, and political terrain well into the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and better able to access opportunities. This dimension, as a powerful symbol of civilization and progress, one that white supremacy places in opposition to blackness, must be included in any understanding of the process by which they were able to access opportunities.

<sup>101</sup> While Spanish immigrants were also subjected to the 50% law, they were not the victims of deportation campaigns.

This respectability was inextricable from the principles of racial pride and uplift that people of African descent, native and immigrant, have practiced in order to defend themselves against white supremacy. The UNIA and other organizations that they supported were dedicated to the notion of returning members of the black race to their former status of greatness through enforcing standards of morality and discipline from which many people had strayed. An essential element of this vision for the future of black people was the escape from poverty and thus the disappearance of immorality was linked to material prosperity.

Unlike that segment of Black Cubans whose African religious practices were more dominant and who were less reserved in their demeanor, the Anglophone immigrants and their descendants constructed their ideal selves as self-contained, frugal, industrious, chaste (for women of course), religious, respectful, and educated. Relatively high rates of endogamy in the communities might be explained by the perceived difference between English-speaking Caribbean families and their Cuban counterparts. According to informants, the former forbade or, in the least, strongly cautioned their Cuban born offspring against marrying native Cubans.<sup>102</sup> One reason for this was the perception that native Cubans of the same class status were not as cultured (read: civilized) and educated as people from the Anglophone Caribbean and thus they would not make suitable mates for those wishing to move out of poverty and into a middle class lifestyle.

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<sup>102</sup> Regarding endogamy rates, the census is deceptive because after the 1940 constitution, all people born in Cuba were Cuban so it's difficult to tell whether they're descendants or not. Another problem is that the huge gender disparity in passenger lists is exaggerated due to the pressure to make it appear as though only seasonal laborers were allowed in the country and the presence of women implies settlement.

As we shall see in the following chapter, some research participants viewed cultural characteristics as assisting them in taking advantage of the tremendous opportunities that the 1959 Revolution would create. The matrix of respectability was thought to act as a buffer against Cuban hostility. They were also perceived to be responsible for economic mobility as they embodied the respectability, decency, and Christianity that adheres to particular notions of a British colonial legacy. As discussed in the following chapters, such perceptions serve to both subvert and reinforce hegemonic notions of race, culture, and the roots of inequality.

## CHAPTER THREE

### NAVIGATING THE REVOLUTION: RACE AND SOCIAL MOBILITY AMONG WEST INDIAN CUBANS

#### *Introduction*

This chapter focuses on the English-speaking Caribbean community's experience of revolutionary change through social mobility, highlighting the predicament in which they found themselves as sweeping changes improved the status of black and poor people, but, with the intensification of United States and Cuban exile aggression, Cuban society became increasingly polarized, and discussions of race and racism became taboo.

Through the narratives of social mobility, I will argue that my research demonstrates the ambivalent position that people of English-speaking descent occupied, supporting findings that cultural explanations for success “mystify culture and obfuscate the structural factors that underlie mobility, and ethnic and racial identities” (Hay 2006: 126), while simultaneously pointing to the limitations of structural mechanisms implemented by the revolution. In particular, I suggest that the revolution's failure to address certain mechanisms of racism dominant in the pre-Revolutionary period contributed to the perpetuation of racism.

The first section of this chapter chronicles the major social changes enacted by the Revolution, situating the immigrant communities within this social upheaval. Then, it focuses on their aspirations for social mobility following the triumph of the Revolution in the 60s and 70s, using the narratives of social mobility to illustrate the powerful role that access to higher education played in the lives of the children and grandchildren of the

British West Indian immigrants. Such opportunities allowed an unprecedented elevation in social status and professionalization, which had been so closely linked to stratification, in an environment demanding personal sacrifice and heavily promoting the equality of all Cubans. As indicated by a refrain I often heard, ‘*somos iguales, pero no somos iguales*’ [we’re equal, but we’re not equal], this, like the elimination of racism, was more hope than reality. In the third section of this chapter, I will more closely examine race in the pre-and early revolutionary periods, arguing that the attempt to create racial equality through greatly reducing class inequality failed in part due to a lack of attention to the manifestation of racism against middle class people of color. This has implications for the Anglophone Caribbean Cuban experience of professionalization and their contemporary predicament in post-Cold War Cuba.

## ***Cuban Society and the Making of Revolution***

### **Economic Crisis and Racial Inequality**

The economic and political situation in Cuba during the 1950s was characterized by instability, corruption, and harsh inequality. Rural Cubans<sup>103</sup>, people of more African

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<sup>103</sup> “Rural workers received low wages and few social services; they were poorly housed and poorly educated. Agricultural workers typically earned less than \$80 a month. Urban workers were comparatively better off—with higher wages, greater job security, and better access to health and educational facilities. This was particularly true if workers were employed by major companies or members of strong union organizations. The average industrial wage was approximately \$120 a month, to which was typically added pension allowances and other fringe benefits. . . . Unemployment and underemployment continued to cast a dark shadow over the entire Cuban working class. An estimated 475,000 sugar workers, approximately 25 percent of the total labor force, averaged less than one hundred days of employment annually. The seasonality of the sugar economy, in turn, affected transportation, retail trade, and other sectors linked to the central activities of the export economy. Beyond the problem of seasonality was that of unpredictability. Cuban workers lived precariously, dependent on the vagaries of invisible market forces over which they had little control”(Pérez: 299).

descent and those from the middle classes<sup>104</sup> were all victims of the U.S.-backed Batista government's policies. In 1953, 70 percent of the Cuban population of nearly 6 million was engaged in small-scale subsistence farming as owners, renters, and squatters. Most lived in desperate conditions, without access to minimum educational, health, and housing facilities. The 500,000 Cubans who comprised the urban proletariat worked in manufacturing and various service sectors, including as domestics, street vendors, waiters, and entertainers (Pérez 1999: 296). The depressed conditions in both urban and rural settings were compounded by the crisis amongst a middle class that was threatened by the mounting political instability and growing economic uncertainty. According to Pérez, the appearance of economic development and a high standard of living based on prevailing measurements concealed the tensions that resulted from fluctuations of the export economy that continued to create conditions of apprehension affecting all classes. The middle class "found little comfort in statistical tallies that touted their high level of material consumption and placed the island near the top of the scale of per capita income in Latin America. The social reality was quite different" (ibid).

With regard to Cubans of color, there were numerous economic and social barriers that deterred them from achieving 'their rightful share' of the affluence that a minority of Cubans enjoyed. Though there was some fluctuation in indicators of social mobility such as school enrollment during the '40s and 50s, previous gains made in narrowing the racial gap in literacy rates were being lost and Cuban society remained characterized by stark inequalities. As touched upon in the previous chapter in the discussion of literacy among

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<sup>104</sup> The Cuban middle class numbered approximately 621,000 and consisted almost entirely of salaried personnel, which included anyone from corporate executives to sales people and clerks (Pérez 1999: 296).

the black immigrant population, almost 30 percent of the Cuban population of color over twenty years of age was illiterate according to the 1953 census. Thus, in spite of rhetoric around racial equality, “in the main Afro-Cubans occupied the lower end of the socio-economic order. Blacks tended to constitute a majority in the crowded tenement dwellings of Havana. They suffered greater job insecurity, more unemployment/underemployment, poorer health care, and constituted a proportionally larger part of the prison population. They generally earned lower wages than whites, even in the same industries. Afro-Cubans were subjected to systematic discrimination, barred from hotels, resorts, clubs, and restaurants” (Pérez 1999:307). Furthermore, the overall decline in literacy rates by 1953 in spite of the fact that the 1940 Constitution established universal education indicates the society’s overall failure to live up to its ideals (de la Fuente 2001a).

To heighten the social tensions that existed, there was an overwhelming foreign presence in the economic and political life of the country. The United States and, to a lesser degree, Britain, was invested heavily in the Cuban economy and played a decisive role in national politics. Given the economic insecurity across classes and Cuba’s history of organized resistance to foreign control, it is not particularly surprising that, on July 26th, 1953, Fidel Castro, a law student and political activist, led an assault on the Moncada army barracks in Santiago de Cuba. Though the attack was thwarted and its organizers severely punished, with Fidel being tried and exiled, it marked the beginning of increased repression and an active military resistance to the Batista regime that would culminate in its overthrow on January 1st, 1959. Though the political aspect of this victory and the

building of revolutionary society will be fully discussed in the following chapter, it is important to note here that this was a popular victory celebrated by Cubans across various social groups. It was with the implementation of radical changes on the part of the revolutionary government and the harsh response of the United States to these changes that these divisions asserted themselves and the society became increasingly polarized.

### **Revolutionary Transformation and Retaliation**

Upon coming to power, Castro asserted that the four main battles of the revolution were against unemployment, poor living standards, the high cost of living, and racial discrimination at work centers (Castro, March 24, Noticias de Hoy in de la Fuente 2001a: 263). The revolutionary program was based on urban and agrarian reform, industrialization, and employment expansion. During the first hundred days of the Revolution, the government cut rents such that rents under 100 pesos a month were reduced by half, those between 100-200 by 40 percent, and those greater than 200 by 30 percent; cut ITT-owned Cuban Telephone Company rates in half; set up a task force to recover property acquired illegally by the Batista regime such that, by the end of the year, they had recovered \$400M worth of valuable property and goods; turned old military garrisons into schools; began cleaning up trade unions; and outlawed prostitution, opening schools to retrain thousands of women (Cannon 1981: 112). In addition, eleven thousand women who had performed domestic labor for the wealthy were re-trained and half a million workers began taking correspondence courses to improve their skills (ibid: 167).

According to *Revolución* of March 1959, wage increases, new jobs, and various other reforms generated an expansion of 200 million pesos in domestic purchasing power. New investment inquiries were up tenfold, license applications for small businesses increased 400 percent” (as quoted in Pérez-Stable 1999:65). Furthermore, by August of 1960, Cuba had nationalized \$1,800,000,000 worth of U.S. industries, followed by the nationalization of 382 large Cuban-owned industries, including all of the banks, in order to realize the goal of using the nation’s resources for the benefit of the people (Cannon:132).

There were also tremendous and immediate changes in the rural sector as a primary aim of the revolutionary program was to minimize the inequality between the urban and rural areas. The agrarian reform law prohibited foreign and sugar-mill ownership of land and landholdings of over 1,000 acres (except for special allotments up to 3,333 acres when economically justifiable). It privileged peasant and small producers’ rights over those of agricultural workers and large producers, established cooperatives, and generally increased state control of land and production (Perez-Stable 1999: 64). Further changes had a significant impact on workers in the rural sector: “In ten months, the revolutionary government decreed 66 million pesos in wage increases to sugar workers and 20 million pesos to workers in other sectors. In 1956-1958, wage increases had averaged 4.2 percent; the annual rise in 1959 was 14.3 percent. The [Labor Ministry] ordered the reinstatement with back pay of workers fired for political reasons during the 1950s and the disbursement of illegally retained vacation payments, and awarded sugar workers retroactive *superproducción* wages [wages lost during mechanization]” (Pérez-Stable 1999: 68). By 1960, the *tiempo muerto* was no more and there was a shortage of workers

rather than jobs. Made possible by heavy Soviet subsidies, “during the 1960s, seasonal unemployment was eliminated and almost all working-age Cubans found stable employment. Between 1962 and 1969, an unofficial estimate of unemployment was 4.7 percent, well below the level of the 1950s. In 1970, annual unemployment was 1.8 percent” (Pérez-Stable 1999: 91, sources: Mesa-Lago 1981 and censuses).

Not only was the quality of rural life in particular improved through creating more secure, fairly remunerated employment and vindicating exploited peasants, but also through providing health care, housing, and education to people who had virtually no access to such basic services. At the time of the revolutionary victory, approximately six thousand doctors were practicing medicine in Cuba, 64 percent of them in the city of Havana. Thus, beginning in 1960, the Ministry of Public Health sent teams of doctors to towns and villages where no doctor had been before. Between 1959 and 1975, the national health budget went from \$22 million to \$400 million, hospital beds from 28,536 to 46,402, medical schools from one to four, and physicians from six thousand (half of whom left after the Revolution) to ten thousand (Cannon 1981: 201). Although the Revolution has been far less successful in the area of housing than health care and education, the vision of home ownership and providing universal and free housing motivated early housing policies such that, between 1959 and 1964, 26,000 new homes were built, representing 47 percent of all new dwellings (Saney 2004: 17).

This improved access to health care and housing, immediate availability of employment, increase in purchasing power and sense of empowerment experienced by the working

classes was the source of much revolutionary fervor. Furthermore, the revolutionary government's obvious investment in bringing about a society in which opportunities for success were more evenly distributed amongst the population evident in the radical changes in the area of education was cause for much celebration. The famed Literacy Campaign in which young people were sent out into the rural areas to teach the more than 40 percent of the population who were illiterate is still looked upon with pride. Increasing the education budget three fold by 1962 and seven fold by 1973 in order to accommodate the increasingly literate population exemplified the commitment to radical change and the end to ignorance and misery (Cannon 1981:189).

During this early period of the Revolution, among the changes that occurred at a frenetic pace was the deterioration of Cuba's relationship with the United States and the splintering of the population that had been briefly united around the ousting of Batista. After initially supporting the rebels, the United States quickly withdrew support of the revolutionary government and the escalation of a hostility that has been maintained for over 45 years ensued. The budding trade relations with the USSR that began with the purchase of 170 thousand tons of sugar in 1959 and the nationalization of sugar *centrales* and oil refineries were followed by the United States' cancellation of Cuba's sugar quota. This, in turn, was followed by the expropriation of all U.S. property. These events that occurred in the first half of 1960 led to the imposition of the U.S. embargo on all imports to Cuba and nationalization of major foreign banks in October of that year and the United States' severing of diplomatic relations in January of 1961. In April of that same year, the U.S. backed a military invasion known as the Bay of Pigs that was carried out by CIA-

trained Cubans who fled the country. Later that month, Castro declared the socialist nature of the revolution and a year and a half later, Cuba's strategic position in the Cold War became apparent during the Cuban Missile Crisis in which Kennedy demanded the withdrawal of Soviet troops and arms from Cuba, imposing a naval blockade that was withdrawn a month later (Stubbs 1989: xi-xii).

The shift in alignment that Cuba's revolutionary program during the Cold War necessitated had a tremendous impact on a country that had been so closely linked to the U.S. Cubans had to reorient themselves economically, politically and culturally while preparing to ward off military aggression and sabotage. In this intense climate where Fidel declared that 'with the revolution, everything and without it, nothing', Cubans were faced with the choice of whether or not to support the transformation that was taking place. At the same time many Cubans rejected the changes and over a million of whom fled the country, there was a process of investment in revolutionary society. This investment was due to, among other things, opportunities for social mobility created by the redistribution of the society's wealth in the effort to eliminate social inequality. Indeed, equality itself, in the Cuban case, can be understood to be a dominant form of social mobility.

### ***English-Speaking Caribbean Cubans Cast Their Lot***

#### **Getting Out vs. Getting Involved**

With the Cuban Revolution, the immigrant communities found themselves in a peculiar position, one that became increasingly contradictory as Cuba's relationship with the United States deteriorated. At the same time that they experienced the revolution as a rout

to greater possibilities, as will be seen below, it raised fundamental questions related to their ambiguous position in Cuban society. At the onset of the revolutionary struggle, there was at least one generation born on Cuban soil and thus some level of incorporation into and investment in their adopted country existed even for those who imagined “going home” some day. As the ‘50s came to a close and the revolutionary movement resulted in political unrest and increased brutality of the Batista dictatorship, some people left the country, others participated in the struggle, and others focused on earning a living and maintaining their families and communities.

By all accounts, British West Indians and their families greeted the triumph of the rebels over Batista with satisfaction because the revolution was being fought to end the severe corruption, inequality, brutality, and intimidation that dominated the dictatorship. The Batista regime’s persecution of Cuban citizens, particularly young people who were tortured and murdered, their bodies often found on roadsides, created an atmosphere of terror and instability that most people, West Indian or not, wanted to see come to an end. Furthermore, archival research revealed that after the attack on the Moncada in 1953, there was a crackdown on Anglophone Caribbean institutions. Records show concerted efforts on the part of the police to close lodges, recreational clubs, and other cultural institutions in order to exert tighter control over the society as a whole, a move that was repeated under the revolutionary government.<sup>105</sup> This dissatisfaction with the political

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<sup>105</sup> I found letters addressed to the organizations that requested documentation such as membership and financial records dating back decades, in some cases. Internal police department memos confirming the closure of the organization were often also in the file. The following illustrates this finding: Club Caribe documents from 1954 and 1959 government letters notifying of dissolution; Club Polar, Caimanera, 1955 request for official recognition, mission statement, revolutionary government letters, one of which notified of its closure in 1961; Logia La Estrella Naciente de Cuba, 1918, Santiago, 1952 letters warning of non-compliance then one to head of secret police notifying of dissolution; British Early Rose, Santiago, 1918,

climate as well as the initial lack of radicalism in the revolutionaries' statement on the economy may explain why even some of those immigrant families that were doing well economically due to employment on the Naval Base supported the rebels (Pérez-Stable 1999:63).<sup>106</sup> However, when Fidel declared the Revolution to be socialist in April of 1961 and the United States began to be concerned over the direction of the new government, a direction that threatened their substantial economic interests in the island, the English-speaking Caribbean community was torn.

As people of African descent who were largely relegated to the bottom of the social hierarchy, social change and justice were welcomed; however, as a group whose presence was closely tied to that of the U.S. capital, their social position became precarious. These preoccupations as articulated by interviewees who remained in Cuba were linked to the uncertainty of their economic and material future. For instance, Edward's St. Kittsian grandfather had retired from the Base and, at the time of the Revolution, was dependent upon a pension that, with the new regulations in Cuba pertaining to the U.S. dollar, he would no longer be able to draw upon. Though his children were more than willing to support him, the prospect of losing financial independence motivated him to leave his family and migrate to Jamaica with his Jamaican born companion whom he met in Cuba after his Montserratian wife died.

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correspondence with secret police in 1952; Brillante Estrella de Cuba, 1919, Santiago, non-compliance 1952 and dissolution 1957; Loyal Pear of Cuba Lodge no. 18, 1920, Santiago, 1952 non-compliance and dissolution; Asociacion Juvenil de "Reina Ester", 1965 letter from ministry of the interior regarding compliance, dissolution due to youth moving to adult lodges (Source from Santiago archives)

<sup>106</sup> As Edward noted, his mother contributed some of her weekly allowance to the cause in spite of the fact that they lived quite comfortably because she did not like the injustices that were commonly committed.

Guantánamo in particular was a contentious space upon which the escalating hostilities between the United States and Cuba played themselves out, impacting the lives of English-speaking Caribbean communities. For instance, in 1964, the United States ordered 700 ‘Cuban’ workers off of the Base, and in 1971, Cuba temporarily cut off its water supply (Stubbs 1989: xii). Research participants in both Santiago and Guantánamo recalled that, amidst such tensions, Base workers were made to choose whether or not they would leave their job or exile on the Base. While some workers were allowed to travel back and forth, undergoing an extensive security procedure at the ‘border’, many of the family members of people in this research chose to stay on the Base, some with the intention of sending for other family once they migrated back to their island of origin or to the United States.

The Bay of Pigs, the U.S. trade embargo, the Missile Crisis, and the tremendous political and economic implications of these events marked the onset of an incredibly difficult period for the community as families were separated through exile and migration, English-speaking Caribbean institutions declined or were shut down, and, as a result of the extensive counterrevolutionary activity, people of English-speaking Caribbean origin were subject to a high degree of suspicion. While the Bay of Pigs was among the most dramatic examples of U.S.-backed attempts on the part of Cuban exiles to overthrow the revolutionary government, Cubans have been subjected to overt and covert attacks for nearly fifty years. From acts of sabotage to the spread of anti-revolution propaganda propelled from Miami via planes, radio waves, and satellite to numerous assassination attempts on Fidel Castro to the bombing of the plane that carried Cuba’s entire Olympic

fencing team, Cuba became no stranger to acts of terrorism. One of the many repercussions of this economic and military assault was to militarize and polarize the nation such that anyone who was not opposed to the United States and capitalism was looked upon with suspicion. As people who spoke English, were employed by North Americans, and had family abroad, some Anglophone Caribbean Cubans found themselves in an awkward position, particularly those in Guantánamo who had such a close connection to the Base.

Ironically, just as the Batista regime had done, the revolutionary government also sought to eliminate ethnic institutions, closing down those that could not produce years and years of records of their activities.<sup>107</sup> The English-speaking Caribbean institutions were by no means singled out; rather, they were simply one branch in Cuba's social landscape whose presence did not support the refashioning of civil society. As de la Fuente (2001a) observes of the Black Cuban social organizations,

“The revolution's integration program left little room for racially defined voices or institutions to persist, much less thrive. However, the Afro-Cuban societies were not dismantled overnight. Many survived much longer than the exclusive clubs of the bourgeoisie. When the government closed them, it was usually for alleged procedural reasons, such as lack of proper registration or failure to pay fees and taxes. Furthermore, the black societies were not singled out as preferred targets of government action. Rather, they were eradicated together with numerous other associations- civic, fraternal, professional, and mutual aid-that supposedly obstructed the process of redefining Cuba's civil society along lines deemed to be appropriate by the revolutionary government...in January 1959, a process of “revolutionary seizures” of the societies began, similar to that which took place after the fall of Machado” (281).

The erosion of their institutional infrastructure no doubt encouraged the departure of many community members, particularly those original immigrants who were more active

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<sup>107</sup> See footnote 96.

in the organizations founded by their own cohort. Their livelihoods had always been dependent upon North Americans, and they were less amenable to becoming further incorporated into Cuban society. Of the participants in this study, eleven had immediate family members who left Cuba during the first 15 years of the Revolution either through migrating or exiling on the Base. One participant, Winton, actually attempted to leave through swimming onto the Base but was caught and jailed for three years. Another, Pamela, applied to leave and, once this was discovered, was ostracized, denied the opportunity to study, and made to do agricultural work.

Leonarda, now age 55, is the daughter of a Jamaican immigrant and the Cuban born son of Jamaican immigrants. Her parents migrated from Banes to Caimanera in order to work on the Base. Her father worked in a nightclub and her mother was a housewife and, in more difficult times, worked as a laundress. They had eight children; her father died at a fairly young age and her mother remarried another Jamaican descendant who had a job on the Base. Her mother left the country in 1970 and now lives in California. The following excerpt from an interview with Leonarda illustrates the social terrain that some people of English-speaking Caribbean descent had to navigate during the early period of the Revolution as well as the dispersion of family through further migration:

A: And do you have memories of Caimanera, of life in Caimanera?

L: There were different bars, one was a store by day and by night, they put out a vitrola and there was music and sailors came, there were problems...they thought that they were the owners of the street and everything...these are things I heard [from adults]. I was young, nine when the revolution triumphed, the first school I went to was the English school with Ms. Odein...

A: A lot of people had her. Everyone says she was...

L: De madre [Really difficult or hard]...I was in a private school with her so that I could be prepared to do well in the Spanish public school...

A: And was this very important for your mother?

L: Yes, of course, for us to be able to communicate because she insisted on one thing, my mother was accustomed to when she called us, we answered in English and if everything wasn't in English, she hit you...but also the English language at that time wasn't important and later it was a little...well, people said 'English, for what? English, for what?'...

A: This was after the triumph of the revolution?

L: Yes, and with this 'for what?' [attitude], are you crazy?, when my mother called me, I preferred to get hit than to answer in English. When I was inside the house I answered in English, but outside I [didn't speak English]...and when I went to the public school and the teacher would call on me, I accidentally answered 'Yes teacher' [said in English]...and this embarrassed me.

A: Would you say that there was discrimination against people who spoke English?

L: Not so much, some rejection, a little rejection, so when we were together one felt a little shy, prohibited in speaking...

A: And what was the environment of Guantánamo like at that time, during the time of the revolution?

L: Normal. At first the language [English] was not [looked upon well] but then, the language school was started and they wanted my mother to be a teacher in the school.

A: Did she want to be a teacher?

L: No, she didn't want to...later, because she was always in the Centre and the lodge, through the Centre, she worked with the British consulate in Santiago. She was like a social worker. She helped the *jamaicanos* from the countryside.

A: What kind of help?

L: She always went to the countryside and she helped them fill out and arrange their papers to leave the country...

A: And what did she say about the country folk, the *jamaicanos* who lived in the countryside?

L: Well, she helped them because many of them...they were like the Cubans who are ignorant and uneducated, they are a little...you have to convince them, to talk with them and say 'no, it's not like that, it's like this'.

A: And why did your mother do this work?

L: Because she liked to help people...

A: And this work, was it part of the system or outside of the revolutionary process, because if she was helping people leave the country...

L: No, it was legal, it was legal. For example, if they had to go to the city for some document, this is what she requested and she got it and so they got it through her...she was a social worker. Some wanted to travel and didn't know how to make the arrangements but they wanted to leave. It wasn't a...it wasn't that they had to leave, they just wanted to leave normally, it was that they spent some time here and wanted to spend some time there.

A: So what did she say about the changes of the revolution? For example, did she think that there were more opportunities for her children, for you all, than what she had, or what did she say about this?

L: She looked at this and she said, 'well, I don't like the system'...because she saw that it was communism and she didn't like this and she didn't want to stay. And three of us stayed.

A: But there are eight of you all, so five left?

L: Yes.

A: And why did some of you leave and others stay?

L: The older ones stayed and the little ones left with my mother. The oldest of the younger ones was 15 or 16. And us older ones have all stayed and are still here.

A: So were you all studying at that time? What were you doing in '70?

L: Well, when my mother left, I had finished my nursing training. Before this, I had some problems studying because to study, I had to do mathematics and Spanish exams and they always failed my oral exam. I had to present myself in various exams in order to qualify for the major and it was always the same, always the same...I think that everything that they asked me I answered correctly and tell me what's this about? They asked me if I had family outside of the country and I say 'yes'. They asked 'who' and I said 'my mother and some of my brothers and sisters'. My stepfather worked on the Base, he was still alive. And they asked if I liked parties and I said 'yes'. Now, I wanted a career where I knew that I had to work and if there's a party, I know I have to work...but for this they failed me. But eventually they accepted me because they knew me from before as I had gone to various exams [and hadn't given up]. With me, what happened was that they thought 'no, no, no, they're not going to educate someone to be a nurse so that she can leave my country'...later I understood and if they [didn't give me a chance] I'd have to leave the country because what else could I do here? If I couldn't study, I couldn't do anything. So, I spoke with them so that they would understand and from there I studied and graduated in general nursing and pediatric nursing.

A: And did you always want to study nursing?

L: Yes, I liked it. I liked nursing in internal medicine, because there's nursing in dentistry, in pediatrics, general nursing...so, what was left was pediatric so I did pediatric first and then general.

A: And what did your mother think about her daughter...

L: This is what she wanted to study...she liked this.

A: So she wasn't in agreement with the system but you had this opportunity to study, one that she did not have...

L: Yes...

A: And your brothers and sisters studied at that time as well?

L: Yes, one became a painter and the other is a mechanical engineer.

A: And did they study with the revolution?

L: Yes, yes. They didn't have to pay or anything, not a cent. And also when I was studying...after I graduated, well...I had my daughter...in that time, there were pre-schools that took care of the children during the entire week and they helped me a lot. I worked during the week until midday, then picked up my child from pre-school and worked in the hospital at night while [someone] watched my daughter...

Thus, in spite of the suspicion that grew as the '60s wore on into the early 70s, the option for incorporation was clearly present for people of English-speaking Caribbean origin. As their own institutions declined, there were mass organizations and more inclusive national institutions to replace them. For instance, with the expansion of the public school system and elimination of private education, the English schools closed, but the educational opportunities sky-rocketed as Anglo-Caribbean Cubans now had widespread access to higher education, further embedding them into Cuban society with the hope of improving their economic position.

It is interesting to note that, while becoming a professional appeared to be the dream of many descendants, one that was within reach in the new national order, for some the imposition of national need superceded their own specific dreams, desires, and inclinations. This exemplifies the kind of qualified improvement that the Revolution brought about in people's lives. For instance, the husband of one of the participants had a dream of studying history or literature, yet he became a veterinarian because the country needed people to ensure the health of its livestock. Another wanted to be a pharmacist, but was selected to study education. As explained above, the entire educational system was reoriented such that the urgent need to fill the technological void created by the loss of so many skilled professionals could be met. There was clearly an ideological component that demonized particular endeavors characterized as bourgeois in the process of socialist transformation.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Cannon (1981) argues- or really asserts with a tone of assumption or logic- that producing liberal arts majors and lawyers were symptoms of a "privilege-ridden system," one that educated people in fields that would not benefit the country. "For a while, the three main universities continued to turn out lawyers and liberal arts majors, when the country desperately needed agricultural experts, chemists, agronomists and

Additionally, just as “...success in satisfying basic needs raised popular expectations for more comfortable living standards...[achieving] relative equality amid austerity...” (Perez-Stable 1999:82), social mobility through equality of opportunity brought about an inherent contradiction. That the same elimination of exclusion that allowed for so many to move out of lower status positions also eliminated some of the material and social benefits previously associated with achieving such ascension.

Furthermore, for those whose dream included the establishment or expansion of a business, the revolutionary government thwarted such efforts. As previously discussed, it was not unheard of for West Indian immigrants and their children to establish small businesses as tailors, contractors, blacksmiths, and canteen proprietors. With the initial increase in income that came into the hands of the workers in the first years of the revolution, there was a concurrent rise in new businesses. However, in 1968, the state nationalized more than 50,000 small businesses, over half of which had been established after 1961, and banned self-employment; “...corner stands offering coffee and a quick snack disappeared. Family stores peddling toiletries, household goods, and other items vanished. Dry cleaning, appliance repairs, plumbing, and a host of other services became unavailable or were mishandled by the state. Consumption was at least 5 percent below 1962 levels” (Pérez-Stable 1999: 119).

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industrial engineers, mathematicians and statisticians-occupations once dominated by Americans....changing the university system from an elite producer of professionals and politicians to one that began to address the economic needs of the nation was part of an attempt to move the entire country in the same direction...”(190). Thus, the emphasis shifted from what were identified as more bourgeois interests to those that had practical value for the country.

This curtailing of entrepreneurial activity was certainly inconvenient and perhaps contributed to the deprivation that resulted from austerity. The fact that the nationalization of these small businesses was carried out by fellow citizens who were representing the CDRs [Committees in Defense of the Revolution] created other tensions. “Those who took command of the stores were in large part consumers themselves. It was necessary only for a CDR representative to come to the store and be given the financial books and records. The bank accounts were frozen while the transfer of control took place. If it was felt the owner could be trusted, he stayed on as the manager-at a salary. Many shop owners, no longer able to make money off their fellow citizens, left the country” (Cannon 1981: 217). While Cannon clearly and perhaps unfairly admonishes even small entrepreneurs and represents this as a positive step in the direction of empowering workers, it is possible that this event had a negative impact on community relations in addition to the supply of goods and services. Given that at least some of these small entrepreneurs were likely to be members of the community whose neighbors would have essentially turned on them and took away their control of their livelihood, sending a strong message to anyone who aspired to a similar independence. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that it was around this time that more *jamaicanos* began to leave the country as this route to social mobility was apparently closed to them.

### **Revolutionary Mobility**

The sweeping changes that were enacted in the early ‘60s made this a pivotal time in the lives of those people who remained and were charged with the task of creating a new society according to participants in this research. While there was fear and uneasiness

among those wary of socialism, communism and the economic and social repercussions of becoming an enemy of the United States on earth, there was also a revolutionary fervor that spread among members of the Anglophone Caribbean community. In particular, the youth were energized by the immediate and radical impact that the initial reforms had on daily economic life.

Perhaps more important for Cuban-born West Indians, at least some of whom had basic literacy skills, was that the revolution transformed the character and content of higher education. Addressing both the lack of institutions of higher learning as well as the inaccessibility of such opportunities to Cubans living in rural areas, the number of universities increased from three in 1959 to forty in the 1980s and enrollments expanded tenfold (Pérez 1999: 360). Furthermore, the commitment to self-determination and independence meant a shift in focus for education. The goal became the production of people educated in running the country. Before, programs most relevant to the national economy were inadequately subsidized and not promoted due to the reliance on foreign managers, technicians, and specialists and those Cubans educated abroad. With the revolution, university curriculums introduced during the 1960s and 1970s reflected the need for people educated in the most strategic sectors of the national economy rather than in the humanities, social sciences, and law, all preparation principally for positions in government and public administration (ibid).<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> “Significant programmatic and curriculum changes were introduced during the 1960s and 1970s. Greater emphasis was given to technological programs, and many of these were linked directly to national planning programs. Through appeals to *conciencia* and commitment, and if that failed, through the use of enrollment quotas, the curriculum was restructured during the 1960s. Between 1959 and 1967, enrollments in the humanities declined by 50 percent, in the social sciences by 72 percent, in law by 93 percent. Enrollments increased in education by 32 percent, in natural sciences by 51 percent, in medicine by 34 percent, in engineering and architecture by 82 percent, and in agricultural sciences by 128 percent. The

The elimination of racial as well as economic barriers to access higher education further illustrated the new premium placed on justice and equality, through resource distribution if not through the tolerance of dissent, and its impact on the lives of working class people. Their relationship to the revolution cannot be underestimated. All research participants identified the opportunity to study and become a professional as critical to their support of the Revolution. It was a radical shift from the exclusivity and inaccessibility of a university education that marked the experience of their parents and grandparents who, as a result of the system of race/class/origin discrimination, could never have propelled themselves into positions of such prestige. Though there were some individual instances where one person in a family or community was able to attend university through much sacrifice as will be illustrated below, such mass access to education was unprecedented. In most instances, after children received an elementary education in the English schools and perhaps some exposure to what would be the equivalent of junior high school in the Cuban schools, options for further education were limited and young people began their working lives full time.

For immigrants and their descendants who were reportedly focused on finding a better life and achieving social mobility, and to whom education was highly valued, this was an amazing opportunity. During this time, the professional class was fleeing the country, opening up countless positions for those who were inclined to take advantage of this situation. The country desperately needed highly trained personnel to work as

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overall percentage of students enrolled in technical programs increased from 59 percent in 1959 to 90 percent in 1967” (Pérez 1999: 360).

professionals, technicians, administrators, and managers in order to stabilize and develop the economy.<sup>110</sup> Those descendants who had attended English and Cuban schools, and in whose community the importance of education and self-discipline were reportedly stressed, were in an optimal position to take advantage of such opportunities. Becoming a professional not only furthered one's personal middle-class aspirations, but it was also viewed as a contribution to the revolution.

The resources that the revolutionary government invested in the educational system combined with a policy of anti-discrimination prepared the formerly disenfranchised to fill the professional void left by the middle and upper class exiles. Those who remained in Cuba and aligned themselves with the Revolution had the opportunity to access social mobility. During this period, the descendants of British West Indian immigrants confronted a certain predicament due to their association with and reliance upon the U.S. presence in Cuba. As we shall see, for some Cubans, speaking English, having family abroad, and historically being brought to Cuba to work for Americans were grounds to distrust those among them with an English-speaking Caribbean background. However, the world that they occupied rapidly became very different from the social, economic and political world of their parents and grandparents. For many, there was a shift from being the elite of the working poor to being part of the educated professional class. This mobility was a source of pride and status, and though they continued to face racial

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<sup>110</sup> More specifically, "of the 300 agronomists working in Cuba in 1959, 270 departed. Approximately half of all teachers emigrated. Of an estimated total 85,000 professionals and technicians in Cuba, approximately 20,000 emigrated. More than 3,000 physicians out of a total 6,000 and 700 dentists out of almost 2,000 departed. The senior medical faculty at the University of Havana was reduced from 200 to 17. Only one trained engineer stayed at the vast Ariguanabo textile factory. One mechanic was all that remained of a large staff trained to run a newly constructed automated glass factory (Pérez 1999: 343)

barriers to “betterment” and, in most cases, lost the institutional base of the British West Indian community, the tremendous opportunities provided by the Revolution appeared to overshadow the ongoing discrimination, daily struggle to create a material life that was commensurate with expectations based on educational status, community disintegration and familial separations.

### *Narratives of Social Mobility*

Narratives of social mobility made possible through the opportunity to obtain a free education dominated reflections on the impact of the Revolution on West Indian communities. In this section, I will focus on the voices of research participants as they relay their occupational and educational experiences. As will be evident, these experiences are seen through the lens of present-day Cuba in which opportunities for advancement and economic stability through education have become complicated by the economic and social transformations of Cuba’s Special Period (the subject of Chapter Six). Given the resurgence of inequality and elements of pre-revolutionary society, these narratives of social mobility are presented by some as testimony to the merits of the Revolution. At the same time that they are a defense against Cuba’s critics, they are also a means of conveying the success of English-speaking Caribbean descendants in Cuba.

The following is an excerpt from my July 12, 2004 fieldnotes that I wrote while in Guantánamo. It illustrates not only a typical way that I became privy to narratives of social mobility, but also a way in which the contemporary economic condition interjected itself into my interactions with people of Anglophone Caribbean descent:

*I'll start with the morning's excursion to the market a few blocks away. Pamela. picked up some corn for the chickens, a soursop...and fish- I tried to pay for everything but she only let me provide the fish. On the way to the market, we passed a Baptist church that used to be the school that both she and Patricia [her cousin/sister who now lives in New York] attended. She went to both the English and Cuban school, this was the Cuban school but they taught English. There were lots of people passed by on the way, some of whom were descendants...At the market, Pamela. kept saying that there was nothing there, that everything looked bad. On the way back...we stopped by several people's homes, mostly women, all descendants...In the first house, there were two women, mother and daughter. The mother has 12 children, all, she proclaimed, went to university. Her parents moved to Cuba from Jamaica. She emphasized the discipline with which they were raised, saying that the discipline was a beautiful thing and that it began in the classroom. She then recited word for word what must have been how each day began in the English school: "Good morning students, good morning teacher..." and the rest was the teacher telling them how they had to behave. She had such pride in the family's accomplishments and her strength as a mother of twelve.*

Much like the director of *La Cinta* whom I met in the late '90s, those people of English-speaking Caribbean descent who had lived through the Batista regime were eager to share their success stories. This was the case in brief and informal interactions such as the one described above as well as in the lengthier contact and semi-structured interviews from which the individual profiles below are taken.

### **Pablo**

Pablo is a 65-year old Guantanamero who lives in a two-story house with his wife. He is a retired manager who is now overseeing the construction project at the British West Indian Welfare Centre. Pablo's father was born in 1897 and came to Cuba in 1920 where he married the daughter of *antillanos*. As Pablo shows me his father's passport and other documents, he says, "my father worked on the railroad...he was very social, a member of the lodge, and had six children, the eldest was a doctor, two are nurses, one is a

housewife, one is a professor, and the other a skilled technician. My father was very respected, so were the other *jamaicanos* when they came to Cuba.”

As he continues to talk, acknowledging that some *jamaicanos* left Cuba after the Revolution and also praising the Revolution for the opportunity to be educated, it becomes clear that his older siblings were educated prior to the Revolution. He recalls, There were a lot of Jamaicans here and when they were all going back to Jamaica, my father wouldn't go because his children went to the university here. The older ones went to university before the Revolution. My brother began studying before the Revolution, left to fight, then began again. Many people of color weren't able to go to school because they didn't have the money. My brother was able to begin his education through a lot of sacrifice. They were *jamaquino*, they didn't smoke, they didn't drink and dedicated their salary to take care of their children. My father only drank a beer at the beginning of the year. He wanted all of his children to be educated. All money went to clothe, feed and educate the children... my brother studied to be a doctor and my sister was sent to the Normal School to study to be a nurse. It was rare to see a family send their children to school to achieve an advanced degree; first, because they were black and second because of their class. Thus, Pablo understands his own family to be exceptional and is quite proud of their achievements.

What is remarkable about Pablo's narrative is that he in clearly invested in constructing *jamaicanos* as strict, disciplined, patriarchal, Christian,<sup>111</sup> upstanding community members who value education and were capable of obtaining it on their own. At the same

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<sup>111</sup> Pablo denied English-speaking Caribbean involvement in African based religious practices.

time, he repeatedly expressed gratitude to the Revolution for his family's success. Indeed, one way that he communicated both his siblings' prestige and family's dedication to the Revolution was through sharing further that his eldest brother, the doctor, completed three missions abroad after the Triumph of the Revolution in Angola and Ethiopia. The younger sister who is a nurse went on a mission to Haiti and the other sister who works in Havana, also as a nurse, has been recognized for her excellence in her field. For Pablo, the Revolution gave his family an invaluable boost in life chances that were already elevated due to Anglophone Caribbean cultural value matrix.<sup>112</sup>

### **Josefina**

Josefina, a physically slight, dark-brown-skinned woman in her early 70s had been born in Santiago and lived around the corner from *Calle Casa* in what was, by Cuban standards, an enormous house built by her father who was an immigrant from St. Martin, then expanded upon by her brother who was a leader in the revolutionary struggle. She had been living there her entire life and its large refrigerator, decorations, CD player and washing machine were indications of the existence and generosity of family abroad.

Though Josefina's family was similar to Pablo's in that they were able to obtain education prior to the Revolution, she did not emphasize the benefits of the revolutionary society; rather, she referred to the legacy of perseverance through conditions of war and deprivation that characterized Cuban history.

A: Do you know what kind of work your father did when he arrived in Cuba?

J: He sold tickets for the lottery. There was a national lottery that was only on Saturdays...and he weighed cane. My [maternal] grandparents...my grandmother worked for a family, a French family. And my grandfather was in the War of Independence...he had a bakery in Jamaica...he arrived here in the late 1890s...My mother was a

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<sup>112</sup> Author interview with Pablo on July 11, 2004 in Guantánamo.

housewife. My brothers and sisters went to school. One of my brothers studied biology, that's the one who died a short time ago. Another one, the youngest, was licensed in sports, that was the youngest. And another...I don't remember but he had various jobs, he was a baker and a lot of things...he was licensed in the church as well so he was 21 years in the church also. The other brother was a shoemaker...and he did construction. The females are licensed in different things...like art. One gave English classes.

A: So you all studied before the Revolution?

J: Here...they studied before the Revolution.

A: Was it difficult for you all to study at this time?

J: For us, it...everything in life has its struggle...

A: Did you have to pay to go to the University?

J: Yes, there was always...a person had to pay...

A: Was the standard of living better before the Revolution or after for your family?

J: Well, for us, the main thing is that we have never been hungry, neither before nor now...the poor are those that don't have the capacity to walk through life at this stage...they are *sinvergüenzas* [scoundrels, no-goods]...those who carry life with life don't experience lack...

A: So you all didn't have a difficult time?

J: No, thank God. Everyday, my father looked for food to feed his children.

A: And your cousins...?

J: My uncle, the engineer, didn't have children. My aunt had one daughter who went to the US, the one who left very young.

A: How has the standard of living changed after the fall of the Soviet Bloc?

J: Well, Cubans maintain themselves. It's like what I told you, those who follow a road that's not clean, these people have little in their life....

A: So, in this time, you all didn't experience difficulties? Because others I've spoken to have said that everyone had a difficult time and part of what I'm interested in is how the *descendientes* were affected, how you all survived this time?

J: How we survived?...Well, how did the *mambises* [fighters in the independence war] survive? If they could survive a war for independence, why not us? Everything in life is a balance, everything has a time. There are times when there is a lot and other times there is not.<sup>113</sup>

## **Ruth**

Doctor Ruth lives in an airy flat that she constructed on top of her family home in a

Guantánamo neighborhood near the railroad tracks that used to be called 'little Spain'

because so many Spanish immigrants settled in that part of town. There was also a fair

share of English-speaking Caribbean immigrants as those who worked on the Base

preferred to be in close proximity to the train, one mode of transportation onto the Base.

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<sup>113</sup> Author interview with Josefina on July 2, 2003 in Santiago de Cuba.

Ruth's mother was brought to Cuba at the age of six by her mother and grew up in Caimanera but was born in Nevis. She worked as a domestic on the Base, married Ruth's father who came to Cuba in 1902 and worked as a diver in the ships department on the Base. Ruth's mother stopped working on the Base when she married, returning to the Base after Ruth's father died of a stroke at an early age. To Ruth's knowledge, they bought the house with money they made playing the numbers. "Poor people had to play the numbers," she says.

Ruth was born in 1947 and went to English schools until the age of 12 after which time she went to the Cuban school where she learned Spanish. Also making a link between English-speaking Caribbean culture and social mobility, she recalls that her father wouldn't permit her to speak Spanish in the house and that, in addition to differences such as language and food, English-speaking Caribbean households were different from their Cuban counterparts as they were very ordered. She goes on to say, "Many ingleses came to cut cane along with Haitians but ingleses always had a spirit of self-improvement... They always had to do things in the right way, this is a European characteristic, the *jamaicanos* have many European characteristics... the *jamaicanos* were more prepared to take advantage of the opportunities of the Revolution."

Ruth was a member of one of the first medical school classes to graduate after the triumph of the Revolution, earning her degree in 1971. She received a scholarship to study in Santiago and recalls that there was a group of first generation Cubans from Guantánamo who studied with her, most of whom went on to study a specialty in

Havana. She says that she didn't intend to become a doctor, instead wanting to study psychology, but her friends convinced her to go into medicine. After practicing for some time, Ruth was sent on a mission to Angola from 1983 to 1985. While other Cubans with whom I interacted talked about their family members' experiences in Angola with a certain amount of pain, she said that this gave her the experience of another country and seeing the black race and the fight for liberation from domination. Though Ruth herself does not have children, she has cared for many nieces and nephews, one of whom, she remarks is a nurse. Those nieces and nephews living in Holguin are also professionals, one a professor and one is studying medicine.<sup>114</sup>

### **Smith**

Jorge Smith was 76 years old when I first met him on a bench in Santiago's central park where he holds court with other retirees nearly every morning between 8 and 11. He is a vibrant, active husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather. Pointing to a bicycle painted a faded ballerina pink, he says, "that is my car," and laughs; indeed, it was not unusual for me to see him riding his 'car' throughout the hilly streets of Santiago. Smith 'el Viejo', as he is called, is a first generation Jamaican Cuban who is quick to smile and joke, particularly about his amorous pursuits past and present. Though retired from his job, he says, he is not retired from life, as he is the secretary of the Organization of retired Civil Defense Workers, president of an association of evaluators, and an organizer of two *danzonero* clubs in the city. Smith was a particularly valuable source of information on daily life in Cuba from the pre-Revolutionary period until the contemporary moment; as a first generation Jamaican Cuban man who was neither a field laborer nor an educated,

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<sup>114</sup> Author interview with Ruth on July 12, 2004 in Guantánamo.

skilled worker, who was raised by and in the West Indian community but seems to have no particular investment in this identity, his story sits on neither end of these extremes. Furthermore, he has experienced life as an adult prior to the Revolution, has raised four children in the Revolution, and was still working at the time when Cuba's Special Period began.

Smith, who was raised by English teachers until age 12, got a job on the Naval Base at age 17 through his father who worked in the canteen. He worked on the Base from 1943 to 1949 as a dishwasher and then an orderly in the hospital and looks upon this time of partying and gambling with great fondness. He explained that he left this job where he made 27 pesos a week—a healthy salary at that time particularly since the peso was equivalent to the dollar—because, after the war, there were a lot of people who needed jobs on the Base so rather than stay in Guantánamo, he opted to return to Santiago to live full time. There, he apprenticed with a Jamaican as a brick layer and worked in a factory at this trade until 1959 when he joined the military as a 'director of work'.

Contrasting the past with the present, he recalls that, unlike now when there is work but life is more expensive, prior to the Revolution, it was difficult to find work but, if you did, you could live. "Things were cheaper," he says, "but it was harder to earn money. A family could eat for a day on a peso but to earn this peso was hard." Smith made 18 pesos a week as a bricklayer and one day when talking about prostitution in Cuba today, told me that before the Revolution, he supplemented his income working as a 'guide' and translator for American servicemen in Santiago's red light district which was located next

to the bay along the Alameda. He said, “Then, prostitutes had their place. It was eliminated after the triumph of the Revolution, but women did this before in order to survive because in that system they were poor and there weren’t jobs and they had to support their children and themselves...there were some *pichones* prostitutes that weren’t from Santiago, they came from Banes and other places looking for work but there wasn’t any...I was a guide for ‘el Franco’, that’s what we called American sailors who came to have a good time...I took them to the red light district and to buy souvenirs like alligator skin wallets and shoes, all of that was here then.”

