Transformations in Blackness: “Revolutionary”
Afro-Cuban Identity, 1959-1966

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements iii  
Important Dates iv  
Maps vi  

**Introduction: (Afro-)Cuba** 1  

**Chapter 1: A History of Race and Racism** 11  
   An Enduring Legacy 13  
   Blackness in Cuba 27  
   Racial Consolidation of a Revolution 30  

**Chapter 2: Revolutionary Cuba’s Race Problem** 33  
   A “New” Cuba 35  
   Political and Social Consolidation 41  
   The Construction of “Afro-Cubans” Under the New State 47  

**Chapter 3: The First Tricontinental Meeting** 63  
   Institutional Conflicts and Interactions 65  
   Cuba and “The People” 76  

**Chapter 4: A Story of Failure** 81  
   The Congo Crisis 86  
   Cuba Looks to Africa 91  

**Conclusion: Third World Connections** 98  

**Appendix**  
Appendix A: “Paint Me Little Black Angels!” 101  
Appendix B: “Black Power” Cover of *Tricontinental* 102  
Appendix C: “Mothers of the Revolution” 103  
Appendix D: “Not Blacks…But Citizens!” 104  
Appendix E: “Gymnastics: A Great Sport Becomes Popular” 105  
Appendix F: Table 1. Population by province according to “skin color” 106  
Appendix G: Table 2. Literacy Rates in Cuba 108  
Appendix H: Table 3. Comparative Literacy Rates According to Gender 109  
Appendix I: OAS Cartoon 110  

**Bibliography** 111  
Primary Sources 111  
Secondary Sources 113
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## Important Dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1492</td>
<td>Columbus sails to the “New World” and lands in Cuba</td>
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<tr>
<td>1776</td>
<td>US American Revolution and a simultaneous boom in the sugar market</td>
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<td>1789</td>
<td>French Revolution</td>
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<tr>
<td>1791-1804</td>
<td>Haitian Revolution and the creation of an independent Haiti</td>
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<tr>
<td>1810-1821</td>
<td>Independence in the Spanish Americas (except Brazil and Cuba)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1823</td>
<td>Adoption of the Monroe Doctrine by the US</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>Abolition of slavery in Cuba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895-1898</td>
<td>Cuban War of Independence (which becomes known as the Spanish-American War in 1898)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>Adoption of the Platt Amendment in Cuba and the end of “official” US occupation of Cuba</td>
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<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td>Creation of the Independent Party of Color (<em>Partido Independiente de Color</em>) in Cuba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 20-June 27, 1912</td>
<td>The “Race War” in Cuba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 24, 1945</td>
<td>Founding of the United Nations (UN)</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 30, 1948</td>
<td>Founding of the Organization of American States (OAS)</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 26, 1953</td>
<td>Fidel Castro attacks the Moncada Barracks. This is the beginning of the Cuban Revolution. Fidel Castro and others are exiled to Mexico.</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 1956</td>
<td>Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, and Raul Castro return to Cuba and begin a guerrilla insurgency of the countryside</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 1, 1959</td>
<td>Guerrillas take over Havana and Batista flees to the Dominican Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 8, 1959</td>
<td>Fidel officially enters Havana and the revolutionary government assumes power</td>
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<td>March 22, 1959</td>
<td>The Anti-discrimination Campaign starts</td>
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<td>July 1, 1960</td>
<td>The Congo gains independence from Belgium</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 28, 1960</td>
<td>Declaration of San José ousted Cuba out of OAS</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 2, 1960</td>
<td>First Declaration of Havana released to refute Declaration of San José</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 18-22, 1960</td>
<td>Cuban delegation moves to Harlem during the 15th UN General Assembly</td>
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<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>Year of Education in Cuba (Literacy Campaign begins)</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 3, 1961</td>
<td>Cuba cuts all diplomatic ties with the US</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 5, 1961</td>
<td>Conrado Benítez killed by counterrevolutionaries in Cuba trained by the CIA</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 17, 1961</td>
<td>Patrice Lumumba, Prime Minister of the Congo, assassinated by CIA</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 17-19, 1961</td>
<td>US invades the Bay of Pigs</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 1961</td>
<td>Cuba officially becomes allies with the USSR</td>
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<tr>
<td>1962</td>
<td>Societies of Color made illegal in Cuba</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 1964</td>
<td>Che Guevara visits the UN</td>
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<tr>
<td>April-November 1965</td>
<td>200 Black Cubans fight in the Congo</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 3-10, 1966</td>
<td>First Tricontinental Conference is held in Havana</td>
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**Maps**

*Political Map of Cuba 1994*

The Cuban Census of 1953 recorded data on the basis of the original six provinces in Cuba. In 1976, the revolutionary government changed the province system to have the fifteen provinces it has today.

**List of Provinces**

1- Pinar del Río

2- Havana

3- Matanzas

4- Las Villas

5- Camagüey

6- Oriente
Introduction: (Afro-)Cuba

On March 22, 1959, Fidel Castro announced that Cuba had eliminated discrimination.¹ Six days later, a cartoon appeared in the revolutionary guerrilla’s newspaper, Revolución, depicting Castro asking the artist to add “little Black angels” into an Easter drawing (See Appendix A).² Despite the fact that Castro announced the Revolution’s success in eliminating discrimination on the island, the cartoon posits what anti-discrimination meant in practice. Eliminating segregated parks and race-based hiring did not remove visual differences nor did it resolve the enduring effects of hundreds of years of explicitly racialized policies on the island. Discrimination had been solved, but race lived on. The cartoon blatantly depicts Fidel asking for Black figures to be added to the image as a means to convey Cuba as inclusive as a result of eliminating racism.³ By making race explicit, the cartoon showed just how non-racist Castro’s government envisioned itself to be. The cartoon likely intended to capture a moment of social progress, increased equality, and the “success” of the Revolution.⁴ However, this pursuit of incorporation reflected a larger phenomenon: blackness as a political tool and a symbol of the revolutionary government’s success in uniting the country. Blackness was no longer an identity for Afro-Cubans while the “non-whiteness” of the island became a central tenet of

¹ “¡A ganar la batalla de la discriminación!,” Revolución, March 26, 1959, 1.
² “Semana Santa,” Revolución, March 28, 1959, 2. “¡Píntame angelitos negros!”
³ Throughout this thesis, I have elected to capitalize “Black” and not “white”. Part of this is a stylistic choice to call the reader’s attention to where Black Cubans actually were, but also as a political statement in line with that of Black Power. Currently, the capitalization of “White” marks a specific relation to white supremacist outlets in the US in 2019. Therefore, the choice to capitalize “Black” throughout this thesis is both a refusal to maintain racial hierarchies, but also invert said hierarchies just as the Cuban revolution inverted the Cold War hierarchy. For an explanation of this capitalization debate, see Merrill Perlman’s “Black and white: why capitalization matters” in Columbia Journalism Review, June 23, 2015, https://www.cjr.org/analysis/language_corner_1.php.
⁴ Throughout this thesis, I will be using the word “revolution” in two ways. One is when “Revolution” is capitalized as a reference to the Cuban Revolution. Otherwise, when it appears as “revolution” it is a reference to the idea of revolution, not what happened between 1953 and 1959.
Cuba’s bid to align itself with the tricontinental movement and establish itself as a leader in the Third World.

Blackness as a political tactic persisted and influenced Cuban politics transnationally, particularly through the *Tricontinental* in 1966. The *Tricontinental* itself was both a conference with a publication and an ideology. The conference met annually, published the magazine monthly, and the ideology guided and shaped radical politics across Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Through a series of articles and covers, such as the one in November of 1968, the *Tricontinental* utilized race-based imagery to create linkages between countries in the “Third World” (See Appendix B). Tricontinentalism promoted unity among diasporic people across Africa, Asia, and Latin America against the threats and domination of imperialism, colonialism, racism, and capitalism.⁵ The Cuban government connected this political ideology of solidarity through the visual of race.⁶ The use of “Black Power” on this cover re-enforces the idea of blackness being a political tool, but this time the Cuban government used blackness in a transnational context. The cover constructs blackness as faceless and ambiguous which only highlights the universality of tricontinental Black Power. Black Power was not just a North American phenomenon associated with the Black Panthers. As an ideology, it connected Africa, Latin America, Asia, and oppressed communities in the US. The Cuban transnational project of revolution utilized blackness and racial “otherness” to foster comradery in light of the Cold War conflict between the dominating powers of the US and USSR. Oppression marked nations as “racialized” in a Cold War context. Being an “other” meant being “raced.” Cuba’s revolutionary politics assumed a definition of Black Power that identified racial problems outside of Cuba as a

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⁶ Solidarity is not simply a recognition of shared experience, but rather an active political linkage established through comparable experiences of colonization and imperialism.
similar phenomenon to Cuba’s own struggle for recognition in the larger international arena. African-Americans were isolated in the US just as Cuba was oppressed and isolated in the world. In Cuba, race became a political analogy to contextualize imperialism. Here Black Power, and in turn blackness, was about solidarity, not racial mobilization.

Between 1959 and 1966, the Cuban government transformed how it utilized race, and, more specifically, blackness. By transforming blackness into a political tool of white, revolutionary elites, the Cuban Revolution created space for a form of international politics based on the “racialized other” while maintaining racist beliefs at home. It is important to keep in mind that the Cuban Revolution was not simply a single year of guerrilla insurgency in the mountains of Cuba; rather, it was a political project that liberated the island of some imperial forces and then expanded its mission of national liberation to the rest of the Third World.7 This thesis attempts to examine the paradox between an overarching revolutionary ideology of racelessness, the continued reality of racial discrimination in Cuba, and a transnational revolutionary project using race-based imagery. Race was not just a contradiction within Cuba, but it also informed incipient Cuban transnationalism—otherwise known as tricontinentalism—made evident by the communities and countries with which the Cuban government allied itself, such as African-Americans and the Congo. The Tricontinental, as both a publication and, more importantly, as an ideology, acted as a vehicle for the revolution to spread internationally. The Cuban Revolution’s political project sought international political mobilization due to Cuba’s experience of “otherness” in the international community; meanwhile, it erased race-based identities at home.

Before analyzing these racialized discourses, a series of key terms and contexts will be defined in order to establish the revolutionary landscape of Cuban transnationalism and the racial politics of the 1960s. First and foremost, this thesis centers a discussion of race and racism. For the purpose of this paper, race and racism are social processes which are negotiated and constantly manipulated but impossible to erase.\(^8\) In many societies, particularly in Cuba and the US, race is based on “skin color”.\(^9\) The phenotypic presentation of a people organizes communities and cultures. Moreover, different societies construct race differently.

For example, the difference between Latin American and North American conceptions of race underpinned Castro’s discourse on the superiority of Cuban race relations. In the US context, society and law interpret race as a binary between white and Black. These categories are rigid, fixed identities that neither class nor education can entirely erase. In Latin America, society and law conceptualize race as a fluid hierarchy. Latin American categories are imbued with a fluidity and recognition of racial mixing known as *mestizaje*.\(^10\) Many Latin American intellectuals, such as José Vasconcelos of Mexico, Gilberto Frerey of Brazil, and José Martí of Cuba, promoted ideas of racial mixing as a divine, moral difference between their nations and the US. However, claims like theirs did not eliminate racism. The policies and social beliefs that

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\(^9\) In chapter 2, there is a discussion of race based on people’s self-identification with a racial group explicitly labeled as their “skin color”. That data comes from the Cuban Census of 1953.

\(^10\) It is hard to give a solid definition from Spanish to English of the concept of “mestizaje” because more than anything it is an ideology. *Mestizaje* is a concept that is different from the term “mestizo” or person of mixed descent which describes the racial/ethnic background of individuals. The two are connected, but *mestizaje* itself is the idea while *mestizo* is a term used to describe a person. *Mestizaje* as a concept operates on two levels: (1) a state-building ideology of cultural and ethnic mixing and (2) individual intermarriage. *Mestizaje* was a tool utilized by state-builders in 19th century Latin America that attempted to disassociate colonial forms of hierarchy based on race with the new republics. In contrast to US segregation policies, *mestizaje* appeared to be a progressive notion of the nation. However, in reinforcing norms for mixing and upholding mixture as the true representative of the nation, subaltern communities and voices are silenced. For more information on *mestizaje* see Edward Telles and Denia Garcia, “‘Mestizaje’ and Public Opinion in Latin America,” *Latin American Research Review* 48, no. 3 (2013): 130-152.
stemmed from ideologies of *mestizaje*, like *la raza cósmica* (the Cosmic Race) and *democracia racial* (Racial democracy), served to whiten the culture by promoting Black cultural traditions as national culture. The multiplicity of racial identities in this fluid context collapsed into a single national narrative of citizen during the early republics. In doing so, it upheld white cultural practices and images and left no room for Black identities. In Cuba, the categories of *raza de color* (race of color) and *clase de color* (class of color) included both Blacks and mulattos in Cuban culture. But the mere fact that people of color were categorized by seemingly synonymous words of race and class further emphasizes the fluidity of racial identity in Cuba. Therefore, the terms Afro-Cuban and Black Cuban refer to this fluid identity of Afro-descendants and mix-race people who experienced marginalization. This thesis attempts to find and feature the ways in which the subsumed blackness of Cuban culture was ignored by the revolutionary government. However, this fluidity also allowed Castro to identify as “non-white” in an international context defined by the American racial binary of white, Western European versus racial other.

Part of the reason why Cuba could define itself as non-white was because of the Cold War. During the Cold War, the US and USSR were the key players in a bipolar international system; they competed for control of the world. At the root of the division was ideological

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11 George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America: Black Lives, 1600-2000* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 1-2. José Vasconcelos wrote of the Mexican nation as being a “raza cósmica” or cosmic race due to its indigenous, African, and Spanish ancestry. Gilberto Frerye wrote of “democracia racial” or racial democracy to describe why Brazilian racial history diverged from what we see in the US. Both of these ideas are loaded with racist tropes and views of national superiority, but they both act as guiding ideologies that can apply more broadly to the region.


13 It is difficult to quantify this number for the reader or give a description of what this community looked like economically and socially because the fluidity of race in Cuba makes this question pointless. The fluidity of race means that some Black Cubans were rich while the majority were not. However, the data from 1953 shows that about 22-25% of Cuban people considered themselves to be Black or of mixed origin.
distinction: capitalism versus communism. The Cuban Revolution forced the two superpowers to contend with a new state set on establishing its own political course, one undirected by imperial states. The Cuban Revolution threatened both the US and USSR’s influence in the Third World because it had its own agenda: spreading the revolution.

The classification of the world into the First, Second, and Third World historically places this thesis in a larger conversation about race internationally. The First World is generally accepted as Western, capitalist countries located in Western Europe and North America along with Japan after WWII. Furthermore, the First World is led by the US and represented in transnational organizations such as NATO. The Second World is the bipolar opposite to the First World. It is the Eastern, Soviet-led bloc of countries typically associated with Communism and united through the Warsaw Pact. Lastly, the Third World is “everything else” or better understood as those lands historically conquered and colonized by the First and Second (European) Worlds. It includes Asia, Africa, and Latin America.14

The non-white community that Castro sought to influence through the Cuban Revolution was the Third World. The Cuban Revolution asserted itself into an international order where the First, and parts of the Second, world conquered the Third world. The phenotypic darkness of many Cubans along with their racial mixing and colonial past positioned Cuba as internationally non-white or better said, non-European. The new Cuban government understood its context and positionality well enough that it asserted itself into a power struggle for a new world order, in which the Third World would be liberated of both their colonizers and imperialists.

The Cuban revolutionary state constructed the narrative of imperialism by highlighting economic struggle and racial difference. The power of European empires throughout Africa,

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Asia, and Latin America created a legacy of racial hierarchy. Race itself is a construct derived from the experience of colonization and the need for Europeans to rationalize their assumed superiority, something which continued after colonization. Following this line of thought, imperialism is the political and economic extension of the colonial experience. Imperialism involves colonialism’s subjugation and domination but goes further; from physical and military conquest, it builds political systems and cultural hierarchies. Through external force, imperialism alters internal systems of societies.

In Latin America, the form of economic imperialism that took root is described as “dependency”. As developed by Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Falleto, dependency theory is the Latin American Left’s response to why the region was economically “backwards”—that is, not following the trend of modernization created by the US and Western Europe. They argued that hierarchy was not simply a phenomenon of internal social division, but a requirement for the expansion and success of capitalism internationally. The dependence of Third World countries, like those in Latin America, on foreign capital made them reliant upon “the more advanced industrialized countries and international corporations.” In the Americas, economic imperialism via private international companies such as the United Fruit Company was the impetus for US-interest and control of Latin American politics. This system also emphasized an internal cooperation from elite actors with the foreign exploiters. Imperialism is a 20th century tool that helps demarcate interactions between the First and Second World actors with the Third World, but also implicates elite actors in the oppression of their fellow countryman.

Ultimately, 20th century imperialism maintained the power structure of colonialism but revealed it in economics and culture.

In order to connect how the Cuban Revolution utilized both their Afro-Cuban population and their dependent, Third World space to forge a Cold War alternative to alignment, I will analyze a series of historiographies to mark the spaces where the “Afro” of the Revolution has been cut out or forgotten. Devyn Spence Benson’s *Antiracism in Cuba* and Alejandro de la Fuente’s *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* have served as the primary accounts of Afro-Cuban history for this thesis.18 Benson’s detailed analysis of the Anti-Discrimination and Literacy Campaigns support my analysis in its differentiation between Black citizens and white heroes, but her ideas merit more development. This project attempts to use the base of analysis around racial practices on the island following 1959 and connect them to the Cuban state’s racially-charged actions internationally. Therefore, Piero Gleijeses’s *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* acts as the bridge between the Afro-Cuban community domestically and Cuban diplomatic history. Afro-Cuban historiography is a rather small field of study; only after 1991 have these questions been researched due to the “opening” of the Cuban state following the fall of the Soviet Union.19 Therefore, in attempting to expand the conversation on the role of blackness in Cuban politics, I will analyze the intersections of diplomatic histories, the context of international decolonization, and racial histories to elucidate the importance of Third World solidarity understood as an alternative political movement to traditional Cold War bipolarity.

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19 After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 there was a general “opening” of society in Cuba. This meant that the government began to acknowledge the racially manifested inequalities on the island that persisted after 1959. However, prior to Soviet collapse racism was an untouchable topic. In the historiography this is referred to as the “return of racism” and is central to Alejandro de la Fuente’s argument in *A Nation for All*. 
The first chapter seeks to detail the long history of what “race” meant in Cuba prior to January 1, 1959. The history of race in Cuba begins before Spanish colonization, but I begin there to mark how the colonial experience laid the groundwork for a “race blind” revolution. The chapter tracks the larger Caribbean history of Black mobilization with the Haitian Revolution in 1804, the growth of the slave economy, and attempts at Cuban independence before 1898.

The second chapter focuses on how the Cuban state interacted (or did not interact) with the Afro-Cuban community as it attempted to consolidate and legitimize its authority internally between 1959 and 1961. Consolidation took place through two campaigns: Anti-discrimination and Literacy. The state also began utilizing blackness as a political symbol to prove its success. As time went on, the state used this blackness as a transnational political tool.

Chapter three discusses this transnational shift in Cuban political discourse. This chapter contextualizes the actions of the Cuban state in the larger international arena of the United Nations General Assembly of 1960. This particular meeting serves as a window into the intersections of race internationally during the Cold War. This is the first moment that Cuba asserted its identity as a Third World nation seeking to be allies with marginalized communities including US African-Americans.

The final chapter analyzes a seven-month expedition of less than 200 Black Cubans to the Congo in 1965. Chapter four seeks to place the Congo experiment in a larger conversation about the radical nature of Cuban tricontinentalism and its explicitly race-based politics. How did a revolution that attempted to erase Black identity permit that an explicitly Black column fight for national liberation a continent away?

The conclusion unites these various Afro-Cuban experiences through an understanding of the revolutionary transnational project of solidarity that was officially consolidated in 1966.
through the *Tricontinental* in Havana. The relationship between Afro-Cubans and the revolutionary state is not a simple explanation of erasure or oppression but a seemingly hypocritical dynamic of exploitation and utilization despite revolutionary claims to progress.

Lastly, this thesis presents a complicated chronology of events. The back and forth of Cold War politics, the fluidity of race in Latin America, and the distinction between internal and external political actions complicates the intricacies of revolutionary Cuban transnationalism.²⁰

The complications and the implications of the topic are challenging to translate just as race in Cuba is challenging to decipher. Race is not an easy bifurcation of Black and white but rather a socially constructed identity that transforms over time. Race never existed in a space separate from politics, culture, or society. Therefore, this thesis attempts to bring light to why the seemingly apparent successes of the Cuban Revolution in regard to race are not so Black and white but rather complicated, difficult to disentangle, and interconnected.

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²⁰ Refer to the “Important Dates” section of the thesis on pages iv and v for a general timeline.
Chapter 1: A History of Race and Racism

The Afro-Cuban poet, Nicolás Guillén, published the poem above in the 1930s as part of his collective book of poetry titled *West Indies, Ltd.* This poem, “Ballad of Grandfathers” (Balada de los abuelos), not only reveals the complex realities of race in Cuban society prior to and after the Revolution of 1959 but also acts as Guillén’s personal reflection about his family dynamics. Said reflection is evident through the imaginary conversation Guillén creates between his grandfathers. They come from two different worlds, worlds divided by race: one Black and one white. This poem’s time and place do not exist; his grandfathers’ conversation is held in an imagined afterlife. Therefore, the hypothetical setting of this poem emphasizes Guillén’s own hopes for the racial reality of Cuba.

In many ways, Guillén used his poetry as a mirror to highlight the underlying, perpetual racial complexities of Cuba, in which slavery’s legacy historically separated Black and white by geography and class. The lives of Guillen’s grandfathers were physically and socially separated because a slave vendor forcibly transported one on a ship and the other migrated of his own will. The real tensions between races does not mitigate the author’s vision of unity between white and Black Cuba. In the quote above, white and Black are not just equals, but they “yearn” for each other. Both grandfathers scream, dream, cry, and sing. Black and white are equally

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22 Ibid., 3. Part of the poem highlights that Guillén’s Black grandfather arrives in Cuba from the ships which relates back to the deeply ingrained nature of slavery in the everyday lives of all Cubans. “¿Qué de barcos, qué de barcos? ¡Qué de negros, qué de negros!”
human because they do, feel, and hope for the same things. Guillén’s own identity is a complicated mix of races and experiences. Guillén attempts to isolate these identities yet combine their voices to establish a singular Cuban narrative. This *mestizaje* (or fluid mixing) of identity and race complicates the notion of unity.\(^{23}\) The literary importance of this poem places blackness, whiteness, and mixedness at the center of a conversation about how race *should* exist in Cuba.

