

The Havana Afro cubano and the Harlem

The Role of the Intellectual in the Formation of Racial and National Identity

From the writings of Frederick Douglass to Toni Morrison in North America to those of José Martí to Carlos Moore in Cuba, intellectuals and writers in the Americas have played a role in creating political and social identities for the descendants of Africans in this hemisphere. From the 1920s through the 1940s, parallel intellectual movements took place in New York and Havana that attempted to find voice and identity for the descendants of Africans in the United States and Cuba. The Afro cubano movement in Havana not only found a voice for Africans in Cuba but also redefined the definition of what it meant to be Cuban, making it difficult for Cubans to assert Cuban national identity without embracing both European and African cultures. In contrast, New York's Harlem Renaissance embarked on a different intellectual project. Rather than redefining American national identity, the movement constructed an African-American identity within American and European culture, so that African-American culture would become admirable and comparable to Anglo-American culture. In the process, Harlem Renaissance writers created a culture that was ennobled but also one

that would parallel Anglo-American culture rather than fundamentally change the dominant discourse in the decades to come. Writers of the Négritude movement (Aimé Césaire and Leopold Senghor, principally) did the same for Africans in Europe. Highlighting the glorious and romantic aspects of African culture, the Négritude movement emphasized that in measuring Africanity against whiteness, African culture was worthy of admiration by Europeans and Americans.

The intellectuals in the Havana Afro cubano movement, by attempting to merge African and European cultures, not only distinguished themselves from the Harlem Renaissance and the Négritude movement, but they did something novel: They redefined the definition of national identity. This is not to say that racism was erased in Cuba. Castro's regime has significantly improved the social and economic conditions of working-class Cubans, most of whom are of African descent. Carlos Moore has pointed out, however, that Afro-Cubans have still been excluded from the upper echelons of political power and social prestige. The color line, what Du Bois called the problem of the twen-

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Movement Renaissance

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tieth century, still operates in Cuba and is similar in some respects to that which operates in Brazil. Cubans embrace African culture—there is not that aversion to African culture that exists in the United States—yet Cubans themselves often relegate descendants of Africans (especially *darker* descendants) to poverty and social exclusion. A contradictory paradigm of race and colorism operates. African culture is included in the definition of what it means to be Cuban or Brazilian, yet socioeconomically, the darker African is excluded.

Although racism is operative in Latin America, this essay will not attempt to address the categories of relative racism in Cuba and the United States. The aim here is instead to clarify that in Cuba from the period from 1920 to 1940, intellectuals gathered to create a new definition of the Cuban nation that would integrate African culture and Spanish culture. During the same period, African-American intellectuals embarked on a related but different project, creating a discourse still circumscribed by separate-but-equal paradigms of dominant Anglo-Saxon culture. In the following generations, white Americans could appreciate Harlem Renaissance writers and artists without fundamentally challenging their own images of whiteness as the center of American national

identity and without recognizing blackness as part of their own heritage.

The Havana Afrocubano Movement, 1920–1940

The first essential political and social reality to grasp is that a *counterrevolution* occurred in Cuba after the war for liberation against Spain in 1898. In the war against Spain, Africans and descendants of African slaves, Chinese coolies, and poor European whites, or criollos, formed the bulk of the military forces that fought against Spain and the white landowning elite. Their principal military strategist and general was a black man (or more accurately, a mulatto) named Antonio Maceo. The other leader of the revolution, a criollo named José Martí, died in the first year of the war. After the success of the revolution in 1898, two events took place that would frustrate the hoped-for political and social empowerment of Africans in Cuba: the arrival of large numbers of Spanish immigrants and the arrival of Americans with their capital. From 1898 until the Great Depression of 1929, large numbers of Spaniards immigrated from Spain to Cuba. The Cuban government subsidized this immigration as part of an unwritten policy of “whitening” the Cuban nation.¹ By 1929, 900,000 Spaniards

had immigrated to Cuba, more than had immigrated in the entire period from 1511 to 1899. This immigration significantly changed the demographics and racial politics of the new Cuban nation.