Smith holds the memory of how the city used to be, showing me where the shops were while talking about his weekend job as a ‘tour guide’ for sailors. He made a commission from steering sailors to the shops and hotels such as the Casa Granda [sic], which sits across the street from his bench in the park. He remembers the names of the brothels and the conversations he had (in English) with the sailors and the conversations he had (in Spanish) with the sex workers who paid him a 20 percent commission. He recalls that it was \$10/hr and \$5 for a short time and \$20 for the whole night, when “the woman belongs to you.”

Life for the women was more difficult because they had to stay in the red light district. Before, there were pimps. Now they all are mixed in with the entire population, which is worse because you don’t know who is ‘*la buena*’ [good] and who is ‘*la mala*’ [bad]. Now they do it because the dollar is here and you need dollars and the only way to get dollars is to associate with those who bring them and they keep opening dollar stores. That’s why there’s so much *jiniterismo* [one name now used for prostitution]. They have to look for dollars to buy basic materials, they have to sell their bodies to get dollars. Now they pay you with Cuban money and you have to pay in dollars for most things, this is difficult...because of the difference in the value of the dollar and the peso. Before the peso was 120 to the dollar. Before that, the dollar was illegal and you could go to jail if you were caught with them...When there was the socialist camp, these

countries had a relationship with Cuba. After it fell, things got worse, the blockade worsened as well. We're not afraid that it's going to get worse from the time just after the socialist camp fell. The lack of fear has to do with the fact that people have the morale of the movement. A beautiful thing is that all of my children have professions, I'm ignorant but my children, they are educated.<sup>115</sup>

Note how Smith punctuates his narrative of contemporary hardships and transformations with an affirmation of the revolution's strength and success. This exemplifies how, in responding to my questions, Cubans engage in a process of weighing past and present, successes and failures, and a host of other polarities in an attempt to understand and represent their experience.

### **Mrs. Henry**

My first encounter with Mrs. Henry, a woman of 92 who migrated to Cuba from Panama with her Jamaican parents at the age of three, occurred in 2004 when Winton, attempting to fulfill his promise to take me to meet other *jamaicanos*, brought me by her daughter's house somewhat unannounced. I had a sense that this might be an unwelcome intrusion when he had to ask for the exact location of her house, indicating that he was at best an acquaintance. Confirming this suspicion, her daughter declined being interviewed, saying that her mother is the one who does the interviews. It was close to the middle of the afternoon, an unfortunate hour in the sweltering, treeless streets of Guantánamo, Mrs. Henry had recently been ill and her daughter had roused her from a nap to speak with me in spite of my objections. After I explained my project and she disinterestedly gave a few details of her personal history before saying, "Well, what else do you want to know?" I apologetically ended the interview. Rejoining Winton and walking back to his house, he immediately started talking about how they are a well-to-do family that has a lot of

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<sup>115</sup> Author interview with Jorge Smith on July 28, 2004 in Santiago.

contact with foreigners and who are all professional. He seemed to be annoyed that the daughter wouldn't let me interview her and brought me to her mother instead, attributing this to their thinking that they are above others. When we left and they suggested that we take a more expensive form of transportation back to the center of town, Winton said that that was the Base money talking, that a bicitaxi is ten pesos versus a coche, which is one peso. The Henrys have the retirement money of their father who worked on the Base for decades so they live better than most, Winton griped.

When I told Edward what had occurred during one of my subsequent trips to Guantánamo, he explained that that is not how one approaches an anglófono family such as the Henrys. Mrs. Henry's husband had worked on the Base, they had been very well respected and involved members of the community, and all of their six children were professionals recognized in their field. Recalling that when he organized events at the Centre, he would drop off a formal invitation and send a car to pick up Mrs. Henry for the celebrations, his belief was that they value formalities and a certain protocol in such matters. Indeed, with his assistance, I did receive a very different reception. The following is an excerpt from that interview that illustrates the aspirations and achievements of this immigrant family:

A: Do you remember when your children started to go to school and started to study?  
 Mrs. Henry: Yes, I was very involved with that part of their training, I didn't want them to be a person who doesn't study...I always read with my children...and we had a little Spanish song...that little children sing 'dos y dos son cuatro, cuatro y dos son seis, seis y dos son ocho y ocho dieciseis'. When [my third son] was a little boy, he went to school and the teacher [started to teach him addition] and he said, 'oh I know it' and began singing that song. I believe in reading to my children and telling them stories of the book that they didn't understand...I wasn't educated so much, until about sixth grade, and I continued that way, you know, that's the way it was. My children, I didn't want them to get that, I wanted them to be something more than what I was and what their father was.

He was from Jamaica, he died in 1982 and he lived very good...he was a good parent. I got married...it was a pleasant marriage and I didn't know my husband was going to die at that time. My son, he's a cardiologist, [my husband] was sick and my son took him to the hospital for a check up. He took him in the morning early to the hospital for him to have a check up and when we got to the hospital, my son said 'Momma, you can go now until 2 o'clock because Papa is going to stay a while with me'. I came home and I went to shop so when he came home we had something to eat...then [a neighbor] came and said 'the doctor is looking for you' so I went...and when I got there, my husband was dead...before they could do anything to him, he just fell and died...[starts speaking in Spanish] he only went to the hospital to die. He died in '82 and he was 82 and it's not because he...but his time came, it's not because he didn't take care of himself...

A: Mrs. Henry, you have a Panamanian Jamaican citizenship and your husband was Jamaican. You all came here apart, got married, had a family, had 6 children before the Revolution at a time when it was very difficult. How were you able to provide for your children's education? How were you and your husband able to do this in that situation?

Mrs. Henry: I really wanted them to study...my husband too, we wanted our children to do better than we did because you know he came from Jamaica and he said that when he came from Jamaica he...didn't have money in Jamaica to study and when he came here, the work that he had was hard...nevertheless he did it all, cutting cane, he knew carpentry...[but had a hard time finding a job as a carpenter]. So, I met him and he worked in different jobs, then found a job at a shop because one of the workers left. So, my husband stayed in this job, because he was a carpenter he knew how to fix things...from there he got with an American...before, the American was the boss...and my husband, since he knew how to fix things, like a broken staircase, he didn't cut cane. So, we got married, had my oldest son and sent him to the English school. Six children and none of them dead, all of them are alive. I feel good.

A: So when the triumph of the Revolution happened, what did you all think about the opportunities, the environment in Guantánamo, and what was happening in the country?

Mrs. Henry: We knew that it was a different thing, it was very tight [as in regimented, controlled]...you weren't free because...I had to ask permission to leave, it's not that communism is bad, no it's not bad...

A: Do you think that with the triumph of the Revolution and the opportunities that it provided for poor people, for children, do you think this helped you to raise your children and to give them this dream that you had of studying? Did the Revolution help you?

Mrs. Henry: Yes, of course, because all of my children were on scholarships- the only one who wasn't was --- because he had...stayed with my father and mother [in Las Tunas] and when he came to Guantánamo he was already a young person, he was 16...he knew English more than Spanish because he stayed with my father and mother, but the other children know Spanish more than English...the one who knows the most [English] is the one who lives here and --- [well known artist]. The doctor who is now in Africa knows English as well.

A: So all of your children are professionals...

Mrs. Henry: I never wanted them to be laborers or bartenders, no, I wanted something else for them. And I wanted them to be more refined, to be a bartender or that kind of thing isn't the same as being educated.

A: And did they participate revolutionary society, in the revolutionary process?

Mrs. Henry: In high school, yes, but they didn't have a leadership position or anything like that. They didn't work, they studied and each one of them has a career. One is an engineer, the youngest is a doctor, and like that. They didn't have time to put into that other thing [referring to politics], in having a position of responsibility, they had to study and have a career...one is a doctor, an engineer and another got a master's degree.

A: And they all got the careers that they wanted...so those who are doctors, wanted to be doctors...?

Mrs. Henry: Yes, the youngest when he was young and was sick and would go to the doctor...when we got back to the house, he said 'mama, when I am big, I'm going to be a doctor'. From small, he was 4 years old, from when he saw the doctor [laughing about how he played doctor with girls] so he became a doctor...my other son who is also a doctor was supposed to come back from Africa this year, but he didn't...

A: So do you believe that the world that your grandchildren confront is very different than the one you confronted?

Mrs. Henry: Very different. Here in this time, every child has to study, it's obligatory. Before, no, before when I studied it was because my mother sent me to study so if there was a child whose family didn't want them to study, he didn't and no one said anything. Now, no, now everyone has to study until 9<sup>th</sup> grade...you have to study because if you don't study, you'll be left behind.

A: And do all of your grandchildren study?

Mrs. Henry: My grandchildren?

A: How many do you have?

Mrs. Henry: Ten great-grandchildren.

A: And grandchildren?

Mrs. Henry: I don't remember [laughter about having grandchildren all over]. Alfonso is in Havana, he has three children and became an actor, he always really liked this, he's in Barbados working now. I think the government here sent him there to give acting classes...He had this affinity from childhood...he recited in the church...he always liked it since he was little, he acted in the Centre and they said that he was a natural, he felt it and he spoke of things from inside of him...it was like that. And the other who lives in Matanzas is an electrical engineer and...if something breaks, they have to call him.<sup>116</sup>

As is clear from this interview, the revolution gave access to those immigrants who had been locked out of the educational system both in pre-Revolutionary Cuba and their islands of origin.

Those who came of age during the Revolution also provided testimony to the social mobility that people of English-speaking Caribbean descent experienced as a result of the

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<sup>116</sup> Author interview with Mrs. Henry on July 29, 2005 in Guantánamo.

Revolution's social programs. As young people in the '60s and '70s, those of their generation were the first recipients of free education. While the political climate and specifically Anglophone Caribbean participation will be elaborated upon in the following chapter, Carlitos' journey toward professionalization provides a glimpse into the dynamic and, at times, chaotic environment of the time.

### **Carlitos**

Carlitos was born in 1955. His maternal and paternal grandparents migrated to Cuba from Jamaica and worked in agriculture on a central outside of Santiago. His father went to an English school and was a shoemaker. "They didn't have degrees like us," he says. Of the beginning of the Revolution, he recalls that he had a cousin who was killed in the time of Batista and he remembers that his grandfather was very nervous about the war. He was young but remembers that the poor suffered. Speaking both English and Spanish at home, Carlitos says he's Cuban because he was born in Cuba but that his blood isn't Cuban because both his parents are *jamaiquino*.

Carlitos went to primary school and then went into studying a trade in Santiago, learning how to operate machinery in a cement factory. At 15, he responded to a call to work and study in Camagüey and, to his disappointment, he and the other young men who were recruited studied sports and sanitation, but primarily performed agricultural work. When his mother found out that he was there cutting cane,<sup>117</sup> she said that she didn't raise him for that, that she left the countryside for Santiago so that he would not have to work in the fields. He remained there until he was 18.

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<sup>117</sup> Part of the massive mobilization for the ten million ton harvest of 1970.

After not studying for three years, the leaders of the mobilization effort in Camagüey gave him a test to place him in some sort of educational program and he failed this test because, according to Carlitos, he hadn't picked up a paper in the three years he was there. Upon finding out that he would be sent to do some sort of manual labor in Santiago, he wrote to his brother-in-law in the Isle of Youth who was the director of a school there. Apparently, his sister and brother-in-law ended up on the Isle of Youth looking for a house because they had been living with his mother. His mother agreed because she wanted him to study so he went but when he got there, the job waiting for him was as a cook at a secondary school. He refused this and found a job as a mechanic's assistant with the help of a white man he met in the park who told him to go to the Forestry Department and ask for a job. Since he didn't know anything about fixing cars, he didn't last very long in this position.

He drifted around for a couple of years until he saw an advertisement in the paper for a course studying veterinary medicine. He went to the office and they told him that he had to go to Santiago to get his paperwork so that he could begin studying. They gave him money to go to Santiago because there was a lack of veterinarians on the island and they were among the first technicians on the Isle of Youth. He stayed on the Isle of Youth for three years and when he began working, he started studying English at night. "I never stopped speaking English," he says, "there were *jamaiquinos* living there...there are *jamaiquinos* and haitianos all over...the *jamaiquinos* told me to continue studying since I was still young." Carlitos followed this advice and studied to become an English

professor for three years, though he has never worked in this field. After spending ten years on the Isle of Youth, taking courses to further specialize in veterinary medicine, he returned to Santiago where he practices this profession.

Carlitos reflects,

I would never have been able to earn two degrees without the Revolution because black people couldn't get ahead. I'm a man who realizes how important and big the Revolution is because before, the only jobs for black people were in agriculture. Even though I had a hard time getting an education, I was still able to realize my dream of studying. I stayed calm, organized my thoughts, stayed away from drinking and violence and solved my problems." Carlitos believes that his upbringing as a *jamaquino* helped him to achieve success and that those members of his family who have become professionals are those who have an English-speaking Caribbean background on both sides. He says, "Now, everyone is mixed *jamaquino* and *cubano*, unlike when I was growing up. When there is a mixed marriage, the children often don't know that they're part *jamaquino* or it's not as strong. It's important, though, that people know their history. It's the blood. Both of my sisters who have *jamaquino* fathers are nurses, both are married to Cubans...almost all of my nieces and nephews have degrees. There are engineers and nurses. There aren't people in my family who are delinquents and only one who can't study because he's mentally disabled. There's another who is a baker in Havana...the difference is that those *jamaquino* descendants have done better than those who had a Cuban grandfather...the difference is the upbringing and the blood."<sup>118</sup>

### **Leticia**

Born in 1950 to the son of Jamaicans and daughter of Haitians living in Santiago, Leticia is another research participant who came of age during the Revolution and exemplifies the ascent of black immigrant families through the Revolution. A divorced mother of two young black men who came of age during the Special Period, Leticia and her family also provide insight into some of the obstacles that persist, as we will later see.

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<sup>118</sup> Author interview with Carlitos on July 30, 2004 in Santiago.

A: So, your grandfather, do you remember what he thought of all that was happening at the beginning of the Revolution?

L: He was a revolutionary, my grandfather! Revolutionary, revolutionary, oh, my grandfather died believing in the revolution.

A: He was born in Jamaica?

L: Yes...in the 20s, my father was born here, my uncle Jimmy was born there but the others were born here.

A: So why was your grandfather such a revolutionary?

L: Well, they saw, well, they struggled a lot, immigrating from Jamaica because of the difficulties there and they saw that the revolution was to help and support the people. When the revolution was advancing, it made everyone literate, they gave free education when before my grandfather had to pay for my father and my sister to go to the nuns' school to study. With the revolution, this was abolished. My aunt studied in the nuns' school with money my grandfather made as a tailor.

A: So they struggled a lot to study, to pay for their children to study...

L: At that time, to go to medical school, you had to pay and you had to associate with certain people and for poor people or black people to get in, they had to make a big deal.

A: So, it seems that it wasn't stated directly that this was for whites, but...

L: It was for people with money, you had to pay money and that's who had money. So, my grandfather saw these changes and that with the revolutionaries you could study and they saw a great difference. And what happened was that they liked the revolution a lot. Up to today, though, we have our problems of racism...Fidel said that everyone is equal but this isn't yet the reality, people still have hidden things and can't be open.

A: So it's not open but it's still there. [nods] For example, in your job, is there racism?

L: You don't see it openly because this doesn't exist in Cuba but what I'm saying is that there are persons who still have their beliefs some little things like 'a white woman shouldn't marry a black man' and these things they pass on to their children.

A: You were nine at the triumph of the revolution, and you began going to Cuban public school...when did you begin to study physical education?

L: Well, after the revolution, everyone took sports in school. Before, at the time of my aunt and that generation, it wasn't obligatory, it wasn't an established thing like now. Sports training in Cuba didn't exist yet. This was founded in '61, two years after the triumph of the revolution. A kid who was agile and had ability in sports, they'd take them out of the school at around 9 or 10 and put them in a special school. I went to the German School in Vista Hermosa and a teacher saw that I was agile so I went to take supervised classes with a group of students from other schools and there was a competition and they eliminated some of the students but I passed. There were a group of teachers that were dedicated to our training and I participated in various competitions around the country. I represented the Oriente region.

A: Did you always want to be a professor of physical education?

L: That was later. In school, when you are getting oriented, you are a student, there are different levels, until 16, you are a junior and from 17 to 19, you are senior and in this stage you leave the school, I was able to go to a special school for those who had an Olympic future. I was a high jumper but began gaining weight and I'm not that tall so when I gained weight, my physical conditioning went down. So, I went to the school for teachers of physical education...I got fat so I went to the teachers' school in Havana and I

graduated in physical education in '72 and they sent me to work in the university and I've worked in the university since then.<sup>119</sup>

### ***Race and Revolutionary Mobility***

Although by the end of the second republic Afro-Cubans had succeeded in entering many areas of employment that had been previously closed to them, they remained systematically barred from some occupations and economic sectors. White-collar jobs in banks, upscale stores, and company offices were for the most part reserved for whites. In some industries, the unions gave priority to employee relatives when filling job openings. In the process, they helped reproduce traditional racial patterns in the distribution of employment. Blacks were also disproportionately represented among the unemployed, and they were the bulk of the inhabitants of the shanty towns in Havana and other cities. They were also overrepresented in the prison population...Racial barriers were particularly visible in areas of social life, in which open racial segregation was not uncommon. Blacks and mulattoes were discriminated against in luxury hotels, restaurants, cabarets, bars, beaches, and social clubs. Their children could not attend the best private schools even if they had the financial means to afford them. Segregation was also evident in some public spaces, such as the central parks of several towns across the island. Blackness remained a formidable barrier against social ascent and mobility, particularly in the higher strata of society (de la Fuente 2001a: 260).

The social mobility that resulted from the elevation to equality, particularly when this meant joining the professional class, most certainly upset Cuba's pre-revolutionary racial hierarchy. Prior to the Revolution, black professionals were rare due to the combination of systemic racial and class discrimination and the widespread corruption. According to de la Fuente's research on the black Cuban population, Afro-Cubans actively campaigned to improve their education and "treated schooling as virtually sacred." The lack of black people in the professions was not only due to the lack of schools in spite of their best efforts, but also the system of patronage that led one black mathematician to state that he couldn't find a job because he wasn't involved in politics (de la Fuente 2001a:139).

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<sup>119</sup> Author interview with Leticia on July 4, 2005 in Santiago.

Access to prestigious and lucrative employment was gained through families and social organizations, social entities from which people of African ancestry were excluded. People without such connections and resources could not pursue higher education, much less attend the exclusive private schools that were part of such networks. Because people of African descent were disproportionately relegated to the segment of the labor force that did not compensate workers well in the form of either money or contacts, they, along with other poor people, by and large did not have access to social mobility through education.

Another social dynamic documented by de la Fuente that emerged during the '40s and '50s and proves to be important in the more contemporary experience of people of English-speaking Caribbean descent is the consequences of success for people of African descent. In 1954, Juan R. Betancourt, social commentator for *Destina Negra* [Black Destiny], stated that, "When a black man succeeds in any activity, he suffers even more humiliation and racial discrimination" (as quoted in de la Fuente 2001a:138). This statement was based on observations of the fate of those Black Cubans who managed to overcome tremendous barriers to obtain an advanced education.

By 1943, there was a growing number of Afro-Cubans professionals- 5.3 percent of the black working population- and this became a problem as "it represented or was perceived as a threat to whites' ability to control access to lucrative jobs...education itself was a marker of status, but it resulted in economic security only in relation to new employment

opportunities” (de la Fuente 2001a: 150). Based on 1943 data on income, occupation and race, it is clear that three times more white professionals entered higher income brackets than black and mulatto professionals and over half of black professionals earned the same monthly income as those in the massive sectors of the economy (ibid: 153). Racial differences in income were significant only among the better-paid occupations, and thus people of African descent who remained in the place to which society confined them (ie: agricultural workers, unskilled industrial workers, and servants), did not confront the same barriers as those who aspired to upset the hierarchy.

This finding that race was a more significant barrier to closing the black-white income differential the higher up the social ladder that black people climb illuminates the nature of the struggle for social mobility faced by people of African descent in pre-Revolutionary Cuba. It also raises several questions concerning the manifestations of racism in the post-1959 period. The Revolution’s initial strategy to eliminate racial stratification included publicly denouncing racial discrimination, constructing it as counterrevolutionary, outlawing segregation in public places, and eliminating the private social institutions where discrimination was widely practiced. Furthermore, in 1960, the government changed hiring practices such that all new employees were hired through the Ministry of Labor, thus subverting discriminatory hiring practices and giving all Cubans an equal opportunity for employment (de la Fuente 2001a: 274).

However, the initial campaign against racial discrimination waned after 1962 when the official discourse promoted the idea that the revolution had solved the problem of race

and sex discrimination. The elimination of extreme class differences through the equitable distribution of society's resources, including institutions of higher education, employment, and medical care, was believed to be a sufficient mechanism through which racial equality could be achieved. Discussions about race and confronting racism became taboo and "if openly racist acts were deemed to be counterrevolutionary, attempts to debate publicly the limitations of Cuba's integration were likewise considered to be the enemy's work" (de la Fuente 2001a: 279). Saney also observes that, "Despite the reality that Afro-Cubans overwhelmingly benefited from the revolutionary changes, racism was not eliminated from Cuban society. While the formal barriers to equality had been removed, the underlying social relations and cultural modalities had not been totally transformed. Moreover, until the mid-1980s, this disjuncture was not addressed or acknowledged in official discourse. Thus, while the state had altered the institutional order, racism...continued to exist in the cultural sphere and realm of consciousness, particularly in the form of racist attitudes and stereotypes of blacks" (Saney 2004: 105).

This stance did not take into consideration one of the dominant manifestations of racism; namely, the resistance to equitable treatment of Black people who achieved a higher level of education. While the Revolution removed barriers that had previously prevented those talented and motivated individuals from reaching their potential, it did not address, or perhaps even anticipate, the resistance to and consequences of having Black people assume positions of status and/or authority. "Some white workers found it hard to adjust to these changes and resented what they perceived as an official bias toward Afro-Cubans. Particularly difficult was the social and physical closeness that integrated

schools, recreational facilities, and mass organizations imposed on blacks and whites...[the] perception that blacks felt as if they were “better” than whites or were “better off” than whites in the island was shared by several white workers interviewed by sociologist and Latin Americanist Geoffrey Fox in 1970, who resented the dismantling of traditional racial hierarchies” (de la Fuente 2001a: 279). As we will see in chapter five, at the same time that the opening up of the educational system and professions was a windfall for people of African descent, particularly those who were anxious for such opportunities, the society’s biases against educated and successful black people in positions of authority were not eliminated, creating a peculiar challenge for those who sought maximum benefit from the revolutionary program.

### ***Conclusion***

In a 2001 lecture delivered at the Center for Cuban Studies, Pedro Pérez Sarduy observed that Cuba did not need an affirmative action program to address racial disparities because the Revolution was Black Cubans’ affirmative action. Similar to what research on affirmative action has shown, namely that the Black beneficiaries of the program, once breaking through the ‘glass ceiling’, have to confront racism in the classroom and on the job, professionals of English-speaking Caribbean descent reported a resistance to black people in positions of authority. Of the individuals interviewed, some claimed Cuba to be a society free of racism,<sup>120</sup> while many reported that they have experienced racism in their professional life and that as educated black people, they confront a different kind of racism than those who have less education or are not ‘cultured’. Many assume that Black

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<sup>120</sup> Re: terminology, for some, the term ‘racism’ refers to those legal or official practices of discrimination or exclusion.

people in high positions are there because it reflects well on the Revolution, not because they are qualified.

An anecdote relayed in Saney's discussion of the disapproval of public displays of racism implies this position taken by many Cubans: namely, that black people are given preferential treatment. In this excerpt from an account published in 1986, a "middle-aged woman" on a crowded bus said, after a black man took an open seat, "and it had to be a black who gets the seat." While this could be implying that a man who doesn't offer his seat to a woman is lacking in manners and of course black, there could also be an expression of frustration that black people are getting a break in revolutionary society and non-blacks suffer as a result (2004: 104).

Due to the official silence around racism, there was no public or organized means by which to confront the on-going threats to black equality. The Afro-Cuban societies and press that had been the main resources in the struggle against discrimination were eliminated shortly after the Revolution. Their existence contradicted the government's assertion that Cuba was a raceless society and the problem of racism had been solved. Furthermore, these independent organizations were a potential mouthpiece from which to point out any shortcomings of the revolutionary program and its implementation as well as articulate the role that black people themselves, as opposed to the Revolution, played in their own liberation (de la Fuente 2001a: 285).<sup>121</sup> As noted earlier, the institutions of

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<sup>121</sup> Indeed, de la Fuente notes that, "in the early years of the revolution, the clubs and Afro-Cuban intellectuals had occasionally challenged local authorities for not promoting the revolutionary ideals of equality and even the central government for the absence of blacks in positions of command..." "There is a tendency," an Afro-Cuban actress stated in 1968, "to assume that the Revolution 'gave' blacks their

people of English-speaking Caribbean descent that served to support their particular economic, social, and political standing met a similar fate as they were either closed down or entered a phase of decline.

However, as we have seen, with the radical changes ushered in after the triumph of the Revolution, there seemed to be some hope that differentiation based on race and ethnicity would not be necessary because the Revolution appeared to be delivering on its promise to end structural racism through the equal distribution of resources. “The massive literacy campaign of 1961, the establishment of universal and free education and healthcare, the redistribution of land by the agrarian reforms of 1959 and 1963, the dramatic reduction of rents under urban reform and the building of new housing and recreational facilities, all of these, among others, radically and positively transformed the lives of the black population” (Saney 2004: 101). By the early ‘80s, although black people were over represented in the prison population and underrepresented in managerial positions, particularly in Party leadership, racial differences in health care, education and employment had been greatly reduced. Indeed, the proportion of black and mulatto professionals had actually come to be identical to whites and there were proportionately fewer whites graduating from high schools than blacks and mulattoes according to the 1981 census (de la Fuente 2001a: 309).

Thus, those who remained in Cuba and were involved in the revolutionary process were certainly benefiting from becoming fully integrated into Cuban society as un-hyphenated

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freedom- gave us the right to enter white society, to have the same things they have. It is an essentially paternalistic attitude. And it creates resentment.” The clubs and the black press were potential channels to articulate such resentment and break the official silence of race. They had to be eliminated” (ibid).

Cubans. In spite of the persistent challenges that they faced upon inclusion, the fact was that the doors of higher learning were no longer closed to them and those who were inclined to pursue an education were no longer constrained to positions of servitude in spite of their qualifications.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### POLITICAL ACTIVISM AND THE FIGHT FOR JUSTICE

#### *Introduction: Jamaicanos in the Struggle*

Much as Gordon (1998) found in his study of the relationship between identity and politics for the African-Caribbean “Creoles” of Nicaragua before, during, and after the Sandinista Revolution, people of English-speaking Caribbean descent in Cuba were by no means monolithic or consistent in their relationships to the state, the nation, or the Revolution. Over time, manifestations of their political will ranged from applying pressure on the British Consulate to protect its darker subjects in a foreign land, to developing Garveyism on Cuban soil to joining and forming trade unions, to smuggling supplies to rebels attempting to topple the Batista government, to exiling on the Naval Base. Gordon’s observation is indeed applicable to the Cuban case: “subject positions, political ideas, and social roles have no necessary logical and linear relation...that they can be arranged in innumerable ways and negotiated such that coherence can be claimed for almost any combination, and that the combinations that emerge have everything to do with the historical meaning they have acquired in specific conjunctures and power relations” (1998: 261).

At the same time that English-speaking Caribbean immigrants advocated for themselves based upon their status as British subjects, their protest of maltreatment and injustice did not contain itself within the realm of foreign affairs. Their association with ‘Britishness’ emerges as but one aspect of their identity, one that served as cultural capital and could be leveraged for protection in a global environment of Anglo dominance. Their identities

and experiences as workers and black people were also bases for activism. As we shall see, the ways in which they have positioned themselves within revolutionary society defy categorizations of them as revolutionary proletarians or Anglophilic, anti-communist aspiring bourgeoisie or flexible strategists whose greatest commitment is to self-betterment.

Having discussed the economic impact of the Revolution on the English-speaking Caribbean community in Chapter Three, this chapter will focus on their political experience in order to argue that their assimilation into Cuban revolutionary society was motivated by a search for social justice in addition to social mobility. I first briefly characterize the British West Indian political predicament of the mid- to late-nineteenth century and early twentieth century immigrant organizing in order to contextualize the radicalism- or lack thereof- of the early twentieth century migrants. Anglophone Caribbean immigrant experience of activism in Cuba, other Latin American countries and the U.S. illustrate that there were a range of factors that influenced the political behavior of this population, including internal stratification and generational divisions. This remained true for people of English speaking origin in relation to the Cuban Revolution. Using a combination of historical and ethnographic material, I examine the motivations and circumstances under which members of the English-speaking Caribbean community participated in and/or rejected the revolutionary process. Exploring revelations of and reflections on the *anglófono* relationship to revolutionary struggle, I conclude by suggesting that the experience of political involvement has been oriented around a range of positionalities and shifting motivations.

### ***Freedom Deferred in the British West Indies***

As discussed in Chapter Two, true freedom in the post-emancipation period in the British West Indies was sabotaged through a number of tactics employed by the British and local elite. As such, the struggle of freed people was to “infuse real meaning into their newly gained liberty,” which necessitated a determined, forceful response to capital using whatever leverage available to them (Scarano, 1989). This leverage was often enhanced through cooperation and collective action including pooling financial resources to purchase land so as to decrease dependence on plantations, organizing work stoppages in protest of low and/or unpaid wages, revolts such as the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion, the labor riots of the ‘30s, and developing new social groups through which coalitions were built. Indeed, institutions for the defense of the collective interests of workers, such as mutual aid societies, cultural and social clubs, and newspapers devoted to disseminating information about the plight of laboring men and women, flowered in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (ibid: 83).

Dynamics in the negotiation of power between social groups were more complex than theories of resistance and accommodation, dependency, or cultural hybridity might suggest. Rather, different strategies for promoting individual and collective agendas were employed across time and circumstance. Thus, a more accurate understanding of the political behavior of English-speaking Caribbean migrants can be rendered from looking at the various cross currents that would have exerted an influence on the population. For

instance, those Jamaicans, if not other islanders, who immigrated to Cuba were the product of both the post-emancipation period of heightened collective resistance and an era of heightened cultural assault. In late-nineteenth century Jamaica, there was an ebb in large-scale activism that coincided with a growing so-called civility (Moore and Johnson 2004). This decrease was likely due to a combination of factors such as increased police surveillance and brutality as a response to the Morant Bay Rebellion, fear on the part of people due to the massacre that followed the uprising, and the focus on “civilizing” the Jamaican population through instilling Victorian values and norms.

### ***Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Immigrant Organizing***

When black immigrants were confronted with the outrageous contradiction between the expectation of freedom and the reality of restraint, between national ideologies that claimed democracy and equality and the reality of terrorism and rampant discrimination, some pushed for justice in the Americas and, in the case of the U.S., actually spearheaded radical politics (James 1998). Migrants to the U.S., Cuba, and the Central American region engaged in spontaneous protests, contributed to national labor movements, and appealed to the British Consulate in an effort to pressure employers and governments to desist blatantly exploitative, brutal practices such as withholding wages, severe physical abuse, and illegal incarceration. Collective strategies yielded varying levels of success, exposing alliances and fissures both within West Indian communities as well as in the societies as a whole. Indeed, an analysis of the research on political activism among these English-speaking Caribbean migrants and their descendants exposes the tense relationship between class-based and race-based organizations at the same time that it

reveals how connected the struggles for economic and racial justice were both in theory and practice.

West Indians both participated in nationally based labor organizations closely linked to the Communist Parties and organized labor unions themselves. The immigrants often found themselves not only constitutive of a highly vulnerable laboring class as foreigners, but also part of a broader class of workers who were actively engaged in a struggle for justice. According to Latin American labor historian Barry Carr, Caribbean *braceros* were touched by the heightened class conflict that asserted itself through the political agitation and union organizing in the sugar industry during the '30s in spite of the divisive impact of language differences as well as regional and local cultural variation (1998b: 89). In the Cuban protests of 1933, which consisted of strikes and occupations throughout the sugar industry, there was significant Antillean participation.<sup>122</sup> In addition, they formed their own labor union in Cuba called the *Unión de Obreros Antillanos de Santiago de Cuba* and participated in national labor congresses. In Costa Rica, Anglophone Caribbean immigrants created The Artisans and Laborers Union of Costa Rica, which was active from 1909-1914 and was a means to form organized resistance against the economic and social abuses of the United Fruit Company.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> The courageousness of such actions must not be overlooked, as immigrants to Cuba were in a particularly precarious position. Indeed, their British passports were stamped with a warning that they had to comply with the laws of the country and refrain themselves from interfering in domestic affairs (Lewis 1988: 109).

<sup>123</sup> For instance, in 1910, they organized workers to resist a 12 per cent wage reduction that amounted to workers financing a new tax on bananas (Harpelle 2001: 26).

Carr (1998b) also finds evidence for a strong tie between communist organizing and black participation in labor unions in Cuba, though there was little direct participation of blacks in the Party until after a 1934 recruitment campaign.<sup>124</sup> The PCC (*Partido Comunista de Cuba*) of the late '20s and '30s defended immigrant workers and advocated for black self-determination, connecting it to a land mass—the southern states in the case of the U.S. and Oriente province in the case of Cuba (Carr 1998b: 91). In spite of the fact that there existed an often uneasy if not contentious relationship between the radical Left and black activists, immigrants and native, and that such attempts often yielded unsatisfactory results, the link itself illustrates that many black immigrants' vision of social justice was not only radical, but in some instances more radical than both the socialist and nationalist currents of activism.

Given the existence of Garveyism in Cuba, a 'race first' approach to activism was also present among Anglophone Caribbean immigrants. The UNIA existed as one option in a black world in struggle against the colonialism and capitalist exploitation of the early twentieth century. It offered a vehicle to advance the specific concerns of black people on

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<sup>124</sup> Documentation of black participation in the Communist and Socialist Parties of the region reveals that people of African descent in general and those from the Caribbean in particular, played a pivotal role in attempting to push black liberation to the forefront of the vision of workers' liberation. In Winston James' 1998 examination of Caribbean radicalism in the United States, he finds that people of English-speaking Caribbean origin such as C.L.R. James and Claudia Jones of Trinidad, Hubert Harrison of St. Croix, and Ferdinand Smith of Jamaica were instrumental in advocating for a Marxist analysis of the black condition. Others such as Cyril Briggs, W.A. Domingo, Claude McKay, and Richard B. Moore formed and were leaders of the African Blood Brotherhood in 1919 in Harlem, an organization that combined radical black nationalism with revolutionary socialism (James 1998: 156). Radical newspapers such as *Crusader*, *Messenger*, *Emancipator*, *Challenge*, and, of course, *Negro World*, all names indicating the forceful righteousness of their creators' mission, circulated throughout the U.S. and Latin America. People of English-speaking Caribbean descent played disproportionately prominent roles in their creation and production of these papers. In Costa Rica, the immigrants also had a newspaper, *The Nation*, which Marcus Garvey edited for a time, using it as a mouthpiece to criticize the deplorable conditions of West Indians in Limón as well as the complacency of West Indian leaders (Harpelle 2001: 32).

the basis that their status, experiences, and life chances were overwhelmingly defined through their blackness. The Garvey movement was not only a means to organize and support material survival, but it also provided “a psychological bulwark against racial discrimination in the Eurocentric value-orientations of Latin American societies” (Lewis, 1988: 108). Race was all-encompassing whether one found oneself in Limón, Santiago, Chicago, Lagos, or London or one was a cane cutter, a clergyman, a schoolteacher, or an entrepreneur. Thus, the call for black empowerment and the redemption of Africa had mass appeal.

Indeed, this call resonated particularly loudly among black immigrants. People of the English-speaking Caribbean diaspora played a decisive role in the proliferation and success of the UNIA, which was the most massive black organization in world history. However, much of this activism occurred outside of their islands of origin. According to 1926 figures, at 52, Cuba had the highest number of UNIA branches outside of the U.S. and those branches in Latin America outnumbered those in the English-speaking Caribbean islands from which the immigrants hailed (Lewis 1988: 99).<sup>125</sup> This suggests that the UNIA was critical to immigrants in their negotiation of economic, political, and social marginalization in their host countries. Ironically, in the Cuban case, the government considered it to be an outlet that would divert attention from labor activism.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Trinidad appears to be the exception as it had 30 branches compared to Jamaica’s 7 and Barbados’ 4 (Lewis 1988: 99).

<sup>126</sup> Indeed, one of the reasons Garveyism was allowed to flourish in Cuba was because Mario Garcia Menocal, reactionary conservative president of Cuba from 1913-1921 who ran the Cuban American Sugar Company and had himself authorized the immigration of foreign black laborers to support the sugar industry, hoped to squelch potential labor unrest by granting the immigrants access to their political/social movement (Lewis 1988: 112). Interestingly, the Cuban government’s turn against the movement that came

Clearly, British West Indian immigrants were attuned to racial and economic injustice and had a willingness to mobilize against it in Cuba as well as other destinations. They were still bound by the ‘problem of freedom’ to which Holt refers, struggling to obtain it in the context of an economic system that directly conflicts with the realization of such an achievement. In Cuba during the period under examination by James (1998), the same sort of contradiction between democracy and inequality that inspired Caribbean immigrant radicalism in the U.S. existed between the ideology of racial democracy and the reality of terrorism and discrimination. Black immigrants in Cuba were involved in organizing for workers’ rights and for the redemption of the race at the same time that they pursued a route of resistance to injustice and mistreatment based upon their status as subjects of the British Crown (McLeod, 2000; Giovannetti, 2001; Charlton, 2005). However, Garveyism in Cuba was significantly weakened with its leader’s demise and the route of redress based on being a British subject decreased in its usefulness as the century moved forward and a generation of Cuban born ‘West Indians’ came of age.<sup>127</sup>

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in the late 20s and 30s and was marked by banning the *Negro World*, declaring the UNIA illegal and prohibiting Garvey from entering the country, coincided not only with the rising tide of xenophobia, but also an increase in West Indian trade union activism.

<sup>127</sup> This was in part due to the clause in the 1940 constitution granting Cuban citizenship to all those born on Cuban soil and the greater attachment that such individuals had to Cuba, regardless of their legal status. Furthermore, immigrants felt that their institutions were to protect those who had a foreign status and thus their children were excluded from membership. In the case of the British West Indian Cultural Center, Cuban-born children were excluded from membership. Their role was to be participants without any decision-making power. In Costa Rica, a similar dynamic evolved in which Costa-Rican born West Indians were invested in the future of the country during the civil unrest of the late ‘40s. Finding that people of African descent were excluded from mainstream political parties and the West Indian—or perhaps more accurately put, the Afro-Costa Rican--community remained without representation at a crucial time in Costa Rican history, they formed an exclusively West Indian political group called the “Comité Dimitrou.” Apparently, it was a radical group that was affiliated with the Communist Party and spoke in the name of working-class members of the community but disintegrated in the wake of the 1948 civil war (Harpelle 2001: 170). Thus, in the transition from being an embattled immigrant group to a national minority subjected to systemic racism, the political activism shifted in a more radical direction, however short-lived.

## *Jamaicanos in Revolutionary Cuba*

### **Prelude to the Movement: Political Climate of the '50s**

A common explanation for the Cuban Revolution is that it was fought to end the Batista dictatorship. However, in examining the attitudes and positions that people of English-speaking Caribbean origin held regarding the increasingly unstable political sphere of their adopted country, it is important to acknowledge that politics, like people's attitudes, were not static. Batista's own political trajectory is one example of this. When Fulgencio Batista, a light-skinned mulatto from Oriente, was General of the Army under the Mendieta government that came to power in 1934, with the army's support, he advocated for the common person and in this way gained popular support. Included among the reforms implemented by this man who two decades later came to be the quintessential evil dictator were women's suffrage, workers' health insurance, state-sponsored health programs, consumer cooperatives, the reorganization of tax structures, agrarian reform, support for public and private welfare agencies, and rural education programs. Under the Mendieta-Batista regime, Batista made alliances with the Communist Party, liberating political prisoners, and was able to abrogate the Platt Amendment in 1934 so that the only clause that remained from the abolished amendment was the U.S. possession of Guantánamo Naval Base (Pérez 1995: 278). He continued on this path during his 1940-44 presidency.

Batista's first presidency coincided with the war years of economic boom. The beet and cane sugar economies of Europe and Asia, respectively, were devastated and thus Cuba was once again in an advantageous position in the world sugar market. It was also during

the war years that the U.S. expanded the Guantánamo Naval Base, providing the opportunity for stable, better paying employment for thousands of English-speaking Caribbean immigrants and their children. However, inflation, corruption and mismanagement restricted the improvement of the economic lives of most Cubans and thus the extent of the period of prosperity was limited. Thus, when the inevitable stagnation followed in the '50s, the Cuban population, including the middle class, was by and large living in precarious economic circumstances and descended into political turmoil (Pérez 1995: 296).

In 1952, Batista lead a coup with little resistance from a discredited Prío government and then won the election of '54 with the majority of the 40 percent of the population eligible to vote. In '53, Fidel and other students led the attack on the Moncada that sought to fill the vacuum in leadership left by the disoriented opposition parties. Throughout the '50s, political tensions erupted in violence. Students were at the forefront of the struggle, organizing a clandestine movement (*Directorio Revolucionario*) and rural insurgency in response to government repression. In the midst of this, the *Granma* arrived in southern Oriente in November of 1956. The revolutionaries were ambushed by government forces, but the eighteen who escaped into the Sierra Maestra waged war, recruiting thousands of fighters from rural and urban areas.

As Pérez describes,

The expanding struggle in the countryside was accompanied by growing resistance in the cities. The urban underground organized by the 26 of July Civic Resistance coordinated acts of sabotage and subversion in the cities. Bombs were set, incendiary fires started. Power lines were cut and trains

derailed. Kidnappings and assassinations increased. The regime responded in kind, and with increasing ferocity. Indiscriminate insolence and widespread murder served to increase further the isolation of the government (1995: 294).

As proof of the terror of Batista's regime, after the triumph of the Revolution, "mass graves of victims of Batista's army were being uncovered the length of the island.

Centers of torture were found, full of instruments. Whole families had been beaten to death, homes burned, towns destroyed. It is estimated that during his seven-year reign, Batista's armed forces, police, military intelligence, Bureau to Repress Communist Activities, and hired thugs had killed some twenty thousand Cubans" (Cannon 1981: 108).

The 26th of July movement rapidly grew in popularity across all segments of the population. This was in no small part due not only to the government's brutal response to youth activism, but also to the rampant corruption. In combination with the withdrawal of U.S. support, the political will of a population largely united across class and race lines against the continued reign of Batista, change was unavoidable. It is in this way that the Revolution was won:

The year 1958 began on a note of uncertainty and anguish. Indiscriminate government terror and repression left few households unvisited by grief. Middle-class impatience increased. On May 26, 1957, the weekly news magazine *Carteles* had disclosed that no less than twenty members of the Batista government owned numbered Swiss bank accounts, each with deposits over \$1 million. Batista used proceeds from the lottery in ways that his predecessors could only have dreamed of. He lavished funds on potential sources of political opposition. Few resisted the president's generosity...He bought off the Catholic Church, the unions, and the press. By 1958, the economy was at the point of collapse, illiteracy and unemployment were on the rise, people were destitute, homelessness, beggars, peddlers, petty thieves, gambling, pornography, drugs, crime, delinquency, and prostitution predominated. It was clear that Batista could

not maintain order and was therefore expendable so the U.S. imposed an arms embargo, essentially withdrawing its support...Even as the United States sought to ease Batista out of office, the revolutionary momentum had sealed the fate of the regime. Failure of the government offensive and the success of the guerrilla counter-offensive had a galvanizing effect on Cubans. Government reversals were the signal for spontaneous uprisings across Cuba. Vast quantities of arms and equipment fell into the control of civilians in the wake of the army's retreat, including artillery, tanks, and small weapons of every type. In the closing weeks of 1958, revolutionary ranks, both the urban resistance and the guerrilla columns, increased rapidly. By December 1958, the batistiano army command in Santiago reported that fully 90 percent of the population supported guerrilla actions...and by January 1959, the Rebel Army numbered some 50,000 officers, troops, and hangers-on (Pérez 1995: 311).

### **Sketches: Involvement of Jamaicano Cubanos in *el Clandestino***

One of the conflicts among informants' perceptions concerned Anglophone Caribbean participation in the movement. While, according to many interview participants, Anglo-Caribbean immigrants generally remained outside of the political activity of the nation out of both fear of reprisal and general disinterest in the affairs of a foreign land, further inquiries revealed that most people knew of exceptions to this position.<sup>128</sup> Indeed, for some, there was a division between the image that people had of the behavior of 'los anglófonos' and the actual experiences that they recalled when asked specific questions about people they may have known or heard about. What this revealed was that people in the community, primarily though not exclusively the Cuban-born children of these

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<sup>128</sup> Naranjo Orovio (1986), in her interviews with Spaniards who immigrated to Cuba and were living outside of the island at the time of the study, found that the typical response to the question about their political participation was, "I was an immigrant, I only worked, I was never concerned or wanted to understand politics. That was left for the Cubans." Though the only political associations that they formed were focused on politics in Spain, not Cuba, there were people who were part of the Spanish anarchist movement of 1910-1920, were part of the party that opposed Machado, and participated in the strikes of 1925 and 1930 (70).

immigrants, responded to the injustices that they witnessed by getting involved in the clandestine movement.<sup>129</sup>

The following information about this involvement is by no means the result of an exhaustive investigation into this segment of the population's contribution to the revolutionary struggle. Rather, the revelation of community involvement unfolded in the process of interviewing people about their own and their community's responses to the changes brought about by the Revolution. This was one of the unanticipated routes of the fieldwork experience and proved to be illuminating as it shed more light on an alternative narrative of English-speaking Caribbean experience: namely, one in which they were advocates of social justice. As such, these sketches are meant to offer a glimpse into the atmosphere of the time and how some members of the Anglo-Caribbean community responded to the political turmoil of their adopted country. Providing insight into the ways in which this segment of the Cuban population greeted the post-1959 world, these sketches reveal that, at the same time that black immigrant families sought to position themselves to achieve the dream of material success, they were compelled to agitate for social justice.

### **Carmen**

In her 60s, Carmen is a retired teacher who lives in Guantánamo. She is also the granddaughter of Jamaican and Barbadian immigrants whose family has been very involved in revolutionary struggle. She had continued in this tradition and was very

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<sup>129</sup> Apparently, Peter Philip, an Antiguan migrant, was even deported by the Batista government in the 50s as a result of his membership to the *Partido Socialista Popular* (the first Communist Party of Cuba), illustrating some immigrant political involvement (Lewis 1988:110).

active in revolutionary society. Indeed, she was difficult to catch up with due to her full schedule; however, when I did, she proved to be a warm, gracious hostess, even insisting on cooking me a meal by lantern light one evening when one of the frequent blackouts occurred during one of my visits. Earlier, sitting in the living room of her house in Guantánamo, she had shared with me boxes of photographs and memorabilia that she had collected over the years. In addition to studio photographs of her grandparents, of herself in an elaborate first communion gown and again with friends in white dresses worn for her *quinceañera*, there were also pictures that document her family's and neighbors' participation in the political life of the country. For instance, she showed me photos of her father among a group of fellow communists gathered in a house and a bar, of the rural children she taught during the literacy campaign, of a young neighbor in army fatigues who was to go fight in Angola, and various activities of her CDR (Committee for the Defense of the Revolution) of which she was a leader.

During the interview, she not only revealed that her Cuban-born father was actually a member of the Communist Party in the '40s, but also provided a sense of the environment in Guantánamo in the late '50s. Furthermore, she suggests that her father's political activism was rooted in the belief that communism was the way to bring an end to racial injustice. The following is an excerpt from this conversation:

C: Well, my grandparents really, the old folks, you know that the *jamaicanos* were very reserved and they had always stayed away from politics, they respected the police and the laws of the country. But my parents, they were Cubans and they were more involved in what was happening...in '56, '57, when things with the revolution were escalating, I [heard] them commenting about how it seemed that Fidel Castro, leader of the rebels, is going to win, because they were hearing things about what was going on in the Sierra Maestra, so, what did they do? ...At night, they put the radio to Radio Rebelde from the Sierra Maestra and we were outside [standing guard] in case the *cajitos*, Batista's

soldiers, pass by, because a lot of them were always passing by throughout the night up the street and down the street, and when one of the tanks, the war tanks, went by [simulates loud noise]. We were outside of the house and they had the radio on very low: 'Radio Rebelde from the Sierra Maestra reports'. It informed us of everything that was going on in the Sierra Maestra and how the revolution was going. And we were outside, if we saw someone coming, not just a soldier, but anyone, because at that time you had to be alert, you had to be afraid and not get taken to jail because they'd kill you, you'd not come back anymore. So, the person in the corner [would give a signal] and the person in front of the door would [knock on the door] and they'd turn the radio off. And when the person passed, they'd knock on the door again and they'd continue listening. This is how I was able to listen to Radio Rebelde at night.