In many ways, this fantastical conversation depicted by Guillén echoes the rhetoric of the independence leader and intellectual, José Martí, during the series of wars for independence in the late 19\(^{th}\) century. As the intellectual leader of Cuban independence against Spanish imperial control and encroaching US imperialism, Martí had to construct a united revolutionary coalition from the heterogenous Cuban population of recently liberated slaves, white Spanish landowners, and mixed-race people in front of him. In order to win, Cubans first had to see people of different races as their fellow fighters, not their servants.

Martí’s language and vision for a Cuban racial utopia, where the categories of “Black” and “white” collapsed in on themselves and created the space for a singular “Cuban” citizen, was not uncommon or unique in the region.\(^{24}\) The development of nation-states in Latin America depended on a process of asserting the citizen as a figure detached from race, ethnicity, and language.\(^{25}\) For Martí, the color of an individual’s skin did not matter nearly as much as their patriotism. His attempt at uniting and building a *nation* meant that he had to find ways to unify a diverse body politic scarred by the experience of slavery. This tension between a largely mixed-

\(^{23}\) Refer to introduction for a detailed discussion of mestizaje.
\(^{24}\) Benson, *Antiracism*, 9. “Martí injected the 1895 war with the unifying rhetoric of ‘racelessness’—the idea that the country was not composed of whites or blacks, only Cubans—that would become one of the tenets of Cuban government platforms in the republic and into the 1959 revolution.”

\(^{25}\) This is particularly present in Latin America in the early and mid-19th century when the newly liberated colonies were attempting to establish themselves as states and was particularly pursued by Liberal parties across the region.
race, Afro-Cuban population and revolutionary imagery to establish a singular national identity, one based around a non-raced cubanidad (Cubanness), proved to be an enduring characteristic of Cuban politics; it did not disappear with the Revolution of 1959 but was only further reified. The tension between real racial diversity and inequity, its lack of clarity, and homogenizing rhetoric diminished the real importance of race in the daily lives of all Cubans. These late 19th century notions of racelessness were progressive for the time, but political discourse alone did not effectively counter the longstanding ramifications of socially-held beliefs or the effects of pre-existing structural policies and problems.26

This chapter aims to expand upon this claim by understanding why and how race was constructed in Cuba socially, politically, and economically prior to the Cuban Revolution of 1959. First, it is imperative to acknowledge that race can never be disassociated from the Cuban experience because of the island’s connection to slavery. From the radical emancipation of Black Haitians in 1791 to the labor of slaves in sugar plantations in the Cuban Oriente, slavery laid the foundation of modern Cuba 27 The convergence of a slave-led revolution and an increasingly interconnected global market based on commodity products, particularly sugar, influenced the development of Cuban race dynamics in the 20th century. In the long run, the ramifications of sugar and slavery created bonds between Cuba and the rest of the Third World that would promote the revolution’s transnational goals after 1959, but the repercussions of slavery and racism internally would remain hidden and uncontested.

**An Enduring Legacy**

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26 Benson, Antiracism, 13. Benson makes clear that these claims to “cubanidad” or la raza cósmica in Mexico were radical in the sense that they had never been thought of before, but they were not particularly inclusive. They sought to create something new [which particularly privileged whiteness] instead of embracing what was already present.

27 The Haitian Revolution of 1791 will be referred to as “Haitian” while the geo-political state will be called Saint-Domingue in this thesis seeing as the state of Haiti was not officially created until 1804 as a result of the revolution’s success. Furthermore, the “Oriente” is the Eastern region of Cuba particularly distinct for its high concentration of sugar plantations and Afro-Cuban communities as a result.
To contextualize the social dynamics of Cuba’s race relations requires an understanding of the importance of Cuba’s geographical location for its development within the international community from the 16th to the 20th century. Cuba was and continues to be the access point to the Americas physically and economically. It sits at the entrance of the Gulf of Mexico and was one of the first places Christopher Columbus encountered on his journeys to the Americas.\(^{28}\) This geographical location made Cuba a particularly advantageous island to control because it “would play a key role in the empire’s system of communication and trade.”\(^{29}\) Cuba was not particularly important for anything it produced, but rather it symbolized the Spanish Empire’s control of the region and facilitated intercolonial trade.\(^{30}\) The Spanish Empire understood that it had to maintain power over Cuba in order to secure the potential wealth from the lands beyond the Caribbean. The majority of colonial Cuban history prior to 1776 can best be understood as an island of merchants and Spanish naval control with little economic production on the island compared to its Caribbean rivals.\(^{31}\) Soon enough, after centuries of lackluster economic development, Cuba would boom as the result of a Black, Caribbean revolution less than 100 miles away.

**A Black Revolution**

The French Revolution and its Caribbean response modeled the two sides of the political and economic transitions that defined the Age of Imperialism: empowered Europeans and

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\(^{28}\) Refer to the maps on page vi-vii. It is also important to note that this thesis deals with Black, white, and mixed-race Cubans. While there were originally indigenous people on the island at the time of contact with Columbus, they were decimated by disease.


\(^{30}\) Ibid., 4 and 43.

\(^{31}\) Louis Pérez Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 54; John Tutino, “The Rise in the Americas of Industrial Capitalism,” in *New Countries: Capitalism, Revolutions, and Nations in the Americas, 1750-1870*, ed. John Tutino (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 42-45. I have included “prior to 1776” as a nod to the fact that the English occupation of Cuba in 1762 helped start sugar production in Cuba that was not fully realized until the 1776 sugar boom internationally.
exploited others. The 18th century proved to be a period of cultural convergence and contestation between people and powers across the world and particularly in the Caribbean. European Enlightenment ideals of egalitarianism and democracy entered the Caribbean on the same ships selling slaves and reinforcing colonial hierarchies. While the American Revolution was important to the Caribbean primarily because it allowed Spanish merchants to circumvent English trade monopolies, the French Revolution of 1789 sparked a colonial revolution on an island of slaves, and some freed Blacks (affranchi), which manifested slave owners’ worst fear: a nation of freed “slaves” ruling and governing themselves. The claims to fraternity, equality, and liberty for which the continental French had fought in spite of Louis XVI’s authority did not apply to the French colonial subjects in Saint-Domingue, which is present-day Haiti. The equality promoted by the revolution only applied to the white European French subjects on the island, not its majority mixed and Black population. The French Revolution was incapable of reconciling its Enlightenment revolution with its maintenance of a larger, European colonial system defined by oppression and hierarchy. The revolution’s accomplishments in Europe were external to Saint-Domingue’s reality. These conflicts made way for a violent reaction in 1791.

32 Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2004), 35. While the vast majority of Black people in Saint-Domingue were slaves, some leaders of the revolutionary movement were free. However, that did not mean that these freed Black men were viewed as equal. The story of the Haitian Revolution is read as a Slave Revolution without the proper context. Slave masters, and foreign countries like the newly formed US, conflated a non-white revolution with slave uprising as a simplified threat to their own power and economic system. Powerful states conflated non-whiteness with slavery perceiving this revolution a threat to their own race-based theories of domination and power. This dismisses the complexities of racial hierarchies and freedom in Saint-Domingue at the time as well.


34 Within this mix of mixed and Black residents of Saint-Domingue there was also a variety of legal statuses between enslaved and freed. Therefore, the Haitian Revolution was not only dealing with racial difference but also legal classifications of people.


36 The constant push-and-pull between ideological consistency and practice not only plagued the French Revolution in relation to its colonies, but also the Cuban Revolution which promoted non-racism externally but refused to engage with race internally.
Armed Black Haitians led the revolution in Saint-Domingue, many of whom were both non-European and had never experienced freedom.\textsuperscript{37} This armed slave rebellion ravaged the geographic, economic, and social composition of Saint-Domingue; revolutionaries burned plantations, sugar exportations stopped, and white landowners fled.\textsuperscript{38} Saint-Domingue’s internal collapse as a result of a race-based revolution and Cuba’s geographic proximity to the conflict gave the island the opportunity to rapidly develop as the new Caribbean sugar power.\textsuperscript{39}

Prior to the revolution, Saint-Domingue had been the world’s leading sugar producer and a major port for the American slave trade.\textsuperscript{40} The slave revolution forced many white landowners—perhaps as many as 30,000—to flee to neighboring Cuba and reestablish themselves with their knowledge, money, and slaves.\textsuperscript{41} The international shortage of sugar gave Cuba the opportunity to develop itself as the new sugar-producing Caribbean island; this status was fueled by Cuba’s capital, both fiscal and human, the arrival of white landowners, and an overall growth in the Atlantic slave trade.\textsuperscript{42} The economic convergence of slave-led revolution with the international market’s demand for sugar molded Cuba into an island flooded with a mixed slave population from both Saint-Domingue and Africa, high export revenue, and increasingly strict slave laws. Only 1700 acres of land were cultivated for sugar in the late 17th century, but by the 1810s, the amount of cultivated land more than doubled.\textsuperscript{43} The economic

\textsuperscript{37} Dubois, \textit{Avengers of the New World}, 171. However, some of the leaders of the Haitian Revolution were freed ex-slaves called affranchi such as Toussaint Louverture.
\textsuperscript{39} Pérez, \textit{Cuba}, 55.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{42} Ada Ferrer, \textit{Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 11; Tutino, “The Rise in the Americas of Industrial Capitalism,” 52. How did the slaves get to Cuba? While the slaves were fighting for freedom in Saint-Domingue, some slave owners tricked their slaves to come with them to Cuba. Other times the slave ships headed to Saint-Domingue re-routed to Cuba because of the news that the slaves had risen up on the island. Ultimately, the geographic proximity of Cuba to Saint-Domingue and similar climate made it so that slavery was viable, but also so that slaves themselves could be moved to the island with ease.
\textsuperscript{43} Pérez, \textit{Cuba}, 56. This led to a geographic and economic expansion of sugar production in Cuba.
“progress” of Cuba following the Haitian Revolution transformed it into the antithesis of the social radicalism of Haiti not in spite of, but perhaps because of, their geographical proximity to one another. The liberation of slaves in Haiti meant more slave ships docked and sold slaves in Havana, and the collapse of colonial control in Saint-Domingue leant to tighter colonial control and punishment in Cuba. The transition of Cuba from a mere trading post of the Spanish empire to an economic powerhouse in its own right transformed the social and political role of Cuba internationally and was a direct result of race-based and slave-led revolution during a period of global capitalist expansion.

The first time that a revolution in the Caribbean radically transformed the role of race and the international power dynamic occurred because of the Haitian Revolution, but, nearly 150 years later, the Cuban Revolution sparked similar effects in both regards. Both the role of race-based fears and the increase in demand for sugar during the 19th century because of the fall of Saint-Domingue indicate how and why race remained at the center of the region’s politics from 1791 to 1959. The heritage of plantation-based slavery influenced the social and economic organization of these Caribbean societies and how these states acted internationally.

Part of the larger project of Cuban historiography is to connect Cuba’s history to other slave societies in order to understand the similarities between race, slavery, and imperialism across the region. Many historians argue that Cuba was an exception due to its continued colonial status until 1898. However, it followed the larger pattern of Atlantic slave societies such

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45 Ada Ferrer, *Freedom’s Mirror*, 10. Haiti is used here to refer to the liberated, independent island of Saint-Domingue that changed its name to Haiti in 1804.
as Brazil and the US. The increase in demand for sugar internationally gave the Caribbean islands economic value and weight that could only be maintained by an increasingly oppressive labor scheme of slavery, just as sugar in Brazil maintained monarchical rule and the US South shifted to plantations. In 1866, Spanish abolition of slavery in Cuba did not eliminate the effects of its long-standing presence. The economics of a sugar-based economy based on a hierarchical labor system influenced liberation movements’ enemies and course of action across the entirety of the Atlantic and the Caribbean. The enemies of liberty in the Caribbean were not just the colonial leaders, but also their economic projects and that which had given them power: sugar.

Not a decade after abolition, in February of 1895, Cubans began fighting for their independence against Spain. The Cuban War for Independence was led by figures such as José Martí and Antonio Maceo who framed their fight in the name of national liberation. Later considered fathers of the Cuban nation, these men positioned themselves against foreign imperial powers and attempted to build a united, collective Cuban identity to combat continued Spanish control. In asserting what it meant to be Cuban, the independence movement also had to confront

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48 Ferrer, Insurgent Cuba, 18-19.
49 This royal decree was an attempt to appease independence seeking parties in Cuba as a result of the 10 Years War which is the aforementioned failed War for Independence. Furthermore, Cuba was the second to last place to abolish slavery in the Americas. Brazil was the last in 1888.
50 Ferrer, Insurgent Cuba, 1
51 José Martí and Antonio Maceo are part of the pantheon of political heroes uplifted by the Cuban Revolution of 1959. José Martí is often attributed by Castro and the revolutionaries refer to themselves as the “generación del centenario” because their actions marked 100 years after Martí’s. Furthermore, Maceo was not only the prominent general of the Cuban army during the War for Independence, but he was also Afro-Cuban. The rhetoric of both of these heroes was adopted and utilized by the generación del centenario (Centennial Generation) as well who sought to liberate not just Cuba, but the entire Third World as well.
how race created “obstacles in the way of public” cohesion. Martí went so far as to confront these problems and attitudes towards Afro-Cubans in his speech “With and For the Good of All” (Con todos y para el bien de todos) by proclaiming that determining the loyalty of Cubans by their race did not change their commitment to liberty. The fight for independence sought to homogenize Cuban identity in a post-slavery context where it was “not Black, not white, [but] only Cuban.” The coalition Martí was establishing for independence was all-encompassing because it promoted a singular raza (race) united against the colonial rule of the Spanish and the encroaching Americans. In his speech “My Race” (Mi Raza), Martí claimed that “men are more than whites, mulattos or Negroes. Cubans are more than whites, mulattos or Negroes. On the field of battle, dying for Cuba, the souls of whites and Negroes have risen together into the air.” Martí dreamt of loyalty to nation that preceded racial identification and experience.

Soon enough, Martí’s greatest hopes—and fears—were fulfilled. US American capitalist interests, which were backed by the US under its claim of peace in the Western Hemisphere, co-opted Cuba’s fight for independence. Prior to official US military intervention, “American” corporations dominated the Cuban economy after the abolition of slavery. The economy of Cuba shifted to depend heavily upon capital, tariffs, and imports from the US in the ten years between the abolition of slavery and the “Spanish-American” War. In 1898, the US entered the conflict

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53 José Martí, “Con todos y para el bien de todos,” 5. “Pues yo sé de manos de negro que están más dentro de la virtud que las de blanco alguno que conozco: yo sé del amor negro a la libertad sensata, que sólo en la intensidad mayor y natural y útil se diferencia del amor a la libertad del cubano blanco: yo sé que el negro ha erguido el cuerpo noble, y está poniéndose de columna firme de las libertades patrias.”

54 Benson, Antiracism, 12.

55 Martí gave a speech titled “Mi raza” which is an attempt to solidify his own idea of cubanidad as understood as a “race”.

56 Brown University, “Document #14: ‘My Race,’ José Martí (1893)”.

claiming that Spanish rule in the Western Hemisphere was a direct violation of the 1823 Monroe Doctrine which the US created to legitimize its intervention in affairs of the Western hemisphere. US utilization of the Monroe Doctrine under the premise of peace only reinforced paternalistic and protectionist policies towards places unprepared for “self-government”.58 Language such as “unpreparedness” and “capability” assumed a level of superiority on the part of the US which justified their intervention in the political construction and military intervention of the newly “liberated” Cuba.

The Monroe Doctrine, in conjunction with US success in the co-opted Cuban War for Independence, created a precedent for continued US intervention in Cuban politics first in the Platt Amendment and, later, in 20th century business relations.59 US foreign policy in the Western hemisphere during the 20th century was predicated on the Monroe Doctrine’s justification to intervene because, with said justification, the US could control the hemisphere in ways that benefited itself politically and economically. This policy would eventually engender the Organization of American States (OAS) with political authority regionally under the helm of the US. It would also legitimize long-run US intervention in Latin American states on the basis of benevolent paternalism for the purpose of economic security.60

20th Century Cuba: Independence and Unification

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, US Americans dominated the Cuban economy. By 1905, individuals and corporations from the US owned an estimated 60% of all rural coffee and sugar-producing property in Cuba.61 Cubans did not control their own economy; the Cuban economy depended on the inflow of foreign capital; however, domestic elites

58 Pérez, Cuba, 138.
59 The Cuban War for Independence is more popularly known as the Spanish-American War due to US intervention.
60 For a more nuanced understanding of the racialized politics of the Monroe Doctrine refer to footnote 69.
61 Pérez, Cuba, 151.
facilitated and benefited from this dependency as well. Cuba was not only economically dominated, but it was also politically limited by US presence. The US military occupied the island between 1899 and 1902 as a result of the Spanish-American War. After 1902, the government was under the constant jurisdiction of the US Congress as dictated by the Platt Amendment which guaranteed US intervention in domestic Cuban affairs whenever problems arose. US military aid and intervention in the Cuban War for Independence had a price to be paid: true independence. In a US report on Cuban political axioms, one line plainly states, “the Cuban people could be united to fight for independence,” but it questions their future capability of governance by asking if they were in fact willing to “[unite] to fight for its maintenance.”

Cuba had exchanged peripheral Spanish colonial administration for consistent political engineering and military intervention on the part of the US.

The role of the United States weighed so heavily on Cuban politics that the notion of intervention was omnipresent. In a review on the role of the US’s control of peripheral Cuban islands following the Spanish-American War, the author paints independence as a political game of “sovereignty”. The author makes clear that the independence of Puerto Rico and Cuba would not come “without the goodwill and gracious consent of the United States which will always have it at their mercy through their control over the islands which enclose it like a band of iron.” Therefore, it was not simply a question of legality but, more importantly, one of

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62 This notion of economic and political control is similar to what Cardoso refers to as dependency theory in the realm of Latin American development. For more information, see Fernando Henrique Cardoso, “Industrialization, Dependency and Power in Latin America,” Berkeley Journal of Sociology 17 (1972-1973): 79-95; Fernando Henrique Cardoso, “Associated-Dependent Development: Theoretical and Practical Implications,” in Authoritarian Brazil, ed. Alfred Stepan (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), 142-176.

63 Ibid., 144. The Platt Amendment was the legislation incorporated into the Cuban constitution in 1903 that detailed the ways in which the US government was able to intervene in domestic Cuban affairs. For more information, see Louis Pérez, Cuba Under the Platt Amendment, 1902-1934 (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1986).

64 Reports, etc., Undated., 01/01/1923-01/01/1924. Engert, Cornelius Van H., Papers, 53636. Georgetown University Manuscripts.

65 Ibid., 8.
competency. The Monroe Doctrine demonstrated America’s legacy of racism because it authorized the US’s paternalistic and protectionist treatment of Cuba.

US intervention in the Spanish-American War contested the independence of Cuba and other newly acquired US American territories. The people and governments of Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines all sought to understand their limbo status of independence. US legislation, like the Platt Amendment, did not refute Cuba’s independence outright but, rather, micro-managed it through the framework of imperialism. Even documents from the US Ambassador to Cuba during the 1920s seek to understand the role of the United States in a country where their “independent” government required approval, aid, and guidance from the US. The difficulty in deciphering this relationship is best encapsulated in the Cuban conception of an American general retiring from his post in Havana. In an editorial in *El Universal* about the departure of the American general from Cuba, the author attempts to thank the general for the time he spent on the island and for his work, but, in the end, the entry characterizes the general as the “personification of a policy which restricts, diminishes or adulterates the independence of our country.”

Individual representatives of the US government were the physical embodiment of ubiquitous foreign-rule on domestic soil.

While Cuba was nominally free, the constant US presence reduced its authority to the point that Cuba was effectively not independent in the 20th century. The Cuban people understood themselves to be an extension of US American hegemonic control which spanned the entirety of the continental US, Central America, and the Caribbean. US hegemonic approaches to political and economic control rested on a notion of superiority which reinforced racialized

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67 The United States was still converting territories in the Southwest United States into states specifically, New Mexico and Arizona.
distinctions between nations and people.\textsuperscript{68} The US government not only viewed itself as more politically and economically competent but also as socially superior. The Monroe Doctrine was established on a notion of paternalism, in which the rest of the Americas was not qualified or able to make decisions of their own accord.\textsuperscript{69} The US policymakers viewed these non-European, non-English speaking countries as lesser, and they exemplified the same prejudice within their own country as they built and implemented Jim Crow segregation.\textsuperscript{70} The people in these countries were a \textit{racialized} other understood as non-white. This notion of otherness, which was bolstered by language differences and the experience of \textit{mestizaje} or racial mixing in Latin America, was the rationale behind the US’s belief that the region was inherently unfit to rule itself. Such racism was not solely an international phenomenon between nations like Cuba and the US but also a national phenomenon. Cuba divided inwardly based on racial classifications of blackness, whiteness, and mixedness despite Martí’s idealistic aims for a raceless nation.

While Cuba continued to expand its sugar producing capacity throughout the 20\textsuperscript{th} century with a series of US trade deals prior to the Hawley-Smoot Tariff of 1930, the role and presence of the Afro-Cuban population drastically changed. The developments of sugar and race were intimately woven together in Cuba. The growth and increases in sugar production directly impacted the race relations of Cuban society because the sugar industry had been dependent on slave labor. Moreover, following abolition in 1886, the same people harvested sugar. Now, the only difference was that they were not owned by masters. Slavery had raced Cuban labor.

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worked plantations and upon liberation they did not have the resources to leave. Therefore, one of the legacies of slavery was the physical location of Afro-Cubans and their work.

The developments of the sugar industry following 1886 drastically impacted the lives of the workers in the industry—that is, recently freed Black Cubans. The enfranchisement of said workers also led to a political response on the part of the institutionalized parties. Cubans of color had to seek out ways outside of the official party apparatus to engage in politics and, more importantly, in the political issues which concerned them. In 1907, Cubans of color established the Independent Association of Color (Agrupación Independiente de Color) which eventually became the Independent Party of Color (Partido Independiente de Color).  