The Spanish who arrived in Cuba entered the labor market or set up businesses that directly competed with those run by criollos or phenotypically Mediterranean-looking Cubans. These criollos and Spaniards shared points of cultural commonality (both had origins in Spain) but also points of friction (the criollos had just fought a war of independence that was to have liberated them from Spain and Spaniards). Criollos, with Africans and Chinese, had only recently expelled the Spanish from the island in what was a class war shouldered by a multiracial underclass. The arrival of large numbers of white Spaniards in Cuba beginning in 1901 must have seemed like a reinvasion to many Cubans.

Many of the Spanish who arrived came with views of race informed by the European intellectual tradition rather than by the Cuban racial experience. Those Spaniards who arrived in Cuba in the first two decades of the twentieth century had their views of Africans informed by European schools of racial eugenics that were influential in both Europe and the United States. Such views included those of Arthur Gobineau and Oswald Spengler (nineteenth-century intellectuals later associated with the Nazi Party in Germany), and Enrico Ferri, Cesare Lombroso, and Alfonso Asturaro (Italian intellectuals who would contribute to Francoism and Fascism).²

Besides mass immigration by the Spanish, Cuba was effectively invaded by American capital during the period from 1896 to 1911. American financiers began investing heavily on the island, focusing initially upon the purchase of sugar plantations and refineries. Land purchases and other sales to Americans quintupled from \$50 to \$250 million. The

portion of the sugar crop produced by U.S.-owned mills increased from 15 percent in 1906 to 48 percent in 1920 to 75 percent by 1928.³ With its substantial interests on the island, the United States interfered in Cuban politics to obtain results that were compatible with American investment.

To protect American capital, the United States also sent marines in 1899 to assure that Cuba would remain pacific. Many officers injected a new racist perspective that was different from the racism that had been practiced in Cuba in the past. Americans brought views on race informed by the North American experience. Miguel Barnet's *Biography of a Runaway Slave* records a slave's recollection of the new brand of "nigger" racism brought to the island by the Americans. Instilling fear in Cuban whites, the Americans helped in effectively disenfranchising blacks who had gained stature in the revolution.⁴

Because of the arrivals of the Spanish and the Americans, politics in Cuba during 1899 to 1920 underwent a white nationalist period. White racism toward blacks attained a new level of virulence. Borrowing from the sociology of eugenics, some white Cuban essayists called for the absolute elimination of the black race.⁵ Poorer whites, or criollos, within Cuba also objected to blacks' taking low-paying jobs. They asserted that blacks accepted substandard wages for agricultural and other industrial jobs (cigar rolling, stevedore work) that pushed them out of these labor markets. This racial pattern was similar to labor rhetoric leveled against blacks, Chinese, and Mexicans in the United States during the same period. Poor criollos became even more disgruntled when in 1913 President José Miguel Gómez relaxed the general ban on black immigration to Cuba that the Cuban government had imposed in 1898. Agricultural laborers flooded into Cuba from Haiti and Jamaica. In the period from 1913 to 1925, 150,000 black workers immigrated to



Grandmother, daughter, and friends outside a house in Cuba. Photo by Chester Higgins Jr.

Cuba from Haiti and Jamaica, taking low-paying agricultural jobs that some white criollos felt should have been assigned to them.⁶ Because of these developments, Cuban criollos in the labor market were being pushed from three directions: by the new arrivals from Spain, by the newly liberated Africans of Cuba, and by immigrants from Haiti and Jamaica.

The expansion of Haitian and Jamaican migration took place one year after the most bloody incident involving race on the island of Cuba. In 1907, Evaristo Estenoz and Pedro Ivonet organized the Partido Independiente de Color, a party formed as a result of growing frustration among blacks and mulattoes in postindependence Cuba. Blacks and mulattoes found themselves still marginalized socially, economically, and politically. Even after their valiant participation in the war, they

were still subjected to extensive economic and political discrimination like blacks in the post-Civil War American South. They were limited in the educational opportunities afforded to them and were relegated to second-class, lower-paying agricultural, industrial, and service jobs. The new Cuban legislature was composed overwhelmingly of white delegates who refused governmental positions even to prominent blacks who had participated in the war. Blacks and mulattoes were pushed aside (often with a nudge from white American officials who emerged from paradigms of Jim Crow, antimiscegenation, and segregation and who were overseeing the island politically, militarily, and economically). Because of their exclusion from government and from skilled-labor jobs, Africans in Cuba began organizing politically, principally within the Partido Independiente de Color.