A: And did they talk about what they were saying on Radio Rebelde? Do you remember what they said?

C: They talked a lot about Fidel Castro, that he was a lawyer and...for the country and he was in the Sierra Maestra and he has...to win. Really, I was young, 13 or 14 years old and one time, I was going by Paseo and I saw a first cousin of mine...[who] asked me, both of us speaking very quietly 'who are you with, those here or those in the Sierra? I'm with those in the Sierra' and I said 'me too', we were whispering because they were listening...some of our parents were commenting about what was happening in the country.

A: So they became involved in the revolutionary process...Did they ever talk about racial discrimination?

C: Yes, and they suffered, they suffered, my parents. One time we went out for a walk and they saw a club near [street] and they entered, a regular club, and when they were inside they sat down and you could feel something but...we sat down, but...we stayed there [without being served]. I was young and I didn't understand either. Before the revolution, younger children of color could go inside the park, but those over 14 couldn't do it. I didn't know that at the time and found this out when a cousin of ours who was 14 [recounts story of how cousin couldn't enter the center of the park]...families then were very reserved, there were a lot of things that I didn't know when I was little, children didn't know a lot, not like now when they know everything, everything. It wasn't like that. My cousin had to tell me that we, because of our color, couldn't go in that part of the park. Look at that, the government prohibited us from going into the park because of color, only the younger children could go in and play. How hard, how hard. Now everyone is in the park, there's white, black, Chinese, Japanese, Jamaican, everyone, young and old. But then, the children of color but the older no, only whites.

A: So your parents...

C: Had to support the government to help blacks...

A: So your parents belonged to all of the organizations...?

C: Yes, my father was a communist in '48.

A: Oh, he was a communist before?

C: Yes, indeed, my father, from when they started...in the shop...in the union and all of that...I also remember when I was young I saw these men were around the house, in the back, there were some in the front, they would knock and my mother opened the door...there was a strong newsletter, *Obrero*,...here in Guantánamo, and if someone

from the army found one of these papers in the house they would kill my father, if they found anything, they would kill him.

A: So he worked in the clandestine movement?

C: Oh, he was in everything, if they found one little paper that suggested my father was against Batista, they would take him to jail and he would disappear. But, thank God, they never found out.

A: So did you know other *jamaicano* or *pichón* families involved in this revolutionary process?

C: Yes, [names people in extended family, positions held like sergeant in the army]

A: So, of the generation of your parents, were there others outside of your family who were involved in the process?

C: Yes, they understood that it was a just process, that they were defending the black class, the poor, that they were fighting against racial discrimination and social discrimination, to end the abuses, the misery and corruption and all of this. They had to support it.

While others did not have as deep a family history of radical leftist political involvement, it is clear that some did become involved in radical organizations in the '50s. One of the most critical sites of radical political action was on university campuses. Though people of English-speaking Caribbean descent were by no means plentiful in higher education due to the severe economic prohibitions and racial discrimination, there were cases in which individuals did pursue advanced degrees.

Josefina, whose Jamaican grandfather fought in the Cuban War of Independence, recounted how her brother's involvement in the movement began when he was studying in the university and became president of the Federation of University Students. He had to flee due to government repression, and fought in the Sierra Maestra. Indeed, her maternal grandfather who migrated to Cuba in the late 1890s participated in the War of Independence and both of her brothers were combatants and one fought in the Bay of Pigs. While she emphasized the supremacy of religious activity over all else, she understood her brothers' participation in the movement to be the result of ideals that they

had within them. She believed that they were born with this sense of justice and had to follow this road. While her parents, as foreigners, did not get involved in national matters, they respected their children's choices and simply worried that they would lose their sons in battle.

### Eugenia

*Yesterday, I went to Eugenia's with the intention of doing an informal interview. As I rounded to corner from Calle Doce onto Calle del Oro, I heard her morning music blaring from the closed metal slat windows of her casita. Her door was wide open and she was walking about...the day before, she had been mopping feverishly. I climbed the three steps onto her tile porch and called her name a couple of times before she heard me over the music and said, 'Aiy, Andrea, pasa, pasa'. I noticed that a sewing machine was in the living room, just outside the entryway to her bedroom, and draped by some worn article of clothing that had been abandoned in the midst of another repair. Hanging in her living room above her couch are three framed pictures. The large one in the center is a print of Camilo Cienfuegos, the Revolutionary hero most often pictured in his green military fatigues with a large straw colored hat and a beaming smile and eyes that tell us of his warmth, compassion, humility and love of el pueblo. To the right of this is a picture of Jesus in soft blues and pinks revealing the fuschia heart that comforts and forgives all believers. To the left is a large black and white photograph of the Pope and Fidel shaking hands with a caption underneath that reads something that I didn't write down. On the bookshelf is another framed picture of Jesus and on the coffee table an artistic rendition of Caridad del Cobre sits upright in its thick glass frame. Surrounding these prominent pieces are smatterings of well-worn plastic flowers and those little ceramic and plastic figurines that no house seems to be without. Her cassette player must be her most valued possession.<sup>130</sup>*

At the moment in which I wrote the last line of that field note, I must have been particularly impressed by the contrast between the vibrant complexity of the salsa that energized Eugenia while she did her chores and the material humility of her home. While the cassette player might have been among the belongings that she valued, she also counted among her valued possessions a car, watch, television, and letter she received from Raúl Castro himself as reward for being a whistle blower at a factory where she worked as an accountant in the '80s. In spite of being an exemplary worker, she had been fired from her position due to her unwillingness to ignore corruption. She decided to

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<sup>130</sup> A. Queeley fieldnote on 6/18/04.

appeal her dismissal, setting off an investigation that became quite public. According to Eugenia, after reporting on her superiors, she was blacklisted because no one in Cuba wants an honest accountant. She was out of work for 26 months and survived through the kindness of neighbors and former coworkers as well as by selling household items, items from the *tarjeta* such as cigarettes and milk that was for her elderly grandmother.<sup>131</sup>

By the time that we met, the car was more often than not in a state disrepair and, though her husband was able to use it as a taxi when it was running, had been a major source of conflict between her and her son. The television and watch were a decade and a half old and she was particularly upset by the fact that she would never be able to visit Jamaica again because they now charged dollars to renew passports, an impossible sum given her very modest pension. Eugenia believes in the Revolution, respects its heroes, but says that she disagrees with a lot that happens in the country, blaming the corruption on those who surround Fidel.

Perhaps shaping these views and certainly defying the perception that immigrants did not get involved in the political affairs of their host country, Eugenia's formative years were spent steeped in the revolutionary movement. Following her mother's death in Jamaica, she arrived in Santiago from Westmoreland in 1955 at the age of 11 to live with her brown Jamaican<sup>132</sup> maternal grandmother who had migrated to Cuba in 1924. Her

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<sup>131</sup> From Granma, December 26th, 1986 article entitled, “¡Hasta Mis Sabanas Tuve Que Vender!” [I Even Had to Sell My Sheets!]

<sup>132</sup> This refers to her grandmother's phenotype as she was very light-skinned with wavy hair. Indeed, Eugenia referred to her as 'white' while, my own reading of her photographs as well as Melvina's perception, indicate that she did not appear to be and was most likely not considered a white woman by fellow Jamaicans.

grandmother taught organ and English classes at home and was very active in the church and community but definitely did not remain outside of the affairs of the Cuban nation. Though Eugenia was 14 when the Revolution triumphed and did not participate directly in the revolutionary struggle that had gripped the country, she grew up in a revolutionary immigrant household, one that provides an example of Anglophone Caribbean involvement in the struggle for social justice. It was in 1958 that Eugenia realized her grandmother was a revolutionary:

Well, I realized that she had packets of clothes and soap from the church and I never asked her what she did with this. The church before the triumph of the Revolution was a family, it was every day, it was everything, Sundays, Tuesdays, Thursday nights...they gave different things, fruit, packages...So, in '58, I realized that my grandmother, she was a revolutionary. I realized when there was a nephew of my grandmother's, the nephew of her husband...[and] one day he came in with a revolver and wanted to [keep it here] and then he left. And my grandmother immediately went to the room where she had classes--the house was wooden and was lower [to the ground] and you could see everything [inside]. She gave classes to children and had begun to give classes to older people to hide revolutionary activity so when people saw revolutionaries in her house, they would mistake them for her students. She was a graduate and trained in teaching English classes...at the beginning of the fighting, a microbrigade of Batista came and my grandmother, she told him, "this house is the house of a Jamaican, and what's more, this is a house of God," and they respected houses of religious people a lot before and also foreigners. She said she would go to the Consul...So, the microbrigade left and I don't know where she had hidden them [referring to the nephew with the revolver] but within a few days, he had left the country. There was another that lived next door who lives in Havana who they were after and had problems and she sent him a package with food and things...she would [pass messages] and give them money and then automatically burn the messages. She met Fidel in person when he was young. My grandmother was very revolutionary. Her husband 'Papa' wasn't revolutionary. My grandmother was a trip and after the Triumph of the Revolution, she always talked about Fidel, she died talking about Fidel. Her life was Fidel.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Author interview with Eugenia on June 16, 2005 in Santiago. According to one of the article series about Eugenia's 1984 struggle in the factory, Eugenia's grandmother greeted the triumph of the Revolution like "un baño de rosas" [a bath of roses]. In this article, Eugenia's immigrant background and that of her grandmother were highlighted. Indeed, in mentioning this story to me in order to familiarize me with the Jamaican/Cuban population in Santiago, a local scholar recalled that Eugenia's identity as a female immigrant of color was used to dramatize the significance of her defiance of the factory bosses. She was portrayed as a humble Jamaican immigrant and exemplary revolutionary who was being victimized by those powerful positions who betray the revolution.

Interestingly, Eugenia's grandmother used her status as a prominent member of the religious community as well as her identity as a foreigner to conceal her clandestine activities. Eugenia identifies her belief in Fidel Castro as the reason that her grandmother participated in the struggle, explaining that, for her grandmother, there was no contradiction between the official atheism adopted soon after the triumph of the revolution and her own deeply felt religious beliefs because "many of the things in the Bible, Fidel did or wanted to do." Eugenia's grandmother was the only report of an immigrant being heavily involved in the movement, which perhaps gives credence to the supposition that the immigrants stayed out of the country's political matters. However, this does not appear to be true of their children as interviewees recall their own involvement and/or family members, friends, or neighbors who participated in the struggle through funneling money, medicine, or other materials to the rebels. This support existed even among those who were relatively well off and had access to some resources, either because they had cash to spare or were employed in positions from which they could pilfer goods to supply the rebels. One interviewee even declared that everyone contributed to the revolution in some way, even if not directly, "everyone was helping," she said, "everyone said that it was a good thing."

Eugenia's story illustrates important points. First, in the black immigrant search for a 'better life', material comfort and economic opportunity are necessarily linked with the struggle for social justice.<sup>134</sup> Secondly, Eugenia's battle against corruption is an example

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<sup>134</sup> The post-emancipation history of the British Caribbean documents both the ubiquity of colonial exploitation and the resistance to the post-emancipation perpetuation of enslavement. Holt (1992) frames

of how people of African descent, in spite of economic and social duress, have tenaciously held on to an emancipatory vision that often pushes beyond the boundaries established by even radical political organizations and movements.<sup>135</sup> Her protest against unfair treatment at her work place was an effort to press individual power brokers as well as the Revolution itself to remain loyal to its ideals. Her belief in these ideals was no doubt influenced by her Jamaican grandmother's active participation in the clandestine movement.

Melvina who was in primary school at the time of the revolutionary struggle, recalls the involvement of young people who were of age and were joining the movement, even going to the hills to become 'Mau Mau'<sup>136</sup>, due to the abuses of the government:

"Everyone wanted to be involved in this because they were so many abuses and they were killing so many young people." Indeed, she recalled that a friend's brother was part of the clandestine movement and was going into the Sierra Maestra when he was killed by Batista's soldiers. He now has a factory named after him. Her own older brother was also part of the movement, but survived to become second in command at a large prison.

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this history in terms of the 'problem of freedom'; namely, that the formerly enslaved could not access the liberal freedom granted the bourgeois man as it is a freedom that was based on individualism and racism and one that could not exist outside of enslavement, domination, and inequality. Though this fundamental theoretical quandary certainly manifests itself in struggles for social justice both historical and contemporary, the daily decisions and actions on the part of the descendants of enslaved men and women reveal that this ideal of equality underlies the willingness on the part of so many to work and sacrifice to create a more just society.

<sup>135</sup> As Robin Kelley (2002) documents in *Freedom Dreams*, his meditative examination of how "self-proclaimed renegades imagined life after the revolution," this vision of a new world, of what the world can become rather than simply what it must not be, has been omnipresent in black struggles, reminding observers that what people are struggling *for* is equally important as what they are struggling against; destruction and creation must have a dialogical relationship.

<sup>136</sup> Some participants used this name to refer to the rebels and is a reference to the Kikuyu anti-colonial fighters of Kenya where "those people who participated in the forest fight and those people who helped the forest fighters of their own free will, without taking to the forest themselves, can be considered as belonging to the Mau Mau movement" (Bijtenhuijs 1983: 4).

Tío Richard, an octogenarian first generation shoemaker who still practices his trade, recounted how he risked his life and came close to being killed on two occasions because he used his street corner business to smuggle messages, clothing, shoes, and even arms to rebels. He said that he witnessed the abuses of the Batista regime, the murder of young people, and had to act.

### **Beth**

Beth is a soft-spoken fair-skinned woman with thick glasses and a timidity that is uncharacteristic of most Cubans I have met. She is 67, has a nervous condition and lives with her elderly mother who is the daughter of immigrants from Nevis-St.Kitts. Beth describes them as a humble family as her grandfather cut cane and later worked as a dairy farmer and her grandmother was a laundress for the administrator of the *central* where they lived and then a cook for the railroad once they moved to Guantánamo. Because of her fearful demeanor, her exploits in the clandestine movement came as a surprise to the friend and researcher who introduced us. Indeed, she herself kept repeating that then she hadn't been nervous and afraid before; apparently, the abuses of the government inspired her to action.

B: [My father] was Cuban. When someone burned the cane, the rural guard picked him up and put him in jail and mistreated him and beat him. The guard caught him and he paid for it though he hadn't done it...

A: And what year was this?

B: In '57 or '58.

A: Did you all know what he was doing?

B: Well, I knew that he had left and that...that the guard had caught him, [this] made me...against the government because the government of Batista, the [rural] guard, caught people and abused them a lot, they beat people for fun because they rode horses a lot and on these horses they carried sabres and hit people...or they put people in jail and tortured them...The majority of the houses had holes in the floors under the bed- then the houses were made of wood- and what my grandmother did was make a hole under the bed and

put cans in it and crackers for the children to eat and rest when they started shooting because sometimes the lights would go out like they go out now. So, the children would lie down there but I couldn't because I didn't like to put myself under the bed. These things made me brave. So, a friend of mine was working with the clandestine movement and I started to help her, storing bullets and I carried a lot of messages. I took a bicycle to a place that was a *central* called Cecilia, it's close to here. I got on the bike and put a message in my skirt or in my bloomers and passed the guard [and flirted with them] and passed them by and carried the message. Back then I wasn't afraid like I am now that I'm old, I don't know if it's because at that time I was so strong, but now I have a lot of fear, fear of everything... I also went to Caimanera where there was a man named Pedro... he's dead, he was in the [fraternal] lodge—there was also a friend called Manuel, *jamaiquino* also, he lived close to here, he was a neighbor. So... he [Pedro] had to come here to look for something, a package, or he came to look for a suit... or something, he was from the 26<sup>th</sup> of July and I had to ride him [on my bicycle back to the mountains]... there was a police jeep, there were really bad police, and there was one that he knew because he lived across the street and so... he was going to run and I told him 'no, don't run, don't run, [the jeep is] going on' and the jeep continued and I went and carried him to the little mountain close by here and I went quickly to my house and told my mother to get rid of the clothes of the MauMau so my mother threw out all the clothes into [our neighbor's] house and when she finished throwing all of this, there was the police... they came by to ask if I had seen my friend... they surrounded his house and shot it up and he wasn't there because I had him hidden. So this happened...

A: What did your mother think of this? Was she involved in this as well?

B: No, never, she didn't want to, only me. I didn't want my family involved in this. This man... there was one who was a guard and he drove a tank and in the tank, this guard whose name is, or was ----, this guard belonged to the MauMau so in the tank he had a sign that if the MauMau saw it, they'd know it was him. So, with him, one time I went to look for some clothes to give to him so he could bring it to [one of the MauMau]... this day, there was a big shooting at the cuartel... because he drove the tank he had to leave and... I saw him so I got on and from there I went and worked... there was the friend in Caimanera so I worked with him and gave the MauMau messages in Caimanera but Papín was the one who carried the messages, he was the boss, not me, I accompanied him and I played the role of his prostitute because it was in the zone [red light district]. We went to a cabaret where there was a room and we sat at a table, put a bottle on the middle of the table and the two of us acted like we were drinking. And MauMau came in a little boat... and he went and delivered his message and left. But I was afraid to be in this [thing] of coming to Guantánamo and going to Caimanera again so I got a job and went to work in the Naval Base. I left Caimanera but on the Base I met a girl who worked with them as well and sometimes... she went to the frontier and saw the MauMau she had to see and she gave him the message and he gave her July 26<sup>th</sup> bonds... Another friend of mine, Anita ---, *jamaiquina* also, sold the bonds, and to the Americans also because at that time the Americans loved Fidel, they lived in love with him and we sold the July 26<sup>th</sup> bonds, they were tickets that said July 26<sup>th</sup>... We [also] came from the Base and carried cigars and food to the MauMau in Cayo Torro... The MauMau in Caimanera defeated the [boat attack]... so when we left, I went to Caimanera and I told one of the

bosses I knew, ‘Mijo, I’m going to the mountains with you’ and he told me ‘go, but go with the Red Cross’ because I was afraid of coming to Guantánamo.

A: And you weren’t afraid of going into the mountains?

B: No, because there were MauMau there.

A: But weren’t there also rural guards...

B: I wanted to go with them. I wasn’t afraid, I had youth, I was strong. So, I stayed in Caimanera [in preparation to leave for the Sierra Maestra]...then there was a noise at 2 in the morning and they said that Batista had left and the noise signaled the triumph of the revolution.

A: So, you were at the point of going into the mountains when the revolution triumphed?

B: Yes, yes. So I never got to the mountains. So, we had to stay in Caimanera for a few days because they wouldn’t let us go because there were a lot of land mines so they didn’t let anyone leave until they took out all of them. The guardia put those down. So everyone, everyone from Caimanera, we came onto the highway, all down the highway, everyone went walking, we didn’t come in cars, but walking barefoot on the highway and when we arrived to Guantánamo, we went to the *cuartel* and they were marching...and the first person I saw was my father, it was so beautiful, how beautiful...

### ***Victory Followed by Radical Change***

*“...it was easy-perhaps necessary—to be revolutionary in early 1959. The language of revolution filled the airwaves and the news columns—moderates, liberals, and radicals alike dipped freely, and frequently, into the wellspring of revolutionary rhetoric. Revolution was in the air, and the atmosphere was rarified indeed. It was intoxicating and seemed to thrive on its own excesses. This was redemption by revolution, and conversions proceeded apace. Under the circumstance, it could hardly be otherwise ...These were euphoric times in Cuba. Expectations ran high, were met, and then raised higher again. Cuba had become an aroused nation. Everywhere and, it seemed, continually, Cubans were marching in protest, meeting in mass rallies, dramatizing demands in public demonstrations...The early reform measures won the revolutionary government widespread popular support, instantly. Workers, peasants, the unemployed received benefits that were immediate and direct. Labor received wage increases, the unemployed received jobs. The urban proletariat received rent and utility rate reductions. Peasants received land and credit. That Afro-Cubans made up a disproportionate share of the uneducated, unskilled, and unemployed meant that they were among the principal and immediate beneficiaries of the early distributive policies of the revolution...The effects were visible. A significant redistribution of income had taken place. Real wages increased approximately 15 percent through a corresponding decline in the income of landlords and entrepreneurs. In the short space of six months, hundreds of thousands of Cubans developed an immediate and lasting stake in the success of the revolution” (Pérez 1995:317).*

Beautiful, indeed. It seems that the initial months, if not years, of the revolution were

dominated by intense emotions: euphoria for some and fear for others. This was not

simply due to the overthrow of Batista by a band of revolutionaries that had become increasingly popular, but because, upon seizing power, these revolutionaries enacted laws that had an impact both immediate and beneficial to the popular classes. Concrete changes in the areas of literacy and education, agrarian and urban reform, racial equality, and income redistribution were greeted with support on the part of the majority of Cubans. As discussed in Chapter Three, during the first year of the Revolution, the government cut rents and telephone rates, increased wages, created new jobs, made home ownership a reality for many, recovered \$400 million worth of valuable property and goods illegally acquired by the Batista regime, nationalized almost two billion dollars worth of U.S. industries, turned old military garrisons into schools, began cleaning up trade unions, outlawed prostitution, and opened schools to retrain thousands of women. One of the primary initial objectives of the Revolution was to decrease the startling disparity between the urban and rural areas. As Franklin Knight observed and reported,

Rural Cuba remained, in 1958, a country apart, almost forgotten and abandoned in its neglect. Well over 90 percent of rural Cubans did not eat fish, meat, bread, or milk regularly. And about 50 percent of the rural folk were completely illiterate, and about 44 percent had never been to school...Housing was inadequate, with 50 percent of rural houses having no bathroom facilities; 85 percent without running water, and 91 percent without electricity...With almost 80 percent of its land cultivable, Cuba utilized less than 30 percent, and planted about 25 percent in sugar cane. Latifundism was widespread...Foreigners owned or controlled 75 percent of all arable land, 90 percent of the essential services, and 40 percent of the sugar industry” (1978: 193).

Clearly, at the heart of this inequality lay the issue of land distribution, thus in May of 1959 with the first Agrarian Reform Law, 40 percent of the rural land was transferred from the sugar trust and latifundists to the revolutionary government and one hundred thousand peasant families were given deeds to the land (Pérez 1995:116).

As a way to demonstrate the magical time at the beginning of the Revolution, Cannon describes the impact of the liquidation of plantations of over 1,000 acres and the distribution of titles to the peasants who farmed the land. “Those peasants who farmed land for their own use were given title to that land- free. In a stroke, the ancient dream of the peasants, who before, as Fidel has said, “couldn’t even plant a cedar or an orange tree for they never knew when the Rural Guards would come and evict them,” was made true” (1981: 116). While the urban clandestine movement was critical to the success of the Revolution, the guerrilla war was waged from the mountains of the Sierra Maestra, the home of thousands of peasants. Thus, Fidel and the revolutionaries experienced rural poverty first hand and strengthened the conviction to transform the lives of this segment of the Cuban population. Furthermore, the peasants were instrumental in protecting and sustaining the rebels.

The deeply impactful literacy campaign provided an opportunity not only for eliminating illiteracy, but also for this kind of interaction between the rural and urban sectors of the nation’s population, nurturing a nationalism rooted in connection across the traditional impasses. The campaign consisted of 100,000 student volunteers stationed in rural areas, 121,000 adults who volunteered part-time in urban areas, 15,000 workers who received paid leave of absences to participate, and 35,000 professional school teachers who worked as administrators and technical advisors (Pérez 1995: 358). In addition to city dwellers coming into long term contact with their rural counterparts, the educated meeting the illiterate, many of these young people who went into the countryside to teach people to

read were single women, thus signifying a transgression of customary gender appropriate behavior.

Although there was clearly debate, struggle, and protest around radical social changes such as the participation of young single women and the abolition of racial discrimination in the public sphere, Cuban society had been pushed into a state of deep turmoil and thus people were ripe for radical and sweeping change. It was this enthusiasm and vigor that was channeled into the volunteer work, born in October of 1959 after a group of citizens cleaned the waterfront in preparation for a convention. Such mobilizations soon became ubiquitous and the mass organizations that organized these efforts came to constitute the backbone of Cuban civil society. In the autumn of 1959, a civilian militia was formed and grew from 100,000 in 1959 to almost 300,000 in 1961. In August 1960, the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) was organized followed by the Committees in Defense of the Revolution (CDRs), which are neighborhood organizations developed to combat internal subversion and sabotage, and the Association of Young Rebels (AJR) that mobilized and organized youths between the ages of 14 and 27 (Pérez 1995: 330). These organizations, in addition to the unions, were the vehicle through which people assessed the problems that they confronted in various parts of their lives, brainstormed solutions, and advocated for change. Alternatively, they were also the means through which the policies of the central government were implemented and enforced.

The high of victory was initially sustained through a political process in which people who before had no voice in the political sphere, were suddenly a part of what appeared to

be a transparent political process. Cannon constructs the process of making the revolution as one of collaboration, one that was very grassroots where there was open discussion and debate. “In the spring of 1960, the political ferment could be felt everywhere in Cuba. An intense national debate was going on in every factory, school, neighborhood, social club, association, and farm. People were discussing the political and economic issues that would determine the future of their country: Is socialism better than capitalism? Should workers strike? Could they survive without the United States? What should they do about the counterrevolution and sabotage? Were the rumors about the Communists true? As never before, the country debated, listened, learned” (Cannon 1981: 126). Indeed, Fidel’s speeches of the early years were known not only for their length, but also the way in which he somehow managed to discuss the problems confronting the country with audiences numbering in the thousands.

Fidel’s speeches conveyed the sense of collaboration and inclusion. One example of this was during the dedication ceremony of the 26<sup>th</sup> of July School in what had been the Moncada Garrison attacked in 1953. Fidel engaged the children, calling out to them that they, the people, are the future of the Revolution, that it is their responsibility: “Now we have much work to do, we have many roads to construct, many dams, many towns, many factories; we have to plow the fields, construct beaches and tourist centers. We have a great job to do and there are not enough people who know how to do these things and therefore our greatest hope is not in what we are doing today, but in what you are going to do tomorrow” (Cannon 1981: 124). Clearly such interactions are wide open to directly contrasting analyses. To those who unequivocally support the revolution and/or Fidel,

this is emblematic of Cuban democracy at work. To others, it can be interpreted as political posturing, communist brainwashing, and/or an attempt to captivate the population so it doesn't revolt.

The economic and political empowerment that was the goal of the revolution was conceived of as possible only through the creation of *el hombre nuevo* or, the "new man." It was necessary to completely transform the consciousness of Cubans in order to truly seize the moment and construct an independent nation that would realize the fulfillment of Martí's prophetic vision. This was critical in both the construction of a just society in the shadow of immorality and gross inequality that characterized pre-1959 Cuba and in the global context of U.S. imperial designs and aggression. As Pérez-Stable notes, "The revolution aimed to foster a new *conciencia*. Without a transformation of popular consciousness, Cuban leaders contended that socialism was no better than capitalism. They argued that the exclusive pursuit of individual, material well being contravened the commitment to equality and the imperative of national unity against the United States. Although the revolution unearthed a valuable resource in the will, energy, and passion of the Cuban people, the challenge was turning them into an economic force in daily life and work" (1999: 83). The promotion of what amounted to a new moral code emphasizing sacrifice, volunteerism, collectivism, discipline, and hard work gave ordinary Cubans an ideal to emulate and an opportunity to create a society that rewarded integrity, triumphed over imperialistic evil-doers, and nurtured that which is best about the human spirit.

The other force that contributed to the emotional and political climate of the late '50s and early '60s was the fact that Cuba was under siege by the United States and those Cuban exiles determined to destroy the revolution and regain their dominant positions on the island. The inevitable escalation of tension between those Cubans who lost and those who gained from the revolution, between the U.S.'s policy of maintaining economic and political control over Cuba and Cuban self-determination, came to a climax with the Bay of Pigs invasion in April of 1961 in which the U.S. sponsored Cuban exiles on their mission to topple the government. Defeated within 72 hours, this invasion demonstrated to the Cuban populace that they were indeed the target of hostility by one of the most powerful countries on earth, one that was not satisfied with the imposition of a trade embargo but also engaged in overt and covert military action.

The government and popular response to this threat was to organize to protect their revolution so that everyone from the militias to the *Pioneros*<sup>137</sup> was ready for attack. Government suppression of dissent was tolerated in the name of national defense. Allegiance to Cuba became synonymous with loyalty to the revolution. As a result of the Bay of Pigs, "the government moved against anyone suspected of opposition to the regime, including priests, foreigners, and ordinary men and women, in and out of government. By the end of April an estimated 100,000 persons were imprisoned or otherwise detained. Virtually no suspected opponent of the government remained free in Cuba after that time. Prisons filled with political enemies. Most were released after the Cuban victory at Girón [Bay of Pigs], but by then all organized opposition had been

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<sup>137</sup> A national youth group for children not old enough to be part of the UJC that one of my informants likened to the boy/girl scouts.

effectively eliminated. Thereafter, planeload after planeload of Cubans left the island” (Rosendahl 1997: 331).

U.S. aggression and the 1961 declaration of the socialist character of the revolution initiated an end to any ambiguous interpretation of *la revolución* as well as a tremendous cleavage in the Cuban population between those who were with the revolution and those who were against it. In her late 1980s ethnography of daily life in northeastern Cuba, Mona Rosendahl found that “many of those who had supported and even fought with the rebels hardly knew what socialism meant, even less about being socialist. Some chose to leave the country when they decided that the revolution was taking a turn they did not like; others stayed on and accepted the new ideology; still others were already convinced of the good of socialism” (1997: 158). Clearly, at this time when Cubans were charged with the very serious responsibility of transforming their society while being bombarded with daily reports of counterrevolutionary activity, there was no neutral ground.

Nationalism could no longer be a unifier when the idealized nation of one segment of the population was one in which their class and race privilege was maintained at the expense of the majority of citizens. A climate of polarization developed where dissent and even a lack of enthusiasm were met with suspicion and harsh social sanctioning and questioning as the only direction of the society was not permitted. Those who might not have been privileged but for whom such a climate was unacceptable either left or were silent.

Those who remained and were enthusiastic about the changes constituted a force that was at once popular and historic, one that was theoretically incorporated into the political

process through mass organizations. This force powered the massive wave of social transformation, giving the impression that the nation was finally under the control of its citizens and that the decisions made and implemented by the government were really of, for and by the people. The government, the nation, and the people, all driven by this new socialist morality, were one and the same.

*Conciencia* permeated through the society--though it can be argued that the communal and non-individualistic aspects of this new ethic were present and practiced before they became official policy--and was to guide Cubans at work, in their neighborhoods, in the mass organizations, and military service. At the work centers in the '60s, rather than compete for material rewards, workers were to compete with a revolutionary ideal in a system that was termed *emulación*. The reward for doing a good job was in knowing and being known for one's exemplary behavior in contributing to the revolution. As Fidel emphasized in the above quote, there was much work to be done to build the revolution and thus the new criterion upon which one was judged was the extent of one's sacrifice for creating this just society.

The late '60s and '70s marked a shift in the revolutionary process and a sense of doubt and disappointment began to emerge, coexisting with a deepened resolve to combat enemies both internal and external. The stand that the country had taken in pursuing a course that was morally, economically, and politically opposed to the United States enacted drastic changes in daily life. The U.S. embargo created a material and, in some senses, cultural or psychological vacuum in so far as goods, services, and information.

The United States had been an influential source of cultural exchange and, with the revolution, this influence practically vanished.

However, in its place was not only the Soviet Union, but also Cuban internationalism, a point that is particularly relevant for this study as it highlights one way in which Cuba demonstrated a commitment to black liberation. Though no one in this study articulated a direct link between their investment in the Revolution and the well-known role that Cuba played in foreign independence struggles, it is important to note that this too contributed to the climate of the time.<sup>138</sup> Between 1975 and 1991, Cuba sent more than 375,000 volunteers at the request of the Angolan government (Waters 2005: 79). Cubans provided decisive military and medical assistance and, indeed, through weakening the South African regime, was instrumental in the destruction of apartheid. Named Black Carlota after an enslaved woman who led a rebellion in Matanzas in 1843, this mission was clearly framed as a struggle against white oppression as well as imperialism. After Cuban troops repelled invading forces in March 1976, Fidel said, “when the last South African soldiers crossed the Namibian border after a retreat of more than 700 kilometers, one of the most brilliant pages in the liberation of Black Africa had been written” (as quoted in Waters 2005: 80).

In the midst of all the positive changes such as open access to health care, education, employment, and the public sphere and the key role Cuba was coming to play in liberation struggles, there were also negative aspects of the revolution. The inexperienced

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<sup>138</sup> Hay (2006) found that two of the thirty black Cubans that participated in her study followed the anti-colonial and black liberation struggles from Cuba and this influenced their politicized racial consciousness.

leadership, foreign aggression, bankrupting of the national treasury by former leaders, the flight of the educated class, and the basic structural issues that most if not all small ex-colonial economies confront constituted significant challenges. After failing at the import-substitution model of development, the government returned to a focus on the single export model and launched a campaign to harvest 10 million tons of sugar, mobilizing national and international support. The entire country was focused on achieving this goal, as if the success or failure of the revolution depended upon it: 1.2 million workers from all sectors of the economy, as well as 100,000 from the armed forces and 300,000 from the sugar industry were enlisted. As a result, “the effects of an effort of this magnitude on other sectors of the economy were immediate, and almost everywhere disastrous. Production of consumer goods declined. Basic foodstuffs of every type- milk, vegetables, fruits, meat, poultry- were in short supply across the island. The goods that were produced often encountered shipping difficulties, for much of the rail and road transportation was diverted to sugar” (Pérez 1995: 342).

Pérez-Stable actually argues that the revolution ended and the reality of socialism began in 1970 with the failure of the harvest that was followed by a resignation to become closely allied with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. In her view, the socialist structures that were put into place as capitalist ones were dismantled failed and militarism filled the void in the form of mass mobilizations and a regimen of military discipline (1999: 118). Cubans harvested a record 8.5 million tons of sugar, but falling short of the 10 million ton goal had a sobering effect, particularly as increased shortages and pressures on daily life followed. Caridad, who is in her 70s and is more vocal about the

lack of quality goods and general precarious economic circumstances in the contemporary period, referred to this time in the late '60s and early '70s as the first 'special period'.

### ***Jamaicanos/Cubanos in the Aftermath of Victory***

The recollections relayed by research participants who came of age in the '60s and '70s, in the early years after the triumph of the revolution, correspond with these representations in the literature. There was a tremendous emotional intensity of the time that came from the excitement of radical change. To be sure, the meaning of this change in the daily lives of Cubans, including those of English-speaking Caribbean origin, itself changed as events unfolded in the creation of the revolution. It was a chaotic time, one of possibility, confusion, joy, apprehension and fear, as the various decrees, reforms, and mobilizations took shape. The young people were forming militias, being offered scholarships, going off to work in the countryside as agricultural laborers and teachers. According to some of my informants, everyone wanted to join the Young Communist League, it was a source of pride and "like a fad," according to some participants who came of age at this time. A word often used to describe the environment of this time is '*lindo*', which can mean pretty, beautiful, or fine, and when used by participants, it also implied a kind of spiritual quality that came from a sense of solidarity and invincibility.

As Leticia, the granddaughter of Jamaican immigrants described:

[It was] an environment of revolution and nothing more... [in] the years of the 60s and 70s, they were creating everything, the sports institute they created in '62, in that same year in '62 or '61 they had the Agrarian Reform when they gave land to the peasants and they had the literacy campaign and they educated everyone to read and write. It was

combustive and beautiful because it was for everyone and there was also, well, all of these laws of the revolution, all of these things of the revolution that Fidel was creating. It was a time when everyone loved the revolution and was helping, doing everything here...later so everyone was ready, they created the militias and you looked forward to when you were 14 or 15 to be in the committee in the defense of the revolution, all of this was created in the '60s...so, here, everything was for the revolution, well, up until now but at that period of beginning everyone was involved. It was a very beautiful time, a time of rebirth...everyone was ready...

Everyone, but particularly the youth, was called upon in the uprooting of the previous system, placing a certain social pressure on families to relax constraints placed upon the young, particularly young women. As might be anticipated, generational divisions were exposed and expanded, at least in the notoriously strict households of the West Indian communities. Like the young people before them who at times migrated to Cuba or other destinations against the advice and will of their parents, some English-speaking Caribbean descendants hid their plans to pursue opportunities from their parents.

Elton, a Guantanamero whose father immigrated from Grenada and mother from Jamaica, deceived his mother into believing that he was studying in Santiago when in fact he had been recruited to train with the national judo team. His mother only found out about this when a neighbor said that her son's picture appeared in a newspaper article featuring the judo team's victory in France! Carlitos, now in his early 50s, recounted that he too went against his mother's wishes by signing up to work and study in Camaguey. He was 15, not yet at the age to enter the military, and was recruited to study and work in another province. He told his mother that they sent out a call for this opportunity and, against her wishes, he got on the bus to Camaguey. Somehow, his mother had gotten word of his plans and went to look for him. She found him on the bus, spoke with

someone in charge, telling him that that was her son and he didn't have permission to leave. She was told that the people in charge of the mobilization were now taking care of him, he was about to complete a mission and she should go home. He recalled that this was the first time he was separated from his mother and that this was the beginning of his long journey in pursuit of an education.

The generational conflict of interest seemed to be particularly pronounced for the young women as the protective parents were reluctant to allow their daughters to brave the world outside the house and immediate community. They had to be convinced by the family members who were in support of not only the revolution itself, but of the revolutionary plan to educate young people and to build a more just society. Leticia, whose Jamaican grandfather she remembers as very revolutionary, described how her family tried to convince her father to let her and her sister study in Havana: "Alone without anyone, to go to Havana?! They had to fight a lot to get him to let me go to Havana. My grandfather who had more awareness and a larger vision, he fought with my father. My sister also, my sister would have studied nursery science in Havana and my father didn't let her go...She wasn't 18 yet."

Some young women buckled under the wishes of their parents and spouses, while others defied their parents outright, as is illustrated by Esperanza in this interview:

E: I was a little cowardly, I was already at the age of finishing [school]...and could have done what I wanted to do. Including when the literacy campaign [came], I was an English teacher and didn't participate, but I could have. I worked in little schools...

A: Here in Guantánamo?

E: In *central* Paraguay. After [that] I worked as an English teacher in La Maya and there I fell in love.

A: With a Cuban?

E: No, with a *jamaiquino* from Guantánamo who worked on the Base. He and my mother agreed that I couldn't continue working so I stopped working outside the home and lost this opportunity. My sister didn't, she was braver than I and even though my mother didn't want it, she went and began school at the *Escuela de Superación* and she began to get ahead. Now she is a neonatologist and has even been abroad. For three years and eight months, she was in Botswana. She's a pediatric nurse.

A: So she was able to study with the revolution...

E: Yes, she studied with the revolution...

A: But she was younger than you...

E: Yes,... and when my mother said that [she was on her own if she left], she said, [continues in English] 'ok, well, the revolution will take care of me', and she left. And she studied in Santiago and she studied in Havana...

A: No matter what your mother said...

E: I always used to...in my mind, I'd say, 'she raised me from a baby, and she raised me without a father, so', but my sister no...

A: She said the revolution will take care of her...

In this conversation, Melvina, whose Jamaican father eventually rejected the revolution and left Cuba, recalls the liberatory environment of the country at that time and how her family members responded to the revolutionary movement:

M: Look, at the beginning of the revolution, everyone belonged to *Jovenes Rebeldes*, everyone, and they began to march at night, chanting '*Jovenes Rebeldes, Patria o Muerte, Jovenes Rebeldes, Patria o Muerte*', all of the young people...I was still too young but I watched [my older sister and brother]. They wore a white uniform, black pants and a white shirt, marching late into the night [chanting] '*Jovenes Rebelde, Patria o Muerte*', until late into the night, marching, marching, marching here and there, marching, every night. Ask [my sister] if she remembers this. So, with the freedom, not the freedom, but with the new system, the system that Fidel put in place in the country, the children of *jamaicanos* were liberated a little.

A: In what sense?

M: They went to school, to the school in the country.

A: So they got to get out of the house...

M Out of the house, for myself, papa didn't let me go to the country because I was sickly, but the teachers came to the house to ask permission from him for me to go to the countryside for 45 days to pick coffee, cut cane- well the men cut cane and the women collected it, harvest oranges...

A: So your father gave permission for you to go?

M: The first time no, I didn't, but the second time, I went.

A: How old were you?

M: This was in '68, well, I was really young. It was great. I learned a lot that I never learned at home. I bathed with cold water, which I never did at home, it was always hot water. I was more free, I felt freer outside of the house and the dominion of my father and many were like me, who felt freer.

A: So there was a group of young people, in the countryside...

M: Exactly...

A: With teachers...but the teachers were young as well?

M: No, now the teachers are young, but then they were old. What happened is that they took the kids in ninth grade and put them in school to be teachers because there weren't any. They did the same with doctors, they started to collect the students in different grades to go out and teach. [My husband] taught in the literacy campaign, and [my sister] also. They went into the bush, deep into the bush and the counterrevolutionaries were killing literacy campaign teachers. [My sister] taught, [my husband] taught, [my brother] taught...I didn't teach because I was too young, but a lot of people went to do this. So, there was a revolution in the country where everyone in the country was involved in the revolution because you couldn't be outside of it, someone would knock on your door and ask why your child wasn't part of it, everyone was part of the literacy campaign.

The other, perhaps more pressing conflict emerged with the government's 1961 declaration of the socialist character of the revolution and the escalation of tension between Cuba and the U.S. As Edward, the 53-year old grandson of immigrants from Montserrat and St. Kitts recounts, speaking at rapid fire, the dynamism of early revolutionary Cuba and its impact on their community was inevitably complicated by the dramatically changing relationship with the United States:

In the 60s, there was an effervescence, the country was in a great effervescence because they were giving a lot of things...it was an environment of active participation in the revolution, in the organizations, in the scholarships, young people getting their studies, their majors, participating in the different jobs of the revolution, the harvest, in the sugar, in the column of the defense against the United States and imperialism that we didn't want to invade, the attack of Cuba's economic objectives, the sabotage, the problem of the flight [of people] from the country, Americans kicking out people from the Base, the inflation and [scarcity], there wasn't this and there wasn't that...an environment that was very effervescent, of contradictory things, shocking things, one day [it's empty]...the other it's filling up, the other who knows what, the price is doing this...the border of the Naval Base who knows who because there's the American guards, and they killed Ramon Peña, and they attacked Lopez and...the combatants...and some

act that was against imperialism...and here there were scholarships and this kid was going, and there there was the agricultural mobilization, and there there was the cutting the cane, and there the harvest of *viandas*, it was like this, and over there there were people leaving the country and there there were the *jamaiquinos* who had to leave the country, you understand? And that family was getting ready to leave for the United States, getting kicked out of the Base so they had no way to live...the church was left empty, the lodges were closed because the people were religious. It was an effervescent environment of contradictions, we lived intense days with great emotions, contradictory emotions. It was like this in the 60s and in the 70s.

As is evident from this quote, people in the English-speaking Caribbean communities once again occupied a somewhat contradictory position *visa vis* Cuban society. They were dependent, at least economically if not psychologically, on U.S. dominance in the country as they worked in the offices, bars, warehouses, kitchens, and fields of the North Americans. Connection with this dominant group secured their economic niche. However, while the status quo might have ‘kept the wolf away from the door’, it also secured their subjugation. Even that minority who managed to prosper was not immune to the vagaries of the racialized social hierarchy. Purcival, a 60-year old airplane technician who was initially excited and involved in the revolutionary process, founding his local militia, explained that his father and mother’s brothers worked for the Base and they didn’t lack for anything. The local *guardia* was even kind to him and other neighborhood children, but, as a black person, he couldn’t enter the central park. Nor could he and his siblings use the beautiful sports center facilities in Vista Alegre because it was reserved for whites. Victory for Fidel and the apparent intention of the revolutionary government to make good on its promises of justice through redistribution of wealth and opening of opportunities to all pleased members of the English-speaking

Caribbean community. As Edward, who is also from a family that was relatively well off in the '50s and 60s, goes on:

A: Do you think that the majority of the *anglófonos* or *pichones*, *descendientes* supported the revolution and participated in the revolution?

R: The majority, no, I don't think so. Some, yes...but you know what happened? The problem is that, one thing happens here in Guantánamo-and this is what I know- an enormous group of people here, their parents worked on the Base and this was the main source of work.<sup>139</sup> So, what happened? At the triumph of the Revolution, the measures of the Americans against Cuba and Cuba against the Americans began, this mess of intelligence that we talked about earlier. One of the reactions that was very strong was the reaction that happened when Cuba obligated the Ministry of Water to cut off the water supply to the Base.

A: This was in 62 or 63?...

R: Around that time. So, the consequence was that the North Americans took out a lot of people [from Cuba]. A lot of *anglófono* families left Cuba and for this, I can't tell you that there was total and open support for the revolution because it wasn't like that. Don't forget that the *anglófonos* at that time, the descendants of the first generation were raised under the guidance/teachings of their parents and the tendency of their parents who were very prudent and respected the internal matters of the country in which they were residing. Therefore, they didn't get involved in anything political, cultural, etc...they wanted to live inside the country, work, earn, achieve their dream but not get involved in national problems. Therefore, this lead the *antillanos* to avoid getting involved in a substantial way in the revolutionary process. So, some knew more about these things, but the majority no.

A: But this changed...

R: Ah ha, there were always descendants who were involved in the revolutionary process, incorporated in the rebel army, who fought against Batista's army, etc. I think that the Moncada program<sup>140</sup> and the way it denounced the situation here, the corruption and all of that, there existed here in Cuba some way, a way of touching the *antillanos* because though they didn't want to mix in with the matters [of the country], they were victims of the system, they suffered all of the injustices, humiliations, that accompanied this society. Although they didn't want to get involved or be protagonists, they in some way wanted the change, and the platform of change that Fidel and his group presented was very interesting. Therefore they, without getting directly involved as protagonists, but maybe from behind, they were in agreement because it was a way that they could be liberated from all of this. Every day it became more impossible to achieve their dreams because [their positions] didn't allow them to be able to pay for their children's education like they wanted. And I know, because I listened to other's conversations.

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<sup>139</sup> In 1964, 700 Cuban workers were fired from the Base (Stubbs 1989).

<sup>140</sup> This is the program for revolutionary social transformation of the 26<sup>th</sup> of July movement that Fidel outlined in *La Historia me Absolverá* [History Will Absolve Me], which he wrote after being arrested and tried for the attack on the Moncada barracks in 1953.

As the relationship between the Cubans and Americans soured, the pressure on the community increased. The following major events marked this time period: the reduction of the sugar quota in 1960 and the imposition of the trade embargo in 1961; the Bay of Pigs in April of that same year, the expulsion of Cuba from the Organization of American States in January of 1962; Cuba's cutting off of the water supply to the Naval Base later that year; the discontinuation of flights between the U.S. and Cuba; the penalization of the dollar and the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1963, which really established Cuba and the United States as mortal enemies. People of English-speaking Caribbean descent, particularly those who lived in Guantánamo, were caught in the middle of this military, ideological, and economic crisis. For instance, the change in the monetary system left Base employees without an easy means to cash their checks that were backed by U.S. banks. Furthermore, in 1976, the U.S. killed a Cuban soldier on the frontier and, according to Edward, after attending his funeral in Guantánamo, Raúl Castro announced that no workers on the Base could participate in any revolutionary organizations.<sup>141</sup> At one of the peaks of the crisis, Base employees were forced to choose to either exile on the Base, which was and remains technically U.S. soil, or continue to live in Cuba and work on the Base, being subjected to checkpoint searches and interrogations. Some chose to remain on the Base, working there until retirement or leaving to the U.S. shortly after exiling.

Even for those who did not work on the Base or depend on it for their livelihood, the nationalization of businesses, the attack on North American dominance, and flight of elite and middle class Cubans dependent upon the U.S. presence had immediate and dire

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<sup>141</sup> Field note 6/28/05.

consequences to economic and social life.<sup>142</sup> According to Pérez, for the nearly 150,000 Cuban employees of North American enterprises, the expropriations were traumatic. From middle managers to clerks to lawyers, this particular group and all of those people and industries that were dependent upon their higher salaries were affected by the immediate decline in their standard of living. Furthermore, members of the middle class who worked for foreign companies had more leverage to oppose government policies without placing their livelihood in danger. With the increase in state control over the private sector, political beliefs came to have a determining effect over employment: “Those Cubans who opposed the revolution, no less than those who showed insufficient ardor for the revolution, were now enormously vulnerable... They were dismissed by the thousands, and their positions filled by loyal supporters of the revolution. Almost seven hundred employers of the Cuban Electric Company were fired and replaced by militants. By 1961, every senior administrator of the 161 sugar mills was a revolutionary. Indeed, between 1959 and 1961, that was the case in nearly 75 percent of the administrative positions of all sugar mills” (Pérez 1995: 329).