This party acted as a mechanism to legitimize the voices of Afro-Cubans who had fought for independence but were excluded from liberal, homogenizing parties. The push to represent themselves attempted to incorporate views and experiences intentionally left out of the new political regime of 1902, which funneled Afro-Cubans into the Liberal party. After a series of attempts to eliminate race-based political organization, Cuba experienced what it had tried to avoid since 1791, its first “Race War”.

The 1912 guerra de razas ("Race War") was not a random explosion of peasant-based violence towards landowners or a well-organized revolution of the oppressed. Rather, it was a reaction to long-standing social problems which had only been intensified as a result of a reorganized economy, a boom in foreign [mainly US] capital, and an impoverished labor force. The “war”, which started as a protest, responded to deep-seated issues of economic inequality

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71 Pérez, Cuba, 167.
73 In 1911, the Liberal party enacted the Morúa Law which made it illegal to organize based on race. However, the Independent Party of Color (Partido Independiente de Color) continued and eventually ended up being involved in the ‘race war’ or ‘guerra de razas’ in 1912.
and access. Participants targeted land because it symbolized the economic productivity of the island, but the rebellion itself did not target the “white race.”

Black veterans of the Cuban War for Independence fought the “Race War” for equality, not to overthrow the whites.

Importantly, the Cubans involved in the “Race War” did not label it as such, but the US forces that involved themselves used race-based language such as “troublesome negro agitator” and “irresponsible negroes” to describe the resisters. The rebels made “their first object...the destruction of property” and, specifically, that of sugar property across the Oriente. It is not accidental that Black peasants and veterans sought to destroy sugar plantations as they expressed their political agency. Sugar plantations trapped them in a system of dehumanization wherein their experiences as slaves not even 30 years earlier made them voiceless in political and social matters. But slavery did much more than strip people of political rights. The lasting influences of slavery created political and social structures in which ex-slaves could not voice their opinions even in a republic. The structural ramifications of slavery and the omnipresence of the US ingrained racism into the state.

The incorporation of and dependence upon Cubans of color during the War for Independence at the end of the 19th century, as particularly illuminated by Antonio Maceo’s service, necessitated a reevaluation of Cuba’s identity. The war tested the validity of the racism that had long separated the worlds of white and Black Cubans. However, incomplete independence and intervention of US imperialists in the liberation of the island interrupted Martí’s idea of a new, raceless nation in the 20th century. US political puppeteering contested

74 McGillivary, *Blazing Cane*, 83.
Cuban sovereignty. The Platt Amendment not only officially canonized US imperialism, but the presence of US sugar companies and the Spanish-American Iron company’s control of the physical property reinforced foreign reach.\textsuperscript{77} Racial instability in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century threatened economic profits; therefore, the US Marine’s cessation of the “Race War” was accompanied by the significant cost of continued Cuban dependence on American business and military authority.\textsuperscript{78} US politicians helped label the conflict as racially charged by calling it a “Race War”. Said label in turn divided the peasantry on Black and white racial lines.\textsuperscript{79} The decision to frame it as a “Race War” led by the Independent Party of Color—the only party organized around racial identity—rather than a class-based resistance to imperial-produced poverty stoked new racially-charged politics which Cuban actors had previously not acknowledged. The American Minister wrote to the US Secretary of State during the “Race War” about the absurdity of a rumor that the Cuban people honestly believed that “the negroes [could] be given the upper hand in the Government. This ridiculous story is creating a surprising amount of consternation and resentment even among intelligent classes who would welcome [US] intervention.”\textsuperscript{80} The minister found it laughable that the US would recognize “negro” demands of equality and representation.

Ultimately, the “Race War” resulted in a US socially propagated division of the Cuban island between Blacks and whites which the War for Independence had attempted to erase 20 years earlier. When the US Marines got involved, they indiscriminately repressed non-white Cubans across Cuba regardless of if they were members of the Independent Party of Color.\textsuperscript{81} The

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\textsuperscript{78} Pérez, “Politics, Peasants, and People of Color,” 537.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., 538.
\textsuperscript{81} McGillivary,\textit{ Blazing Cane}, 84.
\end{flushleft}
progressive nature of Martián *cubanidad* was negated in practice by the continual dependence on American military intervention to quell social problems that were painted as racially charged.\(^82\) Race-based divisions existed in Cuba prior to the “Race War”, but the conflict accentuated the complex array of race relations deeply entangled with US economic and political imperialism. The contradiction between actualized and nominal incorporation of the Afro-Cuban population would not be resolved in a matter of years or even by the Revolution in 1959 but would continue to be a consistent social problem plaguing the Cuban state.

**Blackness in Cuba**

Before delving into how the Revolution of 1959 dealt with race internally, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which “blackness” had been constructed as “Cuban”. Nicolás Guillén, the author of the poem at the beginning of this chapter, was one of the foremost Afro-Cuban poets of the 20\(^{th}\) century. He was a Communist prior to the Revolution of 1959, and, eventually, the revolutionary regime sponsored and commissioned his work. Furthermore, Nicolas Guillén was one of the founders of a literary movement known as *negrismo*. *Negrismo*, much like its Franco-Caribbean counterpart *négritude*, was a literary movement that attempted to use the Black experience as a vessel through which to conceptualize a world in transit, conversation, and change. Geographically, the Caribbean was a point of convergence between people, goods, and ideas.\(^83\) Merchants sold and transported goods from Europe, Africa, the Americas, and Asia in the Caribbean starting in the 16\(^{th}\) century. This network was primarily initiated and sustained through the exchange and profit of enslaved Africans who fueled

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\(^82\) McGillivary, *Blazing Cane*, 74.
\(^83\) Tutino, “The Rise in the Americas of Industrial Capitalism,” 33 and 40.
capitalist connections and markets from the early 16th century until today. The Caribbean islands were the nexus of unrest and frustration with a world order that perpetually marked them as peripheral and without a voice worthy of recognition. Negrismo and négritude provided a space for marginalized, Black voices at the international level. The Harlem Renaissance inspired Black thinkers in the Caribbean to continue the legacy of the Haitian Revolution by producing literature that prioritized their frustrations and gave voice to their own culture much like Guillén. Soon enough, negrismo was adopted by popular culture in Cuba; the marginal existence of Afro-Cubans became the central cultural representation of all things Cuban.

Afro-Cuban music such as *son*, the poetic creations of Nicolas Guillén, and sensual *rumba* became the iconographic images of Cuba for the rest of the world. Cuba exported Afro-Cuban culture through music but stripped it of its “afro” title. Afro-Cuban musicians, such as Pérez Prado on American televisions, became the marketed image of what true Cubanness was. Promoting Afro-Cuban culture as the face of Cuba falsified reality. The state promoted Black culture externally while, internally, Black Cuban creators encountered policies and politics determined by little representation of their own race. The state praised Afro-Cubans for their

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84 De la Fuente, *Havana*, 35-42. The quantity of slaves licensed to enter Havana between 1551 and 1590 was less than 500 annually. Despite this seemingly low amount, the sharp increase of enslaved people to the island changed Cuban society.


86 Much like the conversation of how theories of mestizaje served to whiten culture and erase blackness as mentioned in the introduction, the appropriation of Black culture in Cuba experienced a similar phenomenon. Images of culture were assumed to be fully “Cuban” instead of origination from Afro-Cuban communities. For more on the idea of cultural, racial appropriation in Latin America see George Reid Andrew’s *Afro-Latin America: Black Lives, 1600-2000*. For a Cuban example that I will not be able to talk about in this thesis, see chapter 6 “Afro-Cuban Folklore in a Raceless Society” of Robin Moore’s *Music and Revolution: Cultural Change in Socialist Cuba*.

87 Son as a genre is a uniquely Cuban genre that is the base of salsa, cha-cha-cha, and many other popular Latin rhythms. The musical genre *son* will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

artistic and athletic abilities, but their roles as citizens of the state and their intellectual capacity went unrecognized.

The canonization of the two heroes of Cuban independence demonstrates this dichotomy between white and Black citizenship: Martí and Maceo. José Martí is remembered as the intellectual forefather of Cuban independence while Antonio Maceo is recognized as a leading general. Martí was the forefather and Maceo was the “Bronze Titan.” Whiteness dreamed of the ideal Cuban nation while blackness fought for it. It is impossible to state that Cuban culture erased Afro-Cubans prior to the Revolution of 1959, but it is important to recognize that the representation and power they held was not equal to white Cubans because of slavery’s legacy.

Cuba before January 1, 1959 was a place where race was intimately connected to sugar production and the cultural imagery of the island. Afro-Cubans primarily lived in rural areas due to the historical location of sugar plantations. Their isolation from urban life meant that the vast majority of Afro-Cubans were illiterate given that schooling did not extend to rural areas. Furthermore, the continuation of Martí’s colorblind rhetoric was ineffective insofar as it did not deal with the ramifications of a slave-based economy transforming into a capitalist appendage of the US American business complex. While the Revolution of 1959 was not a direct response to the problems facing the Afro-Cuban community, a social and economic revolution had to appeal to the most vulnerable of society. The Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro and other young, middle-class, college educated, white Cubans was a response to political frustrations directed towards US imperialism and intervention. The world for which Castro’s guerrillas fought was not a world premised on racial egalitarianism but a world where the expulsion of US imperial power could give Cuba the opportunity to legitimately gain independence. However, what would

89 Benson, Antiracism, 12.
this independence mean in regard to race and racism? Would this revolution establish a rhetoric for state consolidation similar to that of Martí, or would it rectify the systemic racial problems that were inherited from slavery, something that had been abolished less than a century before?

**Racial Consolidation of a Revolution**

The role of race during the fighting of the Cuban Revolution was minimal. The guerrilla fighters were not necessarily attempting to construct a racial utopia among their insurgent groups in the jungle. Furthermore, relatively few Afro-Cubans were participants in the actual fighting or the revolutionary leadership, except Juan Almeida.90 This absence in and of itself is noteworthy. The apparent lack of concern for racial problems established the Cuban Revolution not as racist, but as racially unconcerned. The traditional pantheon of Cuban Revolutionary heroes—Fidel Castro, Raul Castro, and Che Guevara—were all white and well-educated men who were attempting “to remove, demolish, [and] destroy the colonialist system that still reign[ed]...[not] in a piecemeal fashion just to come out ahead but rather to conscientiously and responsibly plan the construction of the new nation.”91 The concern was imperialism and the poverty it created, but the Revolution did not prioritize an examination of the racialized component of this poverty until after it became a practical necessity.92 While poverty affected the vast majority of the Afro-Cuban population, the Revolution was not specifically concerned about their plight. The Revolution was not a fight that originated from the marginalized community on the sugar plantations as we saw in Saint-Domingue in 1791; rather, it was a fight led by a frustrated

90 Juan Almeida Bosque became the singular representative and voice of Afro-Cubans in the revolutionary government. He served as the point of reference in regard to “racial problems” for the regime.
91 “Frank Pais, to leaders of the 26th of July (M26-7), May 17, 1957,” in Julia Sweig, *Inside the Cuban Revolution: Fidel Castro and the Urban Underground* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 12. This is a quote of Frank País’s circular to the leaders of the revolutionary movement. The quote was already translated by Sweig.
92 de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 261. Alejandro de la Fuente argues that race became a concern of the state when racism began to poke holes in its legitimacy. A revolution that was unable to fully celebrate its Black and White veterans equally was not a revolution, but just a new corrupted government.
middle-class that sought to *liberate* the island from the larger international forces which had created a situation in which poverty and dependency were constant.\textsuperscript{93} The fighters and leaders of the Cuban Revolution came from universities in cities, where they had been exposed to these ideas. Afro-Cubans were not just less likely to attend university but were also generally less literate than their white counterparts.\textsuperscript{94} The Revolution recognized disparities such as this as reasons for liberation. However, the fight itself separated education from race.

Like the generation before them, Castro and his comrades framed their fight as one of national liberation. In order for the Revolution to liberate a nation, there first had to be a nation. And, in a larger sense, the Revolution had to answer the following question: who was the Cuban nation? As stated earlier, Martí sought to define the nation explicitly in terms apart from color and assert a form of nationality in which patriotism was more important than race. In 1959, the new revolutionary government depended on a similar race-oblivious view in establishing the nation. The international economic experience of exploitation and political dislocation defined the Cuban nation in 1959. Therefore, the liberation of the presumed exploited nation not only ignored the racialized socio-economic realities of poverty and illiteracy, but it intentionally framed the nation to be devoid of race reflecting Martí’s dream for Cuba.\textsuperscript{95}

Furthermore, the socio-economic position of the leadership of the Cuban Revolution made its socially radical agenda unique. The importance of the revolutionary regime’s response

\textsuperscript{93} Fernando Henrique Cardoso, “Industrialization, Dependency and Power in Latin America,” *Berkeley Journal of Sociology* 17 (1972-1973): 79-95. This notion of imperialism harkens back to “dependency theory” as spelled out and highlighted by the work of Cardoso who uses dependency to explain Latin America’s economic and political situation historically. Refer to footnote 16 in the introduction.

\textsuperscript{94} This will be discussed in further detail in the following chapter in relation to the 1961 Literacy campaign.

\textsuperscript{95} While many scholars problematize Cuba’s race question with Marxist ideology, I would argue that in 1959 that would be anachronistic. When the revolution took place, it did not proclaim Communism. In December of 1961, Fidel Castro claimed his allegiance and promotion to Communism in order to gain allyship with the USSR. On December 2, 1961 the front page of the Cuban newspaper read “The United Party of the Socialist Revolution” ("El Partido Unido de la Revolución Socialista"). This was one of the first times that the revolutionary government explicitly connected itself to the ideology of socialism.
to fix deeply entrenched disparities, which in turn happened to be manifested in racial disparities, as part of their truly social revolution meant that there was legitimate concern for the well-being of the entire island. In fact, the revolution created and sustained progress in the realms of healthcare and education unmatched by many other states in Latin America at the time or since. However, this legitimate progress cannot erase the lack of social progress in relation to race. Fidel Castro and his fellow revolutionary partners adopted the colorblind rhetoric of Martí and emphasized the importance of Afro-Cuban identity to Cuban culture through sports and the arts, all of which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Despite the social change caused by the Revolution in 1959, racism remained. The treatment of Afro-Cubans in the image of the Revolution purposely constructed these communities to be in a situation where their poverty was a result of the corruption of Batista, but the revolutionary government did little to drastically alter the presentation of said communities in the media. Racism became an issue for the Revolution because the state needed to legitimize its authority, not because the Revolution itself promoted racial equality. The ideological tension between a revolution for national liberation and the persistence of persecution for part of the populace poked holes in the legitimacy of the Revolution. The underlying continued tension of socially-held racist beliefs made the racial progress of a white-led revolution limited. Part of this regime’s success depended on its ability to effectively construct a nation that was united and supported the Revolution. The question after January 1, 1959 became, how was this new government going to walk the line between consolidation, ideological continuity, and survival? And more importantly, could the Revolution do that?

96 Some scholars in the field argue that the only reason Castro urged anti-discrimination policy was because many Black revolutionaries were encountering discrimination while their white counterparts were being praised by the same people. See footnote 92.
Chapter 2: Revolutionary Cuba’s Race Problem

One way the new government unintentionally addressed race was through music. The revolutionary government utilized raced music to paint an image of the new state through a distinctly Cuban genre, *son*. This genre originally reflected the experience of internal migration in Cuba, specifically that which took place during industrialization; Cubans living in the countryside migrated to cities like Havana.  

Son music has always spoken to the meeting of new cultures and societal change. Its connection to the Afro-Cuban community exists in the instrumentation and percussion of the music. This connection to Afro-Cubans was, in fact, the reason behind its illegality until 1925. The government considered its associations to the countryside negative and to blackness dangerous.  

After 1959, the state sponsored the production of son but with a new twist; now, it promoted Black identity. The lyrics to Nicolás Guillén’s “Son number 6” (Son número 6) reveal a unique, but historical intent to capture and promote blackness in Cuban culture:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{y cuando no soy yoruba,} & \quad \text{And when I am not Yoruba, then} \\
\text{soy congo, mandinga, carabalí.} & \quad \text{I am Congo, Mandinga, Carabalí.} \\
\text{Atiendan, amigos, mi son, que empieza así:} & \quad \text{Listen, my friends, to my *son*, that starts like this:} \\
\text{Adivinanza} & \quad \text{This is the riddle} \\
\text{de la esperanza:} & \quad \text{of all my hope:} \\
\text{lo mío es tuyo,} & \quad \text{What is mine is yours,} \\
\text{lo tuyo es mío;} & \quad \text{What is yours is mine;} \\
\text{toda la sangre} & \quad \text{All the blood} \\
\text{formando un río.} & \quad \text{Forms a river.} \\
\text{Estamos juntos desde muy lejos,} & \quad \text{We come together from far away,} \\
\text{jóvenes, viejos,} & \quad \text{Young, old,} \\
\text{negros y blancos, todo mezclado} & \quad \text{Black and white, all mixed together.}
\end{align*}
\]

Here Black identity is highlighted in both the musical genre and the lyrics. The lyrics depend on blackness to identify what makes the people of Cuba Cuban—in other words, Cubanness. The process of building the larger national identity of “Cubanness” converted Afro-Cuban culture into solely a Cuban phenomenon.\(^{100}\) In many ways, the representation of the Afro-Cuban community did not change after the Revolution as seen through the genre of son and Guillén’s lyrics; rather, the assumption that blackness owed service to Cuban culture continued. Only now, said service extended to the Revolution.

Following March 22, 1959, the Cuban state maintained racism instead of solving it. To understand how racism persisted, I will analyze who remained on the island following 1959 and how the state, along with the media, constructed narratives of the “enemy”. As part of this process, the new government had to contend with dissidents labeled as “counterrevolutionaries”.\(^{101}\) This chapter seeks to dissect the relationship between the consolidation of the revolutionary government and race. In doing so, the Cuban government shifted their wartime enemy from US imperialists to the inanimate experiences of discrimination and illiteracy.

The concept of an enemy acted as the framework by which the government unified the population. The first enemy the Revolution attempted to defeat was discrimination. The limited representation of Afro-Cubans in Revolución, the state-run newspaper from 1959 to 1965, highlights the failure of the Anti-discrimination Campaign. Then, the Literacy Campaign of 1961 emphasized how the notion of “citizenship” transformed during the early years of consolidation.

\(^{100}\) Jorge Conrado, “Indigenismo,” in *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas Vol. 3*, ed. Maryanne Cline Horowitz (Detroit: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2005), 1111-1113. This is a similar nation-building narrative that we see to *indigenismo* in South American countries like Ecuador and Perú where elites took the idea of indigeneity and transformed it to be part of the national identity.

\(^{101}\) The label counterrevolutionaries referred to both individuals who fled the island and those who criticized the government’s revolutionary agenda. The government defined counterrevolutionaries to legitimize and consolidate their rule.
The government’s campaign fashioned illiteracy as the enemy of progress in an attempt to unify all Cubans under the banner of education. The fallacy of a colorblind Cuba, started by Martí in the 19th century in conjunction with the 1959 Anti-discrimination Campaign, made race and racism untouchable topics. Although the Literacy Campaign also created a real positive racial impact, the government never acknowledged it. Literacy was a racial issue that the Revolution treated as a national policy concern. This conundrum made solving racism harder because these campaigns transformed explicitly race-based issues into national ones; making Afro-Cuban concerns simply “Cuban” perpetuated the dismissal of Black identity as lesser, not equal.

Furthermore, the Literacy Campaign of 1961 attempted to incorporate both domestic and international Black figures as champions of the revolutionary cause. In an effort to idolize Black men, the campaign employed stereotypes of the gratitude and indebtedness of Black Cubans to white Cubans. Ultimately, the Cuban government’s attempts to assert their moral superiority in contrast to the US on the basis of race forged preliminary transnational solidarity.

In the end, revolutionary Cuba’s race problem resided in the conflict between socially held racist beliefs after 1959 and the government's inability to maintain a racially-equal political “revolution” in practice. The conflict between revolutionary promises and the Revolution’s politics not only utilized the Afro-Cuban community, but also intensified its marginalization. This tension between revolutionary ideology and practice served as the basis for Cuban internationalism rooted in oppression, but it refused to acknowledge the revolutionary government’s shortcomings internally.

A “New” Cuba

From the beginning of the Cuban revolutionary guerrilla war, the question of for whom the Revolution was plagued its leaders. One major issue the guerrilla leaders faced in answering
this question was *race*. The new government needed support from the Afro-Cuban community to win the countryside and establish their power, but their Revolution was not a fight predicated on racial liberation. Furthermore, many white Cubans fled after the guerrillas took Havana. Therefore, the new guerrilla government based on national, not racial, liberation had to grapple with “white flight” and the needs of the Afro-Cuban community.\textsuperscript{102} The way in which the revolutionary government’s media dealt with the imagery of race following January 1, 1959 established the discourse around race in the government until 1991.\textsuperscript{103} 

The official state-run newspaper, *Revolución*, used subtle language that distinguished white *heroes* from Black *citizens* in the photo essays of José Hernández Artigas.\textsuperscript{104} The state and media differentiated white and Black contributions to the Cuban Revolution by distinguishing between heroism and citizenship. Afro-Cubans gained citizenship as a result of the Revolution, or better said, the state recognized their incorporation into the state as equals. However, the government soon constructed whiteness as the hero of the Revolution. When Black Cubans gained citizenship or supposed equality to white counterparts, white Cubans became the triumphant purveyors of liberty. Two comparative photo essays by José Hernández Artigas in the early weeks of January 1959 encapsulated this distinction. These two pieces featured two different communities—mothers of revolutionaries and Black Cubans—in the same format and context within two weeks of one another (See Appendix C and D). While one article focused on

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\textsuperscript{102} “White flight” as a term is typically reserved to speak about race relations in neighborhood demographics in the US. When African American families began moving into predominantly white neighborhoods in the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century, white families picked up and left. Therefore, the term “white flight” refers to the movement of white families in reaction to black migration (and increased economic access); therefore, the term serves as a valid analogy for post-1959 demographics in Cuba.

\textsuperscript{103} Refer to the introduction for an explanation about how 1991 “opened” up the discussion of racism in Cuba.

\textsuperscript{104} Benson makes a similar analysis of the pantheon of heroes promoted by the revolutionary government later on in the course of the government’s control, but at this point it is important to distinguish between heroism and citizenship as a racial conversation. For clarification, Revolución was the newspaper for Fidel’s guerrilla movement. In 1965, *Revolución* and *Hoy* were merged to create the Cuban newspaper that still exists today, *Granma*. 

the revolutionaries, the only comparable piece of journalism on Afro-Cubans detailed the experiences of older members of the community. None of Artigas’ work immediately following the revolution recounted the role of Black revolutionaries. This absence is telling in and of itself; the presence of Afro-Cubans in the revolutionary leadership was limited, partially due to their limited presence in combat before 1959. These photo essays in the newspaper served as a reflection of the work of the Revolution; it was propaganda. These interviews and photos propagated the image of a revolutionary Cuba that remained dependent on racial distinction.

On January 8, 1959, a week after the revolutionaries took Havana, the guerrilla-sponsored media printed an article based on interviews with the mothers of young fighters who had died in the Revolution. The official newspaper of the Castro’s guerrilla movement, Revolución, published said article by José Hernández Artigas titled “Mothers of the Revolution: The Heroes That Live in Our Memory” (Madres de la Revolución: Los héroes que viven en nuestro recuerdo) on the day Fidel entered Havana. It uplifted and revered these dead compatriots through their mothers’ memories. Each of the mothers’ photographs in the essay accompanied a short quoted paragraph from their interviews with Artigas describing their sons’ personalities, achievements, and valor. The quotations attached to their names and faces did not reflect the entirety of the interview, but Artigas’ editing hand stressed themes of idealism (ideales), honor (honor), strength (valiente), and the belief in a free Cuba (Cuba libre). Every mother’s quotes included at least one, if not more, references to the strength of their sons’ and their belief in the cause of the Revolution. Artigas helped build the image of the revolutionary

105 Benson, Antiracism, 43; De la Fuente, A Nation for All, 261. There is controversy and debate in the field as to whether or not Afro-Cubans as a community actually supported the revolution to the level that the government claimed. Batista had developed a strong support base with Afro-Cubans. Therefore, revolutionary insurgency threatened the social gains they had experienced under Batista.

106 José Hernández Artigas, “Madres de la Revolución: Los héroes que viven en nuestro recuerdo,” Revolución, January 8, 1959, 16.
martyr through the reflections, grief, and photographs of their mothers. Artigas also assisted in constructing the image of the revolutionary hero through the exclusion of Afro-Cuban mothers that had lost sons in the Revolution.

Hernández Artigas organized the piece to praise these white mothers for the children they had lost in the Revolution. In the introduction to the essay, he reflected upon his conversations with these women stating:

There was something more than pain in these mothers. I could feel it. These women celebrate the triumph of the Revolution. These women manifest their excitement for the victory of their sons’ ideals. But these women have paid for all of this with their own blood, with their souls. That is the price of liberty...Can we find a link between these mothers’ immense sadness and with the great excitement of the people? Yes, I believe there has to be.107

Their lament as mothers who had lost children was synonymous with the voice of the nation seeking a way to reconcile the violence and loss of the Revolution with their hope for the future. Hernández Artigas went so far as to assert that for all Cuban people, these men and their mothers were heroes that “had sacrificed themselves for the liberation” of Cuba.108 This message of heroism was not necessarily meant to be a reflection of whiteness in the Revolution, yet not one of the canonized heroes or mothers depicted was a Cuban of color. The death of white revolutionaries had given everyone else the chance for a revolutionary future. The omission of Black mothers and assumption of valor of the revolutionary hero presented by Hernández Artigas in the piece on January 8 reflected the revolutionary problem with race: default whiteness.

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107 Ibid. “Pero es que hay algo más profundo en el dolor de estas madres. Yo lo he sentido. Ellas mismas celebran el triunfo de la Revolución. Ellas mismas manifiestan su alegría por el triunfo de los ideales de sus hijos. Pero ellas pagaron en su propia sangre, en su misma alma, el precio de la libertad...¿Podremos hallar un vínculo entre esa gran tristeza y la gran alegría del pueblo? Sí, yo creo que tiene que haberlo.”

108 Ibid. “Para todo un pueblo, son héroes...quizás podamos aprender de los hombres que se han sacrificado la lección de humildad y desinterés.”
12 days later on January 20, 1959, José Hernández Artigas published his first photo essay about the Afro-Cuban community. The report titled “Not Blacks...But Citizens!” (¡Negros No...Ciudadanos!) compiled a series of interviews with members of an Afro-Cuban neighborhood in Havana. The article displayed their responses towards the success of the Revolution and its impact on their lives. The physical layout of the piece, its photos, and format paralleled that of the “Mothers of the Revolution”. Both pseudo-investigative photo journalistic pieces occupied the same page of the newspaper, used photos of people’s faces and edited quotes from interviews to reinforce Artigas’ introduction.

Within this consistent style and structure, Artigas shifted his focus from white heroism to Black indebtedness. The interviews with older members of the Afro-Cuban community framed their feelings towards the Revolution in terms of thankfulness, hope, and necessity. Carmen Torres, one of the women interviewed, commented that more than anything, the Revolution was an opportunity that “nos traten mejor” (they be treated better). The Revolution provided an opportunity, a particular political moment that members of the Afro-Cuban community had hope of better, more equal treatment socially.

Beyond the constant deference and admiration for the Revolution, many interviewees referred specifically to the problem of renting property. Urban Afro-Cubans saw the problem of rent as an immediate manifestation of their larger economic position. The revolutionary government’s promise for economic liberation predicated on agrarian land (and rent) reform gave Afro-Cubans hope. Of the nine people interviewed, four mentioned their living conditions and their rents. The other five emphasized their ability to feed and provide for their families after not being able to for years. Their economic opportunity seemingly expanded

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109 José Hernández Artigas, “¡Negros No...Ciudadanos!,” Revolución, January 20, 1959, 16.
110 The first agrarian land reform was proposed to the Cuban people on May 17, 1959.
overnight when the Revolution took control of Cuba. Artigas tactfully placed these Afro-Cuban voices in line with the political policies that the government was implementing concurrently. For example, Revolución published this story less than a week before the first law on urban rents went into effect on January 26, 1959. The government, and in turn the media, constructed the Afro-Cuban community as depending upon them and simultaneously used this image to magnify support for the new government’s actions.

However, Afro-Cubans dealt with more socio-economic problems than just rent. Irene Fernández, another interviewee in “Not Blacks, but Citizens!”, went so far as to state that “as people of color, we have many problems...and we are denied many things, not just rent, here in Cuba.” The new Black “citizens” of Cuba were grateful for a Revolution that brought about a hope for housing and a resolution to other social problems. In this new world, Afro-Cubans entered into a realm of citizenship, while their white counterparts became the triumphant and inspiring victors of the nation. White heroism established the “good of all” which included making Afro-Cubans citizens. Artigas assembled a narrative of the Afro-Cuban community pre- and post-revolution based on economic capability and their physical location. Prior to the Revolution, Black Cubans could not afford their rents and ended up in homes “without roofs.” After the Revolution, the possibility of new jobs and lower rents spurred confidence in the Revolution. On the other hand, Artigas constructed their white counterparts as capable students

111 “Rebajan alquileres: cincuenta por ciento,” Revolución, March 7, 1959, 1; “Zona rebelde: Ley de alquileres: Nada se pierde, todo se gana,” Revolución, March 9, 1959, 1-2. The law referred to here is mentioned in Eric Gettig’s “Oil and Revolution in Cuba: Development, Nationalism, and the U.S. Energy Empire, 1902-1961” (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2016), 582 and James O’Connor, “Political Change in Cuba, 1959-1965,” Social Research 35, no. 2 (1968): 328. O’Connor states that “the moderates supported the early rent law, which cut urban rents up to 50 percent” in Law No. Three and the first Fiscal Reform of 1959. This should not be confused with the later Urban Reform Law of 1960 which also reduced rents but had more to do with property ownership than just rents.
112 Artigas, “¡Negros No...Ciudadanos!”, “…las personas de color tenemos muchos problemas, porque nadie quiere alquilarnos una casa y se nos niegan muchas cosas en Cuba”
113 Artigas, “Madres de la Revolución,” 16. “...para el bien de todos.”
114 Artigas, “¡Negros No...Ciudadanos!”, “Nuestras familias están viviendo estos momentos, sin techo ni aliento.”
and revolutionaries who were themselves not indebted to the Revolution. In fact, it was the reverse: the revolutionary government was the white Cuban revolutionaries and Black Cubans were indebted to them.

These narratives further maintained the racial hierarchy present on the island prior to the Revolution. The direct juxtaposition of these narratives placed blackness in a realm of materiality that needed to be grateful to the white revolutionaries who had made their release from oppression possible. The direct comparison between these two pieces makes clear the distinction between the revolutionary government’s opinion about race: the Revolution acted as a path towards citizenship that previous Cuban governments had been unable to grant Afro-Cubans. The Revolution pushed out the mixed-race Batista and aimed to solve Afro-Cuban problems while it implicitly constructed white Cubans to be the saviors of the island.115 But if Afro-Cubans had only gained citizenship with the revolution, what had they been before? More importantly, how did Black identities fit with revolutionary citizenship?

**Political and Social Consolidation**

Part of the legitimation process of any government, and particularly revolutionary governments, is how they *reimagine* society.116 Revolutionary governments consciously define who is pro- and counter-revolutionary. These classifications for the Cuban Revolution were important because in determining who was a counterrevolutionary, they determined who was

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116 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983); Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979). 4. Skocpol defines social revolutions as “rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below. Social revolutions are set apart from other sorts of conflicts...above all by the combination of two coincidences: the coincidence of societal structural change with class upheaval; and the coincidence of political and social transformation.”
Cuban. The Cuban government used both official political and social mechanisms to craft this image through state-run newspapers, political campaigns, and transnational cooperation.

The following section analyzes both the social and political ramifications of a series of the Cuban government’s policies toward nation-building connected to race. The social issues of access and equality sought political solutions which made the politics and social organization of the island more complicated to disassociate. The role of Cuban national identity and race directly related to the policies implemented by the government, if explicit or not. Therefore, in an attempt to retain the holistic approach of the social revolution’s intent, the analysis will not be divided into different sections focused on solely political or social effects.

The social and political incorporation of Afro-Cubans into the revolutionary government and society depended on similar mechanisms of representation used prior to 1959, despite the Castro government’s claims to have eliminated discrimination. The media’s incorporation of Afro-Cubans in the new Cuba promoted them as athletes, reinforced their role as citizens, and made their identity the link to international liberation movements. The joint government-media machine co-opted blackness in particular moments to promote Cuban racial exceptionalism internationally while it ignored the persistence of racial inequality at home.

The state had to reconcile its increasingly non-capitalist economic policy with a social reality that had been informed by the legacy of slavery and sustained by systematic racialized policies. The Cuban revolutionary government attempted to take direct, concrete steps after January 1, 1959 to acknowledge the historical and social problems associated with race on the island. These steps, such as declarations and campaigns, did not eliminate racism, but only made

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118 Cuban identity, as a nation, in an international setting will be addressed in chapters 3 and 4.
the topic taboo and critique treasonous. Although the Revolution was not predicated upon the notion of racial liberation and equality, the social progress and equality promised by national liberation could not be limited to land redistribution and anti-imperialist fervor. Revolutionary liberation contained to economics limited the full liberation of all Cubans.

On March 22, 1959 Fidel Castro announced on Cuban television that discrimination no longer existed in Cuba. Four days later, the front page of Revolución proclaimed that “the Revolution had won the battle against discrimination!” Along with an energized photo of Fidel proclaiming the end of discrimination, a series of “sound-bites” from his speech asserted that Cuba was a unified collective against privileges, and most importantly that he himself was the enemy of discrimination. These short snippets from Fidel’s speech tended towards utilizing anti-discrimination policy to reassert a unified Cuban nation against a common enemy. These phrases further asserted the importance of Fidel himself as the representative of the Cuban people. His personal use of “enemy” with discrimination framed racists as anti-Castro and, in turn, counterrevolutionary. Under the photo of Fidel, a quotation stated, “consider people for their virtues, not their skin.” In one sense, this sentence emphasized discrimination as a race-based conversation, but it also established the revolutionary expectation of “virtue”. If Cuban people were to judge one another upon the criteria of virtue and only white Cubans were the exemplars of revolutionary virtue depicted in popular media and the newspaper, then virtue was a manifestation of racial differentiation.

119 This will be discussed in greater detail in the section titled “The Construction of ‘Afro-Cubans’ Under the New State” starting on page 47.
120 While some Afro-Cubans (primarily Juan René Betancourt who is referenced often in this thesis) attempted to make demands and mobilize based on race, many of those leaders fled the country. However, this question remains important and is currently being researched by scholars in the field such as Devyn Spence Benson who is looking to analyze race-based mobilization in Cuba.
121 “¡A ganar la batalla de la discriminación!,” Revolución, March 26, 1959, 1. “Considero a los demás por sus virtudes, no por su piel…”
A proclamation to end discrimination did not erase Cubans’ awareness of skin color or radically shift their socially-held beliefs in one night. Fidel Castro’s claim to have defeated discrimination in battle placed discrimination in an active, guerrilla framework that had been successful a mere three months earlier. The perpetual enemy of the Revolution would be the imperialist forces, particularly those of the US, but in the short run the government’s consolidation of control of Cuba required conquering a series of enemies which included discrimination and counterrevolutionaries.

Counterrevolutionaries: With Us or Against Us?

To consolidate the Revolution meant to decide who was included and excluded. This process of legitimation and consolidation meant that this new government had to reconcile who was left to be considered the “Cuban people”. Batista’s flight from Havana caused a mass panic and emigration to Miami surged. Those fleeing Cuba had enough money to leave and knew that radical economic rearrangement would lead them to lose more than gain. Therefore, the vast majority of those leaving Cuba and relocating to the US were upper and middle-class white families who feared the revolutionary changes to come. A large Cuban emigre community defined by their whiteness and wealth a mere 90 miles across the Florida straits gave the Cuban government a concrete and direct image of what the Revolution was not. The Cuban government pointed to Miami as the antithesis of the Revolution due to its “white” wealthy masses. Propaganda emphasized that the Cubans who fled were counterrevolutionaries that refused to liberate the nation or their fellow Cuban from racial discrimination.

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122 Brown, Cuba’s Revolutionary World, 46 & 133-134.
124 “White” is in quotation marks to acknowledge the fact that the Cubans that fled in a Cuban context were white, but upon their arrival in the US their perceived race changed depending on context.
In one way, Castro’s claim to have defeated discrimination incorporated Afro-Cubans into a Revolution that many did not have the money or opportunity to escape. Castro’s claim to have defeated discrimination in battle, much like his revolutionary movement had just defeated Batista in a guerrilla war, established a narrative of struggle. The language of war and battle placed “Cubanness” in a context similar to José Martí during the War for Independence in the 19th century. Enemies and battle unified the Cuban people despite their skin color. However, rhetoric did not equate to social change on the ground. Fidel’s proclamation on March 22, 1959 was just as utopic, but unrealistic as Martí’s vision of a non-raced Cuba in 1895.

The Revolution was not colorblind. In fact, it was racially conscious insofar as the government made intentional efforts to increase the representation and presence of Afro-Cubans in the media. On March 28, 1959, the day before Easter Sunday and six days after Castro’s claim to have “defeated” discrimination, a cartoon appeared in Revolución which depicted Fidel Castro having a conversation with an artist presumably drawing a version of the Easter story (See Appendix A). The caption below the cartoon is simple and to the point: “paint me some little Black angels!”125 This cartoon is jarring to the modern viewer who would read such a blatant call for visual representation as ironic compared to the proclamation of having solved discrimination three days earlier. However, this particular cartoon accentuates the reality of discrimination in Cuba. Despite the government’s claims to have solved discrimination, race still marked people socially even after discrimination had supposedly been solved. The “success” of internal race relations became a symbol of Cuban superiority internationally, but this success disguised racist tropes and assignments of blackness within Cuba. This cartoon intended to promote the inclusivity of the Revolution. It was not sarcastic or poking fun at the Castro regime; it was

125 “Semana Santa,” Revolución, March 28, 1959, 2. “¡Píntame angelitos negros!” This is the same cartoon as detailed in the introduction.
produced and published by the newspaper supported by Castro’s particular guerrilla movement (M 26-7). Therefore, the “elimination” of discrimination on March 22 did not mean that the racist beliefs held by individuals disappeared, just that the state labeled the discriminatory social manifestations of racism as illegal and counterrevolutionary.

In opposition to the official declaration of achieved anti-discrimination by the government, other individuals called out the flaws and shortcomings of the new government’s race program. Some Black intellectuals, such as Juan René Betancourt, disrupted the narrative of anti-discrimination promoted by the government through claiming their blackness. Betancourt published an opinion piece in the US’s National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s (NAACP) official monthly organ, *The Crisis*, titled “Castro and the Cuban Negro” insisting that

Negroes have specific rights to defend that none of the revolutions, neither those for independence, nor the Communist, nor this one for democratic restoration, has had nor will have automatic effects against racial discrimination...the fact that we disregard the existence of an object does not, by any means, eliminate its presence.  

Critiques such as these placed Betancourt, and others, outside the revolutionary fold and marked them as counterrevolutionaries. This is why in 1962 the government made Societies of Color (*Sociedades de color*) illegal.  

The threat of identity-based “Black” mobilization threatened the message and consolidation of the Revolution. Asserting pride around a racial identity was not only a threat to Cuban unity, but it also subverted the claim that the Revolution had solved discrimination. If discrimination no longer existed, there was no need to have race-based identity groups fighting for equality. Racial labels were no longer pertinent and claiming said labels was a direct assault to the revolutionary government’s authority. As a result of this oppression, a

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large majority of the Afro-Cuban leadership fled the country, leaving the community without its leaders. Juan René Betancourt left in 1961 to New York as a result of the increasingly restrictive policies on Black mobilization.\(^{128}\) Therefore, the Castro regime construed both Cubans who maintained discriminatory practices and those who critiqued the government’s policies for not doing enough as being against the Revolution. As stated earlier, those that were able to leave were white, wealthier Cubans who took up residence in southern Florida as a result of an easier path to immigration sponsored by the US government because they were refugees from international communism.\(^{129}\) The consolidation of those considered to be “counterrevolutionary” manifested itself racially just as the Revolution manifested itself racially internationally. Those left in Cuba were mostly non-white and not as wealthy. The state needed to engage with blackness.

**The Construction of “Afro-Cubans” Under the New State**

Certain policies and actions served to uplift *blackness* in the Revolution, but they also constrained and limited blackness under the direction and control of the state. This celebration served a larger Cuban international agenda focused on racialized oppressions instead of actualized equality on the island. The Revolution created the space for increased equality, but the goal of ideological national liberation trumped racial liberation.

The continuity of Cuban national identity and its relationship with race did not drastically change following 1959. The presence and representation of the Afro-Cuban community in the media demonstrated the continued manifestation of racism following the Revolution. The stories,  


\(^{129}\) Brown, *Cuba’s Revolutionary World*, 122.
photos, and frequency of Afro-Cubans in the media measure how the Revolution changed the perception and treatment of the community. Prior to 1959, popular culture relegated Afro-Cubans to two areas: sports and music/dance. The Cuban nation prior to 1959 embraced the syncretic traditions of the Afro-Cuban community that birthed the music of Cuba, *son*, and rhythmic dance. These cultural markers of national identity continued to unify the island after Castro’s assumption of power.

Prior to 1959, the Cuban state did not punish local segregationist policies, such as divided parks, or promote an anti-discriminatory policy. The appropriation and whitening of Afro-Cuban culture towards a singular “Cuban national identity” was ideologically acceptable. After January 1, 1959, the continued appropriation of Blackness and limited representation of Afro-Cubans typically located in the sports pages of the newspapers challenged the assumed equality promised by the values of the Revolution.

As mentioned earlier, pieces such as “Not Blacks…But Citizens!” and others such as “A Social Problem in Santiago de Cuba” (Un problema social en Santiago de Cuba) constructed blackness as impoverished and dependent on the Revolution. In “A Social Problem in Santiago de Cuba,” the author commented on the socio-economic status of Cubans of color. He stated that the presence of Afro-Cubans in traditional service sector jobs

…is not due to a lack of fighting spirit, the ability to overcome adversity, or an ethnic incapability. They are victims of a social injustice that no government or social institution has dedicated itself to rectify with the necessary forces, clarity, or sincerity…It is necessary that the Cuban people understand that this social problem of race requires special attention. And this revolutionary program will never forget it.

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130 Aristides, “Todas las playas para el pueblo,” *Revolución*, March 19, 1959, 16. This article talks about the desegregation of the beaches which is just one example of the public places desegregated by the revolutionary regime.

131 This rhetoric is similar to that of indigenismo which was mentioned earlier in the chapter.


133 Ibid. “Todo esto no es por una falta de espíritu de lucha y de superación y de incapacidad étnica. Son víctimas de una injusticia social que ningún gobierno ni institución social se ha dedicado a subsanar con las necesarias fortaleza,
The Revolution had to rectify its race problems. Afro-Cuban helplessness resulted from an international system of oppression. Not one single government or institution caused racism, yet the Cuban Revolution would solve it. Afro-Cubans lived in poverty, and the Revolution’s success was the only escape. Afro-Cuban freedom depended on the successful rule of the revolutionary government. Blackness represented impoverishment and dependency.

*Blackness and Sports*

Beyond poverty and dependence, the media perpetuated the primary image of people of color as athletes. The vast majority of the articles in *Revolución* depicted Afro-Cubans as sports stars. The majority of the athletes depicted were typically boxers or baseball players. The athletes that merited articles were usually African-American athletes with political connections to Cuba. One of the many articles printed on Joe Louis, who had a contract with the Cuban government to promote African-American tourism, stated that he was the best boxer and heavyweight of all time. The appraisal of Black American athletes continued throughout the Revolution’s rule. On September 1, 1960 there was a brief paragraph excerpt on “Racism” (Racismo) next to a photo of Ralph Boston, the Black US long-jump Olympian, and Wanda Dos Santos, a white Brazilian hurdler, embracing one another. The contrast of the topic of racism with a photo of a literal embrace between a white Latin American woman and Black US American not only inverted global power dynamics of US domination and whiteness, but it also constructed the assumption that the race problems of the US did not exist in Cuba. Black and

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claridad y sinceridad...es necesario que se comprenda que este problema social-racial necesita una atención especial. Y un programa revolucionario no lo olvidará jamás.”