Interesting to point out is that as these positions were eliminated, so too were the working class positions that serviced these middle- and upper class employees. For instance, all domestic laborers, low status office workers, janitors, drivers, etc., many of whom were of English-speaking Caribbean descent, must have been dismissed as well. But the consequences went beyond the material. The strict edict of the time was “With the Revolution, everything. Against it, nothing,” thus there was no room for dissenting with

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<sup>142</sup> Entire sectors of the old economy such as insurance services, real estate agencies, law firms, rent collectors, travel agencies, and gambling casinos were superfluous and disappeared. Brokers and middlemen of all types were abolished, thus thousands of middle-class Cubans were without jobs.

the larger direction of the country. Anyone who demonstrated or was suspected of harboring sentiments that questioned this direction was sanctioned. Those Anglophone Caribbean people who were neither scared away by the unrest of the war nor caught up on the revolutionary fervor that followed were forced to take a stand. The deepening penetration of the revolutionary government into daily life and the environment of polarization that developed did not allow for the policy of nonalignment that had often characterized the community.

Under these conditions, in spite of the boom in educational opportunities and significant movement toward economic justice, there began what some described as an exodus of *anglófonos*. English-speaking Caribbean immigrants who were technically foreigners even if they had lived in Cuba most of their lives, were the first group to leave the island as they could do so with relative ease, at least logistically.<sup>143</sup> As with native Cubans, Anglophone Caribbean immigrants and their families faced the choice of dispersing or remaining on the island in a polarized society that was becoming increasingly unpredictable and politically demanding. They too took serious risks and endured painful separations that in many cases proved to be permanent. While there had always been some out migration<sup>144</sup>, the circumstances under which these leavings took place were quite trying as they brought to the fore both ideological and familial divisions. This was an incredibly difficult period for the community as families were separated and community institutions disintegrated.

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<sup>143</sup> Cuban colleagues explained to me that, due to the sensitive nature of the topic, official statistics on post 1959 out migration are unavailable to foreign researchers, particularly one from the United States.

<sup>144</sup> Some informants had family members who left in search of opportunities to study in other Caribbean islands such as Jamaica and Puerto Rico, or traveled to the U.S. with family or spouses who left for reasons often not directly related to the political climate of the country.

There were a variety of reasons given by those who remained in Cuba to explain why those immigrants who left Cuba did so, including illness, the inability to make a living, conflict with the new political system, and the desire to join family who had already left. Though the immigrants did not seem to have a clear idea of what communism or socialism was in practice, it had a sinister reputation that was fueled by the propaganda of military personnel on the Base at the height of the Red Scare. Furthermore, the practical impact of the shredding of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Cuba in no way endeared African Caribbean peoples to the new political and economic regime of their adopted country. Thus, a conflict arose between this mistrust of communism and the appeal that the immediate and profound changes enacted by the revolutionary government, which benefited the poor, working class and black people, had for members of the communities.

The motivating factors for the younger generation's desire to leave are less clear than those given to account for the out migration of the older immigrants. One might guess that there were also a variety of reasons that these young people did not want to integrate into revolutionary society, ranging from a desire to be with family to disagreement with the revolutionary rhetoric of self-sacrifice and struggle to a longing for U.S. culture and consumer products. One Guantanamera who left in 1971 and now lives in New York attributed her departure to the desire to escape the repressive gender role that she would be confined to as a Cuban woman. Of course, this is not only over 30 years in hindsight,

but also with the experience of living in a large cosmopolitan U.S. city. However, it does demonstrate that the underlying motivations for departure resist simplification.

Though the plan for many immigrants was to leave and then send for their spouses and children who remained in Cuba, there were cases of people who left never to be reunited with their wives, children, and extended family members. For the members of the generations born in Cuba who wished to leave, the exit was a more difficult process and an increasingly dim prospect and thus some pursued illegal, more dangerous means, which resulted in death for some and imprisonment for others.<sup>145</sup> Indeed, the atmosphere became quite tense within the Anglophone Caribbean community as people discussed whether or not to stay or leave, particularly given that a move toward the latter choice was dangerous if done illegally, was perceived to be a deep betrayal, and would severely limit the life choices of anyone who voiced such a choice.

The situation of people of English-speaking Caribbean origin brings to the fore the deep contradictions between economic justice and social sanctioning and, I argue, contribute to the politics of ambivalence. Rosendhal's finding that, "A person who shows interest in going abroad can lose his or her job, and someone who tries to emigrate is often left in limbo for a long time, without a job or a place in society, while his or her application is being processed" (1997: 159), was corroborated by my informants, many of whom had family members who left in the first decade or so after the triumph of the revolution.

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<sup>145</sup> Stories of treacherous crossings came up in association with Guantánamo given its proximity to the Base, which was essentially a frontier to the U.S. For instance, a boy who lived across from one participant was shot and killed trying to cross over to the Base. Another informant was himself jailed for 3 years after being found attempting the same thing.

Those who opted to migrate legally were subjected to being ostracized by the larger community and prohibited from attending higher education. Instead, they were sent to perform agricultural labor while they awaited the clearance to leave- which could and did take years for some- and were considered deserters, traitors, and ‘*gusanos*’<sup>146</sup> for their decision. The justification for this treatment was that the revolution could not spare resources educating or training someone who would not contribute to Cuban society. Though understandable, it was nonetheless painful for those who were subjected to ostracism and so maligned.

Edward provided one poignant example of the pain that some people endured as a result of this polarization. I will here quote him at length because it is through his own words that we best get a sense of one of the ways in which the revolution impacted his family, the personal sacrifices that some people made, and the shifts that the future would hold:

E: My uncle R., he integrated [into the Revolution] and had worked as a fireman but then he went to work at the Ministry of the Interior and he kept moving up and moving up and he ended as a senior in the Ministry of the Interior...He studied and got a degree in political science and this was a way he bettered himself and he integrated into the Party and was a combatant. So, what happens, in my family, people who had this kind of integration into these organizations, in the *antillana* family, a big division was created [and also] there was a rejection...Certain relationships, including with your own family who weren't like this [revolutionary] were prohibited. For example, my Uncle R., after entering the Ministry of the Interior, he separated from our family. Why? Because my father worked in the Naval Base, my Uncle B. worked in the Naval Base, my Uncle T. worked in the Naval Base, my aunt was religious, so he separated from the family. He was over there and the family over here. This brought division and brought an affliction in the family in seeing how could your brother, your own brother [do this]...'. The first time my father came to Cuba in 1980, after he exiled on the Base in 1972, I remember walking with him on Pedro Perez Street to visit a friend of his who lives north of there and we were walking, near Curado, and my Uncle R. was on the sidewalk at a cafeteria at the time when he had a position with the Ministry of the Interior. We came on the sidewalk and when my Uncle R. saw that it was us coming, we were about 50 meters

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<sup>146</sup> Literally translating to worms, this derogatory term was widely used to refer to Cubans who decided to leave and thus betray the country after the Revolution

away, he left and entered into the Ministry because it was prohibited for him to have contact with people abroad. And I remember that my father, when this happened, my father quickly crossed the street as he had recognized [my uncle] immediately though they hadn't seen each other for years... I said 'look, that was my uncle R.' and he said 'yes, didn't you see what he did?' and I said 'yes' and he said to me 'what a thing, my God, let's go, let's go cross the street'. And we crossed another street and he said, and I remember he made this expression 'why, God, why does it have to be like this... let's cross because I didn't come here to cause problems for anyone'... My father until today's sun, my father had this pain, but what happens, God is very great and does things. Six years later in 1986, my sister got sick and died. My father came [back to Cuba]... and came through Havana so... we coordinated everything and we met him in Camaguey and then went to Havana. When we got to Havana, we had to store his suitcase temporarily and, as I told you, I have an uncle in Havana who is an actor like Alden Knight, his name is --- and he's also an excellent actor, he and Alden are good friends, he's the youngest brother of my father, and when my grandmother died, my father took over and raised him. When we got there, my father said he wanted to go to the agency to fix his ticket, but first I said let's go to my uncle's house to drop off luggage and all of that and then we'll go to the agency. So my father didn't want to, he wanted to take care of his ticket first, but I told him that the agency wasn't close and we had to go on foot, so, it was early in the morning, around 7 something and we went to my uncle's house. We knocked on the door, my uncle lived upstairs, so we went upstairs and knocked on the door to his room. My father was leaning on the door and my father's childhood friend who lives in Guantánamo and worked on the Base and accompanied him during his trip to see their friends was there. My father was on one side and I was behind him a little. And who do you think opened the door? My Uncle R. The two of them stood like this [gasp] and so what to do? What to do? I was struck still too, we all stood like this and my uncle said 'my brother E.' and they hugged each other.

A: And did he know that you all were going to be at the house?

E: No, no one knew anything...

A: So it wasn't a secret meeting, he just happened to be at the house?

E: God is great. Another of my uncles had finished his law degree in Havana and my uncle R. had come for the graduation ceremony and he was at my Uncle S.'s house so he slept there the night before and got up late and this is when we arrived. For this, I say that God does the things... God made the way to find him, to find him. And my Uncle, you know, he said 'Ay, P., I'm so sorry, I feel sorry for --[sister who died], poor thing. And Dad, how is he?', because my grandfather was still alive and for them my grandfather was a god... My Uncle S. said 'let's go, let's go fix the ticket, let's go eat breakfast, let's go do this, let's go do that', and my uncle R. said 'no, I have to wait for someone to fix my tooth, he's going to come'. And my father said 'leave it alone S. I didn't come here to cause anyone problems, if he doesn't want to come, don't force him'. And my Uncle R. changed quickly and was going and [my father's childhood friend] asked him if he was coming with us later on and he said 'yes, yes, yes, I'll come in the afternoon' and he left. And we left, my Uncle S. didn't want to go, so the three of us left and had a great day. At night when we got back, we asked 'and my Uncle R.?', and Uncle S. said 'no he hasn't come back'. My father wanted to leave and my Uncle S. said, 'no, P., no, calm down' and my father said 'I didn't come here to bring anyone problems' and my uncle said 'no, stay

and eat' and my father said 'no, no, no, all I want to do is leave'. My aunt said 'bathe, rest, stay a while' and my father said 'no, no, no'. So at one in the morning, we left for the airport. I am telling you this so that you know about things. My father always lived with this pain in his chest. Remember that my father's girlfriend, when she came after 6 years, the first time she went to my Uncle R.'s house she went to the door and said 'do you know who I am? I'm your brother R.'s girlfriend and I came to tell you that you are a degenerate. You don't know the pain that caused your brother. All of these years, he has lived with this pain in his chest over what you did. Why did you do this [cussing him out, talking about being a communist]? You know what happened? When my uncle R. was at the end of his career, he retired, and fell ill from a stroke...but so, this God who is above, when He says 'you're mine', you're His. Do you know how this ends? My uncle returned to the Adventist Church and they baptized him and everything! He became an Adventist again...after he had renounced his religion and separated from his family, he returned. The day that my uncle died, in the funeral home, on one side there were the combatants and on the other side there were the church people. What is that? God's power is immense.<sup>147</sup>

As illustrated by the case of Edward's Uncle R., at the same time that people were leaving, so too were people becoming more deeply entrenched in the revolutionary process due to their own social convictions as well as the subtle and not-so-subtle coercion enacted by the limitation of choice. Indeed, the line between enthusiastic and obligatory participation for those who were active in the mass organizations, the educational process, and mobilizations was not as clear as one might assume. The climate of the country was one in which educational and employment opportunities were closely linked with political participation and the "political" saturated public and private spheres. As neutrality and inaction were close to impossible for the majority of the population, it is difficult to discern whether such participation exemplified and nurtured revolutionary fervor or actually obfuscated doubts, discontent, and disappointment. To obtain a job, to be promoted, to get access to coveted material goods, to be successful in the society, one had to emerge favorably in evaluations not simply of job performance, but performance as a revolutionary and contributor to revolutionary society.

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<sup>147</sup> Author interview with Edward on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2005 in Guantánamo.

Furthermore, in a society where foreigners and those connected to foreigners or people who left Cuba were suspect, the Cuban-born descendants of Anglophone Caribbean immigrants who remained were under added pressure to demonstrate their loyalty to the revolution. In addition to contributing as participants in the clandestine movement and the mobilizations of the early '60s, and as trained professionals, they also were present in the mass organizations, including holding positions in the Party. Eugenia, for instance, was the director of her zone that included seven CDRs, organizing campaigns to control the mosquito population, directing neighborhood beautification efforts, and projects of this nature. Melvina was the block secretary for the FMC (Federación de Mujeres Cubanas/Federation of Cuban Women) for years, which entailed collecting the 75 centavos every three months in dues, assisting in the publication of a newspaper that responded to concerns affecting Cuban women, and making sure that the needs of people with problems from employment to teenager pregnancy to spousal abuse were addressed. Carmen became the coordinator of her residential zone, which includes 12 CDRs, in addition to holding a position in the FMC where she was in charge of 14 blocks, and being a delegate of the *Poder Popular* for almost 6 years.

Edward was the general director of CDR district 1 in '72 and '73, the secretary of the union in the teachers sector in the mid-70s, and the ideological secretary of the Juventud until he was obliged to leave when he reached the age of 31. He identifies his excellent work ethic as a characteristic that made him very attractive to the revolution and actually earned him entrance into the Juventud:

I was respectful, disciplined, organized, punctual, etc, etc, [and] I worked a lot, a lot, a lot so I won the respect of...the workers when they did something called the Assembly of the Exemplaries, [where] they select the exemplary workers, ...[which is] the precursor to acceptance in the Party or the Juventud depending on the age, so they had an assembly of the exemplaries and they promoted me to an exemplary worker and I had this same role in the Juventud. But in this assembly, I remember that I got up with tremendous serenity and said that I didn't believe that I could be an exemplary worker, not because of my work but because I was a person that I was from a family that had certain habits, that had certain customs, that I wasn't the son of a worker, that my father worked in the Base and I had opportunities to live a life that wasn't full or lack or anything of that. That I was raised under in the context of a lot of opportunities...because in those years the Communist Youth were fired up, they were the workers and the people...there would be an ideological problem. I had a maid in my house, my father had a car, they had options, I had my education paid for...in this sense, [the revolution] didn't bring me radical benefit, on the contrary, because I had all of this guaranteed...I am a person...I wasn't unrefined, I was taught to use a knife and fork, and to do things correctly. I have my antillana inglesa customs and...they said 'no, no, no, but you're [an exemplary worker]', so I said 'fine'. Anyway, when they saw my conduct, that I didn't believe in this, that I didn't believe I was superior...because these were things that were really criticized during this time of effervescence, so if they saw any of this [you would be excluded]...so I was made a member of the Juventud and in the end, I didn't have any great ideological commitment to communism or anything like that, I just worked and worked with responsibility and discipline and I liked things to be done correctly. I was in the Juventud for many years, I was in it from twenty-something to 31....

Another descendant also emphasized her willingness to work hard for the revolution as a factor that brought her certain benefits. Leticia who was recently given a house by the government for being such an exemplary worker says,

I got my house with a *sweat!* I worked a lot on microbrigades, in the countryside, picking coffee, being a good teacher, doing research and all those things...As a worker, you don't want to be left behind. In your file, they look at what you do and at the end of the evaluations, they take out your file and see that you have a good file, that you give good classes, but also that the union says you do voluntary work, you have to help students, you have to do extracurricular activities, do research, you have to [participate in] expositions and forums...your file includes all of this. Inside your work, you have to do all of this, and after work, outside [too]. You can have a good file and be a light, work well, be a good example,

but if when you go on the street and behave incorrectly, you say obscenities and say you're a professor of whatever, it affects you just as much as inside because you're an example...your children too, you have to be a good example for your children in spite of if they're young or old...I always want my children to walk with pride in their mother...

### ***Conclusion***

In this chapter, I have used ethnographic data to document the participation of people of English-speaking origin, both immigrants and those of the first and second generation, in the revolutionary process. Touching upon the political activism among this population in their islands of origin and other locations, I point to the presence of an impulse of collective agitation for justice. I argue that, while the early years of the revolution created tensions and painful divisions within families and communities, the opportunity to create a more equitable society appealed to members of black immigrant communities. Though there were certainly instances of individual material benefit from fully participating in revolutionary society, this does not appear to be the sole motivation. Rather, a combination of factors including the hope and vitality that characterized the transformation in particular moments influenced the activism of Anglophone Caribbean Cubans.

## CHAPTER FIVE

SOMOS NEGROS FINOS<sup>148</sup>: RACE, CULTURAL CITIZENSHIP, AND THE ORDERING OF BLACK SUBJECTIVITIES*“Not all niggers are the same”*

These were the words of Caridad, a 72-year old first generation brown-skinned Cuban whose Jamaican parents were among the hundreds of thousands of early 20<sup>th</sup> century British West Indian immigrants to Cuba and other Latin American locations. Once a teacher who gave private English classes to middle- and upper-class Cubans before the 1959 Revolution, Caridad would often pepper her Spanish with phrases or commentary in English. In this particular instance, while gazing proudly at the attractive, brown-skinned, college-educated daughter of my hostess, she said, “*ella es una negra de salir.*”<sup>149</sup> Then, turning to me, Caridad remarked, “You know, not all niggers are the same.”

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<sup>148</sup> The term *fino* means refined or sophisticated and is based upon someone’s manners, appearance, bearing, and speech.

<sup>149</sup> This phrase is translated as either “She is a black woman to go out with” or “She is a black woman who is advancing.” The first interpretation signifies that, in spite of her blackness, she is good enough to be taken out in public. The second indicates that she is a black woman who is leaving blackness (For discussions of this term, see Fernández 1996 and Roland 2006: 154). Both interpretations reference a phenomenon within white supremacist racial ideology in which a person might attempt to “treat” the stain of his or her African ancestry with other qualities such as education, occupation, religion, and behavior. Having “treated” his/her blackness, the individual black subject is perceived to be more deserving of inclusion into the nation (see Martínez-Alier 1974, Do Nascimento 1977, Graham 1990, and Wade 1993 for discussions of blackness and racial ideology in Latin America).

<sup>2</sup> The “discovery” and declaration of the social rather than biological basis of race by anthropologists in particular has been instrumental in fueling debates about how to understand and interpret human heterogeneity. (See Wolf 1994, Baker 1998, Williams 1989, and Harrison 1999.)

Aside from being taken aback by her use of the term “nigger,” I was struck by the sharpness with which her brief comments reflected an emerging theme in my investigation of the revitalization of ethnic associations among Cubans of English-speaking Caribbean origin during the Special Period. Namely, that a prominent element of the discourse around British West Indian immigrants and their descendants in Cuba was that they had a way of being black that was different from non-West Indians and that this difference was an elevating one. I was repeatedly told that los *jamaicanos* were clean, respectful, disciplined, pious, hard working, invested in education and self-betterment, and proud of being black. Regardless of a shared racial identity, they were perceived to be markedly distinct from Haitian immigrants, who were thought to be more likely illiterate, confined to agricultural labor, and devoted to *brujería*,<sup>150</sup> and from black and working class Cubans<sup>151</sup> who were said to use foul language, were loud, crude, and prone to disorder.<sup>152</sup>

Such self-representations bear remarkable resemblance to those found among English-speaking Caribbean immigrants in a variety of locations across time and space (See

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<sup>150</sup> Literally meaning witchcraft, this term is a somewhat derogatory way to refer to African religious practices.

<sup>151</sup> In comparing people of Anglophone Caribbean origin to Cubans, there was often some slippage between race and class. At times, respondents would refer to Cubans as a group and, when I asked specifically about the race of these Cubans, they would say “all Cubans,” but other cues would indicate that they were referring to Cubans of color. This might be related to the privileging of national identity over racial identity or the tendency for the importance of racial distinctions to wane the lower one on the class hierarchy. See Martínez-Alier (1989) on this point.

<sup>152</sup> The distinction made between British West Indians, Haitians, and Cubans and its political, economic, and social underpinnings are explored in historical literature on race and black immigration to Cuba (McCleod 2000; Giovannetti 2001; Alvarez Estévez 1988; de la Fuente 2001a (see Chapter Three for a description of the relationship between the labor market and ethnic distinctions. These distinctions were by no means consistent in Cuban racial discourse). As Helg (1995) documents in the case of the campaign against the Independent Party of Color, Haitians and Jamaicans (both those in Cuba and abroad) were said to be instigating and supporting black Cuban resistance, thus race and rebelliousness linked these groups (see Helg 1995, chapters 7 and 8).

Purcell 1993, Gordon 1998, Bourgois 1989, and Harpelle 2001 for examples in the Central American case and Bryce-Laporte 1972, Waters 1999, Hintzen 2001, and Rogers 2001 for U.S. cases). They also indicate a move on the part of people of English-speaking Caribbean origin that situates their experience at the heart of debates about black subjectivity. A perusal of more or less recent titles such as *The End of Blackness* (Dickerson 2004), *Against Race* (Gilroy 2000), *Becoming Black* (Wright 2004), *Modern Blackness* (Thomas 2004), *Problematizing Blackness* (Hintzen and Rahier 2003), and those that speak of transformation, uprootedness, and improvisation (Clarke and Thomas 2006, Fox 2006), indicates that blackness and racial politics appear to be in a moment of transition and/or reconsideration. Scholars are grappling with the basis, usefulness, meaning, and dangers of blackness and its continued status as a category of belonging and an organizing principle in the struggle against racial exclusion.<sup>153</sup> Of particular interest here is how the presence of immigrants who bring distinct cultural frameworks for understanding difference might change, challenge, or conform to existing national racial politics.<sup>154</sup>

One proposal for framing what at times is a disjuncture between the ways in which black immigrants and native black populations interpret and experience a black identity is that black immigrants might be more inclined to participate in a politics of deconstruction whereby class, culture, ideology, and nationality are deployed in the challenge of national

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<sup>153</sup> The “discovery” and declaration of the social rather than biological basis of race by anthropologists in particular has been instrumental in fueling debates about how to understand and interpret human heterogeneity (see Wolf 1994, Baker 1998, Williams 1989, and Harrison 1999).

<sup>154</sup> Though the issue of black immigrants is of most concern here, Ong’s (1996) work on Asian immigrants to the United States reinforces my argument. Also, though I will not be examining the emergence of a “biracial movement” in the United States, activism on the part of people of “mixed” racial parentage to claim distinct categorization has no doubt contributed to these debates about racial politics and black subjectivity.

racial politics.<sup>155</sup> The politics of deconstruction, they explain, “refers to tactical circumvention of the status quo through participation in diffuse and alternative politics in other arenas of struggle” (Hintzen and Rahier 2003:3). This political strategy is juxtaposed with a structural politics of race, which also challenges the white supremacist status quo. However, where the politics of deconstruction accomplishes this by destabilizing notions of a uniform blackness developed within and circumscribed by the politics of race in the United States, a structural politics of race presumes a more monolithic, rigid interpretation of a particular black subjectivity that has been located, structurally, at the bottom of the racial order, and that must provide the basis for personal and political alliances.

According to those who are suspicious of the attention that the multiplicity of black identity is garnering and doubtful of its efficacy as a strategy for challenging white racial authority, disengaging the study of race and understandings of black cultural production from politics, history, and economics constitutes a denial of the most salient factors that shape black subjectivity (Noguera 2003; Robotham 2005). Propositions that privilege the diversity of black subjectivity and that disregard or underestimate the significance of a shared racial identity prove worrisome as structural factors such as institutionalized racism continue to impact the life chances of racialized subjects (Brodkin 2000; Harrison 1995; Mukhopadhyay 1997; Mullings 2005).

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<sup>155</sup> This is not to say that native black populations do not also employ a politics of deconstruction, strategically asserting their diversity in order to challenge racist notions of monolithic blackness used to justify exclusionary practices.

Returning for a moment to Caridad's comments, one might argue that, in declaring that "not all niggers are the same" and that a young, educated black woman is worthy of occupying a place denied her based on race, she is engaging in a politics of deconstruction and challenging the rhetoric of black inferiority. Indeed, in representing themselves as well mannered, diligent, law abiding, etcetera, people of English-speaking Caribbean origin are challenging the dominant racial ideology that positions black people outside of the nation based on traits deemed to be a threat to, and thus incompatible with, modernity.<sup>156</sup> At the same time, the self-representation that they employ in this particular contestation is at least partially rooted in Anglo superiority and does little to disrupt the civilizational discourse infused in ideologies of racial exclusion. Thus, this case provides an example of a way in which the politics of deconstruction might reinforce the very ideologies of exclusion it is attempting to subvert.

Diasporic identities are by no means monolithic and I am particularly concerned here with the ways they change over time, space, and circumstances. I propose that, in order to understand the meanings and workings of Diaspora, we focus on the ways in which multiple "entanglements" (i.e., culture, status, ideology, etc.) function in relation to structurally positioned black identities and vice versa. In this chapter, I argue that we must attend to both the diversity of black subjectivities and the ways in which structural factors such as racial hierarchy and inequality insert themselves into the manner in which people imagine and perform this diversity. I suggest that the politics of deconstruction is

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<sup>156</sup> Hintzen makes this argument in his discussion of West Indians in the San Francisco Bay Area. He asserts that they use constructions of "home" and representations of their personal achievement to establish their difference from black Americans and to contest their exclusion from the modern American space based on the alleged link between blackness and inferiority (2004: 298).

a critical strategy for confronting racial inequality and for protecting against assaults on black humanity, but it need not replace, usurp, or submerge structural politics. Indeed, my research indicates that the structural position of “black identity” and racialized subjects is itself implicated in the sort of blackness that subjects reconstruct and perform when engaging in the politics of deconstruction and, as such, must be taken into consideration when evaluating its deployment.<sup>157</sup>

Examining how Cubans of English-speaking Caribbean descent understand and articulate English-speaking Caribbean identity and drawing upon ethnographic material concerning the content of Anglophone Caribbean cultural citizenship and the experiences of racial (in)equality after the triumph of the Revolution, I argue that the construction and maintenance of a distinct blackness rooted in civilizational discourse is an alternative to ideologies of race mixture and whitening. In this dissertation, I submit that its resurgence in the contemporary period points to the local impact of globalized inequalities in this current phase of neo-liberal hegemony as well as the ways in which revolutionary society have fallen short of its objective to eliminate racism. Ironically, at the same time that my research suggests how, in particular conditions or circumstances, racism might have persisted on a structural level in revolutionary society, there are indications that it is the Revolution that keeps racial discrimination from gaining more momentum.

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<sup>157</sup> Indeed, Hintzen and Rahier’s volume supports this point as the contributors’ social location within the class structure has an impact on the sort of subjectivities that they assert. As the editors observe, “There is considerable evidence...that black immigrants living in inner city communities tend toward accommodation of black American subjectivities...This is much less the case for immigrants such as the ones whose self-ethnographies engage the topic of this volume whose everyday experiences occur outside the social locations of black exclusivity” (2003: 6). It is critical to attend to the significance of class in the sorts of black subjectivities that immigrants assert, and to acknowledge that the sorts of racism that poor and working class immigrants confront might actually quickly create the common, participatory experience of segregation that “informs the production of a black subjectivity rooted in American understandings of racial difference” (ibid).

After briefly exploring the culture of race in the early 20th century British West Indies as well as Cuba, focusing on stratification for the former and the question of racial composition and national identity for the latter, I turn to ethnographic material on my informants' perceptions of English-speaking Caribbean identity. Based upon this data, I argue that the mobilization of this identity in the pre-Revolutionary period was one means of combating social inequality through claims to cultural superiority based on proximity to Anglo culture vis-a-vis other members of the working class and people of African descent. Pointing to patterns found in English-speaking Caribbean immigrant identity politics across time and space, I elaborate on the dynamics of intra-racial cultural assertions. The next section addresses the question of how the Revolution and its promotion of social mobility provided a route to black achievement but did not explicitly empower black people as black people, thereby introducing new challenges in terms of the manifestations of racism. I conclude by envisioning more productive ways of affirming blackness that neither fall prey to discourses of mixture, hybridity, or essentialism, but instead conjoin the valuing of Africanness and blackness on its own terms with the achievement of sustained structural change.

### ***The Culture of Race and Class: The British West Indies at the Century's Turn***

The basic structure of social stratification in the English-speaking Caribbean identified by Hoetink in 1953 as a color/class system consisted of three main groups: the economically, politically and culturally dominating white elite, the primarily mixed race middle-class,

and the overwhelmingly black lower-class majority. Of course, each of these strata was heterogeneous and so, for instance, there were poor whites, middle-class blacks and elite mulattoes. However, the differences within each racial/color, class and culture group did not consistently overwhelm the differences between groups and certainly did not disrupt the fundamental principle that placed wealthy racially white and culturally British/European males at the top of the hierarchy and poor black and culturally African females at the bottom. While the life circumstances of individuals might have moved them away from the mainstream of their group, its trajectory remained constant. But because the boundaries of this tripartite color/class system were not impermeable, those who aspired to be socially mobile were not without hope.

Indeed, Patrick Bryan (1991) finds that, in the Jamaican case, the social mobility (primarily through education) that led to the growth of a black and colored middle-class mentioned in Chapter Two was part of the process of white hegemony. As the education that people received promoted European cultural superiority, those who sought to improve their economic condition were subjected to cultural indoctrination aimed at eradicating African cultural practices characterized as primitive and savage. The agents of modernity attempted to infiltrate the mechanisms of social reproduction, to burrow into the every day practices of the subject and create him and her anew. As Rachel Tolen (1991) reminds us, the aim of the colonial project was not simply to plunder and pillage, but to “civilize,” to produce particular kinds of bodies: subjected yet productive. A key strategy in this quest to physically and mentally contain Caribbean peoples, one that was

adopted and employed as the 19<sup>th</sup> century came to a close, was the transformation of their cultural allegiance.

After Jamaica's Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865, which was but one chapter in the post-emancipation struggle for justice, a concerted effort was made to disabuse Jamaican residents of the notion that their culture had any value. Enduring African cultural practices were nothing more than evidence of the depravity that consumed the world from which European slavers rescued them. While missionaries had been going about the work of 'civilizing' the subjugated for decades, the mid to late 19th century witnessed a shift in which it was not only the Church that sponsored this mission. The state, the press, and public opinion of 'cultured' whites, and middle-class blacks and coloreds all made it their business to transform Jamaican culture in the name of progress (Moore and Johnson 2004). The infiltration of British imperial ideologies and middle-class Victorian values seized upon the areas of religion, sexuality, gender roles, and social behavior, as it was here that the obstacles to achieving a civilized society lay (2004: xiv).

The middle-class Victorian reformists sought to create civilization in their image and thus all social relationships and institutions that did not promote Western Christianity, along with their conception of a strong work ethic, self-improvement, thrift, the patriarchal nuclear family, chastity and personal discretion were targeted for uprooting. This included the old plantocracy as well as the working-class African majority and thus, unlike in the previous social order, wealthy whites were not automatically culturally superior to blacks. Rather, the life of leisure with its relaxed moral standards was viewed

as an enemy to civilization and, according to this framework, those blacks who were educated out of their savagery and conformed to a middle-class Victorian culture were morally superior, if still racially inferior.

However, though wealth and birth decreased in importance, the basic racial hierarchy and ideas about the natures of blacks and whites remained intact; “bad behavior” among lighter-skinned people was thought to be an aberration with negative social consequences while the same conduct among black people was thought to be in their nature and thus accepted amongst them...Uncouth, vulgar, even violent behavior was thus to be expected as their norm...”(Moore and Johnson 2004: 148). People of African descent who had been redeemed by the civilizing hand of British colonialism remained insecure. Though they had improved their social standing, in part by virtue of the fact that internalizing middle-class Victorian culture was elevating in itself and in part due to the economic mobility to which such conversion gave one access, their civilized status would always be up for debate.

Thus, even that small minority of the black population that accessed high-status occupations in medicine, law, civil service, teaching, and journalism for instance, found themselves in an ambiguous position (Moore and Johnson 2004: 10). In a society divided by class as well as color, their education and skills were elevating, but their racial identity inhibiting. It is members of this group that had to go to greater lengths to prove the sincerity of their conversion to British culture. Indeed, Brereton argues that, in the case of Trinidad, the claim to a British cultural identity was that much more important for

upwardly mobile blacks and coloreds because they occupied such a precarious position in the social order (Brereton 1979). Without wealth or membership in the political ruling class, they had little more than their Britishness to buoy their social worth.

Of course, instances of colonized peoples being more culturally British, French, Portuguese, etc. than people native to the colonizing country are not uncommon and it is extremely difficult to evaluate the extent to which such discourses are individually internalized versus selectively and superficially adopted for material or social advantage. Equally abundant are arguments regarding individual and group agency, resistance and domination, the workings of hegemony, and the politics of subjugation. What is important here is that immigrants from the English-speaking Caribbean came from color and class stratified societies in which their efforts at survival and self-improvement were frustrated at every level and where dark skin was a liability and African cultural practices demonized by an aggressive campaign to infuse middle-class Victorian values into the culture of the colonies. Furthermore, cleavages within British West Indian social structure were articulated in terms of culture as well as color and, I argue, manifested themselves in the economic and political lives of immigrants to Cuba.

What is also useful to understand is that, much to the frustration of the 'bearers of civilization', most of whom were member of the colored and growing black middle classes, this campaign was unsuccessful in enacting total conversion of the black majority. Exercising a certain cultural self-determination, they integrated Christianity and Victorian values into their own worldview and moral system rather than discarding the

latter in exchange for the former (Moore and Johnson 2004: 203). Although few behaved as if the two were incompatible, British culture was the culture of dominance at the global level and those who embraced it, even in part, had greater hopes of moving away from the dark bottom of society's barrel.

### ***Afro-Cubans: Inheritors of the Nation and Negotiators of Mestizaje***

As discussed in Chapter Two, in migrating to Cuba, British West Indian immigrants were entering a new nation in which socio-cultural mixture, racial equality, and the struggles of people of African descent were at the forefront of social and political debates. One of the founding myths of the Cuban nation involves Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, a 19th century slave owner, freeing his slaves so that they could fight alongside him against Spanish colonialism. While the accuracy of and motivations behind this incident have been questioned, the widespread participation of people of African descent in Cuba's armed independence struggle is fundamental to the origin of the Cuban nation. According to Ferrer (1999), in the mid- to late-19<sup>th</sup> century independence wars, the fact that black and white soldiers fought alongside one another, with black military officers occupying positions of authority and leadership at a time when scientific racism was gaining momentum worldwide, placed Cuba in the vanguard of the struggle for racial equality.<sup>158</sup> In this vision of history, the nation itself was created through unity among sons of Africa and Europe in a masculinist iteration of mestizaje.

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<sup>158</sup> Indeed, in building her argument that the constant effort to push the boundaries to which racism would have them confined thus signifying the presence of an interracial dialogue, Ferrer documents the constant battle waged against people of African descent in an effort to prevent their access to full citizenship. Thus, while her argument supports the notion of black inclusion, her research can also be used to support the resistance on the part of white Cubans to this inclusion and identify the nature and mechanisms of persistent discrimination.

The complement to mixture through armed struggle is racial and cultural unification through miscegenation, which, according to the ideology of *mestizaje*, annihilates difference. As Jose Martí, intellectual father of the Cuban nation declared, “Cuba is more than white, more than mulatto, more than Negro;” racial equality is achieved with the disappearance of difference behind the cloak of nationalism. Research that challenges the ideology of *mestizaje* and racial democracy acknowledges mixture in Cuba and other Latin American societies, but argues that 1) the privileging of mixture obscures the presence of populations that do not conform to this aesthetic and cultural construct, particularly those of African descent, 2) *mestizaje* is closely connected to gender and class stratification, and 3) ideologies that promote cultural and racial mixture displace the reality of social inequality (Martinez-Alier 1989; de la Fuente 1999; Andrews 2004 ; Puri 2004; de la Cadena 2001; Minority Rights Group 1995; Do Nascimento 1977; Belliard 2001; Hasenbalg 1996; Martinez-Echazabal 1998; Mesa-Lago 1974; Twine 1998 ; Wade 1993).

With mixed results, Cubans of African descent have historically used the national ideology of racial equality in an attempt to contest the predominance of inequality and achieve some measure of social and economic mobility (de la Fuente 2001a; Ferrer 1999; Helg 1995; Mesa-Lago 1974). However, the use of this strategy in combination with racial solidarity has been violently opposed by sectors of the Cuban population. As we saw in Chapter Two, shortly after independence, in an attempt to hold the new government accountable to the national ideology, Afro-Cubans formed a race-based

political party. Indeed, Afro-Cubans, who comprised approximately one third of the population at the turn of the century, “transcend[ed] class and black/mulatto differences...mobiliz[ing] to achieve full political and socioeconomic participation on a scale unrivaled among other populations of African origin in Latin America” (Helg 1995:3). The tragic response to this mobilization was the massacre of 1912, marking an end to black Cubans’ organizing as blacks in the political sphere.

In addition to the events of 1912, the early 20th century debates surrounding immigration are of critical importance to understanding the position of blacks and blackness in Cuban society. Race was at the epicenter of questions of national identity in post-colonial Cuba and the fate of the nation was closely linked to its racial composition. The fear of a black numerical and cultural takeover of the nation fueled the maligning of blackness and persecution of African cultural practices as well as the resistance to Caribbean immigration. As in other Latin American nations, Cuba promoted *blanqueamiento* (‘whitening’) through interracial sex (primarily among the lower classes and between white men and black or mixed women, see Martinez-Alier 1989), popular and legislative support for European immigration, and protests against black immigration (Orovio; Sánchez 1988; Suárez 1987; Chomsky 2000; Naranjo Orovio 1997). Along with the widespread discrimination and belief in European cultural superiority, this indicates that, at the same time Cuba’s racial mixture was recognized and constructed as an asset, the blatant attempts to annihilate the black element of the mixture indicate the workings of a deeply rooted white supremacist agenda.

One of the flaws in ideologies of mixture that is particularly relevant to this investigation of English-speaking Caribbean cultural citizenship and racial inequality is the failure to highlight the hierarchies that exist within and between so-called hybridities. In her discussion of the relationship between hybridity and social inequality, Puri (2004) makes the point that, in spite of the multiple named identities that emerge from the prism of mixture, “an implicit, unacknowledged, and untheorized elevation of one hybrid identity occurs...”(23). Indeed, she argues that the role of what she refers to as “manifestos” of hybridity in the Caribbean and Latin America is precisely to displace the issue of social equality with the rhetoric of cultural equality (50). Thus, the paradox between the reality of racial discrimination and the ubiquitous narrative of racial equality can be eluded. Declarations of the presence and value of cultural mixture obscure the fact that some elements of the social soup subordinate others, and that different cultures continue to collide and re-create themselves in the context of systemic inequality.

In Cuba, as in much of Latin America, it is the black element of the nation’s hybridity that is subjugated and resistance to the presence and recognition of black people as equal contributors to the nation has been justified and fomented by the usual characterizations of black people as lazy, diseased, sexually available/predatory, brutish, untrustworthy, loud, morally degenerate, prone to criminality, unintelligent, superstitious, subject to violence and savagery, etc. (see Ferrer 1999, Helg 1991, Martinez Alier 1989 and de la Fuente 2001a on historical characterizations of Afro-Cubans). Along with the notion embedded in ideologies of racial equality that class, not race, is the basis for discrimination against people of African descent, the conflation of such qualities with

blackness and African cultural practices support a cultural or behavioral explanation for black people's lower economic status and marginalization within a modern nation. While, in theory, the route to equal inclusion can be achieved through a shift in personal conduct, one that not coincidentally overlaps with middle-and upper-class status, in practice, education and the adoption of middle-class culture did not guarantee Afro-Cubans economic security and social legitimacy.<sup>159</sup> With the dominant discourse professing that class and character rather than color is the measure by which society judges and orders its subjects, black subjects attempt to migrate into the elevated element of hybrid identity by proving themselves to be in possession of a character and culture deemed worthy of modernity.

### ***Los Anglófonos in Cuba: Creating an Affirmative Blackness***

In informal conversations as well as more structured interviews, the projection of respectability and desire to demonstrate that not all black people are the same was a consistent element of people's discourse on race and racism.<sup>160</sup> In the pre-Revolutionary period, an English-speaking Caribbean identity has served to both legitimize and provide access to a way to assert a respectable blackness in the context of the Negrophobia of Cuban society. Signifiers of this brand of blackness included the public adherence to Christian morality, the strict boundary between public and private spheres, access to private primary education, and a higher standard of living for some due to access to jobs

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<sup>159</sup> As de la Fuente found in his historical analysis of racial equality in Cuba, "the social situation of black professionals [prior to 1959] was in fact precarious...although education and "culture" made this group eligible for middle-class status, their skin color, social origin, and financial situation, as well as white racism, kept them dangerously close to the world of poverty and manual labor that they were trying to escape" (de la Fuente 2001a:153).

<sup>160</sup> Because this research did not include non-Anglophone Caribbean Cubans in its sample, it cannot be claimed that such a strategy is unique to this group.

provided by North Americans. A discourse of decency reminiscent of that promoted by the middle-class Victorian reformers in 19th century Jamaica is woven throughout archival data as well as participants' descriptions of their group's characteristics.<sup>161</sup>

In their assessment of the Anglophone Caribbean cultural legacy, most participants believed that more than language distinguished them from Cubans, regardless of race and other black immigrants (primarily Haitians).<sup>162</sup> The following is a list of attributes and practices mentioned by interviewees in reference to Anglophone Caribbean culture as they live it and/or observed it in their family members: soft spoken, well-dressed, respected and respectful particularly of elders, honest, trustworthy, proud, abstained from habitual alcohol and tobacco use, invested in education, frugal, independent, religious, unified, organized (in the sense of community and personal habits), strict child rearing practices, responsible, serious, spirit of self-improvement, particular mealtime etiquette such as saying grace, children raising their hand before sitting, eating together at the table, and using a knife and fork, the way of speaking, saying 'good morning' and 'good evening', being cautious about eating or drinking anything prepared by outsiders, intolerant of disorder or things done poorly, calm, reserved, knowledge of natural medicine, educated/cultured, spend their time inside the house rather than in the street, men wear shirts in public, emphasis on punctuality, absence of profanity, and proud of being black.

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<sup>161</sup> Though the issue of sexuality and promiscuity highlighted by Moore and Johnson consistently came up, it was primarily in terms of generational differences rather than those of race, family origin, or class.

<sup>162</sup> Indeed, only three participants expressed the belief that there were no differences. It is noteworthy that two of these individuals sought to impress upon me that all Cubans are equal, thanks to the Revolution. For one, the privilege that was accorded to immigrants from the Anglophone Caribbean was due solely to language. This is in contrast to characterizations of other informants, some of whom specifically emphasized the difference between *jamaicano* and *cubano* "culture".

The single most common umbrella trait that people believe distinguishes English-speaking Caribbean folks is *la crianza* or the upbringing. Both immigrant parents and teachers were notoriously strict, meting out corporal punishment quite liberally. Participants in their 70s, all of whom went to English schools, animatedly recalled incidents of misbehavior and the punishments that they were constantly receiving at the hands of Ms. or Mr. So-and-so. “¡*Como daban golpes!* (How they beat us!),” they exclaimed, or “¡*Pero dura, ay mi madre, que fuerte eran los jamaicanos!* (Tough! Oh my God, Jamaicans were strong/strict!)” To illustrate the strictness of Jamaicans, Winton recounted the fear he felt when, as a 22-year old adult, he anticipated his mother’s response to his coming home late and how, at a much younger age, his aunt would beat him if he even looked at her fruit trees because she thought he was going to steal the fruit. Also, he recalled having to pray six or seven times a day, and would get hit if he didn’t. Melvina who is in her 50s and was raised by Jamaican-born parents was also very vocal about the strictness of her father and grandmother, as well as so many of the adults that peopled her childhood. It was her opinion that such fierce enforcement of rules caused emotional injury to some members of her generation, though she did feel that there were many benefits to *la crianza*.

Such benefits overwhelmed any negative assessment of the childrearing practices in other accounts. Carlitos believed that *jamaquinos* teach their children to be honest and respectful, to not rob and disrespect. He says, “the *jamaquinos*, the true *jamaquinos* and not the improvised ones, raise their children in a very distinct and serious manner that

isn't easy because they could punish or instruct you with a look and that's it."<sup>163</sup> Rubén, who was particularly adamant that the Revolution had eliminated any differences between Cubans, said that he had a very correct upbringing, that his family was very cultured.<sup>164</sup> Isabel feels that the upbringing was very good in that it prepared them for life and how to behave themselves in society. Indeed, she believes that her upbringing was essential in her success. Though quick to say that Cubans also have a good upbringing, she identified that the *jamaiquino* upbringing, which includes an emphasis on punctuality, a proper way of doing things, etc. prepared her for the responsibility that she has in her job. At work, she is viewed by others as a lady, *una negra fina*, as is demonstrated by people apologizing after cursing in her presence.<sup>165</sup>

Ricardo explained that their manner of raising children with respect is a custom or tradition brought from the English-speaking countries. He was not alone in his articulation between British colonial culture and the practices common in their community. For instance, Dr. Ruth shared her belief that the insistence on doing things in the right way was a European characteristic and that the *jamaicanos* have many European characteristics.<sup>166</sup> Melvina, upon reflecting about the strength and borderline brutality of Jamaican women, remarked that this was a product of being colonized peoples. Perhaps an indication of the change in status, the childrearing practices of descendants tend to be less strict and influenced by factors such as the origin of their spouse and the loss of parental control over their children's upbringing through the revolutionary process.

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<sup>163</sup> Author interview with Carlitos on July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2004 in Santiago.

<sup>164</sup> Author interview with Ruben on August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2004 in Santiago.

<sup>165</sup> Author interview with Isabel on July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2004 in Santiago.

<sup>166</sup> Author interview with Dr. Ruth on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2004 in Guantánamo.

Indeed, many first and second generation parents resisted having their children—particularly female children—participate in activities that would require them to be away from home in the interest of maintaining tight control over their activities.<sup>167</sup>

While what can be characterized as an authoritarian patriarchal model of social relations was certainly a strong current in the lives of people from the Anglophone Caribbean, women were not only a dominant presence in the narratives of participants, but they were themselves dominant and were often described as independent. They were reportedly refined, respected, well dressed, proud and hesitant to use foul language, and the majority of *jamaicanas* were also said to be strong in character. Three respondents made the direct claim that they were stronger than Cuban women who were submissive and economically dependent on what their husbands gave them. In some instances, Jamaican women who married Cuban men were ostracized from the community because, paradoxically, they allowed their Cuban husband to dominate them by insisting that they speak only Spanish and attempting to prohibit their interactions with other Jamaicans. This rejection of Cubans, where it did exist, was also explained by the discrimination that they suffered in society. As some respondents reported hearing from their parents, “Cuban people are hell, I don’t want to know nothing of Cuban people.” Of course, this could reflect some Anglophone Caribbeans’ greater access to resources, particularly those who worked on the Base and lived in Guantánamo.

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<sup>167</sup> For instance, Melvina would not allow her daughter to go to on overnight trips while in junior high school. She commented on the freeness of Cuban parents who have their daughters’ boyfriends in their house, eating their food, sleeping with the girl in the house, and then when they break up, another boyfriend appears and the same thing happens. She is strictly against this practice and the only other person that she knows who is like that is a *descendiente*.

Another characteristic ascribed to women from the English-speaking Caribbean that emphasized the value of independence is that they taught their sons how to perform domestic tasks. Unlike the Cuban tradition in which a strict division of labor dictates that men are not expected to be capable of, let alone perform, housework, participants claimed that most men of English-speaking Caribbean origin know how to cook, clean, sew, iron, wash dishes, and do laundry. Awareness of this idiosyncrasy emerged one day in Guantánamo when I met Edward on the porch of a neighbor who is a *pichón* from Guantánamo who now lives in Havana.

To my surprise, both men insisted that they, in contrast to Cuban men who are helpless in the kitchen, are excellent cooks. The neighbor remarked that his mother taught him how to do everything around the house so that one day when he gets in an argument with his wife, he won't go hungry. While Cuban machismo leads people to look down on a man who performs this labor—at least openly—as well as the woman who, by implication, is not properly taking care of her man, it was the practice of Anglophone Caribbean women to impart such knowledge on their sons. The purpose of this was not necessarily so that they would share chores with the women in their lives when they became adults, but so that they would not be dependent on anyone to meet their basic needs. Self-sufficiency, after all, was a highly valued quality and one that suggests industriousness and competency. After including this in my line of inquiry, I found that this was the case with other families as well; indeed, in the two cases of women who had Cuban spouses, the husbands were said to be like *jamaicanos* in that they knew their way around the house.