134 Tommy Albear, “Siempre existieron púgiles de peso completo mediocres,” *Revolución*, January 13, 1959, 13. “Es por eso nuestra opinión con respecto a que Joe Louis, es el mejor heavy weight y campeón mundial de la historia del boxeo.” Joe Louis was a professional American boxer contracted by the Cuban state to incentivize travel to the island following the revolution in 1959. Joe Louis was specifically selected because he could spark African-American tourism which will be discussed later on in the chapter.

white would and could embrace one another in Cuba in such a way that was impossible in the Jim Crow South of the US in 1960.

On the other hand, the images and articles discussed above all lack one key component: Afro-Cubans. The athletes depicted and discussed in these articles such as Joe Louis and Ralph Boston were both US Americans. US American promotion of these US Black athletes exploited their black bodies, but Cuban racial politics used the same mechanisms of representation. Other articles and photos that focused on Black Cuban athletes in the sports pages of the newspapers detailed the stories of Orlando Peña, Niños Valdes, and Pedro Cardenal. The stories focusing on Afro-Cubans were typically isolated to the sports pages and were rarely as large as those about African-Americans. The relegation of Black bodies to represent the Cuban nation through their athletic performance revealed the perpetuation of racial inequality. Blackness whether Cuban or American was relegated to and constantly connected to physicality.

Eventually, as the Cuban critique of US racism increased and the international connection between white Cuban revolutionary leaders and US African-American leaders grew, special print editions and interviews with Black intellectuals such as Richard Wright described frustrations with the US American race regime. Intellectuality from the Black community primarily highlighted foreign Black voices. Afro-Cuban representation was limited to the arena of sports or voices of Black revolutionaries located outside of Cuba, such as Walterio Carbonell who had

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136 All of these athletes were Afro-Cuban baseball players of prominence in Cuba.
137 For more information on the relationship between the Cuban Revolution and Black US leaders look at the last section of this chapter. This relationship is also central to the conversation and argument in chapter 3.
138 Even within the revolutionary government, foreign Black individuals such as René Depestre, a Black Haitian, gained prominence over other Afro-Cubans. The relationship of foreigners to the revolution such as Depestre, and even his boss Che Guevara, demonstrate an interesting dynamic of revolution, nationalism, and power which is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, Depestre’s role and story highlight transformations in the Cuban state’s race problem. For more on René Depestre, see Paul B. Miller, "¿Un Cubano Más?: An Interview with René Depestre about His Cuban Experience," *Afro-Hispanic Review* 34, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 159-178.
been sent to be the Cuban ambassador to Tunisia.\textsuperscript{139} The representation of Afro-Cubans on the island following the Revolution did not reflect a racial paradise of equality, but the continued reality of being Black in Cuba after 1959: being Black meant being less than. The media recognized blackness in the realm of sports, but Afro-Cuban intellectual voices were hardly present. When newspapers published Black voices, the authors were not on the island. In leaving the island, Black intellectuals gained recognition for something other than their physicality. The regime’s methods of representation concentrated on the physical capability and economic deprivation of Afro-Cubans on the island.

White athletes also took precedence over Afro-Cuban faces. On December 9, 1961, there was a full page spread in the sports section of \textit{Revolución} titled “Gymnastics: A Great Sport Becomes Popular” (Gimnastica: Un gran deporte que se populariza) (See Appendix E).\textsuperscript{140} The sports section of the Cuban newspaper had typically recounted the scores and progress of different Cuban baseball teams or professional boxers from across the world. The occasional report on a soccer game, particularly the feats of Spanish soccer teams like Real Madrid, were published as well. The sports pages were dominated by stories about men, and in particular Black men. This story on gymnastics provided a striking contrast to the often-depicted Black baseball player because it showed white athletes. Every single individual photographed in this article was white and over half of these athletes were women. In contrast to baseball and boxing, gymnastics reflected the athletic feats of a wealthier Cuban demographic. Furthermore, the gendered dynamics of gymnastics prioritized female athletes. Although this article may appear random, it demonstrated a transition in who newspapers represented. White, female Cubans

\textsuperscript{139} Walterio Carbonell was one of the foremost recognized Black intellectuals of the Cuban Revolution. One of his most important writings was a book recounting the development of the Cuban nation through a racial lens called \textit{Crítica: Cómo surgió la conciencia nacional}.

\textsuperscript{140} Manolo Alvarez, “‘Gimnastica: Un gran deporte que se populariza,’” \textit{Revolución}, December 9, 1961, 9.
replaced Black men. While a similar argument for gender and the Revolution is valid and parallel to that of race presented here, white women continued to trump the representation of all Black Cubans.\textsuperscript{141} Previously, Afro-Cubans had been assigned social representation through their physicality, but as the Revolution became distanced from its initial claim of anti-discrimination in 1959, blackness became more invisible in the press. The media only recognized Afro-Cubans when white men and women were not contributing to the field. Afro-Cubans were secondary citizens who filled in the gaps where white Cubans were not. Simultaneously, the state attempted to distance itself from its race-based anti-discrimination campaign and shift its policies towards a unified Cuban nation that needed an education.

\textit{The 1961 Literacy Campaign: Racially Coded Social Programs}

In a more formal, political sense, the programs and campaigns implemented by the revolutionary government demonstrated its values. In the section above, the discussion of Afro-Cuban representation in the state-sponsored newspaper, \textit{Revolución}, highlighted the physicality of blackness. In this section, I will continue to use \textit{Revolución} to analyze the promotion of the literacy campaign in relation to the Afro-Cuban community. The 1961 Literacy Campaign employed a language and framework similar to that of the Anti-discrimination Campaign of 1959. The parallel journeys and overlap of these two campaigns led to a new conception of citizenship that ultimately sustained Martí’s claim to “not Black, not white, but Cuban” citizens. The campaign of 1961 symbolized the completion of the Anti-discrimination Campaign with a fight to educate the newly defined and united Cuba. While the campaign was not designed to solely benefit Afro-Cubans, it increased their literacy rates and

\textsuperscript{141} It is also important to acknowledge that the incorporation of one of these groups does not validate the non-incorporation of others. Furthermore, the intersection of race and gender and the role of Afro-Cuban women merits more discussion in the post-revolution Cuban historiography.
simultaneously reinforced notions of Cuban citizenship that made racial identification unacceptable.

The Literacy campaign was part of the government’s larger revolutionary goal to educate all Cuban people. In 1960 at the UN General Assembly, Fidel Castro stated that in the coming year, our people intend to fight the great battle against illiteracy, with the ambitious goal of teaching every single inhabitant of the country to read and write in one year, and, with that end in mind, organizations of teachers, students and workers, that is, the entire people, are preparing themselves for an intensive campaign, and Cuba will be the first country of America which, after a few months, will be able to say it does not have one single illiterate.\footnote{Fidel Castro, UN General Assembly, September 20, 1960. Translation provided by the UN. The following chapter will cover the 1960 UN General Assembly in more detail in relation to both Cuban policy announcements and race-based transnational solidarity.}

Castro announced to the world that Cuba was not only revolutionary because of what happened in 1959, but that this new Cuban government would continue to implement an unprecedented revolutionary agenda. Furthermore, this was not a battle isolated to 1961.\footnote{“Un soldado rebelde lee nuestro periódico,” Revolución, January 8, 1959. While this demonstrates an intent to gain readership following the newspaper’s leadership successful revolution, it also highlights the connection between literacy, education, and the Cuban Revolution. This revolution prioritized reading from its first days in power and a year before the Literacy Campaign which does not happen with all revolutions.} During the guerrilla insurgency prior to 1959, education played an exceptional role. Guerrilla fighters in the M26-7 movement, which was Fidel Castro and Che Guevara’s unit, were expected to devote themselves to learning even while fighting.\footnote{Abel Prieto, “Cuba’s National Literacy Campaign,” Journal of Reading 25, no. 3 (Dec. 1981): 216. This image of a learned guerrilla is maintained unto today through popular imagery of the Cuban Revolution in films such as Che: Part 1 where Che checks on revolutionaries’ math homework while waiting for the next battle.} Education proved to be a central concern of guerrillas during insurgency and after January 1, 1959. The underlying idea maintained that education did not just empower individuals, but entire nations and revolutions as well.\footnote{Ernesto Che Guevara, “Socialism and Man in Cuba,” in Global Justice: Liberation and Socialism (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 2002), 43. Guevara sent this letter on March 12, 1965, but it was published in this book in 2002. “Our work constantly strives toward this education.” The use of the word “this” indicates a specific type of education such as Communist education. However, part of that program and belief was the actual literacy of the people.} On December 22, 1961, an article praising the elimination of illiteracy from the island read as follows: “A Revolution that
Teaches by Doing and Does by Teaching” (En una revolución se enseña haciendo y se hace enseñando). The Revolution practiced what it taught and taught by doing. The revolutionary government claimed to promote and practice its ideology as demonstrated by their promise and campaign to educate the island in 1961.

Part of the problem of growing social inequalities, that helped in part to feed the revolutionary movement itself, was that not all Cubans had access to education. Urban, white, middle-class Cubans had access to private schools typically run by the Catholic church prior to 1959, but the presence of public schools in rural areas was minimal. As stated in the previous chapter, Afro-Cubans and those of mixed-race background were located in rural areas in higher concentrations due to the historical legacy and geographical location of slave plantations. On a national level, the 1953 Cuban census reported that only 25% of Cubans age 10 or older had ever been enrolled in school and 50% had dropped out of school before completing their primary education.

These numbers displayed the need for a better education system nationally and a relationship between race and literacy (See Table 1 in Appendix F). Table 1 reflects people’s responses to the question on the census as to which racial category they most identified. The census in 1953 was the last census taken before the 1959 Revolution; therefore, it gives insight into the demographic makeup of the island before the Revolution. Around 20% of all the provinces’ populations, except Oriente, identified as Black or Mixed race. Oriente’s combined

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146 “En una revolución se enseña haciendo y se hace enseñando,” Revolución, December 22, 1961, 2.
147 Education was not the only reason why social inequalities existed, but one of a myriad of factors that sustained inequalities.
149 Full citation for table sources is in Appendix F.
Black and Mixed-race population totaled 40.8%. Therefore, the census demonstrated the large presence of the Cubans of color in Oriente, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The relationship between race and illiteracy is most evident in Oriente where the literacy rate was 12% lower than the national level (See Table 2 in Appendix G). The high illiteracy rate in conjunction with largest non-white population stressed the social reality of many Afro-Cubans; they did not have the access to the same services such as schools that provided literacy training prior to 1959. Furthermore, Pinar del Río’s relatively high rate in comparison to Havana’s low rate demonstrated the disparities in rural and urban access to education. What these numbers demonstrated was the real effects of regional differences whether that be geographical or racial in the application of the education system. Reducing this social disparity not only helped to inspire the beginnings of the Cuban revolutionary insurgency but continued to be a goal of the revolutionary government. In 1961, the Cuban government transformed their policy campaign focus from agrarian land reform and anti-discrimination to the eradication of illiteracy.

The Literacy Campaign of 1961 used similar language and frameworks as the Anti-Discrimination campaign to promote its new universal mission: win the battle against illiteracy. Throughout 1961, the third page of Revolución always updated the campaign in the margin with a photo under the title “Literacy” (Alfabetización). On December 5, 1961 this update was titled “Literacy: The Popular Campaign” (Alfabetización: Campaña popular pro-alfabetización).

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150 I have decided to combine “Black” and “Mixed” categories here in order to be as inclusive as possible of any Cubans with African ancestry. The fluidity of race and class in the Cuban context would have influenced people’s responses to the census and by combining these categories there is a clearer picture of the racial dynamics of each region.

151 Charles Dorn and Kristen Ghodsee, “The Cold War Politicization of Literacy: Communism, UNESCO, and the World Bank,” Diplomatic History 36, no. 2 (2012): 386. A 76% literacy rate is the assumed starting point for the Literacy campaign of 1961 in most of the historiography on the campaign. (For table citations see Appendix G)

152 Revolución was published every day of the week except Sunday.
and three days later the update read as “Literacy: Territory Free of Illiteracy” (Alfabetización: Territorio libre de analfabetismo). The campaign was not just a social program aimed at educating the Cuban people. It was a political and social project that utilized popular revolutionary imagery and techniques to free the island of illiteracy just as it had rid the island of discrimination and imperialism two years earlier.

Linking the fight for literacy to the same rhetorical, social, and political mechanisms as the campaign against discrimination reinforced Fidel’s claim to a race-free society. Devyn Spence Benson highlights in Antiracism in Cuba two key ways in which the Literacy Campaign of 1961 reinforced racism in Cuba immediately following the Revolution. The first way the campaign upheld racism was through the media-enshrined Black revolutionaries—Conrado Benítez, an Afro-Cuban literacy teacher, and Patrice Lumumba, a Congolese liberation leader—as a result of their servitude to “the Revolution”. These values of servitude and gratefulness directly contrasted with the living, white icons of the Revolution. Furthermore, Benson contends that the overlap between the Anti-discrimination and Literacy Campaigns continued to marginalize Black identity to reinforce a singular Cuban identity. The Literacy Campaign, according to Benson, served as a way for the Cuban government to transform revolutionary sentiment and their legitimation process away from race-based conversations towards a “race-neutral” policy campaign such as education. In this process, the government constructed racial

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154 Benson, Antiracism, 207. The reference to “revolution” here is marked in quotes because it was not just the revolutionary government, but the revolutionary cause of national liberation that Lumumba’s death represented. Lumumba will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4 which discusses Cuba’s relationship with the Congo.
155 The scope of this analysis will be heavily dependent on Benson’s work because my access to literacy education materials is limited.
156 Race-neutral as in the sense that this campaign did not aim to deal directly with race as clearly as the anti-discrimination discourse. However, literacy was not a race-neutral issue due to structural racism’s ramifications which included the high illiteracy rates of Afro-Cubans in comparison to white Cubans.
identifiers, such as Black and white, to be irrelevant because of the success of the Anti-discrimination Campaign and the universal nature of “literacy”. The elimination of discrimination and the promotion of universal education fortified the notion an undivided Cuban nation and the singular Cuban citizen.

The Literacy Campaign did not initially intend to make Conrado Benítez its symbolic figurehead. Benson argues that the Literacy Campaign initially sought to use José Martí as the face of the campaign. Martí was not only the ideological forefather of an independent Cuban nation as detailed in the first chapter, but he was also a symbol of an educated Cuba. Martí was an intellectual who used his education to create ideas, doctrine, and an independence movement. He seemed to be the perfect fit to personify a campaign to liberate revolutionary Cuba from the grips of illiteracy. The assassination of the young Black teacher, Conrado Benítez, by counterrevolutionaries on January 5, 1961 gave the government a serendipitous opportunity to create a new revolutionary symbol of allegiance and reassert the immorals of counterrevolutionaries.

The Literacy Campaign also latched onto Black international icons of national liberation. On January 17, 1961, 12 days after Benítez’s assassination 17 days after the beginning of the Literacy Campaign, the Congolese Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, was murdered. Lumumba was an African leader who represented the international fight against imperialism. The Cuban media had documented the drama of Lumumba’s government and advocated for a free Congo since its independence in 1960. Lumumba’s fight against for independence paralleled that of

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157 Benson, Antiracism, 202. I do not have access to the campaign materials myself as they are not accessible in the US, but this argument surrounding the marketing of Benítez, Lumumba, and Martí depends heavily on Benson’s analysis.
158 Benson, Antiracism, 199.
159 Ibid., 199.
Cuba’s Revolution. So much so that in September of 1960 when Fidel Castro was at the UN General Assembly, Walterio Carbonell, a Black intellectual, wrote that “Lumumba, honest, radical, and intelligent, has become another victim of the experienced diplomacy of the West, whose strategy is nothing more than to buy the time to impose their conditions.”

Lumumba was the African mirror to Cuba. The belief that the CIA was involved in his assassination only further linked Cuba’s anti-US imperialist stance with its memorialization of Lumumba. Many Cuban newspapers documented the Congolese struggle before Lumumba’s assassination, but his death at the beginning of the 1961 made him an unknowing advocate for and supporter of the Cuban Literacy Campaign. Lumumba encapsulated an international idea of revolution that Cuba had started to advocate for in 1960. The transnational image of Lumumba increased throughout the decade as Cuba’s leadership in the non-aligned movement pushed it towards allying with African countries. Lumumba linked the Cuban Revolution to global, “sort of third position...that favored a politics of peace and independence for all people.”

Lumumba bridged domestic Cuban policy to a larger political ideal of liberation. The insertion of these two Black leaders—one Cuban and one foreign—into the pantheon of the almost entirely white revolutionary leadership attempted to increase the representation of the Afro-Cuban community. The “serendipity” of Black martyrdom only proved the incompleteness of the Anti-discrimination Campaign.

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162 This will be discussed in more depth in chapter 3 which discusses the beginnings of Cuban transnational thought.
163 For more information on Cuban and African relations see chapter 4 which will detail the first Cuban expedition to the Congo in 1965.
164 Walterio Carbonell, “La intervención belga y las intrigas imperialistas en la República del Congo,”
165 Benson, _Antiracism_, 199-200.
The media used language to create another inanimate enemy: illiteracy. Creating enemies like illiteracy and discrimination cast critics of the new government as perpetrators of social progress and the Revolution. The government established inanimate social enemies to emphasize an increasingly “unified” Cuban people not divided by race, which only consolidated the regime’s legitimacy. In December 1961, the government began publishing ads at the bottom of the page in Revolución counting down the days until the end of the Literacy Campaign. These ads would say “X number of days to defeat it! The order is: Increase the spread of literacy! Study for more hours! Everyone be strong and active until the end!” However, the most striking aspect of this repeated advertisement was the photo utilized: two young, white Cuban women with books opened studying together in a library. The language of war and revolution was consistent throughout the advertisement with words such as “defeat” and “the order”. The photo presented an imagined Cuba made possible by a literacy campaign charged with militarized language. The advertisement explicitly said that the order (la consigna) of the government to the Cuban people was to increase their studies and work in order to “defeat” illiteracy. Not only were the directives militarized, but the advertisement constructed an image of what this process was supposed to look like. The image depicted two female, white Cubans. Every time this advertisement appeared, it used the same photo. Perhaps the government and media unintentionally excluded men and people of color in the advertisement, but the use of white women depended upon norms of education. This photo reflected the notion that white Cubans represented the success of the Literacy Campaign, and more generally the Revolution. Despite

166 “17 días para vencer,” Revolución, December 4, 1961, 8.
168 Ibid. “17 días para vencer. La consigna es: ¡Acelerar el ritmo de Alfabetización! ¡Más horas de estudios! ¡Todos firmes y activos hasta el final!”
169 It is important to note that while women were traditionally not as well educated as men for much of the 20th century, Cuban women actually had higher literacy rates than men in every Cuban province according to the 1953 Census. Appendix H has a table comparing the literacy rates of men and women in each Cuban province in 1953.
the fact that Afro-Cubans located in rural areas were more often illiterate, the Literacy Campaign advertised white Cubans as the facilitators and receivers of said education.

At an international level, the Literacy Campaign coincided with a series of transformations in the US-Cuba relationship. The US officially broke ties with the Cuban government in January of 1961. Cuba’s agrarian land reform, sugar production, and oil expropriation frustrated the US economically and scared it politically.\textsuperscript{170} Cuba’s need for energy and trade simultaneously distanced it from the US and pushed it towards the USSR.\textsuperscript{171} The US only intensified this Cold War antagonism with the Bay of Pigs attack in April of 1961. Internationally, the US questioned the Cuban regime’s authority. As a response to consolidate his own power, Castro freely allowed dissidents to leave the country. In a full-page announcement in Revolución, the headline stated “If you want to leave, go!: We are giving you 48 hours!” (¡Qué vayan si quieren irse!: Les damos 48 horas).\textsuperscript{172} While giving dissidents an exit strategy, the Literacy Campaign that same year built patriotic support of the government through educating all Cuban people. The Literacy Campaign attempted to reaffirm a Cuban identity through its singular national, race-blind language that built off the legacy of the “successful” Anti-discrimination Campaign.

The 1961 Literacy Campaign claimed a humanist, universal approach to revolution, but the campaign’s racial manifestations were not accidental. Both the development of Black icons and the raising literacy rates in Afro-Cuban community stress the racial problems the Cuban government faced. The Literacy Campaign was effective because by the end of 1961, the

\textsuperscript{170} Thomas Patterson, Contesting Castro: The United States and the Triumph of the Cuban Revolution (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 258-260. Escalating tensions led to US towards more covert methods of intervention following the dissolution of the US-Cuba diplomatic relationship.
\textsuperscript{171} Gettig, “Oil and Revolution,” 425.
\textsuperscript{172} “¡Qué vayan si quieren irse!: Les damos 48 horas,” Revolución, January 3, 1961, 3.
illiteracy rate was only 3.9%.\textsuperscript{173} Therefore, many Cubans, and particularly Afro-Cubans, located outside of the traditional education network of schools located in urban areas could now read. However, the real positive effects of this campaign occurred concurrently with state’s transformation of blackness into a symbol, not an identity. The state’s interference in the issue of literacy frustrated Black leaders like Juan René Betancourt who felt that their community was being co-opted instead of heard.\textsuperscript{174} Blackness was no longer a personal marker but rather an external representation of otherness. The collective, racial struggle of the Afro-Cuban community within Cuba became a metaphor of international struggle through the heroic figures of Conrado Benítez and Patrice Lumumba. The revolutionary government transformed the identity-based campaign against discrimination into a Cuban citizens’ campaign for education. The overlap between these campaigns consolidated “the Cuban citizen”.

The legitimacy of the Revolution depended on how and who was part of the new revolutionary state. Both the Anti-discrimination and Literacy Campaign solidified who the Cuban citizen was, whether through overt claims to anti-discrimination practices or through a universal education program. Citizenship in Cuba under the revolutionary government depended upon Martían rhetoric of “Cubanness” over racial distinction. The state shifted away from race being an identity towards a political tool. Conrado Benítez’s iconization parallels this transition. He was not a bastion or representative of Afro-Cuban interests of his own will, rather the state made him a symbol of hope for the Revolution. Blackness became a tool of the revolutionary government in their policy, but that blackness was utilized in connection to the notions of

\textsuperscript{174} Betancourt, “Castro and the Cuban Negro,” 273.
gratitude, loyalty, and oppression via imperialist forces. Blackness and the Afro-Cuban community were no longer identities or experiences, but markers that the Cuban state used to assert its message of liberation into the world. The divergence between their external projection of racial utopia and internal limits of this paradise presented a paradox for blackness and the Cuban Revolution.

This tension between internal racelessness and international solidarity based on race forces us to locate Cuba in an international context as well. Up until this point, Cuba’s race problem has been contextualized as a phenomenon occurring on the island before and after 1959, but Cuban race relations extended far beyond internal discrimination. During this period of Cold War conflict, the intersections of the US Civil Rights Movement, Africa decolonization, and larger Third World movements made race central to the international political actions of the Cuban Revolution. The second half of this thesis highlights this surprising transnational aspect of Cuban revolutionary politics that not only used race but depended on blackness.

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175 Marxist analysis claims that race is a manifestation of class difference and by addressing class, revolutionary regimes solve race problems. However, this class-based analysis overlooks the intricacies, history, and enduring importance of race in Cuba.
Chapter 3: The First Tricontinental Meeting

Following US intervention in the Cuban War for Independence in 1898, US African-Americans and Afro-Cubans recognized the intertwined experiences of US imperialism in Cuba and Jim Crow racism in the US.\textsuperscript{176} The solidarity between these two Black communities established after 1898 depended on racial identity and experience. They related to one another on the basis of their race as Black minorities. After 1959, this relationship shifted from one between the diasporic communities of Afro-Cubans and US African-Americans to one between the Cuban revolutionary state and US African-Americans. The Revolution’s liberating politics transcended the historical connection between Black US Americans and Black Cubans into a larger analogy based on experiences of exploitation. Racism affected US African-Americans just as US imperialism affected all Cubans.

As this analogy developed, Cuba became a refuge for expelled radical US Civil Rights leaders such as the regional NAACP president who advocated for creating a Black militia, Robert F. Williams, and the Black Power leader, Huey Newton. During Robert F. William’s time in Cuba, he produced his own radio show called \textit{Radio Free Dixie} which broadcast from 1961 to 1965 to the US. \textit{Radio Free Dixie} gave a US African-American the space and the voice that he did not have in the US.\textsuperscript{177} But it also demonstrated a shift in Cuban foreign policy that went beyond subverting the US; the revolutionary government supported \textit{Radio Free Dixie} and Black empowerment rhetoric as a corollary to Cuban, not Afro-Cuban, empowerment. The relationship between diasporic communities transformed into an allyship between radical Black US elites and elite, revolutionary Cuban whites. The elimination of Afro-Cubans from this dynamic


\textsuperscript{177} Cristina Mislan, “Transnationalism, Revolution and Race: The Case of Cuba’s Radio Free Dixie” (PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, 2013), 12, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.
demonstrated how white Cuban elites transformed what race meant within Cuba by making it a politically flexible tool outside of Cuba.

Before these radical leaders sought refuge in Cuba, the state had already displayed its solidarity with US African-Americans, and the larger Third World, in September of 1960 at the 15th General Assembly of the UN in New York City. On September 19, 1960, the Cuban delegation to the UN moved from the Shelburne Hotel in Midtown, a twelve minute walk from the UN headquarters, to the Theresa Hotel in Harlem, the Black Capital of the world, in the middle of the night. The US press perceived this sudden move to be a publicity stunt while the Cuban delegation viewed it as a political necessity to consolidate and legitimize their Revolution for international, not just Cuban, spectators. The Cuban delegation’s choice to stay in the heart of diasporic Africa threatened tradition, and in turn, traditional notions of power. Cuba proclaimed itself as an ally, aligned with the goals, isolation, and overall experience of US African-Americans.

This chapter considers this moment in 1960 as a window into the beginnings of Cuba’s racialized transnationalism within the larger international context of Cold War power struggles, African decolonization and independence, and US Civil Rights. While Cuba may have been a Third World country seeking to legitimize its government, Fidel and his counterparts were adept politicians who used these larger racially charged conflicts and spaces to show Cuba’s power.

This chapter tracks the development of Cuba’s incipient transnational politics on two levels: institutional and popular. On the institutional level, the Cuban delegation to the UN in 1960 not only dealt with the UN but also the Organization of American States (OAS) and the US

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179 Ibid.
180 The word popular here refers to the notion of coming from the people, but not necessarily popularly held opinions.
State Department. These institutions represented combative, politically legitimized, international actors whose policies prioritized US American interests. Cuba used these official spaces of power to reject imperialism and propose its own political project based on liberation and solidarity.

At the same time, the Cuban delegation actively, and strategically, interacted with “popular” groups. The Cuban delegation interacted with subaltern, grassroots organizations like representatives of newly liberated countries, leaders of the NAACP, and the figurehead of the Nation of Islam. These groups represented the collective interests of marginalized communities and, particularly, the interests of the US African-Americans. While these meetings and moments juxtapose the pomp and circumstance of the UN, the Cuban delegation sought out Third World and US African-American elites, not everyday people. The delegation established “relationships” with elites from these popular groups such as Malcolm X and President Nasser of Egypt through press photos and brief meetings. The responses and interactions of the Cuban delegation at both of these levels highlighted its intent to construct a transnational alliance through new channels of political action based on racialized marginalization. Furthermore, in response to its own rejection from the Organization of American States (OAS), Cuba intended to reject traditional hegemony.

**Institutional Conflicts and Interactions**

Following 1959, the Cuban state called attention to its political isolation instead of incorporation. Western institutions of power, such as the US-led UN, segregated Cuba from the rest of the world. This dismissal inadvertently created the space for Cuba to define itself as the leader of the marginalized. Cuba’s location outside of legitimated sources of power after 1959 allowed it to derive its support and legitimation from elsewhere. The OAS, UN, and US would not be able to contain the revolution in the Caribbean; rather, their attempts at condemning the
Revolution only bolstered Cuba’s prestige amongst the non-white, Third world’s fight for liberation.

Each of these institutions reified the political and economic authority of the United States. For example, the OAS detached American affairs from the control of the UN Security Council and the veto power of the Soviets which reaffirmed the US’s domination. In fact, the OAS, as an extension of UN forms, regulations, and suggestions, established Latin American states as lesser to the desires of the United States. Furthermore, it gave the United States the power to intervene in other American nations due to their economic clout in the region. The OAS not only encapsulated American imperialism in its ideology, but it legitimized it as a supranational body. It proclaimed intercontinental coordination while effectively maintaining US domination in accordance with the Monroe Doctrine.

_A Battle of Declarations: San José and Havana_

A month prior to the September meeting of the UN in New York, the OAS met in San José, Costa Rica to create and adopt the Declaration of San José which condemned the Cuban Revolution. The US called the meeting to respond to Cuba’s growing anti-US political and economic stance. The Cuban Revolution had transgressed US-dominated peace in the Western hemisphere. As a response, the Declaration of San José explicitly condemned any nation that attempted to destroy “hemispheric unity and [endanger] the peace and security” of the Americas. It went so far as to state that “the inter-American system is incompatible with any form of totalitarianism and that democracy will achieve the full scope of its objectives in the

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hemisphere only when all the American republics conduct themselves in accordance with” previously established rules of order and democracy.\textsuperscript{185} In this Cold War context, the definitional opposition of totalitarianism and democracy cast Cuba as an outsider and violator of inter-American peace. A peace defined and monitored by the US. Cuban repudiation of US economic interference and hegemony made US imperialism vulnerable in the larger Western, American capitalist theater traditionally “protected” by the Monroe Doctrine.\textsuperscript{186} Cuba had started to chip away at the US’s political and economic monopoly over the Americas. The OAS’s response to the Revolution only further provoked Cuba.

The new Cuban government responded swiftly and directly. Within a week, it released the First Declaration of Havana which was an unambiguous rejection of the condemnation laid out in the Declaration of San José. First, it explicitly named the OAS’s declaration as a document “dictated by North American Imperialism” intended to preserve the Monroe Doctrine.\textsuperscript{187} Then, it countered the charge that Cuba’s new government was not “democratic” by detailing the contradictions of American democracy. According to the Cuban government, true “democracy has never been compatible with financial oligarchy, the existence of racial discrimination, and excesses of the Ku-Klux-Klan,” yet the US claimed democratic superiority despite these glaring

\textsuperscript{185} “Totalitarianism” as a term is fluid in its application and ultimately the label of enemies. During WWII, totalitarianism referred to Nazism in Germany, but during the Cold War it was associated with Communism. In 1975, Juan Linz published a piece titled \textit{Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes} which laid out the first definitions of the terms and making them ameliorative. Before 1975, totalitarianism identified enemies, not their politics. (The piece was later published as its own book in 2000.)

\textsuperscript{186} The Monroe Doctrine was established in 1823 to prevent European intervention in American affairs during the age of competing colonial powers. However, this protectionism transformed to deeply entrenched imperialism under the establishment of the OAS in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

\textsuperscript{187} Cuban Government, “La Primera Declaración de Havana: Discurso pronunciado por el Comandante Fidel Castro Ruz, Primer ministro del gobierno revolucionario, en la magna asamblea popular celebrada por el pueblo de Cuba en la Plaza de la República,” Speech, Havana, Cuba, September 2, 1960. “Condena en todos sus términos la denominada Declaración de San José de Costa Rica, documento dictado por el Imperialismo Norteamericano...la Asamblea General Nacional del Pueblo rechaza asimismo el intento de preservar la Doctrina de Monroe”.

This Cuban critique depended on racialized social beliefs and images such as white supremacy, racial dystopia, and economic inequality. The Cuban rebuttal was not just a defense of its Revolution, but it was also an argument based on the racial juxtaposition of the US and Cuba. While the US allowed the KKK and maintained state-sponsored discrimination through Jim Crow, the Cuban Revolution had established a racial utopia where discrimination was illegal.

The responsiveness of these two declarations emphasizes the internationality of the US-Cuban conflict and the immediate racial overtones the Revolution seized. On the island, the newspapers were filled with cartoons, articles, and photos refusing to accept expulsion from the OAS. One cartoon in particular on September 2, 1960 personified the OAS and Cuba. In the cartoon, a Cuban revolutionary stands below a post where the figure representing the OAS is being hung by a noose (See Appendix I). At first glance, the image seems to reinforce the idea that Cuba did not need the OAS or, better yet, that the OAS was dead to Cuba. However, the cartoon uses the overtly race-based image of a noose. While the Cuban government shamed the US for their racist history, the Cuban revolutionary press implemented race-based imagery to criticize US actions. Although neither character in the cartoon is racially marked, the notion of hanging recalls slave lynchings in the US South. Perhaps the cartoon attempted to convey Cuban moral superiority because the OAS “hanged” itself with its own racist beliefs, or maybe the cartoonist meant to invert the audience’s understanding of who was being hanged. Either way, the Cuban Revolution had reversed the roles of oppressor and oppressed in Latin America. Moreover, this cartoon placed the empowered OAS in the hands of the oppressed Cuba.

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188 Ibid. “que la democracia no es compatible con la oligarquía financiera, con la existencia de la discriminación del negro y los desmanes del Ku-Klux-Klan”

189 OAS Cartoon, Revolución, September 2, 1960, 2.
The First Declaration of Havana asserted Cuban moral superiority in racial terms. It went so far as to claim that Cuba was more democratic because it did not have racial discrimination or organizations such as the KKK that touted white supremacy. Cuba was superior because it refused to engage in the imperial domination of other states and its own people. Beyond defending the democratic character of the Cuban Revolution, the declaration revealed what the Revolution was and for whom it was. Towards the end of the declaration, Castro leapt into a prolonged call to action:

The duty of workers, peasants, students, intellectuals, Blacks, Indians, young people, women, and the old is to fight for economic, political, and social vindication; the duty of all oppressed and exploited nations is to fight for their liberation; the duty of everyone is to build solidarity with all those who are oppressed, colonized, exploited, or attacked, wherever they are in the world or the distance that separates them. All the people of the world are brothers. 190

The First Declaration of Havana was not simply a rejection of the Declaration of San José. It declared a Cuban political project defined by opposition to oppression and the fight for solidarity. The declaration affirmed that the Revolution was not simply an opportunity, but the duty of all people to fight for vindication, liberation, and solidarity. The Declaration of San José not just rhetorically cast Cuba as peripheral to American political hegemony, but it also voted Cuba out of the OAS. This ousting allowed Cuba to claim radical new ideas of solidarity initiated and sustained by their racialized “otherness”. 191 The First Declaration of Havana laid the groundwork and context for Fidel Castro and the Cuban delegation’s arrival in New York two weeks later.

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190 Cuban Government, “La Primera Declaración de Havana,” September 2, 1960. “El deber de los obreros, de los campesinos, de los estudiantes, de los intelectuales, de los negros, de los indios, de los jóvenes, de las mujeres, de los ancianos, a luchar por sus reivindicaciones económicas, políticas y sociales; el deber de las naciones oprimidas y explotadas a luchar por su liberación; el deber de cada pueblo a la solidaridad con todos los pueblos oprimidos, colonizados, explotados o agredidos, sea cual fuere el lugar del mundo en que éstos se encuentren y la distancia geográfica que los separe. ¡Todos los pueblos del mundo son hermanos!"

191 This racial “otherness” should be read as “non-white” in a racial context.
The 15th General Assembly

On September 19, 1960, the leaders of the world met in New York City for the 15th General Assembly of the United Nations. Those in attendance ranged from President Dwight Eisenhower, Premier Khrushchev, President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, to Premier Fidel Castro of Cuba. The interactions between leaders from newly independent countries in Africa and long-standing UN Security Council members sparked tension. American newspapers accounted for the relationships created and the gestures made between all parties. The movement of the Cuban delegation made all these actions all the more obvious. Titles read “Castro Takes His Show to Harlem,” “Nasser Nehru, Visit Harlem,” and “Nikita, Castro Meet In Harlem”. This meeting would not simply be an extension of larger, behind the scenes Cold War problems but, rather, a step towards a new world arena where the Third World was gaining more prominence.

The UN was started to respond to a post-WWII global context concerned with genocide, fascism, and sustained peace. The founding charter lays out the UN’s principle goals to be “to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and to unite [member countries’] strength to maintain international peace and security.” A small group of European and North American founders dictated these international policy standards for decades to come with an unchanging emphasis on security controlled by primarily First World, but also some Second World, actors. The UN reflected the ideologies of the people that thought “international peace and security” or, rather, threats to traditional post-war hegemony, needed to be protected from political outsiders. At the time of the UN’s creation in 1945, the Allied powers

194 The Second World actors primarily being the USSR and later China.
established their control of international affairs. The independent states of Europe, and even Latin America, were the original members of the UN. However, the WWII Allied powers governed the body. Other nations, primarily in Africa and Asia, were not yet states and therefore not members of the UN in 1945.

In 1960, fourteen previously colonized African countries, originally excluded from membership in the UN, became independent states and petitioned for admittance into the body. The liberation of African countries from their former colonial rulers paralleled the liberation of Cuba from US imperialism a year prior. The process of decolonization started in Africa when Kwame Nkrumah gained independence for Ghana from UK in 1957. This precedent caused a chain reaction of uprisings and independence movements in a variety of European colonial holdings. European colonizers faced the threat of violent, prolonged bloodshed alongside considerable economic loss. Quickly negotiated treaties kick-started decolonization in late 1959 and in some colonies, such as the Congo-Leopoldville, took full effect in 1960. This process forced the UN leaders to debate whether or not countries should be admitted in the first place. For example, the admission of these new African countries was complicated in regard to the Congo question. Competing claims to leadership and Cold War alignment of the Congo between Patrice Lumumba and Mobutu Sese Seko restricted the country’s ability to be formally admitted into the UN.

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196 It is important to highlight that the independence process for African nations meant that many of the countries that existed immediately following independence no longer exist today such as the 2 different Congos distinguished by their capitals—Brazzaville and Leopoldville. From this point on, the Congo-Leopoldville be referred to as “the Congo”. For more on African decolonization, see Michael Syrotinski’s *Deconstruction and the Postcolonial: At the Limits of Theory* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007) and Tukufu Zuberi’s *African Independence: How Africa Shapes the World* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, and London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015). Congolese decolonization will be a central topic discussed in the following chapter.

197 This is often referred to in the larger history of decolonization as the “Congo Crisis” and will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.
The transformation of these prior colonies into states reinforced the superiority and hegemony of the WWII Allies who founded and held permanent seats on the UN Security Council.\(^{198}\) The UN functioned to maintain the authority of the WWII Allied powers over the rest of the world. Furthermore, the location of the UN in New York and other European nations located international power in the West. In the eyes of the new Cuban state, and many African states, the UN itself represented imperial power. The UN General Assembly in 1960 became a competition between the encroaching interests of the USSR and the US focused on Cuba while the Cuban delegation turned the other way towards Third World nations.

Castro used the “imperial” space of the UN to define himself and Cuba’s revolutionary regime with vivid imagery; in one of the longest speeches in UN history, clocking in at 269 minutes long, Castro defined his country as non-white, morally superior, and anti-imperialist. First and foremost, Castro characterized Cuba as part of “the under-developed nations.”\(^{199}\) He aimed to claim a label for Cuba that marked it in relation to other states, but this title of “under-developed” was subversive. Castro was not using underdeveloped to demean his own nation; rather, he was using this First World categorization to create an alternative language amongst the Third World nations. Further on, Castro emphasized that the case of Cuba was not a singular case of oppression in the world but rather a representative of “all under-developed countries; [Cuba] resembles that of the Congo, of Egypt, Algeria, West Irian, Panamá…Puerto Rico…Honduras; in short, although…not referred specifically to the rest, the case of Cuba is that of all under-developed and colonial countries.”\(^{200}\) Cuba’s revolutionary experience was

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\(^{198}\) The five permanent members of the UN Security Council are China, France, Russia (the USSR), the UK, and the US. These were the victors of WWII.

\(^{199}\) United Nations, \textit{872\textsuperscript{nd} Plenary Meeting} (26 September 1960), 117 section 49. The document is a translation of the original speech into English.

\(^{200}\) Ibid., 130 section 175-176. West Irian is modern day Western New Guinea.
exemplary of what other underdeveloped nations could achieve. The Revolution liberated Cuba and it flipped the Cold War world order on its head. It changed the world; it did not just reform the past. Cuba’s revolutionary experience set the example for all underdeveloped countries and laid the groundwork for a new system and conceptualization of politics—solidarity.

Post-1959 Cuba posed a threat to the relative peace that the UN had ensured following WWII. Cuba’s dependence on rejecting concepts of development, oppression, and imperialism countered the supranational institutions maintaining these divisions. The UN restricted the agency of previously colonized nations as seen through its refusal to admit Congo as a member. At the end of his speech, Castro tied these links between racial oppression, international power dynamics, and internal revolution by stating that “the National General Assembly of the Cuban people condemns…discrimination against the Negro and the Indian…It condemns the exploitation of man by man and the exploitation of under-developed countries by imperialist capital.”²⁰¹ The platform at the UN gave Castro the opportunity to publicly reject the UN and OAS, both of which intended to punish Cuba for its Revolution. More importantly, this speech explicitly linked race and solidarity in Cuban policy. One year out from the beginning of the Revolution’s governmental rule, Castro was implementing race-based moral claims and using raced spaces as a way to gain marginalized allies in the world.

In this institutional space, questions of alignment and diplomacy charged every action between each individual, speech, and movement. However, this official, institutional space was not the only place where political construction took place. The interactions of the Cuban delegation with local New Yorkers made this week in September of 1960 formative to Cuba’s diplomatic history and development.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 136 section 233. He states prior to these words that this is the response of the Cuban people to the San José Declaration. It is a reassertion of the First Declaration of Havana.
From Midtown to Harlem

As stated by Castro himself, “Cuba has sent many delegations to the United Nations. Cuba has been represented by many different persons, and yet, these exceptional measures were reserved for us: confinement to the island of Manhattan; instructions to all hotels not to rent us rooms, hostility and, on the pretext of security, isolation.”\textsuperscript{202} All of these restrictions put on the Cuban delegation upon their arrival in New York were used by the Cuban delegation to visually demonstrate to the Third World Cuba’s isolation in the international community. The delegation’s inability to leave the island of Manhattan, much like the restrictions placed on the officials of the USSR, was a way for the United States to assert its control over the situation.\textsuperscript{203} The US State Department became a tool to not only monitor enemy states abroad but also in American territory. The State Department’s restrictions and the refusal of the US government to acknowledge the legitimacy of the new Cuban government meant that Cuba could not choose its own schedule, allies, or space.\textsuperscript{204} These political restrictions frustrated the Cuban delegation, but they also inspired its daring move to Harlem.