The other topic related to gender that revealed an adherence to Christian morality and racial pride was sex and sexuality. As mentioned in Chapter Two, cohabitation without marriage was reason to deny membership to certain associations. Furthermore, interracial coupling was frowned upon. One participant recalled a story about an unmarried woman who had gotten pregnant by a white man and miscarried after being beaten mercilessly by her father, both for her pregnancy and the racial identity of her lover. Three participants also emphasized how, in previous times, it was customary for couples to court for years before getting married and having children, unlike now when couples get married and have a child quickly.

In both informal and semi-formal interactions, middle-aged and older participants noted, often with disapproval, the difference between contemporary attitudes about sexuality and those from their era. They shared the common complaint held by older generations of all backgrounds and locations, namely that children today lack innocence as they are well-informed about sexual behavior and begin being sexually active at a much younger age. Due to the strictness of parents and guardians of the first generation, sexual behavior was strictly sanctioned, at least among girls. In addition, (open?) homosexuals, the former president of the Santiago association informed me, were not tolerated in her organization because only those who carried on the ways of their foreparents were granted membership. Thus, the perception of English-speaking Caribbean people as conforming to a particular brand of morality influenced contemporary practices both in terms of the more passive manifestations and the act of boundary making.

It is clear from this composite sketch of the perceptions of English-speaking Caribbean culture that people carry that there is considerable overlap with the traits embedded by the civilizing mission.<sup>168</sup> While most did not directly indicate that Cubans were looked down upon, in characterizing Anglophone Caribbean culture, the traits were in contrast to that which was typically Cuban. The biggest exception to this was Hortencia who openly expressed genuine distaste for certain aspects of Cuban culture. In one instance, she remarked, “Cubans eat with a spoon rather than a fork and knife, they don’t eat together at the same time... a spoon is for soup and beans but Cubans are like pigs, they do things the easiest way that there is, they don’t have culture....” She went on to say that she’s been to Cuban households and speaks with disgust about how Cubans will eat before others, that they eat in front of you without their shirt on, or eat in front of the television. She’s not used to this way of acting, she says.

Hortencia concedes that there may be Cubans who don’t behave like this but it’s not likely because people are easily corrupted by bad habits or manners. She explains that she’s been to other *descendiente* households and notes a consistency between them.<sup>169</sup> Thus, where Cubans were loud, always making some ruckus in the street, *anglófonos* were reserved and private; where Cubans lacked manners and formalities, *anglófonos* were respectful, neat, and ordered; where Cubans didn’t know how to use a fork and knife and sit at the table for meals, *anglófonos* were proprietors of mealtime etiquette;

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<sup>168</sup> Given the emphasis placed on the quiet, reserved demeanor of *jamaicanos*, I found this excerpt from the Gleaner in 1884 particularly amusing: “Now a love of noise is a sign of the savage. It is also an indication of vulgarity. It suggests that those who make it find a sheer delight in barbarous cacophony [sic], or desire to annoy others, or wish to attract attention to themselves” (as quoted in Moore and Johnson 2004: 154).

<sup>169</sup> Author interview with Hortencia on August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2004 in Santiago.

where Cubans (and Haitians) were obsessed with *brujería*, *anglófono* religiosity was manifested in their primary adherence to Protestantism and other denominations of Christianity.

According to most, though some Cubans mistook their pride for arrogance and were envious of their elevated economic status, they were respected by their Cuban neighbors and, in Guantánamo, had an influence on the local culture. Indeed, Dr. Lester asserted that, in his family, these differences aren't evident because in unions with Cubans, the Cuban partner "rose to the moral level of the descendant." Every family is different, he said, but this is generally what happened. Reluctant to say that Cubans behave poorly, but insistent that there is always a trait among descendants that is different such as the habit of greeting people, he recalled that his father taught these habits to him, his siblings and his Cuban mother, who "had very good morals, stayed home all of the time, and supported this upbringing."

In contrast, Elton recalls that his father rejected Cubans. When asked to elaborate on Anglophone Caribbean customs, he responded by saying that his father didn't have Cuban friends, they were all *jamaicanos*, that he never saw a Cuban in his house. He explained this by saying that his father trusted other people from the Anglophone Caribbean while Cubans were always thought of as being negative. His father didn't smoke or drink but when a friend came by who was Jamaican, his father would take out a cigar and drink to offer, which showed the trust he had with these people.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Author interview with Elton on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2004 in Santiago.

Woven throughout these discussions was the position of *anglófonos* in the Cuban labor hierarchy and how this reinforced the claim to an elevated morality and sophistication. For instance, in the case of women domestics, they received hand-me-downs from the middle- and upper-class families for whom they toiled. With household items that would be considered as luxury goods for most laborers, they were able to construct the appearance of a middle-class home. For those who secured jobs on the Naval Base, the standard of living was significantly increased as they not only had access to a wide range of goods, including clothing, sold at lower cost on the Base, but their higher, stable salaries allowed some to buy cars, build homes, and invest in their community organizations.

While the difference was not enough to foist them into a different class altogether, it did allow for a fortunate few to work toward the goal of educating their children in the hopes that they may be able to achieve further mobility. Indeed, it seems that importance was placed upon cultural capital ie: appearance and conduct rather than actual material resources. Several people remarked upon how they were essentially humble people who carried themselves in a way that projected self-respect. For instance, Melvina's father was a blacksmith, but, she recalls, he was well dressed and often wore a suit: "They weren't professionals but they had the feeling of being professional."

Indicating the internal stratification of the community elaborated upon elsewhere, Melvina also recalled her father and his friends making fun of another participant's father, a more humble man from Grenada who spoke 'poor' English. Such interactions

could reflect the difference between Jamaican and Grenadian English or between urban and rural speech, the upwardly mobile skilled tradesman and the more humble agricultural laborer, or all of these. Cited in Chapter Three, the other participant who directly referred to divisions was Teresa who mentioned that *jamaicanos* who had more schooling or were more sophisticated took advantage of those who were ignorant. As Chailloux remarked in her work on this population,<sup>171</sup> they were the aristocrats of the working class, but were by no means uniform in their access to material resources or embodiment of a ‘civilized’ cultural repertoire.

### ***Perceptions of Pre-Revolutionary Racism***

Ever present in these discussions of English-speaking Caribbean culture and social position was the fact of race and discrimination. With the exception of Eugenia who insisted that class difference was the only basis of any discrimination that existed in Cuba and Ricardo who pointed to their selling their labor for less money as the root cause of discrimination against black immigrants, participants perceived the social order of the time to be racist. Racism unquestionably shaped the contours of black immigrant life. Examples that participants gave to support this claim include segregation in social life and public places such as parks, restaurants and clubs, the racial nature of the labor hierarchy with its emblematic brutal economic exploitation, employer comments about disliking but being dependent upon ‘niggers’; the humiliating racism of belligerent navy personnel from the U.S. South who immigrants and their children worked for on the Base; the random beatings meted out by Cuban law enforcement; the verbal insult of

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<sup>171</sup> Presented at the Caribbean Studies Association annual meetings, 2005.

*'jamaiquino mierda'* [sic] that flew out of the mouths of children and adults alike; and the recognition that black people had to remain in their place in order to avoid conflict.

Quite notably, racial pride was one of the characteristics ascribed to the immigrants and some participants were quite vocal about the lack of shame that their foreparents had and they themselves have about their blackness. In a context where the presumed inferiority of blackness was reflected in nearly every aspect of social relations, *jamaicanos* apparently emerged relatively psychologically unscathed. As Teresa put it, she has always been proud to be black and *jamaiquina*. Remarking that she looks for the quality of the person, not the color, she adds that she has never had a complex about being black, *jamaiquina*, *cubana* or anything.<sup>172</sup> Where upwardly mobile Cubans and other Latin Americans of African descent were presumably pursuing the strategy of whitening in order to *'adelantar la raza'* (better the race), at least some workers from the English-speaking Caribbean are perceived to have created and occupied a space in which blackness and respectability were conjoined.

In the narratives of their descendants, English-speaking Caribbean immigrants' own self-respect and 'correctness' allowed them to garner the respect of the larger Cuban community. Racism, most often articulated in terms of petty verbal assaults and structural constraints to economic mobility, was non-existent according to two participants, an obstacle to achieving success to others, and mitigated by the culture of English-speaking Caribbean people according to most. In discussing the bettering of their condition prior to

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<sup>172</sup> Author interview with Teresa on August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2004. It is noteworthy that one of Hay's (2006) black Cuban informants referred to not bring up "racial issues" as not having a complex about race.

the Revolution, language, literacy and knowledge of a trade were named as important factors, but so too was the set of values and traditions elaborated upon above. For instance, Melvina feels that their cohesion and separatism buttressed the effects of racism:

They always looked for racial unity, they never tried to integrate with white people. They spoke badly about whites because the whites were hard and exploited them. They exploited them but when there was a holiday, they gave presents and took care of their employees. The exploitation manifested in the low pay for the work and they were racist of course. My mother worked for a woman who said that she can't stand niggers but she can't live without them. She took care of children in Banes who would say 'look at the *cuco*', which is a ghost. Children were afraid of black people. The Americans would pay my mother and grandmother next to nothing for all of the work they did, also they would watch her because they thought she would steal. Americans didn't permit the workers to have wood houses, only tin regardless of whether they had the money.<sup>173</sup>

Participants reasoned that, working within such constraints, *anglófonos* apparently managed to apply their cultural knowledge and values to assist their daily confrontation with racism and even propel themselves forward. Ricardo made a connection between the strict way of bringing up children and an increased marketability for women seeking employment as domestics in the pre-Revolutionary period. Apparently, like their English, this was valued by the middle- and upper-class employees.<sup>174</sup> Pablo insisted that his older siblings were able to go to university before the Revolution because their father was serious, hard working, abstained from alcohol and tobacco, and valued education.<sup>175</sup> Deunes was under the impression that his great-grandmother's knowledge of natural healing and willingness to help others diffused racial and xenophobic discrimination.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> Author interview with Melvina on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2004 in Santigao.

<sup>174</sup> Author interview with Ricardo on July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2004 in Guantánamo.

<sup>175</sup> Author interview with Pablo on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2004 in Guantánamo.

<sup>176</sup> Author interview with Deunes on August 21<sup>st</sup>, 2004 in Santiago.

One implication of this perceived relationship between culture and racism is that black people are at least in part responsible for any mistreatment that they experience. Caridad, who taught English to wealthy Cubans, recalled that they treated their mostly black Cuban servants poorly but treated her well because she was a teacher, suggesting that one's role, not one's race, determined social experience.<sup>177</sup> Smith echoed this when he said, "racism existed in Cuba, but I valued my color. There were '*blanquitos*' who wouldn't hang out with black people in school. The treatment depends on your presentation and character, many black people are to blame because they don't value their color."<sup>178</sup>

Carlitos expressed a similar sentiment in his response to the question of whether his parents or grandparents suffered discrimination: "No [they didn't] because they could take care of themselves and didn't have to ask anyone for anything. My grandmother raised her children in this same way. Both she and my mother commanded respect so they didn't suffer racism."<sup>179</sup> Eugenia, who does not believe racism to exist in Cuba, neither before or after the Triumph of the Revolution, identified the behaviors that do illicit discrimination: "Yes, for me here racism doesn't exist. And why people may say that racism existed is because people in Vista Alegre [a neighborhood in Santiago] were rich and they lived separate from black people because black people caused an upset wherever they want...It's not that they rob, it's that they form a *bullá* (ruckus, loud argument or fight, lot of noise) and there's a *revuelita* (things turned upside down) that

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<sup>177</sup> Author interview with Caridad on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2004 in Santiago.

<sup>178</sup> Author interview with Smith on June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2004 in Santiago.

<sup>179</sup> Author interview with Carlitos on July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2004 in Santiago.

follows. They break up everything....”<sup>180</sup> Thus, a combination of the conduct, *educación*, values, and race pride of *jamaicanos* and presumably their lack of conformity to stereotypical black behavior such as rowdiness, mitigated pre-Revolutionary discrimination.

There are two points that I must make regarding the characterizations that people had of people of Anglophone Caribbean origin. One is that the replication of this civilizational discourse occurred among people who had achieved some measure of educational and occupational success. As we will see in the next section, Hintzen (2001) found that, among more successful West Indian immigrants, there is a tendency to define West Indianness through success. Thus, I would argue that the representation of respectability is likely a reflection of the ways in which certain segments of the group have sought to ally themselves with mobility through claims to a culturally-based superior character, as those socially mobile elements before them have done.

Secondly, there was considerable slippage between time frames. In describing the cultural traits of people of Anglophone Caribbean origin, at times research participants would refer to their parents and grandparents and at times they would refer to themselves. Most felt that they retained some of these traits (particularly those they felt were responsible for their excelling professionally, as mentioned in Chapter Three), but to a far lesser degree than previous generations due to time and the changes brought about by the Revolution. What I will also note at this juncture and elaborate upon later is the extent to

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<sup>180</sup> Author interview with Eugenia on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2004 in Santiago.

which the current crisis and significant changes that have occurred in Cuban society influence representations of English-speaking Caribbean identity.

***Anglophone Caribbean Cultural Citizenship: the Ticket into the Civilized Circle***

Situating Anglophone Caribbean immigrants to Cuba within the context of English-speaking Caribbean immigrants across time and place reveals a consistent pattern of representation in which some West Indians promote themselves and/or are promoted as possessing cultural characteristics associated with economic mobility and respectability (Bryce-Laporte 1972; Bryce-Laporte 1998; Harpelle 2001; Purcell 1993; Foner 1998; Waters 1999; Hintzen 2001; Gordon 1998). Those who traveled to the multi-racial societies of Central America and the United States during the early twentieth century were steeped in the British cultural imperialism unleashed upon colonial subjects in the mid to late 19th century (Moore and Johnson 2004). As British subjects, they belonged to the dominant imperial force of the time whose culture had come to be equated with civilization itself. Thus, the immigrants could and did draw upon not only the legal protection of the various bureaucratic outposts of empire, but also the cultural capital English(ness) garnered (Wynter 2001; Giovannetti 2001; Charlton 2005).

Comparison to low status groups who exist outside of the Anglophonic civilized circle is central to the dynamic in which English-speaking Caribbean immigrants are represented or identify themselves as industrious, ambitious and achievement-oriented, well-educated/valuing education, and having a strong sense of morality and self-respect. On Central American banana plantations, such constructions motivated and justified the

privileging of black immigrants within a racially and ethnically stratified labor force (Bourgois 1989). Giving English-speaking Caribbean immigrants an edge in the socioeconomic milieu, adherence to a social code that observed formalities, reinforced the containment/repression of physical and emotional displays, and generally reflected middle-class Victorian morality took on great importance. In the cultural hierarchy that developed, “attributes such as body odor [as well as] cultural practices such as eating patterns, personal and domestic hygiene, and attire all became a part of the ideology [of English-speaking Caribbean cultural superiority] (Purcell 1993: ).”

In the United States, notwithstanding eras and instances in which black immigrants have allied themselves with black Americans in the struggle against racism,<sup>181</sup> West Indian cultural citizenship has been a tool used by immigrants both to distinguish themselves from black Americans and attain or maintain middle-class status (Bryce-Laporte 1972; Foner 2001; Hintzen 2001; Waters 1999). Many black immigrants “emphasize their distinctiveness by the use of exotic apparel, display of heavy accents, and avoidance of contact and association with black Americans” (Bryce-Laporte 1972: 40). Foner found in her research among Jamaicans, not only that there is “a common theme...that West Indians are more ambitious, harder workers, greater achievers...that they save more and are more likely to buy homes than African Americans and are less likely to go on welfare,” but also that, “many Jamaicans say that they are less hostile to whites than African Americans but, at the same time, have more dignity and greater assurance in dealing with whites” (1998: 178). According to Hintzen, whether projecting themselves as the fun-loving, carnival-going islander or the studious, hard working, achievement-

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<sup>181</sup> See James (1998), Vikerman (2001), and Hay (2006).

oriented “model minority,” West Indian immigrants rely upon these cultural performances to assert their foreignness, thereby removing themselves from the black-white dichotomy of U.S. race relations (2001: 111).

The close association between assertions of an English-speaking Caribbean cultural citizenship rooted in civilizational discourse and social mobility is evident in processes of stratification among immigrants themselves. Just as establishing difference and distance from native black or indigenous populations is a facet of black immigrant experience, so too is erecting a division between more and less successful immigrants. In Costa Rica, adherence to Anglo cultural affiliation was internalized as the measure of worth and used as a weapon of marginalization. Immigrants who were uneducated, had fewer resources, were less assimilated into British colonial culture, and/or identified as more African occupied a lower status in the community. Those whose habits, behaviors, and beliefs violated the moral code of middle-class respectability, a code that prevailed even among poorer community members, were subjected to mistreatment and betrayal on the part of the community elite who remained silent when West Indians were being persecuted by the state based on religion and lack of conformity to certain social norms (Harpelle 2001; Bryce-Laporte 1998).<sup>182</sup> Class, therefore, is significant in the display of ethnicity as projecting a culture of achievement and socio-economic success are mutually reinforcing. Indeed, Hintzen also submits that, in the case of West Indians in California, “access to the West Indian community and claims to West Indianness are...restricted to the upwardly

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<sup>182</sup> Indeed, a young Marcus Garvey enjoyed a certain amount of infamy amongst the West Indian elite of Costa Rica for his critical stance toward their failure to protect other blacks against such attacks (Lewis, 1988).

mobile (2001: 161).” Thus, West Indians perceive themselves to possess a culture of success because only the successful among them can lay claim to cultural belonging.

The move on the part of some West Indian immigrants to distance themselves from other people of African descent as well as to create cleavages within their own group in an effort to separate out those who are more successful with claims to a cultural affinity for social mobility is dependent upon time as well as other specific conditions. Indeed, Sara Abraham (2001), in her historical study of racial identity in Trinidad and Guyana, reminds us that identities are not forever contingent; rather, they shift at particular moments in history for multiple reasons and that the rise and fall of identities can be periodized. Winston James, in comparing the political activism of early twentieth century Caribbean immigrants, found that island of origin (Hispanic vs. Anglophone), family and class background, and racial climate of the United States influenced involvement in radical politics (James 1998).

In her study of racial and ethnic identification among latter twentieth century black Cuban immigrants to the United States, Michelle Hay found that the time of arrival in the United States, exposure to the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, and racism suffered at the hands of white Cubans and U.S. society at large were key in shaping racial attitudes, ethnic mobilization, and political consciousness (Hay 2006). Notably, she also found that choices around identification also changed within each individual depending upon particular circumstances. Given these research findings, one would expect that the Cuban Revolution and the building of revolutionary society would have a significant role

in the rise and fall of English-speaking Caribbean identity. In the next section, I will explore the subject of race in revolutionary society, suggesting that the ways in which racism manifested itself prior to the Revolution might shed some light on the revitalization of English-speaking Caribbean institutions in the Special Period.

### ***Ordering Blackness***

Aiwa Ong's work on immigrants and social stratification, while based upon Asian immigrants to the United States, is useful in illuminating the racialized social framework within which other immigrant groups place themselves and are placed in societies dominated by white supremacy. Entering into the debate about European objection to immigration based on the culture rather than the race of the immigrants, Ong argues that, "racial hierarchies and polarities continue to inform Western notions of cultural difference and are therefore inseparable from the cultural features attributed to different groups." She maintains that "the white-black polarities emerging out of the history of European-American imperialism continue to shape attitudes and encode discourses directed at immigrants from the rest of the world that are associated with racial and cultural inferiority... This dynamic of racial othering emerges in a range of mechanisms that variously subject nonwhite immigrants to whitening or blackening processes that indicate the degree of their closeness to or distance from ideal white standards" (1996: 751).

I propose that a similar analysis of the 'black' racial category resonates with Ong's findings among those ascribed to the 'Asian' category. In the case of English-speaking

immigrants who migrated to Latin America and other parts of the world, their placement in the regional and national hierarchies adhered to this model where their skills, economic niche, affiliation with Empire, and “culture” ostensibly rescued them from the bottom rung, even managing to elevate them above those who were racially ‘white’ for a period of time. In the case of Cuba, this same ordering occurred among black immigrants, creating a more nuanced picture of the circumstances and social forces that shaped black immigrant experience, as well as between immigrant and native black people.

As immigrant experiences in other Latin American countries as well as the United States and Britain testify, one of the factors that directs the fashioning of black subjectivity is the presence of and relationships with other culturally distinct black groups. In the case of English-speaking immigrants in Cuba, Haitians who were also lured to Cuba by U.S. capital were one such group. As discussed in Chapter Two, Haitian immigrants who entered Cuba in greater numbers, with fewer skills and a revolutionary reputation bore the brunt of the anti-immigrant hysteria of the late ‘20s and ‘30s. Giovanetti (2001) argues convincingly that the fact that Haitians continued to go to Cuba in large numbers after the economic depression and contraction of the labor market explains why they were targeted more than people from the Anglophone Caribbean. While this may be so, when focusing on the rationale provided to legitimize the brutal way in which they were expunged from the country, it becomes clear that they, in comparison with English-speaking Caribbean immigrants, were ‘blackened’.

As McCleod observes, “Haitians ultimately faced greater discrimination because native Cubans perceived them to be less “civilized” and more “barbarous” – indeed, more “African” – than British West Indians (McCleod 2000: 15). Within an ideological framework in which “whiteness is the symbol of ideal legal and moral citizenship...[and] depends upon the “blackening” of less desirable immigrants” (Ong 1996: 742), Haitians were situated closer to the racially black/culturally African pole that lay at the bottom of the social and economic ranking. Anglophone Caribbean immigrants were ‘whitened’ in the sense that they were perceived as more civilized and modern.<sup>183</sup> The employment of a cultural lens through which to evaluate racial categorization, in this case how groups and individuals within the same racial category are ordered, illuminates the process of black subject-making. The perceived cultural differences between black people from the Anglophone Caribbean, those from Haiti, and those native to Cuba both constitute and inform black subjectivities.

With few (3) exceptions, people of English-speaking descent whom I interviewed believed racism or discrimination to be a reality that they and those who came before them have had to face. Of those people who believe that discrimination has persisted, all considered it to be more prevalent prior to the Revolution because it had a greater impact on the social lives and aspirations of black people. Another belief is that there is a cultural difference between people of English-speaking Caribbean origin and Cubans, one that persists to the present among some but that the revolutionary process

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<sup>183</sup> Indeed, Ong asserts that “attaining success through self-reliant struggle, while not inherently limited to any cultural group, is a process of self-development that in Western democracies becomes inseparable from the process of “whitening” (1996: 739),” and thus the narrative of social mobility that emphasizes individual achievement and sacrifice can be viewed as an inherently whitening process.

significantly diminished. Key to this distinction are characteristics associated with modernity and deemed to be more civilized. In asserting that '*todos no somos iguales*' ('we're not all equal'), people of Anglophone Caribbean origin are speaking to the practices that mark them as deserving of a different categorization. At the same time, they are contesting that aspect of the dominant ideology professing blackness to be, by definition, antithetical to modernity. Thus, asserting a civilized blackness is an attempt to reject degradation and demand to define the terms of social inclusion.

The maintenance of this paradigm suggests that there are certain enduring elements of white supremacist ideology. Namely, the link between blackness and backwardness, primitiveness, disorderliness and cultural inferiority. This occurs in part because black people's defiance of this ideology is so often accompanied by its reinforcement. In the case of English-speaking Caribbean immigrants, the casting out of this negrophobic element is often problematic as the cultural deterministic discourses of decency and respectability employed as defense affirm the ideological status quo in which British colonial cultural traditions are valorized. The desire to project respectability to the society at large is in part motivated by the desire to contest the association of order, cleanliness and civility with whiteness, demonstrating that they can and are both black and upstanding.

Subjectivities and the process of subject-making involve not only race, but also culture and class, engendering conflicting evaluations of people within the same racial or class category. As Ong explains, "hierarchical schemes of racial and cultural difference

intersect in a complex and contingent way to locate...[people] of color from different class backgrounds” (1996: 737). The blackness of Anglo-Caribbean immigrants professes not to be a mark of inferiority, as it is not accompanied by the band of degrading signifiers that plague Cubans both black and poor.<sup>184</sup> However, racist ideology, with its fundamental tenet being that external characteristics signal internal ones, dictates that the link between African ancestry and savagery can never truly be broken. In the battle for the recognition of black humanity, the burden of proof rests upon dark shoulders and is a case that perhaps cannot be won, no matter how eloquently argued, so long as the foundational assumption of black and African inferiority remains firmly rooted.

#### Racial Ideology, Discrimination and Black Self-Making in Revolutionary Cuba

As detailed in Chapters Three and Four, the Cuban Revolution was a monumental force that enacted a transformation in the economic and political lives of people of English-speaking Caribbean origin, improving the standard of living and/or life chances of the majority of the population. Factors such as a dramatic decline in economic inequality, the availability and opening of access to opportunity for advancement, the national effort to create a culturally homogenous and thus unified nation, and the mandate of anti-discrimination invited a shift in cultural citizenship. However, as de la Fuente (2001a) argues, the areas in which the Revolution was less successful are the areas in which people of African descent in Cuba appear to experience more difficulty than their white counterparts. Touched upon in the earlier discussion of race and revolution, one of these areas concerns the persistence of individual manifestations of racist ‘feeling’.

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<sup>184</sup> Indeed, as racial disparities have been found to decrease as one moves down the economic ladder, one might argue that the worth of whiteness declines and thus poverty has the capacity to blacken.

In the experiences of discrimination shared with me by research participants as well as through my own observations, it became clear that racist ‘feelings’ have structural implications in particular circumstances. For instance, several people remarked that while there is equal access to employment, race influenced promotion and treatment on the job. Because *socio-ismo*<sup>185</sup> dictates that connections are critical in anything from easing the daily acquisition of certain goods to being chosen to study a particular major to getting an air conditioned office, race and racial attitudes harbored individually can have systematic influence. Unfortunately, there are more frequent opportunities for this to occur in post-Soviet Union Cuba. Before discussing the Special Period in depth in the following two chapters, I will first explore the perspectives on racial discrimination of participants who came of age prior to the Special Period as well as my own observations in an effort to suggest that the survival of the civilized blackness construct is related to the persistence of racial discrimination in spite of both revolutionary society’s strides in and claims to its elimination.

While Eugenia and Ricardo were alone in their belief that pre-Revolutionary discrimination was not based on race but economic factors, several others believed that the Revolution had been successful in eliminating racism in contemporary Cuba through destroying the basis of class division. According to these participants, the Revolution fixed all of the racial problems in society. Now, Cubans across the racial spectrum are more unified and everyone, black and white, Cuban and foreign, is equal. For them, this

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<sup>185</sup> Clearly a critique of the system, this spoof on the word *socialismo* (socialism) refers to the pervasive clientelism that exists such that, to get one’s needs met, one needs to have *socios* (friends or partners).

equality is most obviously reflected in the equal access to public places such as parks and beaches, as well as to education and employment. Two people pointed to the prevalence of interracial relationships as evidence of equality and one said that the sanctioning of racist behavior in the workplace is indication of the lack of discrimination: “if I were racist and I was at the job saying ‘*negra, negra, negra tinta*’ [insult referring to dark skin], they’d fire me, they wouldn’t tolerate it.” When asked if white people resent having a black boss, this same person replied that there are bad people who are just bad regardless of color.<sup>186</sup>

Contrary to this position, the most frequent examples given by those who believed anti-black racism to persist in Cuban society involved references to white Cubans not wanting their daughters to be involved with black men or to have their children consider black friends as equals and situations in the workplace. Regarding the latter, people in this research felt that whites resented the presence and/or authority of blacks and shared that there is even a newer trend toward reserving higher paying jobs for white Cubans. Ambivalence and/or contemptuous behavior on the part of whites when confronted with black dignity and/or success is evident in other stories. One example is that of Tomás who left Cuba in 1980 and now lives in Florida. After the triumph of the Revolution, he was trained in veterinary medicine and pathology, obtained a job, and, according to him, once he became successful and was promoted, his white coworkers began to undermine him. His response to their malice was to continue to work harder and become more successful, which perhaps ultimately backfired. His coworkers eventually sabotaged his

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<sup>186</sup> Author interview with Eugenia on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2004 in Santiago.

lab work, accusing him of counterrevolutionary activity for which he was imprisoned for four years.

In another account, the dynamics appear more subtle and the consequences less dramatic. Melvina, for instance, reported that there is a racial discrepancy between those professors who are chosen to teach in the better equipped, more centrally located facilities. There are two separate schools and she pointed out there were only three black professors in the one that had better conditions. Melvina's claim was that the only reason that she was promoted to this facility was that her friend, Rocío, who is white, advocated on her behalf. In addition to Tomás's and Melvina's report of specific examples of discrimination that sat squarely in the pre-Special Period era, several others in this research expressed the belief that whites do not like to see blacks get ahead; though the Revolution removed the obstacles to entry into spheres previously reserved for whites, it did not change this attitude. As a silence around race and discrimination was officially imposed after the Revolution declared racism to have been eradicated, as a consequence of economic redistribution and the elimination of racially segregated public spaces, there were no means to directly combat what would have been a subtle yet pernicious form of racism.<sup>187</sup>

Winton, recounting the racism and disrespect of Navy personnel while he worked as a bus boy on the Base said, "I had a table, they're from the South. They don't like colored people and when they're drunk it's worse. And when the senior server went to get a tip,

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<sup>187</sup> While Carlos Moore (1988) makes a similar argument, he concludes that black people are worse off due to the Revolution, a position that all indicators on black Cubans—indeed all Cubans—does not support.

they say ‘get out from here goonie. Te decían malas palabras [they curse at you/call you bad names]. They didn’t like to see them earning money. There are bosses who don’t like people of color anywhere.” He then gave his opinion of contemporary race relations, proclaiming that, “there is still racism, you always see the difference. White people are with black people but it’s not from the heart, it’s because they have to be. They’re waiting for Fidel to fall.”<sup>188</sup>

Here, Winton expressed a sentiment that others alluded to: namely, that Fidel is the only thing preventing white racism from being fully unleashed upon Cubans of color. For instance, one afternoon during the daily task of separating stones from the rice, Melvina and I began talking about people who attempt to obtain the citizenship of their parents or grandparents who immigrated to Cuba. She said that she had actually begun the application process for Jamaican citizenship but was stalled at a particular point in the bureaucracy. When I asked her why she wanted to get Jamaican citizenship, if it was so that she could travel, she told me that that was not it, that in order to travel, she would need a letter of invitation, money for a ticket, and a place to stay in Jamaica. She doubts she could get a letter of invitation because she isn’t on the best of terms with her Cuban-born cousin who lives there and doesn’t really know the cousins her mother stayed with when she visited in 1997; moreover, Jamaica is expensive and there is a lot of violence, she said. “So, why get Jamaican citizenship?” I reiterated. “In case something happens in the midst of things,” she said rather cryptically. “Something like what?” I pressed on. At that point, Melvina smiled a smile that says ‘ah, there’s so much for you to understand,’

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<sup>188</sup> Author interview with Winton on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2004 in Guantánamo. It is important to note that “Fidel” can refer to Fidel Castro, the president, as well as the state itself.

and replied, “When he dies, there will be trouble,” punctuating this phrase by brushing the second and third finger of her left hand against the forearm of her right. I had quickly learned that this gesture referred to us: the blacks. It is a way of talking about race in silence and with a drama that is characteristically Cuban. She went on to say,

Fidel is the only thing that keeps the racists in Cuba from coming to the surface, white people here will eat our bones. Fidel is the only thing keeping this from happening but he is going to die, he has to die. White people do not like black people here. You know, whenever you see on television students who sing or recite something, they always choose a white child. I remember when my daughter was a child and she came home asking why she never gets chosen to recite anything. They say that racism doesn’t exist here, but that’s a fairy tale. The only reason why things are not worse is because no one can disagree with Fidel and Fidel is about the people and wants peace.<sup>189</sup>

***Reflections on Racist Ideology: Fieldwork Moments through a Black Foreign Lens***

One of the points that I must reiterate is that the data collected for this study must be situated within the contemporary context of heightened racism and economic insecurity that will be elaborated upon in the next two chapters. Had I interjected myself into the lives of these West Indian Cubans twenty years ago, the story would likely be quite different and perhaps would support an argument for the dissolution of any trace of civilized blackness through revolutionary justice. However, my experiences in everyday life indicate that the racial ideology and maligning of blackness that gives rise to such

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<sup>189</sup> Fieldnote from June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2004.

assertions permeate everyday life in such a way as to suggest they are quite deeply rooted and pervasive in Cuban culture. I found there to be three interwoven facets of racist ideology that surfaced in daily life: one concerns the biologizing of race, the other relates to the criminalization of black people and the third concerns aesthetics and representation.

Similar to the literature on race in Cuba, racist ‘feeling’, when acknowledged, was explained and dismissed as a vestige of the past that has no real consequence in revolutionary society by many Cubans with whom I was in contact. While there were many instances during fieldwork that pointed to the predominance of a belief in an essential, instinctual blackness, the following incident described in this field note is particularly illustrative of this aspect of Cuban racial ideology (as well as my frustrations with it). This occurred during the festivities of carnival when I was out with Lidia, a mestiza friend of mine and Deunes, one of the research participants who identifies as Rasta:

*A note on Cuban racism: When Deunes, Lidia and I went to the parade during carnival and they began a conga,<sup>190</sup> Lidia began talking about how the conga does nothing for her, which of course led her to talk about how her maternal grandfather was of African descent (she looked for someone in the crowd matching his complexion but to no avail...I imagine that she is telling me that she has black people in her family so of course what she's saying isn't about being against black people...). There was a story she remembered from her childhood that always left an impression on her and it went something like this: There was this well dressed black murderer who was in hiding in Santiago and the way that the police decided to catch him was to have a conga travel through all of the city streets. Upon hearing the conga, this negro fino criminal (because of course no*

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<sup>190</sup> This refers to a dance, a genre of percussion, as well as a mobile public gathering in which people follow drummers through the streets, dancing. The conga is infamous for being dangerously chaotic and the site of violent altercations both spontaneous and planned. It is associated with black people and African culture. However, during carnival season, it is not unusual to see people of all ages and appearances joining the conga day or night.

*matter how well they dress or talk or act, they're all animals underneath) tried to stay in hiding but he just couldn't help himself, he had to join the conga (because, no matter how clever and sly they are in evading the law, they cannot overcome their blood which moves with the drum and forces them to act against their better judgment) and was in this way captured. Now, Lidia began telling this story as if it really happened, being totally unaware of how ridiculous and racist it is. She's telling this to two black people with locks, one Cuban and one North American. She's telling this after saying that she too has black blood, but not enough to get her to have any affinity for the conga, which she really can't stand. It's all so problematic (Fieldnote, Santiago, August 2, 2004).*

Another particularly poignant incident that occurred while I was in the company of Lidia and two of her mestizo friends again articulated the persistence of an ideological link between black people and criminality. Having worked in a casa particular, Lidia is privy to many of the interactions between tourists and Cubans. I was present when she told her friends about an Israeli woman who kept returning to Cuba to visit her reportedly well-endowed Cuban ‘boyfriend and planned to sponsor him to move to Israel. Apparently, the man had passed his wife off as his sister and, after spending the money that the Israeli woman sent him to begin the process of leaving the country, failed to pick her up from the airport and had been avoiding her during this particular stay. The first question/statement out of the mouth of the Lidia’s male friend was, “He’s black isn’t he? They are like that.”

Walking home from that one room house in which Lidia’s friend and two children lived, I asked Lidia if I had understood him correctly, that he said that black people are liars and criminals. She said that I had indeed understood him and went on to deny that this was racist, explaining that it was a harmless Cuban ‘custom’ to say things like that and think that it’s more likely for a criminal to be black even though people know that thieves come

in all colors. In an attempt to understand this further, I questioned whether she thought that this 'custom' might have concrete consequences such as police harassment. Again, she denied that the police might be less likely to believe the innocence of a black man or more likely to pursue a black man for a particular crime. Interestingly, in her insistence, she added that this was only a custom and compared it to the belief that a homosexual is more likely to be white (field note, June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2003).

Yet another incident that exposed this particular route that racism travels through revolutionary society again occurred with a mestiza who worked in a tourist agency office where I visited on occasion to confirm travel arrangements. After presuming that I must have a boyfriend and friends in Cuba that keep me coming back along with my studies, she said that she was looking for a foreigner and had fallen in love with one very respectable looking (fino) client, but her hopes were dashed when he came into the office with a lower class Cuban woman. "It's not because she's black that I say this," she made sure to claim, "it's that she was crude and how could a man so refined want that? It must be that he likes it (field note August 7<sup>th</sup>, 2004, Santiago)." Such beliefs inserted themselves into my interactions with and observations of people, primarily mestizos, who worked in various capacities in sectors that catered to tourists. It is noteworthy that I had relatively little contact with this sector and yet was exposed to similar comments, suggesting that this represents a more prevalent ideology rather than individual idiosyncrasies.

Though most of my encounters with this particular articulation of racism was with lighter-skinned mestizo Cubans, there were instances in which those of more African descent across class indicate that they too subscribe to some facets of stereotypical constructions of blackness. For example, during my 2003 stay, Melvina warned me to be careful with my things as carnival time approaches because, “they rob more, the blacks rob.” When I pointed out to her that whites also rob, she held her ground, explaining, “black people here in Cuba don’t feel a sense of solidarity, they harm each other...black thieves are worse.” She insisted that she is not racist, that this is just how it is (field note on July 10th, 2003). In another instance, Hortencia relayed what I view as an urban legend that expressed a combination of distaste for natural hair and fear of non-conformity. In this field note, I wrote:

*Interesting urban legend that Hortencia told me today. She said that when she was in the hospital, they said a rasta came in and a female scorpion had burrowed in his hair and laid eggs in his scalp and when they cut his hair, they found his scalp to be covered in bites. He died from the poison so the story goes. Of course, my interpretation is that this story comes out of a combination of Negrophobia and conformity. There has yet to emerge a story about a woman who goes to the hospital after a bad perm or dye and loses the skin on her scalp and dies from an infection or something like that. Hm, I wonder why (field note, June 11th, 2005).*

Another incident that indicated an uninterrogated belief about the superiority of whiteness occurred during my interview with Carlitos who lived at the foot of the hill of Calle Casa in an apartment above a small market. Early on in the interview, when I asked him about males of English-speaking Caribbean origin being taught to do housework, he said that, giving that he has such an ugly face, of course he does housework so his wife won’t leave him. He then pointed to pictures of his wife, an average looking white

Cuban, and repeated that he's ugly and, to keep a wife like that, he had couldn't have her come home from working all day and then have to do all the domestic chores. Given that Carlitos is a relatively attractive reddish-brown-skinned, slight but muscular black man with all his hair and all his teeth and no obvious disfigurement, I suspected that it was his blackness in relation to his wife's whiteness that drove him to such conclusions.

Interestingly, though he lived a stone's throw away from her, Melvina did not know that he was of English-speaking Caribbean descent and thus she did not recruit him for the association. When I mentioned to her that I interviewed him, she said that she did know him, but as a black neighbor who acts like a slave to his white wife.

In addition to the commonplace disparaging comments about kinky hair (referred to as 'bad hair' or *pasas*, which translates as raisins and is more recognized as derogatory) and assumptions of white aesthetic superiority, it was not at all unusual for people to associate ancestry and sexual prowess, particularly in reference to black men's genitalia. Interestingly, in one conversation that I had with two *rasta moda* friends, both black men in their mid-20s, about why they think tourists visit the island to have sexual relationships with Cubans, they said that Cubans are caliente (hot, good lovers). To support their point, they said that 1) Cubans begin having sex at an earlier age 2) there's competition between men and women as well as among men and women to be the better lover, 3) underemployment translates into more free time, which means more time to have sex, 4) because of its impact on the circulatory system, a hot, tropical climate is beneficial to maintaining an erection, and 5) Cubans are more open and physically uninhibited compared to Europeans who are more timid in expressing their desires. They were not at

all moved by my explanation of the history of sexual exploitation and commodification of people of African descent, and insisted that Cubans are simply better lovers (field note, May 21st, 2003).

What is interesting here in terms of the workings of racial ideology is that they did not make a distinction among Cubans in this regard. It seems as if they are calling upon both notions of tropical vigor espoused by early twentieth century writers attempting to ward off scientific racism's condemnation of European creole physical, moral, and racial degeneracy and stereotypes of black sexual potency. However, it must also be noted that this discussion was situated within a larger conversation about life in the *barrios marginales* (ghettos), which are disproportionately populated by people of African descent. Though I know of no Cuban source that breaks down underemployment by race, given the trend in the refashioned Cuban economy in which people of more African descent are at a disadvantage in key sectors, the reference toward those who are underemployed having more time on their hands also suggests the more African members of society. Furthermore, the classical discourse of opposition between the European and African in terms of climate and physical stamina, upon which earlier race debates were based, are clearly evident in their reflections.

Deunes provided another instance of the biologizing of race in a way that promoted black possession of ostensibly positive traits when he claimed that black people are genetically stronger than whites. Using the language of racial purity, he supported this argument by saying that the outcome of a black and white person is someone who looks 'more' black.

Though he did not attempt to refute my explanation of race as a social phenomenon and, indeed, the perceptions of ‘mixed race’ people are prime examples of this argument, he was slow to concede that blackness is not dominant.

Evidence that racial stereotypes such as the ones discussed above go unchallenged in the public sphere can be found in visual representations of black people in the media, one of the most striking and obvious manifestations of racism that I found. In her research on race and ethnicity among black Cubans in the United States, Hay (2006) identified the Black Power movement as having an impact on people’s attitude toward blackness, particularly in terms of valuing a black aesthetic. However, the Revolution did not have a similar effect. Indeed, observers of race and blackness in revolutionary Cuba have noted that the near absence and stereotypical representation of black people when present in the media is evidence of the shortcomings of the Revolution regarding race and equality (Perez-Sarduy and Stubbs 2000).

The *novelas*,<sup>191</sup> one of the most common forms of entertainment in Cuba, drawing in viewers in seemingly every household, provide a remarkable example. At the time that the *novela* comes on, the streets of Santiago are quieter—sometimes the loudest thing being the dialogue between characters and theme music—and lit by the glare of television screens projected through open windows and doors, escaping with the heat. I generally abstained from scheduling interviews or meetings during the time of the *novela*

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<sup>191</sup> These are basically soap operas that come on in the evening. In Cuba, there are two *novelas* that play at a time, one Cuban and one from some other Latin American country. There are generally three episodes of each per week and, unlike in the United States where soap operas have no end, those in Cuba have a finite number of episodes that play over a period of months.

unless I wanted to risk people being distracted or irritated that they were missing an episode. Watching them myself was valuable as this allowed me to take part in frequent conversations about, and references to, the *novelas*, adding my own commentary about the actions of this or that character.

In fact, on more than one occasion, my thoughts about the *novelas* stimulated discussions about race and representation in Cuba. An example of this occurred when Deunes had taken me to Rubén's home that he shares with his wife who is a nurse, and 23 year-old daughter who works with handicapped children. Rubén's father, a Grenadian immigrant who was an illiterate domestic worker for a Cuban family was reportedly *muy muy revolucionario*.<sup>192</sup> In addition to educating him as an adult, the Revolution allowed him to officially take over ownership of the home that the family he worked for had temporarily left him in charge of in 1959 when they left the country expecting to return when the political order had been restored. Rubén and his family continue to live in the house of his father's former employers and it was there that I was privy to two particularly illuminating interactions about race and racial politics in Cuba.

On one occasion, I had just completed the interview with Rubén when the Cuban *novela* came on. At that time, the *novela* had two black female characters, both of whom were maids, one in a white Cuban male architect's office and the other for a wealthy family. The latter was a young woman whose behavior, lines, and appearance was remarkably daft and infantile, particularly compared to her white counterparts. Both women were

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<sup>192</sup> This phrase, meaning very very revolutionary, is used to distinguish people who are completely in support of the Revolution, often uncritically so.

brown-skinned but by no means dark and the younger one had straightened hair (often worn in braided pigtails that were askew in classic antebellum pickinny fashion) while the older one wore a headscarf. In this particular instance, I averted my eyes when the *novela* came on, having reached a point of frustration with what to me was an insulting representation of black women.

When Deunes shared with them that I was critical of the roles and characterizations of black people in the *novelas*, Rubén's explanation was that the basis of that particular *novela* was in the pre-1959 era and that was how it was then. He was unmoved by my gentle suggestions that his point did not address the stereotypical performances and auxiliary roles that black people played in the *novela* and in the media in general. Of that experience, I wrote, "Rubén's response was that the show was like this because this was before the Revolution, meaning that because the show is depicting pre-'59 life, and *of course before '59 black people were dopey foolish servants, thus the novela has this character*. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to find fault in that logic, but what was interesting to me was that it went unchallenged and that it's so emblematic of a certain blindness that some people have in terms of any social critique [*sarcasm mine*] (field note, August 7th, 2004).

Perhaps not coincidentally, when I returned to their house a couple of days later upon their invitation, I was able to further observe similar resistance in conceding to certain shortcomings of the Revolution. This time, the conversation occurred between Rubén's wife, who is not of English-speaking Caribbean descent, and Deunes while we all sat in

the front bedroom during one of the frequent blackouts, waiting for a downpour and the darkness to pass. She suggested that he show me some of the more beautiful areas of the island such as Baracoa, a popular tourist destination a few hours drive from Santiago.

When he responded that he wouldn't go to Baracoa because he didn't want to go to jail, that to go to Baracoa with a foreigner as a man with dreadlocks, you have to show paperwork verifying that you are married to that foreigner in order to avoid incarceration.

This sparked a heated exchange about which I wrote:

*Somehow [his response] led to a whole 2 hour intense argument- actually it was 1 part argument and 3 parts diatribe by Rubén's wife in which she defended the Revolution and characterized the United States as this diabolical place where people steal organs from the dead and sell them, kill each other routinely, reject immigrants uncategorically (particularly those with dreadlocks), hang black people (Cuba never had a KKK). She said that the United States is always getting into other countries' business and bombing people, killing people all over the world, and that she wishes that all of the other countries would get together and invade the United States She was really pissed. Oh, and then she started in on Cubans who have this dream that the United States is this great place to be and said that Cubans who do nothing here go there and work 24 hours a day, that they didn't put their labor into this country. When Deunes said...that the reason they don't [do anything here] is because they don't see the benefits of doing so, she was not having it nor hearing it... I suspect that part of her adamance in talking about something that she knows little about is that she's trying to beat back her own curiosity and fascination with the place, hoping that her passionate critique will drown out the beckonings of her own sky scraper fantasies (field note, August 7th, 2004).*

As suggested by my last sentence, it was not unusual for those who were the most eager to ask me about life in the United States to be the most adamant and uncritical defenders of revolutionary society. Indeed, during a conversation with Humberto, a Bajan descendant who lives in Baraguá and is a member of *La Cinta*, he asked me about my background and, shortly into my response, interrupted me to ask how life is for black people in the United States. Satisfied to have me confirm that racism is a problem in the

United States, he was quick to say that racism doesn't exist in Cuba. When I questioned him about the criminalization of black people, he said that this is declining because Fidel has pointed out to people the error in that type of thinking.

### ***Conclusion***

In Black Skin White Masks, Fanon critiques the use of colonialist discourse by the colonized Black seeking subject status as this discourse can only allow the Black to speak of himself as Other. In Fanon's estimation, it is only through concrete, revolutionary action to overthrow oppressive forces and achieve freedom that black people can achieve subject status. A key element of the Cuban case as compared to other American locations in which African culture and blackness are devalued and black people themselves mobilize culture to ameliorate conditions of inequality is the Cuban Revolution. The revolutionary mandate of equality resulted in the elimination of racial disparities in education, health, income, and many spheres of employment. Blackness came to be less of a liability for institutional advancement and accessing resources, though it continued to be associated with negative traits and behaviors, affecting black Cubans across the class/education/status spectrum. However, while the Revolution has had a tremendous impact on the structural basis of racial inequality and has catapulted the African roots of Cuban culture into the national and international spotlight, the comments and stories of participants in this research indicate that 'racial feelings' had an impact on their professional and personal lives. It appears that the revolution's denial of difference and silence about racism, something that has changed in the 1990s, contributed to racism's festering rather than elimination.

As will be explored in the next chapter, the changing economic conditions brought about by the collapse of soviet socialism and tightening of the U.S. embargo has led to a resurgence of racial stratification. This, I argue, has been met with a call to once again create/project/embody a blackness that is an alternative to popular conceptions that have increasingly detrimental consequences. To continue to be lodged in popular consciousness as the humble/subservient, ignorant/illogical, primitive/savage element of the nation is to compromise true equality. However, the employment of the language of civilization to differentiate some blacks, in this case people from the English-speaking Caribbean, from other blacks, namely native Cubans and Haitians, also sabotages the achievement of social justice. If Fanon was correct in his assertion that it is only through revolution that black people can achieve true liberation, then does the resurgence of racism and the response to assert a superior blackness throw in stark relief the limitations of the Cuban Revolution for black liberation? Perhaps more importantly, is the language of black liberation and transformations to which it refers a relic of the optimism of the past that has no place in contemporary conditions of neo-liberal, capitalist hegemony?

## CHAPTER SIX

### DREAMS DERAILED? ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE SPECIAL PERIOD

#### *Introduction*

As explained in the introduction of the dissertation, this research was in part inspired by the call for material and moral support of Black West Indians in Cuba, a call that was made in response to the economic crisis following the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern European socialism. Not surprisingly, in undertaking this fieldwork, it was the trauma of the crisis and, more so, the changes in everyday life and the ideological shift that these changes imply that inserted itself into the research. The contrast between *antes* (before) and *ahora* (now), sharpest for those who lived as adults in a Cuba where most of the foreigners were Russian and one could be jailed if found in possession of a U.S. dollar, seeps into narratives of family relations, upward mobility, culture, and racial identity.

The momentous change in the rules of revolutionary Cuban society has occurred in a national context of frequent turbulence, the details of which will be touched upon in this chapter. For those who have lived through the days of Batista, followed the insurgency to its victory, and have spent over 40 years witnessing the birth and death of countless programs, mobilizations, crackdowns, and international alliances, the Special Period is yet another cross to bear. Indeed, Caridad, the 72-year old seamstress, proclaimed that the current economic crisis was actually Cuba's second 'special period'. She recalled a

period in the early years of the revolution in which she experienced a similar sense of insecurity triggered by the scarcity of goods and services.

Comparing life before and after the triumph of the Revolution, Caridad said that, before the Revolution, life was hard and it was difficult to find work (though she had a well-paying job teaching English in addition to income earned as a self-employed seamstress). After the Revolution, things were difficult but it was because there was nothing in the stores and it was harder to get to work because of problems with transportation. Of the 1959 transition, she said, “before, the family I worked for had cars and a farm, a beautiful garden, a gardener...but after the Triumph of the Revolution, there was no garden and everything died.”<sup>193</sup> This statement communicated a sense of nostalgia for the capitalist past that I heard from a few others of her generation.

From the whirlwind of idealism in the ‘60s to the consolidation of the revolution in the ‘70s to rectification in the ‘80s, Cubans have certainly become accustomed to shifting national and individual survival strategies. However, of the storms that Cuba has weathered since 1959, the collapse of eastern European and Soviet socialism and the subsequent withdrawal of economic support is the only one that seems to be approaching the profundity of the revolution itself. During the period of economic free fall, people endured a sudden and precipitous decline in the availability of food and other basic goods, the disappearance of jobs, and reduction of services. Recovery has necessitated negotiating a drastically changed economic and social terrain, one that is branded by

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<sup>193</sup> Author interview with Caridad on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2004 in Santiago.

Cuban exceptionalism at the same time that it has much in common with other post-colonial Caribbean and Latin American countries.

Unveiling the reality of Cuba's precariousness, the crisis of the Special Period has brought to the fore tensions between socialist ideology and daily survival, collectivism and consumption, struggle and resignation. This chapter will first provide an overview of the immediate impact of the collapse of the Soviet Union in Cuba and describe some of the reforms implemented in response to the crisis, with an emphasis on how they have changed daily life in Cuba. Then, it will assess West Indian Cuban responses to the Special Period, which have included attempting to revitalize a sense of community and mutual aid among other Cubans of English-speaking Caribbean descent, strengthening transnational ties, and refashioning both individual aspirations for the future and an understanding of what it is to be revolutionary. While previous chapters deal with the social and material cost of equality, the data presented in this chapter speaks to the price of inequality. Through this evaluation, the central questions concerning the broadening manifestations and consequences of widespread racialization, the elusiveness of stability, and the conundrum in which people of African descent find themselves in the context of reduced government support and protection emerge.

### ***Overview of the Collapse***

#### **The Yanking of the Rug and Wrath of the Yankees**

Though there is some debate regarding the exact moment when the economic crisis began and whether the collapse of eastern European and Soviet socialism dealt a lethal blow to

an already crippled economy,<sup>194</sup> the gravity of the situation is indisputable. Like many small economies, Cuba was and continues to be trade dependent. The Soviet bloc's common market, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), was Cuba's economic lifeline as it gave Cuba access to protected markets and favorable terms of trade. At the time that the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, an average of 84.2 percent of Cuban imports came from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. This proportion fell precipitously over the following three years such that imports from the Soviet Union dropped by over 30 percent in that first year and trade with Eastern Europe practically disappeared by 1991 (Zimbalst 1994b: 8). Between 1989 and 1993, Cuba's Gross Domestic Product fell by 35 percent, private consumption by 30 percent, and gross investment by 80 percent. There was a severe reduction in exports and imports as well as public expenditures. The 'Special Period in Peacetime' was declared as the goods and services that Cubans had come to depend on disappeared virtually overnight and the government implemented drastic reforms in order to prevent further economic deterioration (Brundenius 2002).

In order to obtain a sense of the experience of economic disintegration, it is important to consider certain specifics of the process. For instance, when it was clear that European socialism had passed the point of no return, Cuba and the Soviet Union drew up an accord in 1991 in which the Soviets agreed to provide a certain amount of critical goods in order to mitigate utter deprivation (Zimbalst

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<sup>194</sup> Roque Cabello and Sánchez Herrero (1998), like others, indicate that the economic crisis actually began in the 80s as the growth of 1980-1985 was due to previous investments and subsidies. "At the end of the 1981-1985 period...[there was a] lack of growth of traditional exports and inability of industry to generate new export lines, low yield of economic resources, ineffective investment processes, and poor performance of key sectors of the economy, such as agriculture and construction" (12).

1994). Unfortunately for Cubans, the Soviets did not honor their agreement. This had a tremendous impact on production. Resources needed in the production of anything from livestock feed, to glass, to detergent, to paper simply did not arrive. Without the necessary supplies, production came to a halt and workers were left with nothing to work with or on.

This jolt was intensified by the unprecedented disappearance of imported consumer goods, another consequence of the Soviets' disregard of the newly negotiated trade agreements. For instance, by October of 1991, the Soviets had delivered all of the fuel but only 26 percent of the goods that they had promised:

Cuba had received half of the split peas, 7 percent of the lard, 16 percent of the vegetable oil, 11 percent of the condensed milk, 47 percent of the butter, 18 percent of the canned meat, 22 percent of the powdered milk, 11 percent of fresh and canned fish, no detergent, less than 5 percent of the soap, and just over 1 percent of the spare parts for Soviet-made television sets and refrigerators...By the end of September, Cuba had received only 38 percent of the equipment and only 10 percent of the spare parts that the Soviets had pledged to supply in this category. At the same time, Cuba had received only 16 percent of the fertilizers...none of the wood pulp for paper, 2 percent of the paper and cardboard, 1.6 percent of the tires, 15 percent of the tin, 1.9 percent of the laminated steel—and the list went on (Fitzgerald 1994: 174).

One only need imagine the desperation that such wholesale disappearance of basic goods would incite. Furthermore, the situation worsened with Gorbachev's departure such that in 1992, Cuba's total trade with the former Soviet Union was 7 percent of what it was in 1989. Worse still, in 1993, the Cuban Democracy Act, which tightened the U.S. embargo, and the poor sugar production pushed the country deeper into the crisis as the value of total imports fell 24 percent. With the unprecedented scarcity of goods, inflation on the

black market was astronomical and the peso's value plummeted. The black market exchange rate rose 14 times between 1989 and 1994, going from 7 pesos to 1 US dollar in 1989 to 30 in 1991 to 50 in 1992 to 100 in 1993 to 120 in 1994 (Pérez Villanueva 1998).

### **Immediate Responses and Early Strategies**

The principal economic measures adopted from 1990-1993 involved a cutback in population consumption and production through rationing and reductions, prioritization of food production and the development of the tourism, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals industries, and decentralizing decisions about exports, searching for new markets, and foreign investment (Pérez Villanueva 1998: 22). While eastern European nations confronting economic collapse chose the 'shock treatment' route to deal with the destruction of Soviet socialism, Cuba came up with an anti-shock policy in which social services and employment, though significantly compromised, would be maintained. The entire population would absorb the blow, thus avoiding utter devastation among some segments while others were less impacted.

Ironically, for all of its intractable inefficiencies and stifling bureaucratic machinery, central planning actually softened the blow of the loss of imports as it ensured equitable distribution and the funneling of scarce resources into prioritized projects (Zimbalist 1994a: 11). From food production and distribution to labor relocation to health and education provision, the government's tight control over the allocation of resources and its commitment to distributing the meager supply of goods equitably ensured that everyone shouldered the burden of deprivation. Indeed, the government's response to the

crisis, whether rooted in a moral imperative, the desire to legitimize its power, or some combination of the two, serves as testimony to the enshrinement of equality in revolutionary Cuba.

Though it's difficult to isolate one or two products whose absence had the most dramatic impact on the economy, the loss of fuel imports would certainly spring to the top of any list. As oil is used for everything from vehicles for farming and transportation to the provision of electricity, the drastic reduction in its consumption affected all areas of society. The breadth of both this severe shortfall and of Cuban ingenuity employed to avert total collapse are evident in the following statement:

Beginning in 1990, the leadership slashed gasoline supplies for private and government vehicles; pared bus and train schedules to the bone; eliminated nighttime sporting events; curtailed television transmissions to a few hours a day; reduced electricity supplies to offices, factories, farms, and homes during peak hours; instituted rolling blackouts in Havana; and shut down means of production, including fleets of tractors and whole factories. To cushion the impact of some of this, Cuban leaders decided to import bicycles from China and to begin producing bicycles domestically. They also significantly increased the use of oxen for agriculture and of other draft animals for transporting people and goods. Cuba even opened a new post office for deliveries between Havana and the provinces by carrier pigeon (Fitzgerald 1994: 179).

In addition to the 10 percent reduction in domestic electricity consumption, 50 percent reduction in taxis and reduction in bus services in 1991, there was a reduction in domestic publishing as daily newspapers became weeklies and, with the exception of some school texts, no new books were produced. Television broadcasting was reduced to 48 hours a week (Eckstein 1994: 99). As one might imagine, all of this effected an overwhelming change in daily life.

One example of the enduring ways that such shortages affect daily life is the transportation system. I found ‘*el transporte*’ to be infamous for multiplying the stress and burden shouldered by the majority of Cubans. As shared in the case of Pamela’s family whose loss of a dear member might have been prevented with the availability of transportation to the hospital, the problems of *el transporte* can have dire consequences. However, the way in which I encountered and observed its impact was as people go about the business of their lives. In response to cutting back taxi and bus services due to the lack of fuel, four new modes of transportation were introduced during the Special Period: *coches* or horse drawn carriages carrying 10 to 12 people at a time, *camiones* and *camionetas*, both essentially trucks designed to transport goods or even livestock that are now crammed with human passengers, and *bicitaxis*, which are carriages powered by cyclists.<sup>195</sup> Motorcycles, many of which I was told were brought back by those people who were working in the Soviet Union, are another form of transportation as well as relatively lucrative self-employment, but they are more high end, a *moto* ride costing ten times that of a *coche*. While it might appear that these *inventos*<sup>196</sup> of the Special Period would seriously reduce the problems associated with getting from point A to point B, there is still not a supply sufficient to meet the demand. Thus, overcrowding, long lines, erratic schedules, and the resulting frustrations are part of most Cubans’ daily diet of the Special Period.

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<sup>195</sup> In conversation with a bicitaxi driver, I found that they work *por cuenta propio*, meaning that they are self-employed. Though it is hard work (Santiago is very hilly), this particular driver told me after biking me uphill during a rain shower, he prefers it to working for the state.

<sup>196</sup> A Cubanism that refers to improvised, somewhat makeshift innovations Cubans have created due to the circumstances of severe scarcity.

In terms of the drastic reduction in food imports, which quite obviously posed a tremendous threat to the population and required immediate attention, there was an effort to increase staple food production through use of new land and expansion of livestock, establishing new distribution centers, storage facilities and canneries, moving surplus labor to the countryside, improving irrigation techniques, and introducing new seed varieties (Zimbalist 1994: 11; Eckstein 1994: 99). The food program that had been put into place during the rectification period had to essentially be discarded as the devastating losses of Soviet inputs, along with inefficiencies of the program itself limited its production, supplying only a fraction of the food needed for the population.

The mandate that the government be responsible for supplying sufficient amounts of food at negligible cost to the people was a tremendous expense that the state struggled to but could not bear. In 1991, food subsidies cost anywhere from 450 to 800 million pesos and, if processing and distribution are included, that amount climbs to between 1 and 1.6 billion pesos. Thus, beginning in 1992, the state started to increase prices for agricultural products in order to cover some of the production costs, stimulate output, reduce subsidies and increase workers' salaries (Roca 1994).

With the lack of fuel and other essential supplies, factories and work centers could not function and thus had to be closed down, resulting in massive unemployment. As the right to employment is central to revolutionary society and is even guaranteed in the Constitution, the government was obliged to create a solution to this particular problem. Between 1990-92, the State Committee on Labor and Social Security (CETTS) came up

with Resolutions Nos. 13/90, 17/90, 4/91, 3/91, 1/92, and 3/92 in order to manage the reallocation of labor. Though a main strategy was to divert labor to the agricultural sector (mobilization), the resolutions also included job swaps to save on transportation costs, permanent and temporary transfers to another position or occupation within the same or different work sites, enrollment in training programs, and compensation of surplus workers who were paid a certain percentage of their former salary while displaced (Díaz-Briquets 1994). Workers were relocated to industries in which labor was in higher demand and mechanisms were created to deal with the upheaval that resulted from such disruptions and relocations, and reducing the size and work hours of the civilian labor force (ibid: 120).

Another issue related to the problem of labor was that of higher education. One of the contradictions of Cuban society is that the economy, drained of resources in part because of the provision of free education, has difficulty in supporting the educated populace that the revolution has created. However, with the advent of the Special Period, not only was the immediate expense of educating people a concern, but also the question of spending scarce resources creating a population whose education did not serve the new needs of the society became more urgent. Given the immediate need to solve problems related to feeding the population and providing basic care, Cuba cut back on university admissions and tracked more youth into polytechnics. Indeed, the headline of a 1991 Granma article: 'CAN WE DEVELOP WITHOUT MANUAL LABORERS?: Should We Go on Turning Out Tens of Thousands of University Graduates When We Already Have Over 380,000 Professionals? Not Everyone Should Be an Engineer, a Professional or an Intermediate-

Level Technician'<sup>197</sup> is indicative of the debates on this issue and has tremendous implications for the futures of Cuba's youth.

### ***Reformed Society: Desperate for Dollars***

There has been a flurry of reforms aimed at surviving the global shift enacted by the events of the late '80s and early '90s that have left Cuba economically unprotected and ideologically isolated. The legalization of the dollar,<sup>198</sup> the development of the tourist industry, opening to foreign investment, promotion of exports and reduction of imports, and the opening of farmers' markets and other restricted options for self-employment are among some of the most significant, enduring reforms implemented (Brundenius, 2002; Mesa-Lago, 1998; Rodriguez, 1993; Espino). Confronted with the loss of the Soviet support that had shielded Cuba from having to sell itself on the western world market, leadership moved to prioritize the acquisition of foreign investment in order to attract desperately needed hard currency.

The legalization of the dollar was a key aspect of the government's strategy to acquire hard currency. This particular measure has had overwhelming and immediate consequences throughout Cuban society. Prior to 1993, shopping with foreign currency was limited to the very small sector that catered to foreigners and Cubans were punished

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<sup>197</sup> As quoted in Eckstein (1994: 99).

<sup>198</sup> The U.S. dollar was legalized during the summer of 1993. In November 2004, it was no longer accepted and the *peso convertible*, a Cuban currency that is the equivalent to a dollar, has taken its place. This was done in an effort to obtain the dollars and any other foreign currency held by the population. As this occurred just prior to my most recent field research trip, I more often refer to the process of circulating foreign currency in the population as dollarization.

if found engaging in economic activity in this sector.<sup>199</sup> By 1995, Exchange Houses (CADECA) were opened, allowing the legal exchange of Cuban currency for hard currency and vice versa, giving non-state enterprises and individual citizens access to foreign currency (Pérez Villanueva 2004: 49). With legalization, remittances dollars from Cubans abroad, primarily those in the United States, began flowing in by the millions.<sup>200</sup> In conjunction with the influx of hard currency from tourists that accompanied investment in this industry, the introduction of remittance dollars into the economy set into motion a transformation in social dynamics.

### **Rising Inequality**

Though rescuing the country from an untenable cash crisis, the partial dollarization of the economy has resulted in a rise in inequality, separating the population into those who have access to foreign currency and those who do not. It has created a system of multiple exchange rates and segregated product markets between those operating in pesos and those in dollars. According to Domínguez, this distorts relative prices, makes it impossible to measure true profitability, and reaps havoc on industries such as sugar

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<sup>199</sup> In the pre-1989 world, Russians were the dominant foreign presence. There was the black market in which goods could be bought in pesos at five to fifteen times the price at regular stores and there was what was known as the red market in which Russians sold goods bought at these foreign shops and resold them to Cubans for pesos or rum (Jatar-Hausmann 1999: 23).

<sup>200</sup> Eckstein's (2004) research on the changing relationship between Cubans at home and those abroad documents a radical shift in the attitude and policy on both sides. In her interviews, she finds that those who remained in Cuba experienced pressure to distance themselves from those abroad that was both externally and internally imposed. Some interviewees resented their family for leaving and their political beliefs overrode personal attachments, resulting in a deterioration or complete loss of communication (recall Edward's account of his paternal uncle described in Chapter Four). Others responded more to the political and economic rewards that awaited those who severed ties with relations abroad. In contrast, Cubans abroad are now embraced officially and looked upon as rescuers by on island relations. "Traditional income-sharing raises migrant social status within the homeland context. Cubans who previously stigmatized migrants as outcasts, *gusanos*, as authorities had taught them to do, are re-envisioning those who leave as heroes. However, new migrant attained cultural capital is conditional on remaining abroad, retaining homeland ties, and sharing economic assets" (Eckstein 2004: 338).

where products are sold on the international market in dollars, yet producers receive payment in pesos. At the level of the consumer, the multiple exchange rate regime allows those who actually have access to hard currency to purchase imported goods in pesos and thus have no incentive to curtail consumption (2004: 31).<sup>201</sup> Dollarization has also resulted in a devaluation of education and distortion of labor as there is a total incongruence between skill and/or work and reward. Indeed, Eckstein argues that the introduction of remittances into Cuban society has led to a devaluation of higher education both because those recipients of remittances were not necessarily educated and some of those abroad that send money are from humble backgrounds (2004: 341).

In addressing the rise of inequality in the 1990s, Espina Prieto (2004) points to several key features and trends. Among them are the differences between workers that have emerged as a result of the appearance of incomes that are completely disconnected from work. As discussed in the previous chapter, this has had a particular impact on professionals whose salaries and, sometimes status are dwarfed by those who have less education but family abroad or work in the tourist sector. There has been a polarization and concentration of incomes and the emergence of a segment of the population that lives in poverty at the same time that the state has lost its absolute centrality in redistributing income, thus resulting in a quantitative and qualitative weakening of social services (Espina Prieto 2004: 221).

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<sup>201</sup> Indeed, in 1998, official figures reported that 56.3 percent of the population held hard currency, but because there are such limited opportunities for accumulation and investment in one's own or private enterprises, the main outlet for this currency is consumption (Zimbalist 2000: 25).

Given the changes on the world stage, some argue that such inequality in Cuba is inevitable. Pastor (2000), however, asserts that the inequality that has arisen as a result of the halting reforms of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century is the worst sort of inequality. It is an inequality where prostitutes and taxi drivers earn more than doctors and Party members and those with prosperous and/or generous family in exile form a privileged group. There is a complete disconnection between skills and productivity and reward. In contrast to the kind of inequality that results from those with more energy, talent, and skill receiving greater rewards, this sort of inequality, he reasons, breeds resentment and frustration (43).

### *Ethnography of the Special Period*

#### **The Collapse**

Cubans watched the dismemberment of the Soviet Union with the same stupefaction as the rest of the world, but for them it had profound implications on their everyday lives. Without oil from the Soviet Union, public transportation was a disaster; a three-hour wait for the bus was common. Constant blackouts interrupted life at home and at work. In fact, Cubans used to say that in those days they did not suffer black outs or *apagones*, but *alumbrones* or illuminations, since the lights went off and rarely came back on. The supply of running water was erratic at best, forcing many schools to close down<sup>202</sup> and hospitals to operate under extreme conditions. There were no spare parts for consumer goods, no fertilizers, and no food...Factories closed down. With no jobs to go to, people stayed at home while getting paid sixty percent of their salaries...But soon people found that even with their meager salaries, they always had more money in their pockets than they could spend. There were simply not enough things to buy...Prices were kept low in the official market but scarcity was rampant; people were hungry and desperate (Jatar-Hausmann 1999: 41).

As stated earlier, the Special Period inserted itself into the research both by providing a context for the resurgence of English-speaking Caribbean identity and as the most immediately relevant fixture in the lives of all Cubans. While the most current issues

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<sup>202</sup> This is the only reference I have found to school closures.

facing a transforming Cuba dominated people's day-to-day lives, in discussions, the first years of crisis were detailed by some, dismissed by others, and alluded to by most. What emerges from accounts of experiences in the early '90s is how all encompassing the crisis was as well as the gravity and traumatic nature of the situation. The food and water supply was severely reduced, there was no gas to cook with, and transportation practically disappeared. Clothing was scarce, soap and toothpaste came every few months and sanitary napkins not at all.

When such consumer goods began to become more available, inflation was astronomical and most people could not afford them. According to one professor with whom I worked, people at all levels of society suffered from problems experienced from the inability to maintain personal hygiene. She relayed to me a discussion she had with a neighbor in which the neighbor talked about the bug infestations and skin rashes people developed from the various soap substitutes that were widely used, denying that she too experienced this condition. According to this informant, many have suppressed this and other memories of the worst period of the crisis.

To explain the extent of the scarcity, it was the women who talked about having to cook the little food that there was without oil and the desperation with which neighbors fought for water during its infrequent delivery. With no gas for the stove, people dismantled each other's fences as they scavenged for wood to burn so that they could cook their meager meals only to find themselves with no means to clean their bodies of the smoke's sooty residue given the scarcity of soap. The only research participants who remarked

that they did not suffer from the loss of food was one who works as a clerk in a produce store and could pilfer goods for his family, and another who lives in a more rural area further north where they had livestock and could grow their own food. The other exceptions were those who had family members who worked on the Naval Base and had more resources with which to acquire the little that was available on the black market. However, these cases were clearly the exception and thus the majority of people were forced to endure material deprivation and the psychological consequences of insecurity.

Such realities would come up in conversations whose beginnings were seemingly innocuous. For instance, what started out as a casual inquiry about her relationship with her Jamaican grandmother who was then 92 took a turn toward the deprivation of the recent past. Hortencia recalled that her grandmother used to be strong, but with the lack of food during the Special Period, her stature changed. Having seen photographs of her grandmother at different periods of her life, I now questioned my assumption that time itself was the culprit of the visible deterioration. Saying that her grandmother was not one to complain, Hortencia remembered detecting the toll that the lack of nutrition and worry exacted. She recalls that they went hungry a lot during this time as there wasn't meat, rice, or any of the food upon which they had relied. Consequently, they often ate cornmeal porridge with beans. According to Hortencia, this lasted for 5 years as things began to get a little better by the mid 90s.

*“Gracias a la naturaleza y al Espiritu Santo que nosotros sobrevivimos”* (“Thanks to nature and the Holy Spirit that we survived”), Hortencia pronounced to punctuate the

recollection of her grandmother's decline and introduce stories of her own suffering and humiliation. At the time of the crisis, Hortencia was a young teenager and attending high school at a school away from home where she says that they fed the students rice with candy at times. She said that she cried daily and, when home for the weekends, begged her mother to allow her to stay home as she had to guard the few items in her possession at the boarding school because theft was rampant. These were dark days for her, the intimate details of which that she clearly recalled with pain. She confessed having to use, clean and reuse old cloth for sanitary napkins and remembered with particularly acute humiliation comments made by strangers about her ill-fitting bra and by cousins who were not as bad off about the condition of the two pairs of underwear she owned.

Hortencia's quinceañera was particularly illustrative of both the attempt to cobble together a life that had some resemblance to the one lived *antes* [before] and the anxiety produced by the absolute fragility of that distorted facsimile. In spite of the hardships that they endured, Hortencia's family was actually one of the more fortunate ones as her aunt was working abroad on a mission in South Africa and thus was able to help. This assistance was particularly critical at two points. One of these instances was Hortencia's quince in 1993, which was the darkest moment of the crisis. Again, it was in the process of socializing that the harsh details of the Special Period interjected themselves. While showing me pictures of her when she was younger, the few shots from her quince appeared and I remarked on the thinness of her older brother, who I know as a tall, rather burly man. She corrected me when I mistakenly attributed this to his youth, reminding me that this was during the worst part of the Special Period.

Indeed, upon closer inspection, I noticed that all of the faces I had become accustomed to seeing were slightly sunken, displaying forced smiles and belonging to bodies clothed in loose-fitting garments. Hortencia explained that, though her aunt provided the food, clothes and money for the photographs considered to be essential for even the most minimalist of quinces, there was still the problem of electricity. She recalled her distress at the prospect of having one of the frequent black outs arrive as an unannounced and unwelcome guest. Without music and light, the party would have been over, the lack of electrical power a metaphor for the powerlessness felt by Cuban families across the island in the face of this sudden and ominous disconnection from external resources.

An instance in which the assistance of family abroad provided rescue from a more dire situation was relayed by Melvina. With the shortage of food, the near disappearance of the public transportation system, and the mandate that as many people continue to go to work as possible, people were left with no choice but to either walk or ride the bikes hastily supplied by the government as a solution to the lack of gasoline. While maintaining as many job centers as possible and providing some form of transportation constituted the government's attempt to stem the crisis of unemployment and fuel scarcity, this created other problems. The low caloric intake combined with the increase in exercise was responsible for people's significant weight loss. Melvina, whose health has never been particularly good, had to walk several miles to her job and fainted in the street one day. She was taken to the hospital and it was discovered that she needed major surgery. At that time, it would be generous to say that the hospitals were low on supplies

and thus her sister, the physician on a mission in Africa, had to bring all the necessary materials for her operation from anesthesia to gauze to antibiotics.

Another grave incident was relayed to me during my stay with Pamela and Mabel in Guantánamo, providing me with a window into the worst consequences of the Special Period as well as the toll that the lack of resources on a regional level can take on a family even in spite of connections abroad. Mabel spoke of the economic situation in Guantánamo with a disgust that was laced with bitterness. During one of our conversations that was dominated by her allusions to and at times details of the trials that they are going through (“*no hay nada aquí*”/there’s nothing here), she began talking about how the transportation is so horrible. She said that there are no cars or buses or anything that comes by the house at certain times of day and that if someone is sick, they can call an ambulance but it won't come for 24 hours. “What do people do?” I asked. “They die,” she said, then proceeded to tell me of how her second husband got up in the middle of the night with pain and they ran out to the street, trying to get a car to take him to the hospital but the drivers of the cars they found were all drunk and there was nothing and no one to help them so he died in the house of a heart attack. She believes that his life could have been saved had he gotten to the hospital in time but there was nothing that they could do so they sat and watched him die.

The day after Mabel shared this with me, Pamela told me that her stepfather was Cuban, that he took care of her severely handicapped son William as his own and was a tremendous help around the house. Mabel and he were married for 5 years and she was in

bad shape after he died. I was staying with them on the 7th anniversary of his death and was shopping with Pamela when she bought the white candle that sat burning on the table next to a glass of water throughout the day. At some point in the morning, Pamela, a practitioner of Lucumí, as the Yoruba tradition is known in Cuba, opened the small door under the stairs to reveal an altar that contained several *orisha*.<sup>203</sup> She cleaned the space and the steps at the top of which sat another *orisha*, lit more candles, and put out rum. It was when I asked her why she was doing this that she told me the significance of the day, saying that she set out the candle to remember her stepfather and that he was a good man who died because there was no ambulance. I thought that maybe he would have died even if there had been some way to get him to a hospital, but the spirit of the house would have survived. As it is, there is death and impatience and waiting. Pamela's daughter, Yanet, seems to be waiting for an opportunity to build the kind of life different from the ones she sees her mother and grandmother living. Pamela is waiting to for her time to travel that will come in her 60s, she says after two trips to Havana and two denials of her requests in spite of all papers in order. Mabel may have given up on waiting for a change in government or something that will bring back days less burdened by empty stores and life as a widow. And perhaps they're all waiting for the moment when William needs that ambulance that would only come when it is too late.

While people all over the world meet every day struggling against scarcity and deprivation, what is unique about the Cuban case is the suddenness with which this occurred and the contrast of this situation with the kind of lives people lived *antes*. This is particularly the case for those who had achieved professional status prior to 1989 and

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<sup>203</sup> The Yoruba name for deities, also referred to as *santos* or saints.

certainly the kind of life hoped for, promised and, in some instances, provided by the Revolution. The trauma lies not solely in the objective reality of the absence of consumer goods, but in the intense anxiety that resulted from being confronted with their own vulnerability and insecurity as well as the humiliation that accompanies such a fall. Once the government adopted market-oriented strategies to save the economy from utter disaster, what some would argue as the inevitable did indeed occur. In exchange for being able to put hunger if not some nutritional deficits behind them, Cubans have had to contend with social transformations such as the reassertion of inequalities and erosion of the safety net.

### **Tourism**

The tourist industry has been instrumental in creating such social transformations and its impact on everyday life has been tremendous. The development of the tourist industry has played a role in processes of stratification among Cubans in addition to introducing more lucrative employment. It has revived a dormant social division emblematic of the colonial/imperial era: that between native and foreigner. In arguing for the inevitability of further reform, Baloyra observes,

The contrast between foreign capitalist opulence and domestic socialist mediocrity is just too strong at all levels. For example, concerning tourism, criticism has emerged from within the party itself over the system of apartheid created by the increasing number of foreign tourists visiting the island, which has resulted in the virtual exclusion of *criollos* (natives) from the choice spots in the littoral and has put extra pressure on the supply of food in the country. Cubans are practically excluded from the “dollar area,” and ordinary citizens cannot make purchases in well-supplied stores reserved for foreign tourists, entrepreneurs, and diplomats (1994: 35).

Cubans are in an incredibly disadvantageous position *visa vis* foreigners. Like most tropical tourist destinations, the contrast between the material world of tourists and those of Cubans is stark and the desperation to acquire foreign currency has resulted in innumerable affronts to the dignity and pride emblematic of a particular version of revolutionary sensibility.

*Jineterismo* is the most often cited example of this, but there are ways in which those not directly involved in the tourist industry feel the preferential treatment given to foreign presence. Once such instance occurred one night when Lidia and I went to the Culture House in Santiago, a club where Cubans used to go to listen to live music, poetry, enjoy art exhibits and performances. When we approached the entrance, we were told that they had instituted a policy whereby ‘non-members’ could not enter unless accompanied by a foreigner, regardless of whether they could pay the entrance fee. Membership is available only to a select group of people in the arts and thus others who want to attend must find a foreigner to accompany them, which clearly encourages *jineterismo* and is humiliating to Cubans. The Culture House, like many other clubs, restaurants, and places of entertainment, was populated by older white foreigners accompanied by young black and brown Cubans.

Indeed, many of the venues previously enjoyed by Cubans have been turned over to tourists and the Cubans who accompany them simply by virtue of the fact that they do business in foreign currency. This includes hotels and vacation destinations that have now become inaccessible to ordinary citizens who look on as foreigners who possess not

only coveted material goods but also, by virtue of the fact that they are in Cuba, the ability to realize a dream of so many Cubans: that of traveling. Being confronted with a comparison that highlights their constraints is particularly frustrating considering that a little over a decade ago, Cuban families, thought not able to travel internationally, were themselves accustomed to enjoying cultural spaces, taking domestic vacations and participating in other leisure activities and were not dependent upon foreigners for such pleasures.

### **Routes of Informality**

Though the concessions of the reforms were resorted to under much duress and continue to be plagued by problems such as rising inequality and its consequences, they constitute a significant shift in the economic life of the population, one that is difficult to envision as only short term. For instance, the informal economy and officially illegal activity such as pilfering goods from work centers and participation in the black market have flourished during the Special Period. Given the state's declining ability to provide essential goods, and possibly to punish all those who engage in such activity, Cubans rely on mechanisms outside of state control to find the necessary goods to live (Fernández, 1994).

Countless examples of this occupied my daily life in Cuba. Activities ranged from people selling fruit on the sidewalks or out of horse drawn carts, to the more hidden door to door peddling of goods such as cigarettes and special diet items such as milk for children under six and elders that appear on the *libreta*, to the more risky selling of stolen cigars

by a white Cuban who works at one of the big hotels. Indeed, this last encounter provides an example of new routes to advancement and roots of rising inequality: this same white Cuban who had a job at a hotel and made money from selling stolen cigars also earned income from the *casa particular* that he and his wife ran. Thus, it can be the case that one foreign currency-earning endeavor supports others, deepening the chasm between those with access to dollars and those without.

**Conseguir<sup>204</sup> or ‘El dolor del dolar’<sup>205</sup>**

Along with tourism, the depenalization of the dollar in August 1993 transformed everyday life in Cuba. Although the rationing system is still in place, the goods provided at significantly subsidized rates that appear on the *libreta* and are available with any regularity are few. People frequently complain that these basic goods such as rice, beans, sugar, oil and cigarettes are only enough to last for half of the month. Meat, poultry, fish, and vegetables are even less available and most people have to find a way to supplement what the government provides with what is available through the black market and bartering. With the introduction of the dollar, a greater variety of consumer goods were available to purchase in dollars at the ever-increasing number of dollar stores. The main problem of course is that most people are paid in the national peso, currency that now has an exchange rate of 25 to 1, a marked improvement from the astronomical inflation at the beginning of the crisis when the rate was as horrifying as 200 to 1.

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<sup>204</sup> Literally meaning ‘to get or acquire’, this word was frequently used in the context of the search for material goods and connotes the struggle to obtain goods through legal and illegal means.

<sup>205</sup> One of many phrases in the Cuban cachet of linguistic witticisms, this means ‘the pain of the dollar’ and refers to the struggle and suffering Cubans go through in trying to acquire dollars and the goods available to those who have foreign currency (many of which are not luxury items).

For instance, during my 2005 field research trip, attention was on the implementation of an increase in the minimum from 100 to 220 pesos and an adjustment of the pay scale. However, as revealed through a conversation with Deunes who is a grocery store clerk, the salary increase still falls short of what is needed because the issue for most is being confined within the peso economy when so many goods are sold only in dollars. In his opinion, the salary range in Cuba that is now from 220 to 1,000 pesos a month translates into between 10 and 50 dollars and you really can't buy anything with that. Pointing out the more detrimental impact that this has on Cubans of African descent, he says, "those people who have studied and gotten advanced degrees can't save money and take a trip or save money and buy a television or stereo because of the exchange rate. The way to overcome this is to work in tourism and those jobs are mostly for whites, which leaves [the characteristic forefinger's brush on the forearm to refer to blacks] in a worse situation. *Los negros somos embarcados* [We blacks are left hanging]" (Field note June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2005).

### **In Pursuit of Consumer Goods**

One of the main consequences of the dual economy in daily life is the sharp increase in consumer products and the division between those who can afford to acquire coveted material goods and those who cannot. Possession of goods is largely divorced from skills or participation in revolutionary society. Prior to the withdrawal of Soviet support and during the rectification period in particular, the primary means by which Cubans received material goods such as refrigerators, televisions, telephones, kitchen appliances, washing machines, and other household items for free or at a discounted price was through the

system of emulación.<sup>206</sup> Every so often when there are goods available to distribute, the names of the best workers and citizens are suggested- one can elect oneself- to a committee in the work center or the CDR and a selection process occurs. Performance at one's job, contribution to and conduct in one's neighborhood and participation in volunteer work are all taken into consideration.

Rosendahl, who conducted her fieldwork in the late 80s, describes the process as follows:

“the state distributes articles to the central union, which in turn distributes them to the municipality branch unions those in the central union feel have done good jobs. The branch union leader then awards the articles to different local unions, from which a group is elected to choose the persons who have earned the most merits and therefore will be awarded the article” (Rosendahl 1997: 37). While she reported that people were evaluated on the basis of merit points, the participants in this research explained that they have a ‘revolutionary resume’ (called an *expediente*, which means ‘record or file’) that contains all of the service they have performed for the Revolution and are ideally evaluated based on the extent of their dedication. In essence, their personal sacrifices made for the good of society are rewarded with something that improves their standard of living or, in the least, makes daily tasks a bit less arduous.

As one might imagine, there is tremendous stress and conflict involved in this ritual of competing with coworkers and neighbors for highly coveted modern goods. Rosendahl found that people complained of being treated unfairly around the way merit points were

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<sup>206</sup> This system began with the Guevarist notion that productivity and its public recognition should be a reward in and of itself but then the use of material incentives or *estímulos*, were introduced.

counted and that the biggest conflicts arose when housing was at stake given the tremendous housing shortage (1997: 38). While, as mentioned previously, one of my research participants was actually awarded a house through this process apparently with no objection from anyone because, as she said (and pantomimed), she got that house from the sweat of her brow, others were not so fortunate and/or hardworking. Some people even opt out of participating because they feel it is not worth opening themselves up for public scrutiny, criticism and strained relationships. Furthermore, there are more options for acquiring such material rewards, however remote, illegal, or morally compromising they might be.

With the increasing availability both of consumer goods and of the means by which to acquire them, it is possible that there is both less and more investment in the distribution system. On the one hand, for those who have access to foreign exchange, there is presumably less of a need to participate in such competitions. On the other, with the greater exposure to consumer items by virtue of their more widespread availability and the resultant inequality in standards of living, people are more feverish in their pursuit of material possessions. Again, as Alden Knight said, prior to the collapse, they were “poor but equal”, and this relative equality contained people’s expectations and aspirations in terms of their standard of living. Unlike now, consumer items were equally (un)available to nearly all Cubans and conspicuous consumption itself was in ideological opposition to revolutionary society where sacrifice and humility were championed. With the introduction of tourism, in particular, the benefits of consumption over sacrifice are everywhere. Cubans’ awareness of and desire for the range of consumer goods that are

available has grown at the same time that the ability to maintain even the previous standard of living has become more difficult for those shut out from the dollar economy. As one young man commented to me when discussing his dissatisfaction with the current system, “We just want the normal things that everyone has...you know, a television, a VCR...just normal things.”

### **Perspectives on Jineterismo**

The perception of such luxury items as ‘normal’ as well as the decreasing quantity of basic goods available through the rationing system have no doubt contributed to the tolerance for and even valorization of those who participate in ‘la lucha’ to acquire consumer products. For instance, Davidson (1996) found that some Cubans applaud *jineteras* as true breadwinners who are sacrificing for their families. In my conversations with Tomás, in order to demonstrate the deterioration of conditions in Cuba, he recounted a story in which he visited a former coworker on one of his trips to the island. When they worked together, she was an advocate of propriety and the enforcer of respectability, admonishing him when she found out that he was having a relationship with a coworker. This same woman, he says, when he asked about her children during his visit, did not hesitate to tell him that her daughter is a *jinetera*. To Tomás, the fact that she, of all people, could say that her daughter is a prostitute in the same exact tone and manner in which she said her son is a technician, was emblematic of the malfunctioning of the population’s moral compass.

I found, however, that the extent to which *jineteando* and other illegal activities pursued in the search for foreign currency are accepted varies. Some people, primarily those over 50, harshly criticized those who prostitute themselves for foreigners and the benefits that such associations can bring. To them, the young people who reject official employment and school in favor of looking for tourists to attract are misguided, ungrateful, and completely ignorant of how difficult life was before the revolution. For instance, in commenting on the *jineteras*, one friend contrasted their situation with that of her mother, who was a black woman who worked on a coffee plantation, eventually migrating to the city to work as a maid. To her, this was what a lack of opportunity looked like, not the life of a young person who has been educated for free, has had access to medical care and is guaranteed some form of employment.

Eugenia, in response to a question about the existence of racism in Cuba, identified the problem in Cuba to be one of class and went on to explain that anyone who is not improving themselves is making a choice to not do so. In the past, she says, “the problem was that everyone had to pay and so a lot of people didn’t have the means to pay...there was a man who became a doctor who worked cleaning during the day and studied at night. He was of color. There were a lot of people who learned how to read and write during the literacy campaign, but a lot of the young people today don’t want to go to school.”

Like many who sought to support their view of continued opportunity, Eugenia gave the example of a recent program in which the government pays young people who dropped

out of school, or were unable to pursue the studies that they wanted, to continue their education in the evenings. “They pay them their salary as if they were working so if you lost out, now you can study and they pay you to study...and is this racism? Look, there are young people who major in the sciences and go through quickly...there are people in the streets who aren’t doing anything... they’re losing time not working, not studying when the government pays them to study. Here, there are a lot of good things. You have to look not only at the bad things, but the good things too.” From this perspective, the revolution has provided and continues to provide opportunities for those willing and able to take advantage of them. Perhaps most important to those who hold this view, the revolution provides the opportunity for dignity, if not material gain, and thus those who choose to hustle are lazy at best and morally bankrupt at worst.

The reaction against those who engage in direct forms of *jineteando* to acquire material goods, particularly as their sole source of income, has to be understood within the context of overall social participation. Employment in work centers has been a vehicle through which the state and community exercise leverage to secure participation in the rallies, volunteer work, and other activities of revolutionary society. Thus, those who choose to work exclusively outside of the legal economy are removing themselves from an important component of the social structure in addition to committing what can be judged as moral compromises by hustling. This may in part explain why those who engage in what amounts to *jineterismo* but also maintain a legitimate job don’t seem to be subject to the same social sanctioning.

Observers of the Special Period indicate that there were and continue to be shortages in basic goods and that those who do not have access to foreign currency suffer the most. There has also been a reported decline in university admissions and increased competition. This contradicts the notion that there is abundant opportunity and those Cubans who choose to prostitute themselves are doing so out of a selfish desire for non-essential luxury items. However, it is also the case that those who are better off than many turn to jinetando in one form or another as a way to acquire basic, non-essential, and luxury items that would otherwise be unattainable.

A prime example of this was Hortencia who, at the age of 22, began a “relationship” with a 67 year-old foreigner. Better off than most with family abroad and professional salaries, she nevertheless pursued this relationship, with the reluctant approval of her parents. Having experienced the hope of the early revolutionary period, become professionals, and achieved a standard of living that afforded them some privileges and luxuries, the deprivations of the Special Period have been particularly demoralizing. The real value of their salaries has diminished, the places where they used to vacation are now reserved for tourists, the prices of basic goods have risen, and so they welcome into their home as their college educated daughter’s ‘boyfriend’ a foreigner old enough to be *their* father.

### **The Professional Predicament**

Cases such as this are by no means unusual in Cuba’s new economic environment in which characteristics of the social order have been distorted or completely reconfigured. One of the oft-cited illustrations of this upset has been the decline in the relative material

status of professionals. Through vignette, Jatar-Hausmann touches on what I refer to as the professional predicament:

Blanquita was just arriving from a rough night *jineteando*. Her 300-peso salary as a psychologist couldn't pay for her nice clothes, or for the clothing and food she wanted for her son either. That's why she had followed the example of many university graduates in the '90s and was moonlighting as a *jinetera* or prostitute. Since university professions were not included among those liberated for self-employment, university graduates could only moonlight in activities allowed for self-employment. Many did it in legalized services as plumbers, hairdressers, or taxi drivers. Others preferred *jineterismo*... She could easily make US\$100 in one night. She just had to go out dancing, eat in a nice restaurant, and have a little sex. "Isn't that what free women do everywhere," she thought (1999: 63).

Professionals who spent years of their lives training to practice their craft earned at most between 500 and 700 pesos per month, a healthy salary in the days before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Now, when converted to dollars, this \$20-28 falls quite short of an income needed to maintain their previous standard of living. While being a professional or educated has not been completely stripped of its social prestige, the fact that it does not correspond to greater earning power appears to be demoralizing. For instance, some participants commented that professionals are resentful of the better treatment *jineteras* might receive in stores ie: being served before others, because they have foreign currency.

While this dynamic has moved many professionals to seek employment in the tourist industry or some form of self-employment, some are able to use their position to acquire foreign currency. First, there are certain state jobs that offer workers a portion of their salary in foreign currency. As Zimbalist notes, "in Cuba's *perverse* economic environment...hard-currency rewards are useful in mitigating the distorted incentives that

enable hotel chambermaids, bellhops, taxi drivers, prostitutes, and others working in the dollar-based economy to earn several times more than engineers, doctors, or manufacturing workers” (19, *emphasis mine*).<sup>207</sup> One research participant works in the airport as a highly trained airplane mechanic and, in addition to the 500 pesos and transportation to and from work, he earns 50 US dollars (now *pesos convertibles*) per month. If he is late or misses work, however, his dollar earnings are reduced. Another who works for a communications company that is financed through a joint venture also receives part of her compensation in dollars.

Professionals working in those areas of the economy that earn foreign exchange dollars are eligible to benefit from such arrangements, however those who work in fields not connected to foreign investment are not so fortunate. Ironically, medicine and education, the two areas in which the Revolution has had the most success and incurred the most expense, do not generate this sort of capital. It is widely perceived that doctors and teachers are some of the hardest workers and receive the worst treatment. For instance, the food available to physicians who are obligated to work extremely long shifts and are frequently on call is notoriously inadequate. Also, there is a mandatory three years of service required of doctors and teachers after their training in which they are assigned a placement and must work there or wherever the state sends them. Furthermore, it is extremely difficult for doctors and other key professionals to migrate. One physician I

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<sup>207</sup> Pastor also refers to Cuba’s reform process as perverse (32) and I find this language to be an interesting commentary on the authors’ understanding of the Cuban economy and transition. Use of such a word communicates that the process is a violation of and offense against not just those who people the “economic environment,” but the standard social order and system of reward.

met who had won the migration lottery<sup>208</sup> and was trying to decide whether or not to move to Florida or New York said that he had been required to work for ten years before being allowed to leave the country.

Another way that professionals become more economically viable is through being sent on a mission abroad. Cuba is well known for its internationalism as well as its skilled workforce and, taking advantage of these strengths, the government exports professionals to countries in need of such expertise. The majority of the participants in this research had close family members, friends, neighbors, or co-workers who had been or were currently working outside of the country. Those who were specialists were particularly sought after and, if they were proficient in English, could be sent to the more coveted destinations such as South Africa.

While I know of people who worked in or were preparing to be sent to Jamaica, Haiti, Angola, Botswana, South Africa, Zambia, and China, the most common destination at the moment is Venezuela. Part of a show of solidarity with the revolutionary social change occurring in Venezuela and the growing anti-neo-liberal movement of the region, Cuba has sent thousands of professionals to the country in addition to hosting thousands of Venezuelan patients and students.<sup>209</sup> I found that Cubans range in their opinion about this exchange from believing it to be an important strategic and moral move on Cuba's

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<sup>208</sup> As part of the 1996 U.S. Cuban Migration Act, Cubans can enter into a lottery and be selected to migrate to the United States.

<sup>209</sup> As of the April 2005 agreement, Cuba plans to send up to 30,000 health care professionals, train 40,000 doctors and 5,000 health technology specialists in Venezuela in addition to 10,000 doctors and nurses in Cuba itself. Cuba also committed to surgically treating 100,000 Venezuelans with visual disorders (*Granma*, April 29, 2005).

part to resenting the government's willingness to remove badly needed professionals from the island for *la política*.<sup>210</sup> Regardless, being sent on a mission is perceived to be an opportunity to improve one's standard of living as those skilled workers who leave earn more than they would in Cuba and have access to consumer goods abroad.