The largest and most publicized disruption caused by the Cuban delegation at the 15\textsuperscript{th} General Assembly was their move to the Hotel Theresa in Harlem from the Shelburne Hotel in Midtown the night of September 19. \textit{The New York Times} publicized this event as a “walkout” and casted the Cubans as entitled politicians hoping to circumvent paying their hotel bill.\textsuperscript{205} They cast the Cubans as rowdy house guests who were destroying the hotel with “cigarette burns and a

\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., 117 section 51.
\textsuperscript{203} “Text of First Khrushchev Conference,” \textit{The New York Times}, September 22, 1960. It is important to note at this point in time, Cuba had not yet officially aligned itself with the USSR. Therefore, this demonstrates how the US was billing Cuba as the enemy and Communist before that had even been established by the Cuban government.
\textsuperscript{204} Max Frankel, “Diplomats Study His Ties to Soviet,” \textit{New York Times}, September 22, 1960. When referring to the US’s lack of recognition for the new Cuban government, I am referring to the omission of Cuba from the “American” lunch hosted by President Eisenhower.
\textsuperscript{205} Love, “Castro Walkout Termed a Stunt.”
yanked-out telephone[s]” in their rooms.\textsuperscript{206} The \textit{New York Times} made Castro and his delegation appear to be making the move from Midtown to Harlem out of their own volition. No external forces were explained or given except for the delegation’s ill-mannered ways. According to Raúl Roa Kouri, advisor and travel coordinator for Castro’s trip to New York in 1960, the manager of the Shelburne wanted $20,000 as a security fee because housing the Cuban delegation was “running a great risk…Hordes of people [were] threatening to create disorders, to throw rocks against [the] hotel, and to provoke a great deal of damage.”\textsuperscript{207} The Cuban delegation viewed this security fee as the continuation of US imperialism. The move to Harlem was both a rejection of the $20,000 payment and an affirmation of Cuba’s revolutionary stance. Harlem itself represented a community peripheral to broader US American culture; therefore, the election of the Cuban delegation to move there emphasized Cuba’s identification with the \textit{periphery}, or better said, the Third World. It was not only impressive that the Cuban delegation moved, but the fact that multiple political actors in the international and domestic context went to Harlem to visit Castro made the move historically critical. Cuba was not on the periphery alone.\textsuperscript{208} Other leaders came to Harlem to participate and talk with Cuba. A new international institution developed in New York under the direction of Cuba, and it was not the UN.

Cuba shifted the dynamic of a typical UN General Assembly meeting by creating an alternative system of meetings with radical, community leaders such as Malcolm X and the regional NAACP president, L. Joseph Overton.\textsuperscript{209} Cuba blatantly subverted the UN’s hold on New York and presented a counter-imperialist way to interact with these institutions of power.

\textsuperscript{206} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{207} Mealy, \textit{Fidel and Malcolm X}, 33.
\textsuperscript{208} This idea of being peripheral stems from the theory of dependency which was referred to in the previous chapters.
For example, Castro had not been invited to the President Eisenhower’s Americas lunch. So, the Cuban delegation hosted its own meal with employees of the hotel in Harlem.\textsuperscript{210} Cuba’s rejection from formal elite spaces allowed them to create new connections. The perception of the American press, the UN, and the OAS constructed Cuba to be a disobedient child. However, Fidel and his comrades were more than political troublemakers; they were intentionally disrupting the international social fabric that had created a sustained bipolar peace since the end of WWII.

\textbf{Cuba and “The People”}

The Cuban delegation utilized their interactions in these formalized, international institutions of power to gain say with Third World countries and marginalized communities in the US. As demonstrated earlier, Cuba utilized the formality of elitism entrenched in these supranational organizations as a platform to push back against the box in which Cuba had been placed. The Cuban delegation dismissed institutional formalities as the arbiters of power. The Black neighborhood of Harlem became the Cuban Revolution’s home base for the next two weeks, where non-white leaders from Africa, Asia, and the US came to discuss the world as they saw it.

However, Cuba was not the only party involved in this process of redefining solidarity across the Third World. The Asian-African Bandung Conference legacy in tandem with the admission of fourteen new African states to the UN in September paved the way for a new Cold War order.\textsuperscript{211} This coalition between independent and anti-imperialist African and Asian states created an alternative third collective in the UN which could not be controlled or determined by

\textsuperscript{210} Mealy, \textit{Fidel and Malcolm X}, 55.
\textsuperscript{211} The Bandung Conference was held in 1955 between various Asian and African nations to discuss international issues. It served as a very significant precursor to the \textit{Tricontinental}. 
the politics of “East” or “West”.212 According to these New York Times articles, African nations rebuffed Khrushchev’s attempts at alliance building, but they were also not entirely open to aligning themselves with their recently ousted colonizers.213 The independence of the non-aligned movement from US-USSR competition created a crack in the Cold War diplomatic landscape that Cuba attempted to navigate. In a time when assumed political power lay in the hands of the First and Second World’s leaders, the Third World existed in a tertiary role. The Cuban Revolution and the actions of other recently liberated nations forced the UN to contend with non-white leaders and countries. Leaders such as President Sukarno of Indonesia, Patrice Lumumba of the Congo, and Premier Fidel Castro of Cuba crafted an image and platform for national-liberation of previously colonized peoples as a path to power.

Moving the delegation to Harlem was part of that image. In a New York Times article titled, “Castro Is Seeking Negroes’ Support,” the author tied the Theresa Hotel move to an attempt by Castro to incorporate US African-American support for his revolutionary regime which included the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, subsidized African-American travel to the island, and contracting Joe Louis as a spokesperson for Cuba.214 More importantly, the delegation made a concerted effort to demonstrate the actual incorporation of Afro-Cubans into their government. Specific individuals’ presence, such as Juan Almeida, helped legitimize the Revolution’s “raced” connection to the marginalized individuals of Harlem.

During his stay in Harlem, Castro invited leaders of local communities to meet him. Instead of international heads of state, Castro invited the Black leaders of Harlem and prominent

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213 Ibid.
voices such as Malcolm X to join him in his hotel room. Castro’s lackluster English skills limited his interactions with these Black leaders as most of the meeting held at the Theresa were fifteen minutes long or less. There are no documented transcripts of these interactions, but the importance of the visual impact of meeting is perhaps more important than what was said. Photos of Castro and Malcolm X chatting on the end of a hotel bed not only reinforced the transnationality of the Cuban Revolution, but also attempted to reorient the world. For the Cuban delegation, the imagery of these meetings was more important than the content actually discussed. Malcolm X would soon become a leading voice of Black radicalism in the US. The ideological crossover between Castro and Malcolm X was rooted in the internationality of oppression. Both leaders believed that racism and imperialism were related, and that they shared the same origin: oppressive, hegemonic cultures subordinating others. The image of these two liberationists together was just as radical as their politics.

The proclaimed elimination of racism and lack of Jim Crow-style oppression made the Cuban revolutionary project acceptable to Black Power icons. The fact that Black radical leaders such as Robert F. Williams left the US for Cuba affirmed their belief in a non-racist Cuba by saying:

As for my being used as a pawn in the struggle of Cuba against imperialist and racist North America, I prefer to be on the side of right than on the side of Jim Crow and oppression. I prefer to be used as an instrument to convey the truth of a people who respect the rights of man, rather than to be used as an Uncle Tom whitewasher of Black oppression and injustice and an apologist for America’s hypocrisy.

215 Mealy, Fidel and Malcolm X, 47.
216 Mealy, Fidel and Malcolm X, 42-43. The rights to these photos are reserved but are depicted in full in Mealy’s book. They are also available at the Universal History Archive/UIG via Getty Images if you search “Fidel Castro 1960”.
217 While I argue here that the image of Malcolm X and Fidel Castro may be more important than what was actually discussed, the book compiled by Rosemari Mealy called Fidel and Malcolm X was the result of conference in 1990 held in Havana discussing the importance of this meeting historically and the crossover between these two leaders.
Other Black radical leaders like Huey Newton sought refuge in Cuba as a result of the persecution they faced in the US. Cuba’s connection to Black radical leadership forged a new relationship between the island and US African-Americans. However, the tension between complete Black liberation and the reality of race in Cuba, and its lack of systemic reparation, pulled at the seams of Cuban diplomacy. Much like the difficulty in translating the conversations between Castro and Malcolm X, was it possible to translate a race-blind revolution into a racialized foreign policy project?

The Cuban delegation utilized their physical and geographic space to imbue their political message with a historical trajectory much larger than its own. Harlem was not only the “Black Capital” of the world, but also the home to a growing number of migrants from Puerto Rico, whom the US had also colonized. Harlem not only represented the Black community in the US, but it also had a history of being a home to marginalized political movements, such as some of the first Communist parties in the United States. The physical neighborhood of Harlem linked Cuba to a community outside their domestic revolution.\(^{219}\) The Hotel Theresa became a linkage point of solidarity that occurred outside the walls of the UN between Cuba, US African-Americans, and Third World liberation leaders. This moment was the beginning of political movement that grew out of the interactions between non-imperial powers and the Cuban government.

As time went on, Cuba continued sending representatives to the UN to denounce imperialism. The UN became a space where Cuba rejected the institution and asserted its own racial politics. In 1964, the Cuban government sent Che Guevara to the UN to denounce Western meddling in African decolonization. During his time in New York, Malcolm X invited Guevara

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to speak at an event, but they were unable to meet due to security concerns. The parallels between Cuban actions at the UN in 1960 and 1964 emphasize a renunciation of Western institutions and an assertion of race-based allyship with Black elites in the US such as Malcolm X and revolutionary leaders in Africa. The UN provided Cuba the opportunity to build relationships with African, Asian, and US African-American leaders that would facilitate their own international institution in 1966: OSPAAAL (Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa, and Latin America).

However, before starting their own solidarity project, Cuba decided to physically export the revolution to Africa. Immediately after Guevara’s speech at the UN in December of 1964, he went on a tour of African nations. By April of 1965, he was in the Congo fighting with a cohort of less than 200 Black Cubans for the liberation of the African nation. While Guevara recounted this mission as a failure, Black Cubans in the Congo spreading the revolution demonstrated the possibility of a shift in the revolutionary virtue of Afro-Cubans in the eyes of the government.

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Chapter 4: A Story of Failure

This is the story of failure... Victory is a great source of positive experiences, but so is defeat, especially in light of the extraordinary circumstances that surrounded these events: the protagonists and source of information were foreigners who went to risk their lives in an unknown land, where people spoke a different language, and where they were bound only by ties of proletarian internationalism, thereby initiating a new feature in modern wars of liberation.221

Che Guevara wrote the words above as the opening preface to his diary published posthumously from his seven-month stint and revolutionary involvement in the Congo between April and November of 1965.222 This expedition is often referred to, as Che did in the first line of his diary, as a “story of a failure”. However, this seven-month intervention was more than a moment of failure in the export of the Cuban Revolution’s mission of national liberation to Africa. It clearly asserted Cuban political presence during the Cold War apart from Soviet and US American directives. Cuban revolutionary action in 1959 rooted itself as a moral claim against US imperialism. Incipient Cuban transnational action made a parallel claim to moral superiority against “yankee” imperialism across Asia, Africa, and the Americas. The enemy of Western hegemony and the lack of political and economic autonomy in the Third World, which Cuba had also experienced, fomented transnational coordination and solidarity. Cuba’s participation in Third World matters transformed the island of six million people into a competing Cold War power. In sending a column of guerrilla fighters to the Congo, Cuba led an international war against “yankee” imperialism internationally whether that Yankee be American, Belgian, or French.

This expedition failed insofar that both the Cubans and Congolese rebels were ill-prepared and unsure of what non-imperialist foreign intervention would look like on the ground.\footnote{Mary-Alice Waters, \textit{From the Escambray to the Congo: In the Whirlwind of the Cuban Revolution Interview with Victor Dreke} (New York, London, Montreal, an Sydney: Pathfinder Press, 2002), 136.} Cuba had not yet sent a cohort of guerrillas to a foreign country to fight with locals. Prior to Congolese intervention in 1965, medical missions had been the primary representatives of Cuban interests and involvement outside the island.\footnote{One of the successes of the Cuban Revolution was the increased education of doctors on the island. As part of Cuban diplomacy, the state educated and sent out medical missions as a means of spreading the cause of national liberation. I do not focus on them here because I wanted to analyze how Black Cubans were utilized differently from other more well-documented and studied forms of Cuban diplomacy after 1959. For more on the medical missions, see Isaac Saney, "Homeland of Humanity: Internationalism within the Cuban Revolution," \textit{Latin American Perspectives} 36, no. 1 (2009): 111-23. For a continuation of this policy into more recent times, see Sarah A. Blue, "Cuban Medical Internationalism: Domestic and International Impacts," \textit{Journal of Latin American Geography} 9, no. 1 (2010): 31-49.} Cuba had been involved in the conflicts in Algeria in 1963, but not under the premise of Cuban leadership in the fight.\footnote{Piero Gleijeses, "Cuba's First Venture in Africa: Algeria, 1961-1965," \textit{Journal of Latin American Studies} 28, no. 1 (1996): 164.} The Congo insurgency and Cuban participation in 1965 transformed Cuban transnationalism. The Congo altered how Cuba exported the revolution. Cuba placed soldiers on the ground in the Congo to train rebels. The government did not ship in Congolese military leadership to Cuba for a guerrilla boot camp as had been done with Latin American rebel causes.\footnote{Brown, \textit{Cuba's Revolutionary World}, 192-222; Piero Gleijeses, \textit{Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa}, 1959-1976 (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 87.} This chapter primarily seeks to answer why this mission took place to begin with instead of solely analyzing why it “failed”.

The Congo experience was victorious insofar that it gave the Cuban revolutionary government the opportunity to assert itself into Third World politics at a level that neither the US, USSR, nor China could do. The expedition facilitated Cuba’s growing political weight in the Third World and established a precedent for future Cuban intervention, most notably that of
Angola a decade later.\textsuperscript{227} Che’s proclamation of failure in the Congo responded to the immediate frustration and loss faced by the Cubans in 1965. However, this failed experiment helped to shape the way in which Cuban foreign policy utilized transnational solidarity marked by racial connections in a decolonized, Cold War context to set a precedent for international cooperation and “modern wars of liberation” through the Tricontinental Conference in January of 1966.\textsuperscript{228}

Therefore, the goal of the following chapter is to demonstrate that the intervention in the Congo marked a turning-point in transnational Cuban solidarity. The tension between internal claims to colorblindness in Cuba along with the government’s explicitly race-based transnational actions underline an irony that not only informed their policy decisions, but also continued to marginalize a large demographic of people in Cuba. The Cuban government’s manipulation of “blackness” into a political tool away from a social identity within Cuba facilitated a racialized foreign policy based on national non-white otherness as a valid reason for intervention.

In order to do so, it is critical to acknowledge that this moment of intervention has not been studied extensively. This historical episode is relatively ignored and labeled as unimportant to Cold War history because there were less than 200 Cubans in the Congo, the seven months they spent there was relatively small compared to the larger Congo Crisis that took place between 1960 and 1965, and the primary sources on all sides are difficult to access. On both the Cuban and US sides, the cohorts sent to the Congo were classified and their respective governments did not publicize their presence in the fighting. There is a newspaper article from the US that mentioned finding a Cuban journal in the Congo on July 18, 1965, but beyond this reference there is no archival evidence available currently to suggest further US knowledge of

\textsuperscript{227} While more source material and secondary literature exists on the Angola missions, the experience of the Congo more directly connects the idea of blackness and solidarity. The Congo intervention also set a precedent for future Cuban actions in Africa.

\textsuperscript{228} Guevara, \textit{Congo Diary}, 15.
the Cuban presence in the Congo. However, beyond these rare articles, both sides maintained a level of classification and secrecy that makes accessing documents difficult. The Cuban government did not reveal Che Guevara’s whereabouts during the 1960s and his involvement in Africa was not disclosed until the 1990s. Furthermore, on the side of the Congolese, there was not an active international leftist press after the assassination of Patrice Lumumba that effectively kept records or mentioned the actions of the Cubans in the country. This presents a problem for historians attempting to piece together the political and social importance of Cuban-African relationships following 1959.

These limitations hide the fact that this moment shifted the Cuban role in transnational, Third World politics. The secondary literature on this particular moment is also limited primarily to three scholars: Piero Gleijeses, Sergey Mazov, and Frank Villafaña. Each of these writers acknowledges the lack of source material and use extensive Soviet archives to amplify their arguments about Cold War relations between Cuba and the Soviet Union as seen in the actions taken in the Congo. While this means there is much left to be said and debated about Cuban intervention in the Congo, historians need to better conceptualize this moment as the starting

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229 “Congolese Report Finding Cuban Diary,” New York Times, July 18, 1965, 58. Frank Villafaña’s Cold War in the Congo: The Confrontation of Cuban Military Forces, 1960-1967 deals most directly with US intervention in the Congo by discussing how non-citizen Cuban migrants trained by the CIA were sent covertly to the Congo to fight at the same time that the Cuban cohort under Che Guevara was also there.


232 Piero Gleijeses, Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976; Sergey Mazov, A Distant Front in the Cold War: The USSR in West Africa and the Congo, 1956-1964 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); Frank Villafaña, Cold War in the Congo: The Confrontation of Cuban Military Forces, 1960-1967 (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2009). Elizabeth Schmidt’s in Foreign Intervention in Africa: Cold War to the War of Terror also gives a brief overview of the Congo Crisis and mentions that Cuban intervention was present. At the end of the chapter on the Congo, she refers to these 3 authors in a supplementary bibliography as being the primary scholars to have looked at the intersection of the Congo and Cuba in 1965.
point for Cuban involvement in African decolonization. 200 fighters may not be a large military force, but the Cuban island of only 6 million people sent 200 Black Cuban fighters to a country where they did not have any historical or necessarily political ties before 1959.

For the purpose of this chapter, I will be primarily using the previously stated secondary sources by Gleijeses, Mazov, and Villafaña along with the memoirs of Cuban guerillas in the conflict. These memoirs published by the Cuban government present a specific narrative that parallels that of Che’s focused on failure, but these reflections will aid in constructing an understanding of how the intervention looked on the ground. Ultimately, this chapter is attempting to construct an understanding of the precedence of Cuban race-based politics established by the Congolese intervention in 1965. Through historical imagining and a hope to create more interest in Latin American-African connections, this chapter seeks to build a connection between Cuba and Africa that is often left to the Angolan intervention of 1975.

In order to understand why this mission existed in the first place, I will analyze the intent of sending a cohort of Cuban guerrilla fighters to the Congo. Regardless of whether or not they were successful, the act of sending Cubans to the Congo demonstrated a larger political vision on behalf of the revolutionary government than just being anti-US. Before discussing the specifics of the Cuban intervention, I will highlight the Cold War context of African decolonization, the role of the UN in the Congo Crisis, and the historical and symbolic figure of Patrice Lumumba. Then, I will analyze Cuban actions in relation to the Congo such as the intent, construction, and aftermath of their presence in late 1965 which was heavily racialized from recruiting “dark-skinned” Cubans to asserting unity based on their shared oppressed, non-white experience. Ultimately, the Congolese experiment put Cuba in a position to promote tricontinentalism—that is solidarity based on Third World experiences. Cuban participation in the Congo Crisis
encapsulated Cuban transnationalism and a belief in national liberation that was not "race blind" like the Cuban Revolution in 1959 but race dependent. To understand Cuba’s role in the Congo, it is important to contextualize the “crisis” itself.

The Congo Crisis

The general historiography of the Congo Crisis demarcates two periods of heightened conflict and foreign intervention: one from 1960 to 1961 and the other from 1964 to 1965. Cuban intervention in 1965 responded to the prolonged Congo Crisis between 1960 and 1965 which was inherently international. The Congo Crisis was not a domestic political event, but an international Cold War conflict that involved the Belgians, French, British, US, Congolese, Rwandans, the UN, and the Organization of African Unity (OAU).

The first part of the Congo Crisis directly responded to the hastily conducted decolonization of the country by Belgium in a matter of six months. In January of 1960, Belgium controlled and planned Congo’s independence for June 30, 1960. The imperialists decolonized quickly, but within their own parameters. For example, the Belgian government shifted colonial state-run companies into private Belgian entities before the official date of independence so that they would not lose the economic profits of the Congo when they relinquished political control.\(^{233}\) Independence did not end decolonization conflicts in the Congo.

On July 11, 1960 the Katanga province seceded from the Congo with the support of Belgian troops still present. Katanga’s secession proved pivotal to international involvement in the crisis because it held the majority of the country’s mineral wealth and specifically,

\(^{233}\) Elizabeth Schmidt, *Foreign Intervention in Africa: From the Cold War to the War on Terror* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 20. Here I distinguish between political and economic control. However, in practice decolonization and the conflicts that resulted from this process was because Europeans sought to maintain political control through economies which is known as “neocolonialism”. For more on neocolonialism, see Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stages of Imperialism* (New York: International Publishers, 1966).
uranium. The growing conflict of the Cold War matched by the drive to create nuclear weapons fueled by uranium made the Congo Crisis a central issue for the fight between East and West. The previous Western European colonizers of the region along with their close ally, the US, wanted to maintain control over the Congo’s uranium, while the Soviets sought to provide an alternative to the centuries long Western domination that the Congo had experienced for centuries. On July 12, Patrice Lumumba, the newly elected Prime Minister and charismatic figure head of national liberation, sought international help. In a conversation with the US Secretary of State on his trip to Washington DC between July 27 and 29, Lumumba made clear that he had appealed to the UN to intervene and force Belgian troops to leave the country. However, he had been informed by a letter from the Belgian ambassador in Leopoldville that “there would be no withdrawal of Belgian troops…[because] the United States, which stands for liberty and independence, was supporting Belgium in her desire to maintain her troops in the Congo, contrary to the wishes of the [UN] Security Council.” If the UN refused to force the Belgian troops to leave, then Lumumba would seek help from “the Soviets or any other country that would help.” Therefore, Lumumba’s appeals for Western intervention from the UN, and the US, did not mean that the Congo aligned with capitalism or even Soviet communism.

Lumumba was pragmatically pleading for international assistance.

236 Stephen Saideman, The Ties That Divide: Ethnic Politics, Foreign Policy, and International Conflict (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 38. Patrice Lumumba became the first Congolese prime minister of the nation and a symbol of liberation from imperialism. Lumumba as a politician was just as important within the Congo if not more important to the rest of the world as a representative of the Third World and specifically in Cuba after his assassination.
Despite these calls for help, the West read Lumumba’s turn to the Soviets as an assault to its control. As a result, these Western institutions barred the Congo’s admittance into the UN and the delegation’s physical entry into the US. The US government had denied Lumumba and the other Congolese representatives visas to the US to punish Lumumba’s turn to the Soviets. In September of 1960, the UN General Assembly debated whether or not to admit the Congo into the UN without the Congolese delegation present.

The Cuban press viewed Lumumba’s appeals to the West as his greatest “error” because it had created a “doubly bad problem” where the Congolese would have to “kick out [both] the Belgians and the UN from national territory.” But the Cuban government, and in turn press, painted the Congo Crisis as a struggle parallel to Cuba’s own revolutionary trajectory. On December 9, 1961 Revolución printed an article titled “Washington Admits Intervention in the Congo” (Admite su intervención en el Congo Washington) which identified US American intervention in the Congo as correlative to US American imperialism in Cuba.

On January 17, 1961, the Congo Crisis reached a dramatic climax with the assassination of Patrice Lumumba. However, the violence and internal struggle between secessionists supported by Belgian troops and Congolese “rebels” persisted with governmental turnover and a sustained baseline of violence for the next four years. In 1964, the violence spiked again as a result of the withdrawal of UN troops in June and the election of Moïse Tshombe who had been president of secessionist Katanga from 1960 to 1963 and opponent to Patrice Lumumba. Cuba did not have the resources or ability to intervene in the Congo in 1960 which was only a year

240 Carbonell, “La intervención belga y las intrigas imperialistas en la República del Congo,” 6. These quotes came from the section labeled “Errores del Primer Ministro Lumumba.” The quote in the original Spanish is as follows: “el problema es ahora doble, sacar a los belgas y a la ONU del territorio nacional.”
after its own revolution. However, the revolutionary government looked to the Congo throughout the crisis as a source of inspiration and a nation experiencing a parallel journey of liberation.\textsuperscript{242}

By 1965, the revolutionary government solidified their internal legitimacy to a point that their foreign policy became more daring and international. Cuba’s turn towards Africa depended on linking US imperialism to European colonialism through the figure of Patrice Lumumba, but this turn also demonstrated an intent to destabilize Cold War hegemonies between the First and Second World. Intervention presented the Revolution an opportunity to assert itself where both the US and USSR no longer wanted to engage.\textsuperscript{243} This space gave the Cuban revolutionary government the chance to develop a foreign policy rhetoric across the Third World based on experiences of oppression.

\textit{Lumumba the Martyr}

Part of building this racialized discourse of oppression across Africa, Asia, and Latin America depended on establishing links between symbolic figures and causes across the Third World. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Cuban government used the image of Patrice Lumumba alongside Conrado Benítez, an Afro-Cuban literacy teacher assassinated by counterrevolutionaries in the Cuban countryside, to promote the 1961 Literacy Campaign. Much like Conrado Benítez, Patrice Lumumba had also been assassinated by individuals funded and trained by the CIA.\textsuperscript{244} Therefore, the creation of martyrs for the “revolution” both within Cuba and transnationally hinged on connecting subversive US intervention as undermining the agency of the affected countries. The CIA had not only trained and funded counterrevolutionaries

\begin{footnotes}
\item[242] Piero Gleijeses, \textit{Conflicting Missions}, 77.
\end{footnotes}
against Castro, but they had done the same for the perceived anti-American leader, Patrice Lumumba.

However, as mentioned earlier, there is no concrete evidence to suggest that Lumumba preferred the USSR over the US. In fact, he originally sought support from the US in 1960. None of his choices could appease the US unless the US was in control.245 The Cuban government interpreted Lumumba’s predicament as an imperialist trap. The position that Castro and Lumumba found themselves in after the liberation of their respective nations underscored the imperialist reach of the US. The fact that these Third World nations gained independence threatened the control of the US, and the West at large, in maintaining a competitive counter to the Soviets.

The similar experiences of imperialism in conjunction with Cuba’s explicit incorporation of Lumumba into domestic propaganda formed the beginnings of transnational solidarity. As Lumumba became a martyr in the Congo, he simultaneously became a symbol of international revolution in Cuba. Lumumba embodied the international component of the Revolution as a Black man. The contrast between the white heroes of the Cuban Revolution with the Black, African leader as the face of international revolution demonstrated a shift in understanding how “blackness” as a political category functioned in a global context. While discrimination was said not to exist in Cuba, race remained salient in Cold War politics. The Jim Crow South grew increasingly hostile, the Soviet Union criticized US race relations, and Africa was experiencing decolonization. Race was unavoidable outside Cuba. The inonization of Lumumba through a parade memorializing his death and incorporation into the Literacy Campaign predated Cuban intervention in the Congo, but the relationship between the Congo Crisis and the Cuban

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245 In 1959, Cuba experienced a similar conflict when attempting to appeal to the US shortly after the revolution assumed power.
Revolution started in 1960.\textsuperscript{246} Lumumba the historical figure and politician became a tool of the Cuban government to promote domestic racelessness and an external project of transnational liberation after his death.

**Cuba Looks to Africa**

Up until 1964, Cuba only acted as a “concerned spectator” in regard to Africa.\textsuperscript{247} Cuban foreign action shifted to Africa with the Congolese intervention of 1965. As mentioned previously, analyzing this decision is difficult because there is no written record of discussion or Cuban grand strategy.\textsuperscript{248} Despite this difficulty, the Congolese intervention still merits analysis because it epitomizes the beginnings of Cuban action in Africa based on a “multiple Vietnams” strategy and explicitly recruited Cuban fighters based on their race. The tensions in the Cuban revolutionary government’s perceptions of race internally and internationally as highlighted throughout this thesis also existed within their foreign intervention. Cuba intervened in the Congo because of a common experience of oppression, but the government sent only Black soldiers to fight. While this decision could have been to maintain their cover, it still merits analyzing why no white soldiers were sent.

**A Fight Against Imperialism**

Guevara’s speech at the UN on December 11, 1964 marked the beginning of the ideological shift to becoming an actor instead of spectator in international affairs. Similar to Castro’s decision to go to the UN General Assembly in 1960, a Cuban newspaper announced on December 9 that Guevara was leaving for New York.\textsuperscript{249} Two days later Guevara gave his speech

\begin{footnotes}
\item[246] “Un comentario: Lumumba.” Refer to the timeline to see the overlap and simultaneity of these events.
\item[247] Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 77.
\item[248] Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, 374. Gleijeses explicitly makes this claim which is important to notice because of any scholar in the field, he has access to the largest array of sources in Cuba, Russia, and the US.
\item[249] *Revolución*, December 9, 1964, 1.
\end{footnotes}
condemning the UN for allowing “imperialism...to turn this meeting into a pointless oratorical tournament, instead of solving the serious problems of the world.”

Guevara went further than to just condemn imperialism, but he asserted that Cuba “reaffirmed [its] support to all peoples in conflict with imperialism and colonialism.”

Guevara openly confirmed that Cuba declared itself to be part of the “Nonaligned” countries of Asia and Africa with support of the “socialist camp” because the Nonaligned countries, like Cuba, “fight imperialism.” Guevara gave Cuba a capacious definition of alignment as to neither offend the USSR nor trap itself into being a puppet state.

Beyond asserting the Cuban position during the Cold War, Guevara’s speech focused on the Congo Crisis as a continuing example of imperialism where “those who used the name of the United Nations to commit the murder of Lumumba are today, in the name of the defense of the white race, murdering thousands of Congolese.” In this quote, Guevara links imperialism to race. The language utilized here accentuates the centrality of racialized language to the goals and actions of revolutionary Cuba. Later on, Guevara parallels the “German imperial” conquest of Belgium during WWII with Belgian imperialism in the Congo. Belgian troops “murder[ed] in cold blood thousands of Congolese in the name of the white race, just as [the Belgians had] suffered under the German heel because their blood was not sufficiently Aryan.”

By alluding to the Nazi occupation of Belgium, Guevara equates imperialism to racist, genocidal fascism. This connection inverted the notion of First World saviors and Second World communists.

Imperialism was a racial phenomenon that First World nations, along with the Second World,

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251 Guevara, Speech at the United Nations.
252 Gleijeses, Conflicting Missions, 378.
used to establish spheres of influence during the Cold War. Guevara’s pronouncement at the UN made Cuba’s promise to fight imperialism clear.

*Multiple Vietnams*

In order to fulfill such a promise, the Cuban government pursued a “Multiple Vietnams” strategy. Although there is no specific documentation that lays out this strategy in stages, Castro and Guevara used the phrase to characterize the Cuban Revolution as transnational.\(^{255}\) An article titled “Create Two, Three, Many Vietnams” appeared in the thirteenth issue of the *Tricontinental* in April of 1967.\(^{256}\) This article attributed to Che Guevara highlighted similar themes to those of his UN speech, but it also gave a concrete analogy to destroy US imperialism: create more Vietnam Wars. Guevara stated:

> All this has internal repercussion in the United States...: class struggle even within its own territory. How close we could look into a bright future should two, three or many Vietnams flourish throughout the world with their share of deaths and their immense tragedies, their everyday heroism and their repeated blows against imperialism, impelled to disperse its forces under the sudden attack and the increasing hatred of all peoples of the world!

The Vietnam War wore down the Johnson Administration, US population, and drained resources.\(^{257}\) He suggested that in order to defeat the larger imperial machine of the US the Nonaligned countries under the leadership of Cuba should attempt to provoke more wars like Vietnam. At an economic summit on Afro-Asiatic solidarity in February of 1964 in Algeria, Che linked Vietnam to the Congo stating “before the ominous attack of North American imperialism against Vietnam or the Congo you all must respond by supplying these sister countries all the

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\(^{256}\) Che Guevara, “Create Two, Three, Many Vietnams,” *Tricontinental*, April 1967, page # needed still from

defense that they need and give them all our solidarity without any condition.”

The Congo was another Vietnam. Despite claims on the part of the US that they were not involved, the Congo became a war between indigenous actors seeking independence and international forces unwilling to relinquish control.

Cuba’s involvement in the Congo reflected an intention to involve the Revolution in a movement beyond the island: solidarity. The Cuban Revolution intended to defeat US imperialism and intervention in 1959. Cuban extension into Africa maintained the same goal, but for other people. The bonds between the Congolese struggle may have been politically constructed, but Afro-Cubans also connected these two nations.

A “Dark-Skinned” Column

The primary accounts of Cuban intervention in the Congo come from participants’ memoirs. The two central memoirs recounting the Congo expedition detail Che Guevara and Víctor Dreke’s experiences. Both of these reflections are printed and distributed by trade presses and provide narratives approved and sponsored by the Cuban government. Therefore, these stories must be analyzed not only for the context and content they provide the reader with about what happened in the Congo, but also the images of loyalty and servitude they invoke.

The beginning of this chapter reflected upon one of Guevara’s quotes emphasizing the failure of this expedition, but part of this failure is due to Cuba’s lack of understanding.

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259 Mike Hoare, The Road to Kalamata. 1. Mike Hoare’s story is about him being a mercenary hired by the Katanga secessionists. While this particular memoir recounts his experience between 1960 and 1961, he returned as a mercenary during the 1965 conflict.
Guevara’s memoir falls into racist exhortations of frustration calling the Congolese and Rwandan fighters lazy and reduces the failure of the mission to the “borders between ethnic groups” and the “tribal character” internal to the Congolese rebel coalition.\textsuperscript{260} Even Víctor Dreke, one of the Afro-Cuban commanders charged to lead half of the Cubans in the Congo, commented on the problems of “tribalism” that plagued liberation in the Congo.\textsuperscript{261} Moments such as these highlight the ways in which Cuban revolutionaries were not impervious to racism. As seen throughout the entirety of chapter 2 of this thesis, the Cuban government’s proclamations of solving discrimination did not eliminate racist thoughts or beliefs from Cubans.

The Cuban government and military chose the cohort of individuals to fight in the Congo based on their prior revolutionary experience and their skin color. Both Guevara and Dreke reflect upon the creation of the Congolese cohort as a “very Black” column.\textsuperscript{262} Guevara said that it was Gaston Soumialot’s, one of the Congolese rebel leaders, idea “if the instructors [sent by Cuba] were Black (ie. Afro-Cuban).”\textsuperscript{263} Furthermore, Dreke commented that “there were so many compañeros who were Black that everyone thought [the mission] would be [in] Africa.”\textsuperscript{264} The government selected guerrilla fighters because of their race. This posits an interesting question for the Cuban regime which attested to not discriminating, but then only chose fighters because of that race. Understandably, as in line with Soumialot’s reasoning, choosing Afro-Cubans to go to the Congo would maintain the secrecy of the mission. However, the language used to describe the Afro-Cubans and the images of loyalty promoted in Guevara and Dreke’s memoirs reinforce the assumption of Black loyalty to the Revolution.

\begin{footnotes}
\item [260] Guevara, \textit{Congo Diary}, 35 and 38.
\item [261] Waters, \textit{From the Escambray to the Congo}, 141.
\item [262] Waters, \textit{From the Escambray to the Congo}, 125.
\item [264] Waters, \textit{From the Escambray to the Congo}, 125.
\end{footnotes}
Dreke, as an Afro-Cuban himself, continually reaffirms his dedication and praise of the Cuban Revolution by asserting that many Blacks in Cuba believed that they should not join anything “until the victory of the revolution.” Furthermore, at the end of his memoir, Dreke finds it important to reiterate the Afro-Cuban guerrillas’ loyalty to the Revolution by stating:

After thirty-four years, out of that column of 128 men, only one—who married a foreigner—has left the country, and he’s never spoken ill of Cuba. This fact is a demonstration of loyalty. This is important, although no one has written about it. Where are the members of Che’s column in the Congo? The ones still alive are right here in Cuba today.

Blackness once again existed as a tool of the Revolution to instill values of loyalty. Dreke’s memoir serves as the only primary account of an Afro-Cuban guerrilla in the Congo published and promoted by the Cuban government. The image that his reflections entail is not a critique of what happened in the Congo, but an extension of revolutionary support and loyalty that only a cohort of Black guerrillas could engender.

In order to fulfill the promise of revolutionary solidarity pledged by Guevara at the UN in 1964, the Cuban Revolution had to use Black bodies. Black fighters were the only ones sent to forge transnational solidarity. The fight against imperialism transformed from ideology to practice due to the actions of a dark-skinned column who received no recognition for their sacrifice once they returned home. Their struggle and fight remained a secret for 30 years until the 1990s when the Cuban government made public its participation in the Congo Crisis. Only one month after this cohort returned home to Cuba, Havana opened its doors to the first OSPAAAL Tricontinental Conference between January 3 and 10. Delegations from each

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265 Waters, *From the Escambray to the Congo*, 23.
266 Waters, *From the Escambray to the Congo*, 144.
Africa, Asia, and Latin America arrived in Cuba to discuss the root of their shared struggles: imperialism. In reality, the Afro-Cuban fighters that had recently returned home from the Congo had lived a tricontinental experience and fought for solidarity on the ground. But the state’s maintenance of classification did not allow for the lived experience of Afro-Cubans to interact with elite Third World leaders at the conference. The Afro-Cubans sent to the Congo put Cuban tricontinentalism into practice and embodied the Cuban Revolution away from the island because of their blackness. Upon their arrival home, they returned to their everyday lives and a society that did not know their sacrifice or even recognize their race.
Conclusion: Third World Connections

Between January 3 and 10 of 1966, exactly seven years after the Cuban guerrilla insurgency entered Havana, the Third World descended on the city for the first Tricontinental Conference. In August, the Tricontinental publication published its fifth issue containing a series of documents adopted at the conference. One of these documents was titled, “The rights of afro-americans in the United States.” The document “condemned the murder of Malcolm X, imprisonment of William Epton, and victims of the violence unleashed by imperialism.” But, more importantly, it incorporated US African-Americans into the tricontinental movement, or better understood as the “great battle being fought by the people of the three continents.” This call to arms alluded to an inclusive revolution, one that reached beyond its Third World allies to the oppressed and marginalized in the US. Yet this new conference and “alternative third position that favored the politics of peace and the independence of all people” did not incorporate all people.269

The Tricontinental used the experience of the Third World, racialized language, and a call to national liberation to create “many Vietnams”. The Cuban revolutionary government directed and hosted the conference as a way to engage and develop a third alternative to the bipolar division of power in the world. Cuba deemed itself the figurehead of this cooperation. But, in many ways, Cuba was absent from the conference despite its control. The Tricontinental was a collective of information that allowed an array of countries to connect on the basis of their shared experiences, particularly those of exploitation and marginalization at the international

269 Carbonell, “La intervención belga y las intrigas imperialistas en la República del Congo,” 5. “...una suerte de tercera posición, en medio de la lucha que libran el Este y el Oeste, posición que favorece la política de la paz y la independencia de los pueblos.”
level. Cuba had successfully liberated itself from said domination and, in turn, become a model for other Third World countries. By making itself the leader of the Tricontinental and, thus, this model, Cuba placed itself in a position to avoid criticism of its own revolution and failures.

As seen throughout this thesis, the Cuban Revolution did, in fact, fail in regard to race. It did not eliminate discrimination, nor did it solve racism on the island after March 22, 1959. The legacy of race in Cuba formed through a long history of slavery, sugar production, capitalist expansion, and, ultimately, revolution. The Haitian Revolution kick-started capitalist, and eventually imperialist, interactions between the US and Cuba, all of which were centered on sugar. Sugar incorporated Cuba into a larger global economy on the basis of its slave-based commodity production. As a result, Cuba’s role in the world was racialized. As a colonial island with a large slave population producing sugar for the rest of the world, Cuba’s international otherness and complex internal racial dynamics have been an unavoidable issue for Cuban political leaders for centuries, since before its independence. In fact, it was José Martí who attempted to unite the racially divided island on the basis of independence. 100 years later, Fidel Castro picked up the mantel by attempting to practice what Martí had only endorsed in theory: an independent, “raceless” Cuban nation.

Internal attempts at consolidation ignored the ramifications that racial distinction had caused for Cubans. Announcing the end to discrimination appeased people on the surface, but it did not effectively make Afro-Cubans equals. The revolutionary leadership—that is, Castro’s government—perpetuated images of Afro-Cuban loyalty and gratitude. In part, the government utilized race and racelessness as a marker of the revolution’s success. By eliminating the threat of Black mobilization and transforming blackness into a political symbol of incorporation and solidarity, the government consolidated its rule.
In September of 1960, when Fidel Castro moved the Cuban delegation to Harlem during the UN General Assembly, he blatantly linked himself and the Revolution to blackness. With the help of decolonization in Africa and Civil Rights Movement in the US, Fidel’s labeling of Cuba as non-white became all the more permissible. Cuba’s colonial and imperial past isolated it from the First and Second Worlds, but the revolution’s decision to involve itself in African liberation projects cemented its place in the Third World.

The Cuban government’s decision to send a covert cohort of 200 explicitly Black Cubans to the Congo did not coincide with its proclamation of anti-discrimination. The revolutionary government exploited the differences between Cuban national identity and individual racial identity to proclaim itself as a Third World leader. Upholding whiteness internally as the exemplar of revolutionary valor while proclaiming blackness externally displaced the Afro-Cuban community. Between 1959 and 1966, the Revolution used Afro-Cuban bodies to consolidate the government’s authority, instill gratefulness, and fight for transnational liberation in a country that was not their own. In the process, Afro-Cubans lost the agency that the Revolution promised to maintain.

In November of 1968, the Tricontinental publication distributed an interview with Huey Newton, a prominent leader of the Black Panthers. This particular issue’s cover depicted two hooded men and the words “Black Power”. In the interview, Newton was asked what Black Power meant to him. He responded by saying that “Black Power [was] really the people’s power. [It did] not humble or subjugate anyone to slavery or oppression.”270 In Cuba, Black Power was never the people’s power. In a rather ironic way, Black Power silenced Afro-Cubans and made them invisible internationally.

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Saturday March 28, 1959 was the day before Easter Sunday in 1959. This cartoon appeared six days after Fidel Castro had announced the end of discrimination and the beginning of a three-year Anti-discrimination Campaign.
Appendix B

Appendix C

Appendix D

Table 1. Population by province according to “skin color” between 1931 and 1953

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>1931</th>
<th>1943</th>
<th>1953</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinar del Río</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>343,480</td>
<td>398,794</td>
<td>448,422</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>80.6</td>
<td>79.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>270,547</td>
<td>321,154</td>
<td>357,252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>33,029</td>
<td>32,729</td>
<td>27,339</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havana</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>985,500</td>
<td>1,235,939</td>
<td>1,538,803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>77.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>774,518</td>
<td>963,098</td>
<td>1,184,493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>118,914</td>
<td>153,192</td>
<td>168,704</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matanzas</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>337,119</td>
<td>361,079</td>
<td>395,780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>77.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>247,712</td>
<td>277,527</td>
<td>307,230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>48,975</td>
<td>45,498</td>
<td>39,712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>10.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix F continued

Table 1. Population by province according to “skin color” between 1931 and 1953

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>1931</th>
<th>1943</th>
<th>1953</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las Villas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>649,269</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>767,454</td>
<td>81.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>51,691</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>59,469</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>110,355</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>108,998</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camagüey</td>
<td>408,706</td>
<td>72.7</td>
<td>388,719</td>
<td>79.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>296,722</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>50,648</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>68,881</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>46,164</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>39,081</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>356,532</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the purpose of this thesis, I have left the category of “yellow” out of the chart because the largest percentage it received was 1.2% in Havana in 1931 and this racial category is extraneous to the core of this thesis which is attempting to understand the role of the Afro-Cuban community, but it is important to highlight that there were Asians present in Cuba throughout the 20th century that were otherwise unacknowledged.
Appendix G

Table 2. Literacy Rates in Cuba, by province, between 1931 and 1953

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>1931</th>
<th>1943*</th>
<th>1953</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All of Cuba</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>71.3</td>
<td>76.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pinar del Río</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>62.7</td>
<td>69.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havana</td>
<td>85.8</td>
<td>81.0</td>
<td>90.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matanzas</td>
<td>72.3</td>
<td>75.9</td>
<td>80.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las Villas</td>
<td>68.5</td>
<td>71.0</td>
<td>75.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camagüey</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>72.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oriente</td>
<td>64.6</td>
<td>62.6</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


*The numbers for 1943 depend on the source because some demographics were not included as illiterate.
### Table 3. Comparative Literacy Rates Across Provinces According to Gender in 1953

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Total Literacy Rate (%)</th>
<th>Women (%)</th>
<th>Men (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pinar del Río</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>69.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havana</td>
<td>90.8</td>
<td>91.1</td>
<td>90.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matanzas</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>83.8</td>
<td>78.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Las Villas</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>72.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camagüey</td>
<td>72.7</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oriente</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>68.1</td>
<td>61.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This data in table 3 comes from both the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development’s *Report on Cuba* from Appendix G and the General Report on the 1953 Census from the Cuban National Office of Demographic and Electoral Census from Appendix F.
The quality is low, but the figure being hung has the letter “OEA” for “Organización de Estados Americanos” in Spanish which is the Organization of American States (OAS). The writing is not clear on the other figures hat, but it is clearly an armed revolutionary.
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