A third means for professionals to earn foreign currency is to provide their services illegally. For instance, in a case where there might be a long wait to be seen by a specialist, someone in need of this medical service may offer to pay the doctor in dollars in order to be seen immediately. This is, of course, completely illegal and, while I did not encounter physicians who clandestinely practiced their profession in exchange for dollars, there were stories of this occurring as part of the process of *conseguir*. Perhaps had I needed medical attention, I would have come into direct contact with such 'doctors for hire' as I certainly encountered academic professionals who exchanged their skills and assistance for dollars. It is not surprising that, at the same time that there is a black market for goods, there is a black market for services and professionals are involved in this exchange in spite of the risk.

One of the reasons why this is socially risky and, indeed, is part of the predicament in which professionals find themselves, is that those educated by the revolution in many ways belong to the revolution. The more educated one is, the greater one's social obligation. They are indebted to the revolution for the opportunity to achieve their 'cultural level' and, as such, are expected to show their gratitude through personal

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<sup>210</sup> This translates as 'politics' and, in this case, is used to express frustration and dissatisfaction with politics being so infused into daily life and requiring such sacrifices.

sacrifice. Given the history of the flight of the professional class and its devastating impact on young revolutionary society, they occupy a sensitive position, one that has become rife with contradictions and constraints during the Special Period. At a time when education brings fewer material rewards, professionals are subject to more restrictions than non-professionals as evidenced by their exclusion first from those who are eligible for self-employment all together, then from those who can charge for providing the services in which they were trained.

While it can be argued that their material reward has never corresponded with their level of education and expertise, the distinction is that dollarization has elevated those with far less intellectual capital. It is in the contrast that the injustice lays. However, at the same time, they are more likely to have legal access to the coveted opportunity to travel abroad and experience life outside of Cuba, even if it is in places often as poor if not poorer than Cuba. In combination with the respect that education still garners, such privileges are weighed against the distortions of the current period as professionals seek solutions to their particular predicament.

### ***Coming of Age in the 'Special Period'***

The generation that came of age during the Revolution, in addition to contending with the insecurity and deprivation of the Special Period, the devaluation of their accomplishments in the context of dollarization, and the rise in racism, have had to parent the generation of Cubans that has no first hand experience of revolutionary idealism and opportunity discussed in Chapters Three and Four. Young people who were in their

adolescence or early twenties at the onset of the Special Period have had to contend with an entirely different social and economic landscape than that of their parents. In a Cuba that has been left unprotected on the global market, the state has been less able to take care of its citizens' material needs, constituting a breach in the social contract.<sup>211</sup>

Though well informed about the gains of their parents and the benefits of the Revolution, for many the relevance of this struggle is lost in the context of their first-hand experience of inequality and restricted access to the global consumer market. In a relatively short span of time, the rewards for prioritizing the daily struggle for the survival and, in some cases prosperity over revolutionary ideals have become quite significant. The young people in this study, while they might respect the history of the revolution, do not communicate a sense of ownership of or belonging to it. This by no means signifies that there are not youth who choose to be active in the existing political framework or are moved to preserve and protect the government as it is. However, such focused, enthusiastic young revolutionaries failed to make their way into this sample; rather, those who were struggling with mapping out and executing a plan for their lives in uncharted waters were predominant. For them, the issues of contracting opportunities, police harassment, constraints on economic mobility within Cuba, the difficulty in migrating, and racial discrimination were most pressing.

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<sup>211</sup> This contract essentially states that the basic needs of all members of the society are well taken care of in exchange for their participation in the building of a revolutionary society. Concretely, this participation includes volunteer work, organizing and attending rallies, being active in the mass organizations, prioritizing the society's needs over personal interests in choosing a career, standing guard as part of the neighborhood watch system, and reporting anyone who one suspects of less than/counter-revolutionary behavior.

One outstanding occasion in which I was an observer-participant in an intergenerational discussion on the revolution occurred in Leticia and Isabel's family home, a wooden structure built by their grandfather, a successful tailor, in the '40s. The house is now in serious disrepair, but is graced by beautiful antique wooden furniture acquired before the Revolution and provides shelter for and/or is frequented by Isabel, her husband and two late adolescent children, David, Leticia, and two other cousins.<sup>212</sup> I went to the house with the intention of meeting informally with David, a Rasta who had been jailed and had his locks shaved and rotates between the homes of his aunt, mother, and grandmother. Arriving in after to a house still sleepy from the siesta where I could hear reggae music playing from the backyard, I was delighted that what began as a recruitment effort ended up in a lively intergenerational interchange about race, education, and the rewards and constraints of revolutionary society captured in the field note of July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2004 excerpted below:<sup>213</sup>

*David began [our talk] by saying that his beliefs are heavily influenced by his Jamaican ancestry, that Jamaicans are Africans. He started talking about being Rasta, his belief in Africa as the mother of civilization, that we came from kings, that everyone in the Bible is black, that Europeans got their knowledge from Africans and now hide this truth, and other elements that comprise your basic Rastafarian/black nationalism ideology. He's quite talkative and animated, completely comfortable expounding upon/monologueing about his truth without interruption. But, I had to interrupt and ask where and how he came to this understanding...he said that these are things you're not taught in school, that all they teach you is the history of black people since slavery, since their arrival to Cuba, and not the history of Africa and its role as the cradle of civilization. He said that they only teach you what they want you to know and that they cultivate in students a hatred for the U.S. by drilling the history of the relationship between Cuba and the U.S. At this point, Leticia came and joined the conversation and*

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<sup>212</sup> Indeed, emblematic of the tremendous contradictions in Cuba, one afternoon, one of these cousins who lives from illegal activity was playing video games on a lap top computer on a beautiful wooden table that has to be covered in plastic because the holes in the roof are so severe that when it rains outside, it rains inside.

<sup>213</sup> See de la Fuente (2000) for his survey that found stark generational differences re: Cubans' commitment to the Revolution.

*clarified that they don't teach them to hate the people of the U.S., that there is a distinction between the actions of the government and the population. Isabel seemed to be in agreement with David in terms of the extent of race based oppression that has existed and the general lack of knowledge about Africa, that Africa is always represented as the dark continent. Though David recognized that Cuba is a society that has maintained African cultural traditions, he emphasized that there is a concerted effort on the part of whites to keep knowledge of Africa from black people. When I asked whether or not they thought that their white neighbors actually had this knowledge and were keeping this from them, he conceded that they are ignorant as well.*

The course of this discussion about education quickly revealed a tension between the generations. Namely, the resistance on the part of some young people to believe that pursuing an education is worthwhile in post-Soviet Union Cuba, given that they have witnessed their family members and people in society at large suffer material deprivations in spite of their education. Many of those who had experienced the revolutionary process in the early years and/or who saw the constraints that their parents faced in pre-Revolutionary Cuba were critical of the youth's lack of enthusiasm or outright unwillingness to pursue education and legitimate, though poorly remunerated, forms of employment. As I observed:

*This [discussion about African history] brought out a tension in the family and between generations that has to do with David not pursuing an education and Leticia and Isabel not being in support of his choice. His arguments were basically that he doesn't need a degree to have knowledge, that he pursues this knowledge on his own through reading the Bible and whatever other texts he can get his hands on (he brought out his grandmother's 1883 (?) copy of [a religious book called] Prophets...and said that there was a lot of knowledge in there that he can't access because it's in English) and meditation, and that in order to study what he'd like to study he'd have to travel and this is impossible to do under the current system. He is clearly frustrated by his mother who, according to him, has a degree in physical education and isn't interested in opening her mind (she ain't got no knowledge a self as Muhammed Ali would say), that she wants him to get an education but her education hasn't freed her from her ignorance. My point was that you have to start somewhere, which got an approving nod from C...There is the sense that Leticia and others of her generation and the one before her believe that David's generation's frustration and desire to leave is due to*

*ignorance of what Cuba was like before, what it's like in other places, and a generalized disillusionment characteristic of youth. They weren't exactly screaming at each other but he did raise his voice and she was talking over him and out the side of her mouth at points. At time, points were punctuated by the sucking of teeth and 'atiendame, atiendame, atiendame [pay attention to me, pay attention to me, pay attention to me]' was a near mantra at one moment.*

While education continues to be free and employment guaranteed, the specifics in the implementation of these mandates have a significant impact on their value to the population. There appears to have been a certain pressure on young people to pursue the career that would most benefit the revolution, rather than the one they might be most interested in (see Chapter Three). However, with the flight of so many professionals in the 60s and 70s and the economic support to expand social programs, there was a greater range of opportunities. Now, there is more competition and, according to one participant, there is a lot of pressure to do well so that you can continue in a desired field; furthermore, she added, students who have the best contacts have greater choice than those who are most qualified.

For those young people who want to conform to social and familial expectations in addition to pursuing their own interests, higher education is not as accessible as it once was and as some older participants believe it to be. There are limited numbers of slots available for particular majors and each course of study is not available to be undertaken every year. Thus, it was common for a young person to be studying one thing because what they really wanted to pursue wasn't available, to be waiting for their major to be offered, to not be able to work in what they were trained<sup>214</sup>, or to get discouraged and

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<sup>214</sup> Jobs in certain fields such as education and medicine or other priority economic sectors such as tourism, science, industry, or areas favored by foreign investors, are guaranteed, while jobs in industries hardest hit

settle on a job that doesn't require such education. Azicri's remarks support this as he found that, "being admitted to a university and being able to study in the field of one's choice is more difficult, and finding a job in one's field after graduation is sometimes impossible... In March 1997, when 18,250 positions in higher education for the next school year were announced, the annual academic competition among college-bound students began... The time when university studies were open to almost anyone interested in a college education has gone; circumstances have changed drastically... Decreasing opportunities for college graduates and the need to reduce expenditures have forced the regime to limit access to higher education" (Azicri 2000: 91). Reminding us that, in the case of Cuba, all is relative, Azicri goes on to say that, "still, the number of professionals trained under the revolution produced the ratio of 1,050 researchers per one million inhabitants, a figure comparable to those in industrialized societies" (ibid).

The other dilemma that young people confront when considering their future is the predicament of the professional mentioned in the previous section. At the same time that there is this difficulty in pursuing a desirable course of study and finding employment in one's field, there is the issue of most professional compensation being limited to a peso salary. According to a 1994-95 study conducted by the Center for Youth Studies in Cuba, young people were still biased toward professional work due to its status, but workers aged twenty-five to thirty feel underutilized in their jobs and 71 percent of unemployed young people felt that there was no economic motivation to work. A trend of young people being supported by their families and engaging in the informal economy

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by the lack of raw materials such as the mining, chemical, and geology industries, are few (Azicri 2000: 91).

developed (Azicri 2000: 92). Young people see that higher education does not allow one to reap the material rewards available to those working as unskilled laborers in the tourist sector. Furthermore, the predominance of '*socio-ismo*' compromises the legitimacy of meritocracy, further diminishing young people's chances of accessing opportunity through education alone.

### ***The Fate of Political Idealism in '00s: a view through generations***

In interviewing those who came of age during the early '60s and '70s, a time when the Cuban Revolution was a triumphant site in the global struggle against imperialism, colonialism, and white supremacy, their responses to questions about that time often included commentary on the fate of this early energetic and hopeful period. Perhaps as evidence of a tendency to valorize the past, perhaps a commentary on the realism that comes with age and maturity, perhaps the result of the most recent severe economic crisis and turn that the revolution and, indeed, the world have taken, or perhaps an indication that the face of radicalism has shifted, for some the political dynamism of the past stands in contrast to the dormancy of the present. For those who came of age during the 'Special Period', who have memory of neither the harshness of pre-revolutionary inequalities nor the effervescence of a society in rapid transformation, the activities and organizations that captivated their parents' generation appear to be met with apathy an/or a certain disaffection if not a subtle contempt.

With the exception of Leonarda who attributed the fall in volunteer work to a lack of materials and poor coordination, for those who I spoke with who noted a decline in active

and enthusiastic participation in the mass organizations identified the Special Period as what marked this shift. As Melvina reminisced about the festive environment of the countryside during the mobilization, singing the songs and recalling how she and the man who would become her husband met during the 10 million ton harvest, she mused about what a happy time it was, how it was a healthy life, healthier than now. According to her, at that time the revolution needed the support of the masses so there were a lot of parades and meetings, unlike now. When asked when this changed, she says, “this was after the fall of the socialist bloc when we were in the pure, pure, pure part of the Special Period and everything ended. A lot of tourism came in and it was very different, a lot changed, drugs came in, tourism, the people with family abroad began having contact with them, they began to come, singers and performers could come, before no foreign artists came to sing, and now there were more artists from abroad, it’s totally different. Before, it was more pure.”

Eugenia elaborated on the impact of the economic crisis on the revolutionary activities, holding the measures taken during the Special Period responsible for the lackluster approach to activities that before were examples of solidarity and revolutionary vigor.

She specifically identifies the rise in inequality that has come about due to the depenalization of the dollar and implementation of the dual economy as the culprit:

E: Yes, I belong to the FMC, the CDR, before I belonged to [militantes], the people who do exercises for combat... The activities aren’t the same as before, they’ve fallen a bit.

A: Since when?

E: Before, the activities were more...now, there isn’t unity in the blocks, people have a lot of problems and...you see a lot of things that aren’t ...because, like when you’re going to do an activity, the CDRs decorate the block beautifully, and all of them aren’t equal.

A: When did this begin?

E: With the problem of the divisa [dollar], the shopping [stores]. It was totally different. Those who have divisa can go to the stores, those who don't can't...until '93, we were really, well, everything has changed because not everyone receives divisa. Some businesses pay in divisa, some don't. The tourists give money and people can earn \$15 to \$10 a day in tips. Everyone can't. Some people rob, here if you wear a chain, they take it because of greed. The youth are looking...here and there to try to build a beautiful house...those who leave the country [it] is not because of the [revolution], it's ambition, they're looking for money.... Those who are doing missions earn 50 dollars a month over their salary and the money in the country they're in, they bring televisions, washing machines, refrigerators, CD players. We're not all equal, we can't be equal...since this began, we're not the same...I'm a revolutionary...everything I have, the television, the car, was given to me by Raúl, by the Revolution. The people want more. The more they have, the more they want. For example, the military workers, they retire at 45 and have their pension of 450 pesos, then begin to do another job, they travel...they don't leave jobs for others...here there is too much greed, everyone wants more and more and more. In this country, a [great] control over things exists. In my house, I live alone and in others, ten people live on one *tarjeta*...I love Cuba and the Revolution, but I want to travel but everything is in *divisa*...now, there is the division of the *divisas*. There are kids who go to school with a backpack, with their uniform, and there are others who have old uniforms or don't have school shoes. Before, everyone was the same, they had the same pair of shoes. Now, they go to school with a watch, with this, with that...while others don't and I say that things aren't like before.

For Purcival, it was the deprivation and desperation of the Special Period that brought

him to a place of bitterness about the failure of the revolution to bring about prosperity.

Considering the enthusiasm of the '60s the result of naiveté and inexperience, his sense

of betrayal as well as frustration with life in the revolution as he begins his 60s is more

salient and thus overtakes any nostalgia about past involvement in the revolutionary

process. Indeed, the hard times of the '90s seem to have diminished if not erased the

value of prior successes and opportunities such that he initially represented the change as

occurring prior to the Special Period.

P: The triumph of the revolution came and it seemed like it was a beautiful thing. I thought...I would have been abroad now because my father was going to send me to Jamaica to study, but I didn't want to go because it was so beautiful...At that time, it looked really beautiful, we were fooled a little, things changed a lot.

A: So, you told me that things changed. Do you remember the stage, the moment when you realized that things were changing, that it wasn't like you thought?

P: It wasn't like I thought, from '80 on, I had more experience and was older and could think more.

A: So, did you participate in other revolutionary organizations?

P: No, only the militia.

A: And what did you do with the militia?

P: They did *guardia*, they went on the weekends, we did mobilizations- military exercises- and all of that...

A: And you sang and had your march songs...

P: All of that, I liked that then but later I saw things change and I quit all of that.

A: When did you see things change?

P: The things changed in eighty, well, really in '90 with the Special Period, it's not the same, there wasn't oil, there wasn't anything, you didn't find anything, I ate very little. There were always blackouts, like the ones you see that we have now, it was worse then. We spent 24 hours without electricity. I got very skinny, I looked like...in the early '90s there wasn't any food that I liked, I like meat but there wasn't any, everything was bad, bad and I didn't eat. You had to invent something to eat, there wasn't chicken, meat, [and] people began raising animals in their backyards, like pigs, in order to feed themselves.

A: So this was in the beginning of the '90s, and before then...

P: I remember that when I began to work I earned 176 pesos and...things were cheap...I was married and had a daughter and my wife [didn't work] and I gave her money, things were cheap, not like now. A beer that costs 10 pesos was .60 cents then. The price started going up, first it was 60, then 80, then 1 peso and now it costs 10.

As Purcival went on to discuss his frustrations around other changes such as the elimination of overtime, he revealed that the volunteer work that he performs such as hurricane repair work in Havana is not truly voluntary, rather it's what is referred to as '*oblivoluntario*'. This means that the consequences of not participating are such that participation might as well be mandatory. He indicated that a certain unspoken coercion was exercised in achieving mass participation in the revolutionary process as a whole because employment depended upon it. Perhaps Purcival was disgruntled prior to the economic crisis and the events after 1989 just hammered the last nail of the coffin of his revolutionary zeal and, when pressed to recall details, this most recent and intense period of suffering loomed most large though he might have long been dissatisfied with revolutionary life.

For Carmen whose father had belonged to the Communist Party of the '50s and whose family was known as revolutionary, the Special Period did not lead her to cease her activism. On the contrary, it seems that as a community leader, she was in the thick of things, trying to find solutions for the many problems of a population that witnessed increasing desperation. She recalls: "Yes, things were very difficult and a lot of people didn't understand how to resist. They abandoned the country in rafts, swimming, though there are sharks in the sea, because they felt desperate...it was difficult, there wasn't anything to eat, we washed our clothes with salt and baking soda and a plant called *mabita*. A moment arrived when there was so much need that there wasn't soap, shampoo, things to wash clothes and our bodies...this was very hard, oooo...I was the delegate of the *Poder Popular*, and had to talk a lot about what was happening, about the population...we had to learn how to invent, it was really, really hard...[but] I had a lot of faith in the government..." However, not everyone is as committed and energetic as Carmen and as *la lucha* has called *conciencia* to a duel in the daily lives of so many Cubans, the speeches, rallies, volunteer work, and posts in the mass organizations seem to have minimal genuine appeal to the majority of participants.

The material and psychological devastation of the Special Period was brought on not solely by the loss of the socialist bloc as a trading partner and protector, but also the consequence of heightened U.S. economic aggression. The Cuban people were called upon once again to brace themselves for the intensity of life under siege and, as one man in his 50s who had participated in the literacy campaign and worked for the revolution

put it, he just wanted to grow old without the constant threat of being under attack. His statement reflects a weariness with sacrifice and the unrelenting lash of politics, perhaps an inevitable consequence of the 'new man' becoming old in a world that is in some ways more hostile to justice and equality.

There also seems to be indications of a changing understanding of what constitutes a 'revolutionary' rather than the diminishing of a revolutionary spirit itself. For one, I found that there is a perception that the motivations of those who are often at the forefront of activities and organizations are primarily self-serving. While there was likely always some overlap in self-interest and political involvement, those who commented on the current situation seem to greet their more publicly political fellow Cubans with a certain distrust. Also, the old mechanisms of empowerment and social change have understandably become institutionalized such that their ability to be vehicles for radicalism within the country is likely limited. And, as Melvina observed, the introduction of tourism has seriously altered the social and economic environment such that people, particularly the youth, are now more exposed to a world of goods and ideas outside of Cuba and the socialist bloc.

One prime example of the impact of the global flow of ideas and information on conceptions of revolutionary action and character is the introduction of Rastafari in Cuba. It is important to include in this discussion of political participation and the generational divisions that have emerged the comments of descendant Rastas who came of age during the Special Period regarding revolutionary society. Hansing (2001) notes that the

Revolution has come to symbolize Babylon to some Cuban Rastas due to the overwhelming role of the state and its imposition of considerable restraints on the individual. The two that were involved in this research, David and Deunes respected the revolution's legacy, but did raise important questions regarding its role in the lives of Cubans. For instance, both mentioned that their families benefited from the revolution's opening up of opportunities to study and elimination of racial inequality on an official level and that their parents had been active in the revolutionary process, but they themselves did not participate in the daily activities of the political process.

In David's case, he attributes his departure from the path of his mother and her generation who are critical of the choices that he has made, namely becoming Rasta and not taking advantage of educational opportunities,<sup>215</sup> to living in a different time and place. As evident from the excerpts above, he finds his family members who don't understand his path to be ignorant, that they along with other black people have benefited from the revolution in that they have a better life than before and thus the system has worked for them. However, their advancement was within ideological confines that he has moved beyond. He is not against the Revolution or the system and actually spoke at length and with respect about Castro's ability to use the United State's own laws against it, that he was able to liberate Cuba from the United States. But, his exposure to Rastafari teachings and decision to follow this spiritual path has had a tremendous influence on the way that he views the rest of Cuban society. For instance, he finds fault in the educational system's failure to teach the pre-slavery history of black people, instead, he remarked, it indoctrinates students into communism and the revolution. As indicative of his

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<sup>215</sup> When I returned in 2005, he had actually enrolled in the continuing education program for youth.

dissatisfaction with the limitations that revolutionary ideology and conformity place upon Cuban radical thought and action, David says that he does not blame the teachers themselves, that they just teach what it is they're taught. They get a degree in something and just teach within that restricted space with no interest in more profound knowledge.

Unlike so many other youth that I encountered who did not raise the option of social or political involvement as a solution to their frustration about the limitations of the society, David actually articulated his view of what his role in contemporary society was to be. In discussing this, he said that the police's job is to keep order and that Rastafari do the same thing but through counsel. He seems to have a vision of himself as a healer in the society as people seek his counsel. He envisions his contribution to revolutionary society to be as a guide, providing his fellows with an alternate perspective on daily problems, many of which stem from materialism and dysfunctional gender relations. Thus, while he was not involved in the structures erected by and within the revolution to serve as vehicles through which Cubans demonstrate a certain social commitment, and indeed was somewhat marginal as he had recently been released from a year-long period of imprisonment for questionable charges, he nonetheless was articulating an investment in addressing the concerns of the society.

Deunes, the other research participant who is Rasta, identifies himself as a revolutionary but has reinterpreted the meaning of the term such that it conflicts with the way in which it is most often used and understood in Cuban society. Someone who is said to be 'muy revolucionario' deeply believes in the Cuban Revolution and its ideals, often participates

actively in the mass organizations, and is staunchly anti-imperialist. This revolutionary views the Cuban Revolution as the best route to realize the goal of a just society. In Deunes's view, revolution is defined as and through change. Since change is something he believes in strongly and enacts in his life, he views himself as a revolutionary.<sup>216</sup> What is most interesting about this perspective is that he roots it in his identity as a Rasta as Rastafarians reject the ills of society in pursuit of transforming it to a more peaceful, spiritual human existence. Rastas do seek and support social justice and thus must not have allegiance to a system that condones, perpetuates, or fosters injustice.

While Deunes acknowledged the positive changes enacted by the Revolution and was very integrated into and connected with his fellow Cubans, also viewing himself as someone others seek out for counsel, he did not participate in the official political organizations. He had a certain impatience with the reluctance of those Cubans who were considered to be revolutionary in the official sense to recognize the failures of the system and, as the specter of comparison is always looming, to cast North American society as the devil's spawn. Recall from Chapter Five that in a long argument between he and his aunt to which I was privy and in which his aunt was enthusiastically listing the evils of U.S. society, denying any of the problems that Cuba faces, particularly those that were not directly related to U.S. aggression, he became quite exasperated with what he termed

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<sup>216</sup> Interestingly, this idea was reiterated by Ariel Fernández, one of the pioneers of Cuban hip hop, during a lecture he gave in February 2007. Pointing to generational conflicts and racism as responsible for the popularity and content of Cuban hip hop, he said, "We were trying to take back the spirit of the early years of the Revolution...we need to say the truth, we have people talking to you all day and telling lies...I am a revolutionary, a true revolutionary, no one can tell me what my level is...the huge problem with the revolution is that it wasn't deep enough...any politician knows that if you bring everything to somebody, he's free and doesn't need you anymore so at some point you need these people to depend on you...like they say, you give a man a fish he eats for a day, you teach a man to fish, he always has something to eat. The Revolution didn't teach people how to fish."

her blindness to what was going on in Cuba. It was not her support of the Revolution, it was the rigidity of her thinking and refusal to move away from such polarizations in the face of the obvious that seemed to disturb him.

This frustration, in addition to a sentiment akin to disgust surfaced when the topic of the CDRs and other mass organizations came up. While Deunes did recognize that some of the neighborhood activities, for instance the celebration of children's birthdays, were beneficial to the community, he was not interested in participating in such organizations. He expressed a certain distrust of those who espouse revolutionary rhetoric as they often fail to provide a balanced representation, minimizing or denying the real conflicts and contradictions that exist in contemporary society. Adhering to what he essentially considered to be a dishonest position, in addition to being a hotbed of gossiping, he was unable to take them seriously and only participated in neighborhood activities organized by the CDR begrudgingly, if at all.

Of course, the perspectives of these two young Rasta men are inseparable from that aspect of Rasta that embodies a countercultural identity as well as the fact that men with dreadlocks have been targeted for police harassment and incarceration by Cuban authorities for reasons discussed elsewhere. However, among those youth observed and interviewed who appeared to conform more closely to Cuban aesthetic, religious/spiritual, and cultural norms, there was a marked absence of enthusiasm for involvement in mass organizations and activities such as political parades. Furthermore, with the exception of two participants, none of the children of people in the middle age

category were reported to be active either. One young woman who is a college graduate and is completing her third year of mandatory social service introduced me to the term '*oblivoluntario*' and participates in activities only when not doing so would have negative professional consequences. Another young woman who has family in the United States identifies others' insincerity evident in their wanting to befriend her because they think she has more resources as the reason she restricts her social circle and thus does not get involved in more public life.

Indeed, participants mentioned a growing greed, self-interest, and materialism as among the recent serious problems confronting Cuban society. These problems are perceived to be rapidly changing its fabric as they threaten to bankrupt the moral foundation of the revolution. With such ills sparing very few Cubans in the contemporary context where inequality has been on the rise and perhaps the consequences of clientelism are more pronounced, the question of whether or not the official, approved, and institutionalized mechanisms for activism meet the needs of the next generation. If it can be said that the revolutionary enthusiasm and participation of even those who came of age during the revolution has waxed and waned according to whether or not the revolution is meeting their material and psychological needs, what can be expected of the youth who may value justice and equality but not have the same allegiance to the current interpretation of what is revolutionary? What might evolve from the observation and rejection of a dysfunctional silence? What course will the impulse to forge a path toward social justice take? What and who will be revolutionary for this and the next generation of Cubans?

### ***Race and Racism in the Special Period***

While all Cubans experienced hardship immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the declining equality resulting from the reforms has placed Cubans of African descent at a particular disadvantage (de la Fuente, 2001a; Pérez-Sarduy and Stubbs, 2000; McGarrity, 1992; Mesa-Lago, 1998). Less likely to have relatives abroad who send remittances, to be hired in the tourist industry or to have homes that can be converted into lodging and restaurants for tourists, people of African descent do not have equal access to foreign currency in an economy where people need dollars to purchase many basic goods. Researchers have found that these circumstances have led to an overrepresentation of Cubans of African descent in illegal activities such as prostitution, petty theft, and street hustling and a resurgence of racism in a society that had made significant progress in eliminating structural barriers to social inequality (Davidson, 1996; de la Fuente, 2001b). Such conditions prompted Alden Knight to proclaim that he will no longer perform Nicolas Guillen's poem "Tengo" (I Have) because it represents what was achieved in Cuba for Black and poor people but has now been lost. He states that, "...when "I Have" can again in all honesty be performed, then we shall have achieved again what we had by the late 1960s, which were years of poverty but equality (Perez Sarduy and Stubbs, 2000: 134).

With the depenalization of the dollar and the development of tourism, Cuba's social division into those who had dollars and those who did not was racialized for various reasons. For one, remittances, officially recorded to be in the billions, have become the second largest source of foreign currency. The majority of those who have left Cuba are

of (more) European descent and thus those people on the island receiving this monetary relief and participating in the dollar economy are largely white. A study in Cuba found that only 5 to 10 percent of black Cubans receive remittances, compared to 30 to 40 percent of whites. Furthermore, if it is indeed accurate that black people have been more invested in the Revolution, this low number might also be reflecting the fact that those who equated loyalty to the Revolution with disconnection from family abroad are also at a disadvantage (Eckstein 1987: 342).

This has had repercussions beyond the unequal distribution of consumer goods. With the legalization of certain kinds of private businesses, primarily restaurants (*paladares*) and lodgings (*casas particulares*) geared toward foreign tourists and operated out of individual homes, people of European descent who receive remittances have been able to invest it in such money making ventures. Not coincidentally, it is white Cubans who disproportionately live in houses that can be more easily converted into guesthouses because of pre-revolutionary housing patterns that have not been successfully eradicated.<sup>217</sup>

Furthermore, the tourist industry, the largest earner of foreign currency, has been notorious for practicing the policy of *buena presencia*, meaning that one has to have a 'good appearance' in order to get a job in a hotel, a travel agency or a tour company. Cuba, like other countries plagued by a history of white supremacy, has a legacy of privileging those who lean toward a more European aesthetic and thus people of more

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<sup>217</sup> De la Fuente's (2001) argues that racism manifests itself most strongly in the areas in which the Revolution has been less successful.

African descent, by virtue of being black, cannot possess a ‘good appearance’. There have also been cases in which the foreign companies who have invested in Cuba through joint ventures in the tourist industry have insisted on hiring only white Cubans. However, given that white standards of beauty are deeply embedded in Cuban culture, it is plausible that such practices are quite homegrown.<sup>218</sup>

Effectively excluded from the legitimate jobs in the tourist industry, people of more African descent have come to be disproportionately represented in the more public aspects of the underground economy such as *jinetismo*. Cuba has fast become one of the most popular destinations for economizing sex tourists seeking to fulfill their tropical fantasies with women and men of African descent (Davidson 1996). Thus, the most visible workers in the sex industry are those prostitutes, pimps and hustlers who are in the street looking for tourists whose racism will be indulged in exchange for foreign currency.<sup>219</sup> Such circumstances serve to reinforce the Negrophobia and racial prejudice that Cubans harbored but allegedly only impacted people on an individual rather than a systemic level prior to the crisis. Indeed, the introduction of the tourist industry provides a prime example of how racial inequality functions in Cuba in the context of the crisis. The more intractable, ‘revolution resistant’ elements of the race/class system such as housing patterns,<sup>220</sup> racial stereotyping and individual prejudice are nurtured with the

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<sup>218</sup> For instance, the persistence of racialized terminology such as *pele bueno/malo*, and the absence of black people in the visual media. See Godfried (2000) for a list of Negrophobic terms/expressions.

<sup>219</sup> Light or white Cubans too are engaged in *jinetismo* but it may be in a less public arena. Indeed, their whiteness makes their activities less visible or subject to such stigmatization.

<sup>220</sup> Due to the Revolution’s failure to improve in the area of housing, people of African descent are more concentrated on the outskirts of the cities in ‘barrios marginales’ where there are fewer services and worse housing stock (de la Fuente 2001).

movement toward market relations, taking on a more exaggerated form and leading to more profound consequences such as increased racial profiling and police harassment.

As stated earlier, chief among the complaints about the new changes is that Cubans are treated as trespassers in their own country. Even if they were to have the economic means to patronize certain hotels, restaurants, and clubs, they are banned from spaces reserved for tourists. This practice, in conjunction with the racialization of *jineterismo*, leads to racial profiling targeting black men and women. My first personal experience of this was when I attempted to enter a café in an area of Santiago frequented by tourists.

Accompanied by another black American woman, we were stopped by police officers, asked for our carnet,<sup>221</sup> and allowed to enter only when language made it clear that we were not Cuban women. Once inside, I realized that there were indeed black Cuban women patronizing the establishment, but they were in the company of men who appeared to be ‘johns’ or pépes [people who solicit sex workers]. I have no idea whether or not they were asked for their carnet or if the fact that they were accompanied by foreign men secured a hassle-free entrance. What is clear, however, is that the division between foreigners and Cubans is not just economically, but racially marked.

Another stark example of the racialized policing of public space occurred in Santiago’s central park, ‘Parque Céspedes’. Though the park was often crowded with Cuban families, groups of young people, and couples, it was also frequented by tourists, in part because one of the largest hotels in the city sits at its northeast corner. As such, there were a fair share of *jineteros* working there on any given night. It was also a place I spent

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<sup>221</sup> The photo identification card carried by all Cuban citizens.

time observing and meeting friends, some of whom were young black men, some of whom have dreadlocks, some of whom were looking to meet tourists, but most of whom were bored and found the park to be one of the only communal spaces to hang out with their 'crew'. As discussed earlier, police target men with dreadlocks due to the phenomenon of the '*rasta moda*'. The daily lives of both Rasta participants in this research have been seriously impacted by the attention that is the consequence of their choice to be Rasta in a society that associates Rasta and dreadlocks with drug trafficking and other illegalities. I witnessed this harassment first hand on several occasions, but one evening in the park in particular I recall the same police officer coming around and asking them for their carnet three times in under an hour—realizing that I did not have a carnet but a passport, he didn't continue to ask me after the first time. Disgusted, my friends eventually decided to vacate the park.

It is not only those individuals easily singled out because of the choices that they make around appearance that suffer the consequences of a climate in which black people are increasingly associated with crime and illicit activity. Those black people who at least overtly conform to social expectations are also subjected to a racialization empowered by shifting economic conditions. For instance, because the employment environment is more competitive, racism and other forms of discrimination have a greater impact and it appears that the problem of racial bias may be particularly acute for those entering the workplace. Those jobs that pay in dollars are highly coveted and, according to some participants, less available to black Cubans. For instance, in explaining why her daughter did not pursue a career in chemistry, Melvina said that the best jobs for chemists were in

the brewery, candy factories and two or three of other industries where they didn't hire blacks in those positions precisely because they paid in dollars. She didn't want her daughter to end up a hairdresser with a degree in chemistry. This perception, possibly based on observed trends, a singular experience, rumor, or some combination of the three, speaks to the anxiety about the significance of current and future transformations for people of African descent.

Deunes' perspective as a Rasta who in some ways has conformed to social expectations, primarily through maintaining a state job in a produce store and remaining committed to close relationships with neighbors and family, is particularly illuminating. One afternoon while we were discussing the problems of the dual economy, he said that black people are left out of the tourist industry and the dollar economy. Though he didn't have a clear explanation for why that was, when I asked if it was because of racism, he said as if he was disabusing me of the idea that Cuba is a racial democracy, "Racism does still exist here. It's not that there is any direct rejection or abuse, but indifference...If I go to a store, they say there's nothing there or they don't have what I need...If someone who looks like me, a black man, but doesn't have dreadlocks goes into the store, they don't have what he needs either. But, when a white man goes into the store, the clerk says 'oh, let me see what we have'" (Field note, June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2005). Thus, his perception is that discrimination is an obstacle to black people getting their needs met regardless of appearance, that their blackness itself would deter clerks from attempting to help them.

There are several participants who recounted recent incidents of discrimination and manifestations of racist attitudes. Isabel who holds a supervisory position in a communications firm that is a joint venture with France observes that it is not only her blackness, but her being a black *woman* that impacts her work experience. She is one of the heads of her department, most of her co-workers are women and says, “You see that they don’t like to see a woman as a leader and worse a black woman, it’s not open but you can always tell that it’s there. Women always have to defend themselves to move forward and you see this in the overwhelming majority of jobs in Cuba (98 percent). You always have to fight because they always want to put in the white woman, the little pretty woman, the one whose father is so and so. You see how many well-educated young black women there are and you don’t see them in the best jobs.”<sup>222</sup>

Melvina’s comments concur: “the discrimination persists and blacks have to fight against this. For instance, when a black woman with the best marks loses a job at the airport to a white woman with a lower mark, the black woman has to write the Party and fight for the position. The same is true for jobs in the beer and rum factory that pay in dollars. And, when a black person has such a job, they are harassed so that they leave and a white person can take the job. With the joint ventures, the foreign companies wanted white Cubans and they removed blacks from the job. This was not Cuba’s fault, they were in at a disadvantage because the economy was so bad. There are the ‘TRD’ stores that are Raúl’s stores and they hire blacks there, they think that stores that are Cuban should hire black workers.”<sup>223</sup> Caridad, in comparing the presence of black people in retail across

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<sup>222</sup> Author interview with Isabel on July 30<sup>th</sup>, 2004 in Santiago.

<sup>223</sup> There are three different companies that manage dollar stores in Cuba: TRD, Pan-America, and Cubalse.

time, reflects, “Before the Revolution, in the stores, there weren’t people of color working. After the triumph of the Revolution, there were more than there are now. The state can’t dominate everything so what happens is that friends hire their friends and whites have more personal relationships with each other...white people always think of you as black regardless of how they treat you, they always think that they’re superior. There are neighbors who don’t like to see a person hold their head high.”<sup>224</sup>

Within these stories is a trend suggesting that there seems to be a resistance—or at least the perception of one— on the part of many Cubans to accept Black people who do not conform to racist stereotypes. At the same time that there is officially equal access to the society’s resources, a person of African descent who is competent, successful and unwilling to adopt a subservient stance or fulfill other common notions of blackness appears to present a threat to the dominant racial order and thus encounters problems. Some participants were quick to say that other people of African descent are often guilty of enforcing this aspect of the social order.

For instance, Hortencia relayed a story about how she not only experienced the wrath of a coworker who accused her of pretending to be ‘refined’, but that her Black supervisor also treated her with resentment and hostility because she dressed in nice clothes and was well liked by her students. She went on to say,

I remember reading Malcolm X and the part about his sister Ella being a proud black woman and this was a good thing. Cubans don’t like this, they think this is vanity. This brings a lot of problems at work and with friendships because they can’t say just anything to you...It could be that

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<sup>224</sup> Author interview with Caridad on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2004 in Santiago.

jamaicanos were proud of their race, why not? They were black people who weren't crude, uneducated, who didn't swear or steal, so they may have thought that 'we're black, but at least we're black people who study, think and do things in life'... It's a tradition here to think that black people have all of these negative traits. They always expect a black person to be crude and ignorant and so when you're not like that, they say you're pretending. My mother said that she had the same experiences, that you have to be poorly dressed, ignorant, dirty, ugly and speak poorly and it bothers people when you're a black woman who isn't like that. They are emotionally empty, and at least I am rich because the little I have I love.

Thus, it seems that educational achievement and social mobility have not been sufficient mechanisms to win people of African descent a positive valuation in Cuban society, even among Black people themselves.

Edward, in discussing his work experience and involvement in revolutionary activity, identified his punctuality, organizational skills, and work ethic as qualities that lead people to seek him out for leadership positions. However, he, like Winton, Tomás, Carlitos, and others, claimed to have encountered coworkers who undermine him based on his race and/or demeanor. Edward also revealed how individual prejudices and, more so, a broad acceptance of such beliefs, might amount to systemic discrimination, particularly as Cuba strengthens its connections with an international community that does not include the former Soviet Union. In discussing the missed opportunity for a linkage between the University of the West Indies and the universities of Oriente Province,<sup>225</sup> a project that he spearheaded and developed, it was his impression that the university president's decision to put focus on building ties with Spain and two Latin American countries and let this relationship wither had to do with racism and regionalism. He felt that the president neglected to put resources into this connection

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<sup>225</sup> The University of Havana does have relations with the University of the West Indies.

because his racism led him to presume that the universities were inferior institutions as they were situated in small island nations with majority black populations.

While Edward's analysis may or may not have been accurate, his perception indicates one of the routes through which racism might persist at an institutional level (and outside of the tourist industry) in spite of official policies. Furthermore, included in his response to the university president's dismissal of the University of the West Indies system was to point to the ignorance on the part of many who don't know that these are high caliber universities. He emphasized that they train students in the British system and boasted of internationally renowned faculty-scholars. The subtext of his elaboration of the superiority of these institutions was illustrative of the race-ethnicity-colonial legacy complex in which England and therefore its subjects are superior to Spain and its subjects, in spite of the fact that British subjects are more black than Spanish subjects, thus turning the racial order on its head. In this pyramid/ paradigm of civilization, the British are still on top and in spite of their subjugation, some who were under the Crown use this Crown to defend themselves against white supremacy.

### ***Special Identities in a Special Period***

While racially skewed involvement in the informal underground economy is highlighted and understandably bemoaned by commentators, it appears that there are other strategies that members of the Afro-Cuban population have pursued that raise the question of the role of ethnicity in people's responses to declining equality and that beg for further investigation. Similar to the story of the Cuban Sephardic Jews featured in Ruth Behar's

*Aido Kerida* (2001), a documentary about this group's search for identity and history, the story of Cubans of English-speaking Caribbean descent is one of "continued diasporas and intercultural adaptations" ([www.ruthbehar.com](http://www.ruthbehar.com)). However, unlike the Jews of Cuba whose religion "has been kept alive in Cuba through the efforts of Jews in Canada, Mexico, and Argentina" and who are experiencing a revival as a result of the influx of humanitarian aid and interest on the part of American Jews (Behar 1995), immigrants from the English-speaking Caribbean did not enjoy the white skin privilege that facilitated economic mobility both within Cuba and abroad.

The radical changes in Cuban society have had a mixed impact on people of English-speaking Caribbean descent. For those few who can claim pensions from the Naval Base or who have family living abroad willing and able to send money, the dollarization of the economy has not had an immediately devastating effect. Indeed, as with the pre-revolutionary era, there have been certain benefits from the island's increased orientation toward the market for a segment of the population. However, the money from the pensions and the remittances does not seem to translate into greater opportunities unless it facilitates departure from Cuba. In the case of one participant, now deceased, who was the son of Jamaican immigrants and a retiree from the Base, two of his three daughters work and live in Jamaica, one as a Spanish teacher and the other manages her husband's pharmacy. The 21 year-old daughter of one became pregnant at 18 and left to live in Jamaica and is now attending university there and raising her child. She was able to do this with the help of her grandfather as well as her mother. She, like many young people,

felt that leaving Cuba was the best option to build a better future for herself and her family.

Other families who have received monetary help from Base retirees and/or members living abroad certainly live better than other Cubans but whether or not they are achieving social mobility in the sense of changing their status or position in society to any significant degree is debatable. They may be able to repair their houses and buy consumer goods such as clothes, appliances, and food sold in the dollar stores, but this elevation in their standard of living relative to Cubans who have no access to foreign currency is limited by a dependence on the generosity and success of others. In many cases, this assistance is either sporadic or inadequate to attain and maintain a lifestyle that would become self-generating.

Aside from the Base pensions, which one family received and two were in the process of trying to access, and employment that paid a portion of the salary in dollars, the other source of foreign currency was relatives living or working abroad. At least 15 of the participants in this research received some form of financial support from family who either immigrated to the United States or another Caribbean island or were working abroad on a mission in Africa, the Caribbean, or Latin America. Relatives provide a means to acquire expensive manufactured goods such as appliances and clothes, to get money for much needed home improvement, to care for elderly family members, and to curb the frustration and desperation that can come about in the absence of options. There were five participants who themselves had worked or were attempting to work abroad. In

the new environment, any link to the lives and incomes of those outside of Cuba is considered to be a lifeline.

### **Institutional Revitalization**

I first visited the British West Indian Welfare Centre in August 2001. As my trip coincided with Guantánamo's carnival, the Centre was crowded with people, elders in thick glasses, supported by canes, and accompanied by the younger and more agile, as well as youth listening to the music coming from the Centre's stereo system. On the walls were flags from various English-speaking Caribbean countries, a large photograph of Mr. Skelton, the Centre's founder, a framed promotional poster of Marcus Garvey's regalia clad bust in front of what could only be a representation of a ship from the Black Star Line, and various plaques. After some introduction and discussion, I was allowed to look at the organization's meeting minutes and spent the next two days in a corner, feverishly taking notes in the midst of a community and town alive with festivities. This would be the place where I would meet with and interview some of the participants in this research as well as gather for events sponsored by the organization, one being the presentation on the English-speaking Caribbean presence in Cuba to group of undergraduates from the United States.

While Anglophone Caribbean associations were either revitalized or established in all areas of the island, the two that were under investigation for this study were Blue Mountain Society in Santiago and the British West Indian Cultural Center in Guantánamo. The trajectories of these organizations are a critical vantage point from which to observe not only the institutionalization of identity, but also the consequences of

the economic crisis on social relationships and the moral economy of people of African descent who engaged in a project of social justice. As Jones' plea for support of black West Indians in Cuba suggests, and my field research indicates, the havoc created in Cuban society by the collapse of Soviet socialism and the tightening of the U.S. embargo have led to a reconnection with and perhaps reassertion of- at least in certain public arenas- identities that include an English-speaking Caribbean origin.

Clearly, this reconnection has a highly functional component: these 'lifelines' are a source of economic support and offer some relief from the deprivations suffered by the severe shortage of key resources and consumer goods. However, for those who are particularly passionate about the 'rescuing of their roots', those members of the community who came of age during the Revolution, the reward for attempting to rebuild their cultural institutions is more complicated than actual or potential material gain. Given the overrepresentation of professionals involved in this effort, it appears that the erosion of dreams partially realized more so than the pressure created by those deferred has been influential in this movement toward reestablishing the networks of support based upon family origin.

Guantánamo's British West Indian Welfare Centre's dormant period of the 70s and 80s was brought to an end when, in 1992, a group of young professionals decided to come together to form the Young People's Department of the Center. With the stated goal of "rescuing their roots," they came together to support one another during trying times and began beneficent activities such as helping the community's sick and elderly, providing

English classes, researching their history, celebrating holidays, forming sports, dance, and music groups, and planning for the reconstruction of the Center's building, which was in disrepair. The Department began with 206 members and increased to over 600 within four years and this activity stimulated the development of other associations throughout the island and the formation of a national network of Anglophone-Caribbean associations. They became the sister organization of the Caribbean American Children's Foundation, the humanitarian organization founded by Alberto Jones, a Jamaican Cuban living in northern Florida.

Though the activities of the BWIWC were approved of and monitored by the state, it is a non-governmental organization and as such is not sustained by government funding. Thus, in addition to the social, educational, and mutual aid activities of the group, there was a move to reach out to the international community as a way to fund the programs that were being developed. Emblematic of such collaboration, Jones organized two African-American trips to Cuba that were hosted by English-speaking Caribbean organizations, and initiated projects that target donations to schools and organizations in Santiago and Guantánamo, ensuring that many of those who will most likely benefit will be of Black West Indian descent. This trend of ethnic revitalization occurred within other hyphenated Cubans such as the Chinese, Jews, and descendants of Spaniards from different regions of Spain.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>226</sup> The phenomenon of ethnic associations is one that begs further study in relation to the state of Cuban civil society. For instance, I was told that the Galician association in Santiago was closed because they were receiving so much equipment and resources and were suspected that they were conducting counterrevolutionary activity.

From this starting point of transnational collaboration, the Young People's Department of the Center founded an international relations department in the mid-90s in order to build relationships with institutions and personalities from the countries represented in the membership of the Center. With this objective in mind, they organized events at the Jamaican embassy in Havana, one of which was organized around a visit by Jamaican Prime Minister P.J. Patterson.<sup>227</sup> They also established a link with the University of the West Indies, participating in an annual intra-Caribbean migration conference at Mona, Jamaica. Indeed, a delegation of Cubans from the leadership of the BWIWC has attended this conference since 1999, accessing the coveted opportunity to travel outside of the island. There were plans to develop an exchange program between the UWI system and the University of Guantánamo, as the number of Cubans of English-speaking Caribbean descent, particularly those who are professionals, and the existence of the Center made Guantánamo the perfect site to anchor a bridge between Cuba and the CARICOM Caribbean.

Blue Mountain Association in Santiago, founded during the Special Period in order to feel better in a difficult time and to come together and help each other, according to Melvina, existed as a separate entity but collaborated closely with BWIWC. Of the association's founding, Melvina described that when she went to an event honoring dedicated community members of the previous era at the Center in Guantánamo, she saw

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<sup>227</sup> Apparently, they worked tremendously hard and sacrificed a lot to dull their desperation, appear dignified and generous upon welcoming him, hoping of course for some reciprocity. However, in his speech, Patterson said that he could see that they didn't need any help because they were well dressed and could put on such a wonderful event. He only spoke to them for 5 minutes, took a photo with them and left. There was the sense of disgust, disappointed, frustrated, etc. because everyone thought that he would help the association because the Spanish embassy helped the associations.

the name of her grandmother as one of the honorees. She took pride in this legacy and was inspired Melvina to spearhead the establishment of an association in Santiago, of which she was the president. She contacted everyone she knew and word spread throughout the community. Initially, different people in the organization were responsible for the descendants in each neighborhood of the city and these representatives reported back regarding who was ill, and who needed what. Melvina recalled that this was a time when different associations in Santiago came into being and that their domain was the Caribbean and African sectors within Cuban culture. As such, they participated in planning the Festival del Caribe at Casa del Caribe in which descendants presented papers, attended meetings and assisted in other capacities, worked on events sponsored by the Casa del Africa and participated in the Caribbean Expo.

One of the most notable aspects of both Edward's and Melvina's accounts of the revitalization was that the people who were sought out and joined, at least initially, were professionals and technicians. In the case of Blue Mountain, the few resources that they were able to gather in order to organize celebrations and other events came through the access to goods that members had. Melvina explained that they had to get all of the supplies such as gas, food, and drink, and everyone chipped in to contribute goods (legally) to the activities. Since there were a lot of descendants in different industries, they were able to acquire necessary goods with the support of the government.<sup>228</sup> Indeed, the husband of the woman whose apartment they first convened in was a lawyer and did all of the paperwork. This indicates the necessary connections to initiate such a project,

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<sup>228</sup> In fact, Robinson, a descendant, has position in government and assisted this process.

illustrating how it was an avenue that the professional class pursued to respond to the disadvantageous circumstance.

In the case of the BWIWC, their goals of creating educational programs and medical support clearly required professional leadership. As Edward explained, “we established series of lectures for the general membership...now, [we have] more advantages because we are using the force of the Center's own membership who are qualified...there are doctors, engineers, professors, etcetera, etcetera, all of course trained by the Revolution, and we use this to improve the membership in different areas, in particular in the question of health and disease.” Even for those members who are not highly educated, the focus is on self-improvement and education, henceforth the program of lectures and conferences.

Furthermore, the professional identity of the associations was evident the discourse of respectability that reared its head in discussions about the recruitment and acceptance process. Initially, the people who were known members of the community formed the association. But, after the call was put out more broadly through the media—a radio program in the case of Blue Mountain—the process of discrimination ensued. Those that were not known had to bring in a passport or identification that proved that they were descendants. Melvina recalled that, “some people who had not been raised as Jamaicans and only wanted things came from poor neighborhoods to join the association...people who were unknown were investigated...people after the third generation were not accepted into the association.” Going on to describe the process of selection, she justified the exclusion of applicants who were poorly behaved, people who had been in jail,

known homosexuals, and whites by saying that they did not follow the ways of their ancestors. While other participants did not speak to this revealing ‘admissions’ process, they did confirm that the organizations were primarily composed of educated descendants. This effort to control the “type” of person who entered the associations suggests a strategic defense of “ethnic” boundaries. Through membership in the associations, people could access material resources and thus “West Indianness” as defined by the professional leadership seems to once again be the source of a certain amount of cultural capital.

Interwoven in discussions of the development of these institutions and who was perceived to belong to the community was the issue of motivations for seeking membership. As stated, people who had grown up in the Anglophone Caribbean community and were most familiar with its history initiated this revitalization. However, as the organizations grew, they attracted more people and the motivations for involvement seemed to be dominated by self-interest. As revealed in a conversation with Eugenia about her understanding of the resurgence of interest in family origin, the possibility of going abroad is a major motivation to some. She confides, “Let me tell you something, this is between you and me, the problem is of traveling. In the association, for example, the people [who the association hosted] came from Jamaica, from Barbados, [and could] send an invitation,<sup>229</sup> [people seeking membership] wanted to leave.

Everyone’s looking for a way to travel...look, here, never, never have Jamaicans been *tan tan de viajado* [so interested in traveling]. My grandmother only went to Jamaica

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<sup>229</sup> One of the requirements for Cubans to receive authorized to travel is a letter of invitation from the country (institution or individual) where they would like to go.

once...no one was thinking about this and what happened is that everyone is looking for their mother or father now, this I don't understand..."

According to Edward, there are certainly those who have taken advantage of the institution to further their own personal agenda. Indeed, he showed tremendous disgust for those currently in leadership who he believes are allowing the Center to dissolve because their primary interest has been to access the opportunity to make contacts abroad. In spite of this, when asked about the resurgence of interest, he is not so pessimistic as Eugenia, He stated that, "there are different motivations...[when it began], in this period, remember that this was the Special Period in '93, the people lacked something to fill them spiritually and the Center was born with an enormous force, with a great quality in its activities and this had an impact on the society. Of course...when [the descendants] listened and saw that this had quality, they saw a possibility of participating, that they were could join, you would see group after group after group after group of people joining." Edward was joined by other participants in his understanding that the real crisis of the Special Period that led to people coming together was a spiritual one as this was also one of the explanations that people gave for the rise in religious participation. Indeed, given the historical link between English-speaking Caribbean associations and religious institutions, this is unsurprising.

This spiritual or psychological component of the economic crisis also asserted itself in interviews that revealed a relationship between the resurgence of these institutions and the ambivalence towards blackness and the continued hesitancy to admit the persistence

of racial discrimination in Cuban society. As suggested in Chapter Five, this identity offers an alternative way of asserting blackness, one that is respectable and devoid of folkloricization and the tropes of primitiveness that continue to shackle blackness in the society's imaginary.

While acknowledging the progress that has been made as a result of revolutionary policies and the role of external forces in their erosion, both Edward and Melvina exhibit a keen awareness of the inequalities both historical and contemporary. It is no coincidence that they were particularly influential presidents of the revitalized English-speaking Caribbean associations in Guantánamo and Santiago. This revitalization occurred at the height of the economic crisis, which was accompanied by a rise in racism. I would argue that their investment in anglófono identity and the revitalization of the institutions of their ancestors is in large part about claiming a space of decency and respectability for black people who are pushed to desperate and more public measures to compensate for the recent disproportionate decline in standard of living.

Evident in their narratives about the associations, their families and communities, and current struggles is the insistence on demonstrating an alternative way of being black, one that does not conform to degrading stereotypes. For instance, the photographs that Edward showed me illustrated the presence of a vital black community that had its own rites and rituals, ceremonies, wealth, and traditions. Emphasizing that West Indians were proud *as black people*, he clearly supports race consciousness. When he described how the men from his lodge dressed in suits and ties, most of them descendants, paraded

through the streets of Guantánamo to commemorate Antonio Maceo, they were honoring a black Cuban hero and making the statement that black men have dignity and are deserving of respect.

Similarly, when Melvina described meetings and events sponsored by Blue Mountain, she emphasized the orderly, respectable behavior of descendants. In one instance where they were invited along with other ethnic associations to an event at ICAP [Institute of Friendship of the Peoples], she proudly stated that they remained dignified, unlike the Haitians who behaved subserviently and the Spaniards who got intoxicated. The strict guidelines for behavior in and around society were an attempt to change the image of black people in the eyes of whites, to assert that “*somos negros pero no somos igual que todos los negros...*” [we’re blacks but we’re not the same as all blacks]. In her view, there are always racists because of the past and this behavior includes those who consider Anglophone Caribbean descendants to act like whites. Her response to this is “no, I’m black” and that this is an insult disguised as a compliment. Thus, she both rejects the racist ideology that asserts black homogeneity based on inferiority and refuses to be ‘whitened’ based on her lack of conformity to racist stereotypes.

### ***Cuban Rasta: An Alternative View of Affirmative Blackness***

Though the resurgence of Anglophone Caribbean associations was evidently a strategic move in a changing economic and social climate, this process provided a forum in which black people could, as a group, publicly assert an affirmative blackness. For those who were not involved in the associations, there are signs that this need to contest the

predominant views of blackness manifests itself in other ways, the most striking of these being Rastafari. Katrin Hansing (2001) finds that Rastafari in Cuba, across the three different ways that mostly Afro-Cuban youth have adopted it, namely as religion, philosophy, or style, share a commitment to affirm African-inspired aesthetics and values. Furthermore, they share the social experience of the consequences of such a stance, most unfortunately, persistent police harassment and general social condemnation. Stemming from these experiences, they share a belief that, in socialist Cuba, Babylon is not capitalism, but rather the power of the myth that Cuba is a multi-racial democracy and egalitarian society. Hansing reasons that, “By embracing Rastafari’s anti-hegemonic, anti-racist, egalitarian, freedom-embracing and overall humanistic message, they are identifying with a philosophy they view as truer and more just than the one they see, hear and live in” (2001: 742).<sup>230</sup>

Both David and Deunes identified themselves as African and part of their connection to Jamaica, the origin of their great-grandparents, was alive to them as the birthplace of the Rastafari movement and as a closer link to Africa. Though both viewed themselves as playing active roles in their communities, being sought out by others for support and guidance through difficult times, they recognized that their decision to follow the path of Rastafari placed them outside of Cuban social norms. It also made them a target for police harassment—David had been arrested and jailed for a year during which time his locks were shaven and Deunes avoided public places such as the central park and locations frequented by tourists for fear of encounters with the police that would end

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<sup>230</sup> It is noteworthy that Rastafari is a predominantly male movement in Cuba and thus the interpretation of it as liberatory and egalitarian is through a male lens. Furthermore, most of the Rastas in Hansing’s study adhered to dominant Cuban gender norms (2001: 738).

similarly. They both struggle with being Rasta in a society that misunderstands them and perceives their path as subversive. With an understanding of politics that does not include individual refusal to conform to hegemonic aesthetics, values, and beliefs, they insist that they are not at all political, that Rastafari is expressly outside of politics.

Though by no means ‘counterrevolutionary’ or dissident, the principles and lifestyle that they are affirming in being Rasta contradict a very critical hegemonic value in Cuban society, namely that of conformity;<sup>231</sup> in particular, conformity to the devaluation of blackness. With implications illustrated by but far beyond the aesthetic, the wearing of locks—an affront to those who take offense to being confronted with so much ‘*pelo malo*’ unleashed—the identification as African in a highly nationalistic society, and adherence to a philosophy that professes black divinity in the form of Haile Sellasie are a challenge to dominant assumptions about racial and cultural ordering. As stated above, while the African cultural presence in Cuba is certainly recognized and celebrated, it is also relegated to the folkloric. In everyday, popular knowledge, such culture is ‘*una cosa de negros*’ (a black thing), which is most often said in a dismissive if not disgusted

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<sup>231</sup> While I only address the implications of this challenge to conformity as it relates to blackness, Rastafari locates power in the individual and opposes systems that attempt to control individual will. As Chivallon (2002) explains, “even while deploying a powerfully mobilizational rhetoric of particularizing symbols of identity (Africa vs. Babylon, Blackness vs. Whiteness), Rastafarianism operates in a space that is open and without constraining norms...still more astonishing is the fact that this resistance against order arises not from the difficulties any group might encounter in the effort to create “structured organization” but, instead from a genuinely ethical posture expressed through the philosophy of “I-an-I” (“I an I” in Jamaican Creole, an affirmation of “We” as the meeting of two individualities). That posture undergirds the movement ideologically” (371). Indeed, Deunes and David definitely expressed this resistance to constraints, whether imposed by capitalism or socialism and enforced by the state, family members, or the community. Indeed, David treated anything that ended in ‘ism’ with suspicion, insisting that the term ‘Rastafarianism’ not be used, precisely because of this resistance to the programmatic, ideological, oppressive codification of the philosophy that the suffix ‘ism’ enacts.

manner, suggesting that it is nothing to be taken seriously, respected, or considered to be a valuable contribution to the progress of Cuban society.

With the turn to tourism, along with the black and brown bodies that dance, drum, and ‘perform’ religion, African cultural traditions are used to sell the island as an exotic tourist destination (Cornebise 2003). Furthermore, non-stereotypical media representations of Cubans of African descent are glaringly few and far between (Pérez-Sarduy 2000). I would argue that, in such a climate, committing to Rastafari, just as devoting oneself to invigorating a particular version of Anglophone Caribbean culture, is a means of asserting an affirmative blackness.

Of note is the contrast between the kind of blackness asserted by Rastafari and that projected by those linked to the ethnic associations. While the former emphasize a connection with Africa and reject Eurocentrism as mental slavery, the latter derive their sense of cultural elevation from practices more closely aligned with late 19th century British colonial indoctrination. While Rasta is blatantly non-conformist in its opposition to the dominant view of blackness, the politics of black respectability adopted by many Anglophone Caribbean descendants, simultaneously legitimizes and subverts the racial and cultural hierarchy in which blackness is equated with inferiority.

An example of how such a contrast might be lived occurred one afternoon when Deunes sat down to a meal at Melvina’s house and asked for a spoon in place of the culturally loaded knife and fork. Melvina turned to me, the foreigner, and explained how she had

taught her husband, a Cuban of Haitian descent, to use a knife and fork, implying that this is one of those backward yet correctable Cubanisms. Deunes responded that he knows how to use a knife and fork, but prefers to use a spoon because it is all that is needed. Clearly, his preference reflected his path, one in which simplicity is valued and the trappings of European civilization are cast off. Perhaps indicative of Melvina's resistance to this, she suggested that he use a knife and fork on at least one other occasion and, in spite of his high regard for and deference to his tía, Deunes held his ground (and his spoon).<sup>232</sup>

### ***Triumphant Individualism?***

The fate of the revitalization of English-speaking Caribbean ethnic associations is perhaps illustrative of the larger conundrum faced by Cuban society as it attempts to grapple with opposing interests of social support and material resource acquisition. As of 2000, the association in Santiago disbanded due struggles over the material donations and access to foreign visitors brought by the Center's sister organization. The project linking the Center and the University of Guantánamo has been suspended, apparently due to a decision to focus on links with Spain and other Latin American countries. As of 2005, the project to renovate the Center's building has been put on hold due to lack (or mismanagement) of resources. Furthermore, there have been grumbling about trips to Jamaica taken by leadership as a few people have chosen to remain abroad, thus calling into question the intentions and credibility of those who seem to be squandering the opportunity to promote the institution and further developing linkages.

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<sup>232</sup> It is important to take a moment to emphasize the distinction that for some people that exists between Rastas and *rasta modas*. I found there to be a general distaste for the latter while perceptions of the former were less disapproving and not perceived to be one of the ills brought about by tourism.

In this climate, the scale measuring the fulfillment of black immigrant dreams of economic mobility and social justice has tipped further toward the direction of doubt and disillusionment. As the nature of market relations is to reward individualism over equality, this phase of the Revolution has perhaps necessarily witnessed a contraction, not just of opportunity, but also of the circle of care from the society as a whole to increasingly smaller social units. Though it is still common to find a deep interdependence among neighbors and community members, collectivism does not appear to be fairing well in its mortal combat with individualism. As is evident from the current fragile state of the recently revitalized Anglophone Caribbean institutions, when limited resources become available, the sense of desperation of those worn down by the scarcity of resources, the loss of status and earning power, racialized inequality and perhaps the tight state control over economic and cultural can be quite socially destructive.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION

#### *Dreams Multiplied: The Last Entrée*

On June 10, 2005, my hour-long flight from Miami to the Antonio Maceo Airport in Santiago de Cuba touched down. It was a Wednesday, it was 9:30AM, and I was returning for my fourth field research trip to Cuba since the summer of 2001 when I began an investigation of the English-speaking Caribbean immigrant experience in Cuba. Upon disembarking, along with the humidity, I was struck by a new or else previously undetected sign that greeted travelers as they ambled toward customs. Posted by Cubanacan, one of Cuba's tourist agencies, it read "*Cubanacan, Agencia de Viajes. Ofertamos Alojamiento, Renta de Autos, Taxis, Excursiones, Asistencia en Aeropuerto, Boletos Aéreos, Charteo de Aviones y Helicopteros. Multiplicamos Sueños. We Multiply Dreams.*" (Cubanacan, Travel Agency. We Offer Accommodation, Car Rental, Taxis, Excursions, Airport Assistance, Airline Tickets, Airplane and Helicopter Charters. We Multiply Dreams.). It was a relatively simple sign in blue, red, and white: the colors of the Cuban flag morphed into a promise of pleasure through meeting needs that were wildly extravagant in the Cuba that I had come to know.

Conspicuously punctuated by the English translation of *Multiplicamos Sueños*, this ad promised to not only *realize*, but to *multiply* dreams and I was taken aback by this adoption of the capitalist strategy to create rather than to simply meet consumer needs. How different were the dreams and destinies of the targeted market of foreign tourists and Cubans living abroad from the over 140,000 English-speaking Caribbean immigrant

laborers who began pouring into eastern Cuba nearly a century ago, I thought. I also could not but note the contrast between the bold claim to multiply dreams and the actual plaque, modest in terms of size and presentation, lacking in the grandeur and glamour of similar offers in other destinations. Its awkward insertion into the airport's austere surroundings betrayed not only the disjuncture between foreign fantasies and Cuban realities, but also the profound tensions that dominate social discourse. With the collapse of the Soviet Union and eastern European socialism, Cuba lost the economic and ideological support that fueled revolutionary social programs. The crisis that ensued has been somewhat alleviated through Cuba's participation in the market, seriously undermining the revolutionary ideals and culture that have been cultivated and promoted for two generations.

Throughout my fieldwork, I found myself constantly confronted by Cubans' struggle to navigate through the multiple chasms that characterize the post-Soviet landscape. Polarities such as those between foreigners and Cubans, dollars and pesos, official and unofficial policies and discourse, and the generation that came of age during the Revolution and the Special Period's youth abounded. In addition, the social landscape was mined with divisions between friends, families, coworkers, organizations, and even within individuals themselves, much of which was attributed to the radical transformations ushered in by the Special Period. However, indicative of Cuba's duality, at the same time that these cleavages were ubiquitous, so too were cooperation, mutuality, and reciprocity. Perhaps Cuba is the site of dreams derailed as well as multiplied.

### ***Project Summary***

Stimulated by an interest in the revitalization of English-speaking Caribbean institutions in Cuba during the Special Period, the primary objective of this study has been to uncover and analyze the factors that have influenced the maintenance and mobilization of a distinct English-speaking Caribbean ethnicity in Cuba. The key questions that I addressed were: 1) what were the characteristics and social position of this group prior to the Revolution, 2) how were people of English-speaking Caribbean origin impacted by the Revolution, and 3) what is the relationship between the particular circumstances of Cuba's Special Period, including Cuba's position within current geo-political shifts, and the emergence of ethnic solidarity among this segment of the black Cuban population. In order to pursue these questions, I conducted field research in Santiago and Guantánamo between 2001 and 2005, which involved interviewing first, second, and third generation Anglophone Caribbean Cubans, participant observation, and archival research. While there has been some historical research on British West Indian immigrants in Cuba and one anthropological account of this group's identity formation, to my knowledge, this study is the only one that focuses on the experience of this group in revolutionary Cuba.

With regard to the first question concerning cultural characteristics and social position, research on English-speaking Caribbean immigrants and their descendants in other locations reveals marked similarities in representations of an English-speaking Caribbean cultural identity; namely, one that is infused with notions of respectability. These characteristics such as thrift, adherence to Christian morality, and a strong work ethic are

rooted in 19<sup>th</sup> century British cultural imperialism and have been used to explain West Indian success in the context of anti-black discrimination. Indeed, this has been used to argue against the importance of racism in determining black people's life chances. The current study both challenged the notion that cultural traits have a significant impact on mobility in the face of structural factors and interrogated West Indian respectability, arguing that this is one of at least two narratives of identity and experience. The other one considered in this research concerns English-speaking Caribbean participation in social activism.

Investigators have also found multiple factors such as the presence and status of other black groups, gender, class status, generation, experience of racism, and the political shifts of host countries to be significant in patterns of English-speaking Caribbean racial and ethnic identification. Another contribution that this study has sought to make to this literature is an analysis of the ways in which revolutionary society has influenced these patterns. In the Cuban case, the Revolution aimed to create a just society through a more equal distribution of resources and the elimination of racial barriers to accessing society's resources. However, this work supports other research finding certain manifestations of racism to have persisted in revolutionary society in spite of the radical shift in social relations brought about by the transition to socialism. People of English-speaking Caribbean origin provide a lens through which I consider questions of black subject formation in the context of significant strides toward economic justice accompanied by challenges toward the elimination of racism and its impact on black people's daily lives.

The third area of investigation focused on Cuba's Special Period and attempted to evaluate English-speaking Caribbean Cuban ethnic mobilization as a response to the post-Soviet Union economic crisis and market reforms. Through the words of my informants as well as my own experiences living in Cuba as it faces a markedly different global economic and political landscape, I looked at how factors such as the dual economy and tourism that are implicated in increasing social inequality are negotiated in people's daily lives. In analyzing the contradictions and travails of Cuba's current transition, I consider the constraints and options in the current period of globalized corporate capitalism, many of which Cuba shares with other small and transitioning socialist economies.

### ***Main Findings***

There are two main findings related to the question of characteristics and social position. One concerns the presence of this discourse of respectability that is a feature of representations of the English-speaking Caribbean experience across space. My research indicates that this is not the only narrative of the group; I found that participation in social activism both prior to and during the Revolution was also a part of the English-speaking Caribbean experience in Cuba. Historical work on English-speaking Caribbean social stratification, some of the comments made by my informants, and archival evidence suggest that the narrative of respectability strongly implicates class divisions and aspirations for social mobility. Rather than being a cultural characteristic of the group, the respectability matrix refers to behaviors that a segment of the population relies upon

as a resource for positive valuation and as a means of creating, reinforcing, or emphasizing individual agency in class or status divisions.

As Hintzen (2006) found, being West Indian and being respectable and socially mobile can become mutually exclusive such that anyone who does not adhere to certain behavioral and financial expectations forfeits belonging. In the Cuban case, immigrants who did not adhere to the code of morality and meet a minimum of financial requirement were excluded from belonging to community institutions, perhaps with the exception of churches. As the institutions played a crucial role in group consolidation and creation, those who were more marginal perhaps because they remained in agricultural labor, were completely illiterate, were not legally married, were homosexual, were chronically unemployed, etc. would have been excluded.

The sampling bias in my research might have reinforced this effect. Recall that I used snowball sampling, beginning with people who were known by local academics to be of English-speaking Caribbean origin because of their leadership roles in the ethnic associations that were reportedly composed primarily though not exclusively of professionals and technicians. They, in turn, pointed me in the direction of family, friends, and associates, many of whom had participated in the English-speaking Caribbean associations. Those people who were of English-speaking Caribbean descent but did not recognize or act upon this as a basis for social relations with other descendants were underrepresented in my sample.

The second finding related to the characterization and social position of people of English-speaking Caribbean origin is that their relationship to the Cuban nation and society might best be described as predominantly ambivalent. Those descendants whose perceptions I did capture characterized people of English-speaking Caribbean origin as respectable members of the working class who, though discriminated against, had an advantage over other workers due to their ability to speak and understand English. The presence of British West Indian laborers-cum-West Indian Cubans was closely linked to the strong North American presence in pre-Revolutionary Cuba. This placed them in an ambivalent position both in relation to the Cuban nation and their employment situation. At the same time that they relied on North American industry for their livelihood, the racism and exploitation that they were subjected to compromised their ability to achieve the level of success of which many dreamed. In addition, Cubans against U.S. dominance as well as the addition of cheap laborers and more black people on the island resented their presence and authorities were notorious for victimizing black immigrants.

This ambivalence carried over into the revolutionary period. With the Triumph of the Revolution and, moreover, the escalation of hostility between Cuba and the United States, people of English-speaking Caribbean origin found themselves in a difficult position. At the same time that they were in support of the egalitarianism and anti-discrimination that the Revolution advocated, in many cases the radical changes in revolutionary society threatened their livelihood and they became suspects in an environment where speaking English and association with North Americans and people abroad was frowned upon. Those who remained in Cuba and became integrated into revolutionary society did this

through education and political activism, largely abandoning the ethnic institutions that had been central to their communities for the promise of social mobility and creating a more just society.

However, the social mobility and professional status made possible by the revolution forced a confrontation with a key manifestation of racism: namely, the resistance to or resentment of black people who achieve a certain level of success. While people in this study praised the revolution for providing an opportunity for professionalization and some had been quite active in revolutionary society, many have had to face mistreatment by fellow Cubans and believe that white people don't like to see a black person get ahead or assume a position of authority. Indeed, one of the main findings of this research is that this is one route through which racism has persisted and I argue that respectability has been a way in which Cubans of English-speaking Caribbean origin have defended themselves against racism's psychological and material assault. An English-speaking Caribbean identity was and continues to be a source of pride in part because it is constructed as a way of being black that is in opposition to the dominant popular ideology that casts blackness as inferior, primitive, backward, servile, ignorant, immoral, criminal, ugly, etc. In contrast to this litany of offensive characteristics, Anglophone blackness is constructed as dignified, refined, educated, clean, organized, and respectable. Indeed, projecting themselves as *negros finos* both defies the stereotypical blackness so dominant in Cuba and contests notions that race mixture is necessary in order to *adelantar la raza*.

I also contend that the persistence of racism in the lives of more successful black people is implicated in the resurgence of ethnic institutions during the Special Period. Both popular and scholarly observations conclude that darker Cubans are at an acute disadvantage within Cuba's transforming economy. Not only do they receive a disproportionately smaller percentage of the remittances, but they are also marginalized from the legitimate jobs in the tourist industry, the other main source of foreign currency. Due to a racist aesthetic, black people by definition cannot possess the "good appearance" needed to work in the industry and, as a result of pre-revolutionary housing patterns, they are less likely to have homes that can be turned into guesthouses and restaurants for tourists. With the exception of the folkloric performance niche, more African looking Cubans are at a serious disadvantage in accessing tourist dollars in a way that does not involve prostitution and hustling.

An important finding that emerged from my research is the way in which professional people of African descent are being impacted by the combination of rising inequality and what is referred to as a resurgence of racism.<sup>233</sup> Along with other professionals, they have experienced a decline in the material rewards that their education provides. This sudden drop exposed their vulnerability and instability and has had a powerful psychological as well as material impact. Those who are exclusively dependent upon a peso salary or whose access to foreign currency is minimal face a significant challenge in maintaining the moderately comfortable lifestyle that they had prior to the introduction of the dual economy. Furthermore, unlike their more European colleagues, they have had to contend

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<sup>233</sup> The resurgence of racism refers to findings that racism has a more concrete impact on Cubans' daily lives, rather than the notion that it somehow disappeared from the social landscape.

with the more overt maligning of blackness and I argue that this has led to a greater need to defend themselves both in and outside of the workplace.

My research suggests that the mobilization of ethnic identity by people of English-speaking Caribbean descent during the Special Period has been motivated by a desire to: 1) access resources abroad at a time when survival and/or mobility is dependent upon foreign capital, 2) revive the tradition of mutual aid as the state's ability to provide for its citizens has declined, and 3) assert a respectable blackness in the face of resurgent racism. With regard to this last motivation, I found evidence that the alternative to subscribing to a discourse that roots respectability and racial redemption in adherence to Anglo notions of the civilized is the path of Rastafari. Two of my informants were Rasta and I suspect that both the West Indian associations and Rasta could be viewed as prototypes of self-defense against the rising impact of racism. While neither negates a nationally rooted identity, they both challenge how blackness is situated in Cuban society. Rasta is a move toward an African diasporic, affirmative identity that embraces and finds respectability in deeper roots while the Anglophone Caribbean identity draws its respectability from characteristics associated with a British colonial legacy. Rasta names and rejects white supremacy and lays claim to respectability based upon an African identity and the valuing of that which is constructed as African along with a rejection of the immorality of European civilization. However, the two participants in my research who are Rasta and both male, recognize this path to be at best misunderstood and at worst maligned within Cuban society and thus it is not really a viable alternative for most people of African descent.

With regard to the relationship between the ethnic revitalization and current geo-political shifts, one of the questions that emerges from the data is the extent to which the mobilization of either ethnic, racial, or African identity by Cubans of Anglophone Caribbean origin is indicative of the limitations of revolutionary inclusion and/or the local impact of globalized monopoly capitalism. From the narratives of the early years of the revolution provided by my informants, it appears that the euphoria and activity of the time encouraged widespread involvement in social transformation. Most ethnic associations were neglected and/or dismantled and, though the object of some suspicion, Cubans of English-speaking Caribbean descent were included in the national body. However, the terms of this inclusion included such things as disassociating from family and friends who chose to leave, mandatory participation in revolutionary organizations and mobilizations, and agreeing to be silent in the face of persistent discrimination. I suspect that this could have played a role in the extent to which some people of English-speaking Caribbean origin declined to relinquish their ethnic identity as a potential source of mobilization.

Moreover, as de la Fuente (2001a) found, in the areas where the revolution was more successful, racial disparities and other inequalities were eliminated; conversely, the revolution's failures translated into people of more African descent suffering from the impact of racism. Though Cuba made tremendous advances in extracting the teeth of racist sentiments and has demonstrated a commitment to black liberation through its internationalism, Cubans of African descent did not have any accepted mechanisms to

address the contradiction between declarations of racial equality and the continued experience of racist behavior. Any evidence of racism, if acknowledged, was explained as a vestige of pre-revolutionary Cuba that the revolution will eventually take care of. However, evidence indicates that the persistence of anti-black attitudes, while not limiting access to opportunities, had very concrete consequences in such areas as people's social lives (see Nadine Fernandez 1996 regarding interracial couples), the more subtle areas of occupational experiences, disparities in incarceration rates, and in any circumstance where the preference for a more European aesthetic might be asserted.

However, though racism persisted in various areas of pre-1989 revolutionary Cuba, current global trends are clearly implicated in its revitalization. I am in agreement with Robotham (2006) when, in his critique of cultural theorists, he maintains that "it is impossible to understand the vitality of racism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as due to some kind of unspecified ideological momentum from the past...the contemporary imperialist root of modern racism must be the point of departure" (48).

Though varying in their position on the fate of the social safety net and the type and role of the state, the general consensus of analysts of the Cuban economy is that Cuba must increase its adoption of market mechanisms in order to be at all viable. However, market oriented reforms such as the growth of tourism, the dual economy, and legalization of some independent economic activity have exacerbated underlying fissures in the post-colonial, post-Cold War social landscape. Finance capital and imperialism are foundational processes of contemporary racism and thus the extent to which Cuba can

unhinge itself from these forces will have a tremendous impact on the lives of participants in this research.

### ***Latin America's Turn to the Left***

The most interesting and perhaps hopeful turn in this phase of Cuba's economic and political life has been the Latin American swing to the left and the deepening ties with Venezuela in particular. Of the response to the post-Cold War political and economic order, journalist and political commentator Tarik Ali writes,

The earth had been stolen, surveillance satellites littered the sky, but free thought and dissidence had not completely disappeared...The glimmer of an actual political alternative, however, was visible only in Latin America. There, new social movements had thrown up new political leaders. They were insisting that, despite the fall of the Soviet Union, the world was still confronted with old choices. Either a revamped global capitalism with new wars and new impoverishment, chaos, anarchy or a rethought and revived socialism, democratic in character and capable of serving the needs of the poor. These leaders were determined to rescue the stranded ship 'Utopia', to initiate more egalitarian, redistributive policies and to involve the poor in the political life of their countries. For proclaiming these modest goals they were traduced and vilified (Ali 2006: 25).

Ali argues that the neo-liberal reforms have not helped Latin American countries, giving Argentina as an example of a country that went along with the reforms letter for letter and ended up imploding in the 90s. There has been a strong push back against neo-liberalism because it is a global order that bankrupts the middle class, further impoverishes the poor and benefits the 'haves and the have mores'.<sup>234</sup> Cuba's resistance to neo-liberal reforms through its cautious, halting adoption of market reforms indicates that it neither wants to follow the path of the former Soviets that dismantled socialism and left a vacuum nor the

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<sup>234</sup> G.W. Bush quoted in Michael Moore's 2004 documentary, *Fahrenheit 911*.

Latin American and Caribbean countries whose population is suffering the consequences of neo-liberal policies.

With the election of populist president Hugo Chávez who has thus far remained committed to the promise of transforming Venezuela into a more egalitarian society, Cuba may have the support that it needs to fulfill similar promises made to its own population. Venezuela initiated the Bolivarian Alternative of the Americas (ALBA), a project that proposes an alternative to U.S.-sponsored Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). In opposition to neo-liberal principles, this agreement is centered upon “solidarity, reciprocity, respect for differences, and full integration” (Wagner 2004).

In exchange for Venezuelan oil, Cuba provides medical professionals, treatment both in Venezuela and Cuba, and a market for Venezuelan goods. Critics of this alliance have charged, among things, that Venezuela is now the new subsidizer of the “Castro regime.”<sup>235</sup> Given the tremendous human resources that Cuba is investing in Venezuela’s Bolivarian revolution, it seems that Cuba is following the advice to use its human capital as leverage in the global market. However, once Cubans have helped Venezuela to become a society of literate, educated people in a wealthy country, the question of what more Cuba will have be able to offer in exchange for oil will have to arise. The issue of achieving and sustaining growth given Cuba’s resources, population, size and expectations is fundamental.

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<sup>235</sup> See University of Miami’s Cuba Facts statement, “How Venezuela Subsidizes the Castro Regime.”

What provides considerable hope for the future of this alliance is that it is not solely Cuba and Venezuela that has taken a stand against neo-liberal policies. Evidence of Latin Americans' resistance to the poverty and inequality generated by these policies are visible from the Zapatista movement and most recently the mass resistance to the corrupt election politics that defeated leftist candidate López Obrador in Mexico to Brazil's landless workers' movement to the social movements against the privatization of water and other resources in Peru and Bolivia to the victory of Evo Morales, leader of Bolivia's Movement Toward Socialism Party (MAS) in 2005. Though this shift is by no means ubiquitous, as is clear from Chile's Uribe and Brazil's Lula da Silva ultimate support of neo-liberal capitalism, it is clearly a trend that holds promise for Cuba's ability to create a successful twenty-first century socialism.

### ***“Taking Back What is Rightfully Ours”: Final Reflections***

In the midst of the dissertation revision process, I decided that I would give myself a day off from writing and thinking about Cuba and the story of people of English-speaking Caribbean descent. I would drive to a spa out in beautiful Sonoma County, and spend the day lunching at a highly recommended local spot, dozing in a Japanese tea garden, soaking in an enzyme bath, and enjoying a stress-alleviating late afternoon massage.

Having relished in the day's escape, by 5:30, the only indulgence that remained was my massage. My masseur was a tall white man whose name I can't recall. He began asking me about what I did—part of what I assumed was an assessment of where I might be holding tension. Though talking about my research was the last thing that I wanted to do,

rather than reinvent myself as an author of children's stories or a flight attendant or anything other than a doctoral candidate who conducted field research in Cuba, I went into automatic pilot and gave him the spiel. Unfortunately for me at that moment, he was quite inquisitive because, as he said, "my grandfather was Cuban...or really Spanish, he came to Cuba in the early twentieth century." I responded by saying that I study the descendants of people who migrated to Cuba from the English-speaking Caribbean during that same time period. I thought, but did not say—recall that I really did not want to be having the conversation to begin with—that his grandfather was probably among those Spaniards encouraged to migrate to Cuba in order to right the racial 'imbalance' exacerbated by West Indian migration.

The only reason that I could make sense of why I was exposed to what next tumbled out of his mouth in a most inappropriate and undesired moment was that it must be the stimulus for the final words of this dissertation. He shared that his grandfather was a successful land owner who had a plantation in Cuba but left for the United States after the revolution. Then, taking on an authoritative tone, he pronounced, "My brother and I are waiting for things to change, for Castro to die, so that we can go back and claim what is *rightfully ours*." While I have certainly encountered the sort of arrogance and white male privilege evident in the masseur's comments, I had only read about those Cubans in the United States who, having lost out in the shift in power enacted by the Revolution, are eagerly awaiting the island's re-subjugation. Though after his pronouncement he filled in my stunned silence with ramblings about the questionable feasibility of a plan to take

over the land that his grandfather had owned, the sentiment and unwavering belief in his right to Cuba's most important productive resource was unquestionable.

As part of my fieldwork experience, I internalized the tensions and polarizations that I discuss in this dissertation. At the same time that I was impatient with some of my informants' uncritical stance toward the obvious problems of revolutionary society, I found myself itemizing the revolution's successes when faced with others' complaints. When people expressed a desire to leave the country, I thought of the perils that await them abroad; when they demonized the United States and those Cubans who want to leave, I advocated for a more tempered approach. At the same time that I felt irritated and confined by the tight control that the state exerts in people's lives, I defended the need for Cuba's vigilance because of the demonstrated U.S. threat. Involuntarily, it seemed, I filed remarks, incidents, and observations on one side or the other of the chasm between 'pro- and anti-revolution'. The masseur's comments stirred this impulse, validating Cuba's (pre)caution both in terms of security and economic reforms. Any political instability or sudden relinquishing of control over economic sectors and enterprises might allow those who are anxious to make Cuba another notch on the neo-liberal belt to claim victory.

It appears to be impossible to do research on Cuba without having to confront the question of the island nation's future. This seems to be the inevitable end point of so many conversations. Perhaps anticipating this, Ariel Fernández, in a talk about black Cubans and hip hop in Cuba, predicted that what will occur in Cuba will be reminiscent of what occurred at the conclusion of the Independence Wars. Fernández was referring to

the fate of Antonio Maceo and his famous protest at Baraguá. At the conclusion of the Ten Years' War, Maceo was the only Cuban leader who refused the terms of the treaty offered by the Spanish as it did not declare Cuba a free nation. His protest of his fellow generals' accommodation to continued colonial rule as well as his brilliance as a military strategist has earned him status as a national hero.

Fernández forecasted that, similar to Maceo's 19<sup>th</sup> century peers, today's Cuban leaders will make deals with the Americans, selling out black Cubans and, indeed, all Cubans who desire true equality and justice. For Fernández and other young people such as Deunes and David who envision themselves as the real revolutionaries within the Revolution, Cuba is actually rightfully *theirs*. Regardless of the frustration and bitterness that perhaps fueled Fernández's remark, the question of the restructuring of allegiances, particularly as it pertains to race, is one to attend to as Cuba moves forward into its own image of twenty-first century socialism.

*Appendix A*  
*Background Data on Interviewees*

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Age in 2007</i>	<i>Family from ESC</i>	<i>Age at arrival</i>	<i>Island</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Occupation(s) of Adult Arrivals</i>	<i>Occupation(s) of Participant</i>	<i>Spouse Origin</i>
Iris	95	Came w/ parents	6, 9	Jamaica	1917, 1920	Laundress, Stable hand	Laundress, Seamstress, Housewife	Jamaica
Ernest	81 (died in 2004)	Parents	Young adults with children	“	1917	“	Driver and mechanic on Naval Base	Haitian
Alberta	25 (moved to Jamaica in 2002)	Grandparents	“	“	“	“	Student	Haitian
Melvina	55	Both Parents	Mother was 6 and 9, father 16	“	1917/20, 1923 (maternal grandparents arrived in 1912)	Cook, Nanny, Laundress, Stable hand, Blacksmith	English Professor	Haitian
Purcival	60	“	“	“	“	“	Airplane Mechanic/Engineer	One Jamaican
Hortencia	28	Maternal grandparents (father Haitian descent)	“	“	“	“	English Professor	N/A
Ann	Late 70s	Parents	Father 32 Mother 30	“	1920	Tailor, Cook	Retired teacher	Cuban
Leticia	56	Paternal Grandparents (mother Haitian descent)	Grandfather 32 Grandmother 30	“	“	“	Professor of Physical Education	Cuban
Isabel	55	“	“	“	“	“	Supervisor at Communications Company	Cuban
David	25	Maternal Great Grandparents (mother's father's parents)	“	“	“	“	Student	N/A
Josefina	Early 70s	Both parents and maternal grandparents	Father 23, mother 8 mths	Father St. Marteen and maternal gp/mother Jamaica	“	Lottery ticket seller and weighed cane, housewife	Homemaker, Craftsperson	N/A
Smith	80	Both parents	Early 20s	Jamaica	1917	Stablehand/agriculture, then at club on the Base, mother ill	Dishwasher/orderly on Base, free mason, guide for servicemen, foreman in construction	St. Thomas and the DR
Deunes	35	Great Grandmother	---	Jamaica	1936	Housewife	Studied civil engineering and	N/A

							music, store clerk	
Richard	84	Parents	Early 20s	Jamaica	1936	English teacher, housewife	Shoemaker, photographer and boxer	---
Eugenia	63	Self to live with maternal grandmother	8	Jamaica	1955 (grandmother in 1924)	English and piano teacher	Accountant	Cuban
Caridad	76	Parents		Jamaica		Photographer, English teacher	English teacher, seamstress	Cuban
Alfredo	63	Grandparents	---	---	---	---	---	Cuban
Ricardo	57	Grandparents		Jamaica		Father worked on Base	Researcher	
Mabel	70s	Parents	---	Jamaica	---	---	Housewife	Jamaican then Cuban
Pamela	58	Father, maternal grandparents	40s,	Jamaica	1943 to Gtmo, Cuba earlier but as adult	Firefighter on Base	English professor	
Yanet	25	Grandfather, greatgrandparents	“	“	“	“	Podiatry school	Cuban
Winton	73	Parents	---	Jamaica	Mom, 1923	Maid on Base, then in elderly home	Warehouse worker, golf course, bus boy, English teacher, boxer	Haitian
Pablo	68	Father, maternal grandparents	23	Jamaica	1920	Railroad	Construction foreman	Jamaican
Ruth	60	Parents	Mother at 6 w/grandmother	Nevis	Father in 1902	Domestic, housewife, domestic on Base; father diver on Base	Physician	N/A
Lester	50s	Paternal Grandparents	---	Barbados	1935	Blacksmith, housewife (father English teacher, then worked on Base in photography store)	Physician	Cuban
Carlito	54	Grandparents on both sides	---	Jamaica	---	Agricultural workers (maternal grandfather cut cane, father was a shoemaker)	Veterinarian, English teacher	Cuban
Maria	50s	Paternal grandparents (mother Dominican Cuban)	---	Jamaica	---	Father was a plumber	Secretary	N/A
Ruben	50s	Father, maternal grandparents	17	Grenada, Jamaica	Late '20s/early '30s; late	Father domestic worker, then	Musician	Cuban

					1800s	construction		
Yasmin	24	Paternal Grandfather, great grandparents	“	“	“	“	Counselor	N/A
Edward	53	Paternal grandparents	---	St. Kitts, Montserrat	---	Carpenter then photography store, father golf course manage, mother housewife	Professor	N/A
Teresa	60s	Father, Maternal grandparents	Father 12 or 13	Jamaica	---	Mechanic, housewife	Housewife	Jamaican
Elton	56	Parents		Grenada/NY C, Jamaica		Carpenter, cook on Base then housewife	Judo team trainer	Cuban
John	102	Self	10	St. Lucia	1914	---	---	---
Esperanza	69	Parents (stepfather's parents Bajan)	Mother late teens	Jamaica (father did Jamaica to England to Cuba)	---	Father office clerk, stepfather fireman, mother domestic on Base	---	N/A
Mrs. Henry	93	Self with Parents	3	Jamaica via Panama	---	Agricultural workers	Housewife	Jamaican
Leonarda	57	Grandmothers	Adults, had children in Cuba	Jamaica		Agriculture, father worked in canteen on the Base, mother housewife then laundress when father exiled on Base in '70	Pediatric nurse	Cuban
Humberto	50s	Grandparents	---	Barbados	---	---	---	---
Elizabeth	Late 60s	parents	adults	Jamaica	1916	Mechanic, housewife	Laundress, English teacher	Jamaica
Beth	69	grandparents	---	St. Kitts and Nevis	---	Cane cutter and dairy worker, laundress and cook	---	N/A
Carmen	Late 60s	Maternal and paternal grandparents	Paternal grandparents adults with two children and one on the way	Paternal grandparents and maternal grandmother Jamaican, paternal grandfather Barbadian	1912	Paternal: land-owning peasant farmer, housewife who also sold baked goods; Maternal: Worker at Naval exchange, housewife	Teacher	N/A

*Appendix B*  
***British West Indian Associations***

The following is a list of some of these groups and the objectives that they outlined in their bylaws, some of which reveal that these institutions were places where the value complex of respectability was reinforced:

- The West Indian Democratic Association/Sociedad De Antillanos Amantes de la Democracia, founded in 1941 in Caimanera having 86 members in 1943, which increased to 107 in 1944, their mission as “obtaining the moral and intellectual progress of its members, the protection of the same, at the same time trying to cooperate with the cause of democracy (translated from Spanish).” (Materia: Caimanera, Legajo:197, Expediente: 1)
- Club Caribe: Sociedad de Instrucción y Recreo (Caribbean Club: Education and Recreation Society) founded in Caimanera in 1952, had the objective of “the development of social life” (Materia: Caimanera, Legajo:197, Expediente:12)
- Club Polar also in Caimanera (1955-61), had 23 members and aimed to “provide education and recreations to its members” and “develop culture and sports of the village” (Materia: Caimanera, Legajo: 197, Expediente: 16)
- Logia La Estrella Naciente De Cuba (Rising Star Lodge of Cuba), founded in 1918, notes that it is in Santiago de Cuba but “under the auspices of the independent order of British Jamaica” indicating its membership to the Jamaican chapter of the lodge (Materia: Logias, Legajo: 914, Expediente: 8,10,13,14)
- British Early Rose Lodge, founded in 1918, also a Jamaican lodge operating in Santiago de Cuba (Materia: Logias, Legajo: 914, Expediente: 8,10,13,14).
- Logia “Brillante Estrella de Cuba” (Bright Star of Cuba Lodge), founded in 1919 (Materia: Logias, Legajo: 914, Expediente: 8,10,13,14).
- Loyal Pearl of Cuba Lodge no. 18, founded in 1920 in Santiago (Materia: Logias, Legajo: 914, Expediente: 8,10,13,14).
- Guantánamo Cricket Club, 1956, aimed to “contribute to the physical and moral health of our youth and people in general...organize events, observe strict punctuality, maintain strict solidarity.” (Materia: Sociedades Deportivas, Legajo: 2485, Expediente: 4)
- Luz Unida Numero 10,973 (United Light No. 10,973) (1925-1961), Santiago (Materia: Logias, Legajo: 929, Expediente: 2)
- Anglo-American Antillians Association (sic), 1944-50, was composed of British and American Antilleans (30 at the first meeting) in Puerto Padre and identified itself as a “Mutual Aid and General Education Society.” It’s objectives included “(1) give economic assistance to members when possible (2) defend or represent to the best of its ability whichever member in legal matters (3) find ways to help members with practical and social education (4) develop ways to acquire funds for the help of handicapped and elderly of out community.” (Materia: Sociedades Extranjeras, Legajo: 2568, Expediente: 3,7)
- “Asociación Progresista de las Indias Occidentales Inglesas del Central Delicias” (“The West Indian Progressive Association of Central Delicias”) Puerto Padre

was formed in 1943 after a visit by a British minister named Sir George Ogilvie Forbes and the president of the Anglo-American Commission Sir Frank Stookdale. Its mission was “(1) protection of members (2) education, establishment of new schools, libraries, literature courses, etc. and other diversions that will fortify morals.” This group declared no religious or political ties and included descendants (Materia: Sociedades Extranjeras, Legajo: 2568, Expediente: 3,7)

- ‘Club de Adelanto de Antillanos Británicos’ (Club for the Advance of British Antilleans) was founded in 1946 with the mission to (1) acquire funds for mutual aid of sick members or those who are suffering economically and to pay for funerals, (2) inculcate social virtues, culture, morality, fraternity, and protection needed by members, (3) counsel/advise of new currents of times in which we live. (Materia: Sociedades Mutualistas, Legajo: 2583, Expediente: 4,6)
- La Asociación Sucursal de la Liga de Jamaica en Santiago de Cuba (Branch Association of the Jamaica League in Santiago de Cuba) (1919-1952) identified its purpose as “to develop patriotic feelings and mutual interests, stimulate unity within the community and develop the individual and collective intellectual, economic, social and moral life of the inhabitants of this island.” The documents of this association included a pamphlet for the “Jamaica’s Welfare First” conference organized on August 1, 1914—the first of August being the date marking the emancipation of Africans enslaved by the British Empire. There was also a ‘Report on the Proceedings of the Annual Convention’ held in Kingston on Sunday, 28<sup>th</sup> July and Friday, August 1<sup>st</sup> and Saturday, August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1918. The motto of this organization was “In co-operative efforts lies our economic salvation.” Themes addressed at this convention included Jamaica’s loyalty, the importance of moral training to fight against illegitimacy, the “training and reformation of the masses,” and the need to advocate for equal opportunity for all. (Materia: Sociedades Patrioticas, Legajo: 2623, Expediente: 1,2)

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