Although the party had been founded in 1907, by 1910 it had 20,000 members, posing a significant threat to the Conservative and Liberal Parties in elections. Fearing this threat and claiming that the Partido Independiente de Color was intent on fomenting a race war, the Cuban Congress enacted a law prohibiting the formation of political groups based on race, thereby making the Partido Independiente de Color an illegal party. Unwilling to accept the demise of their party, Estenoz and Ivonet allegedly staged a revolt against the state in Oriente Province in May 1912. Taking advantage of this situation, President Gómez sent troops to crush this rebellion. In the resulting pogrom, the Cuban army killed more than 4,000 blacks and mulattoes.⁷ This "Little War of 1912" (La Guerrita de Doce) renewed Cuban awareness of the role of race in politics and had lasting consequences for race-based politics on the island. The political and ideological developments of 1900–1920, the demographic changes accompanying them (the arrival of Spaniards, Haitians, Jamaicans), and the economic boom from expanded sugar production all affected the discussion in Cuba about race. Cuba was about to embark in two directions regarding race.

One approach emulated American Jim Crow and European Fascist and Nazi views that aggressively promoted the separation of the races and the elimination of the black race as legitimate political objectives. During this period, racist groups including La Liga Blanca de Cuba and El Orden de los Caballeros—a Cuban chapter of the Ku Klux Klan—were formed with the express purpose of "whitening" Cuba demographically and culturally. Intellectuals including Rafael Conte, José M. Company, Mario Guiral Moreno, and Carlos de Velasco argued in favor of eliminating or diluting the vote for black men (notably, the constitution provided for universal male suffrage regardless of race)

or replacing Cuba's social system of race with the system of racial apartheid (Jim Crow) existent in the United States.⁸

Because of the shocking pogrom of the Little War of 1912 and the introduction of American- and European-influenced styles of racism in Cuba, some intellectuals within Cuba began questioning whether these approaches to race relations were relevant to the Cuban racial experience. By the beginning of the twentieth century, most Cubans were genetically mulattoes. Few Cubans could claim to be either pure Spanish or pure African. Marriage and concubinage between white men and black women were common. (Nevertheless, there was still social resistance to marriage between black men and white women.)⁹ Cuba, after 400 years of tolerated miscegenation, was not socially and attitudinally prepared to adopt the brand of legislated racism being practiced or discussed in the United States or Europe. Cuba was, at least genetically if not yet culturally, a mulatto nation.

Despite this tolerance of miscegenation and acceptance of interracial offspring, many Cubans still practiced racial discrimination against the darkest blacks—mulattoes were still more acceptable socially than darker blacks. This structure of social reward based upon color encouraged lighter-complexioned Cuban elites to practice marriage with white women while sustaining concubinage with black women as a means of maintaining their social status. That said, the tolerance of miscegenation in Cuba also led to social practices that allowed blacks and whites to congregate, mingle, socially engage, and marry. This particularly occurred among blacks and whites from the nonelite classes. Elite bars, schools, and restaurants often denied entry to blacks. (Even today, dark blacks are barely visible in the best Cuban restaurants and hotels, such as the Hotel Nacional.) Nevertheless, in most locales, social segregation never approximated the Jim Crow practices of the

United States. Although criollos may have attempted to deny blacks access to public spaces and whereas they traditionally excluded blacks from access to better paying jobs, the American taboo and the shame associated with interracial relations were not replicated in this context. Most prominent Cuban "families had mulatto cousins: the better the family, the more probable this was."¹⁰ Spanish males and criollos in Cuba from the sixteenth through the twentieth century seemed to have preferred sexual relations with black and mulatto women. The extent of interracial sexual contact in Cuba reached levels unprecedented in the United States. Their offspring provide genetic proof of such contacts. Furthermore, in Cuba, paternity across the races was socially acceptable and legally recognized. Social acceptance of interracial progeny reached levels unthinkable in the United States, which legislated interracial marriage as a crime punishable under the law. Because of this socially accepted practice of miscegenation, racial tolerance was much greater in Cuba than in the United States. Cuban criollo attitudes toward African Cubans during these periods were mostly schizophrenic. Although tolerance of interracial relations was acceptable, the appearance of the black man in well-paying jobs was not.

In the final analysis, some intellectuals in Cuba concluded that the political programs and the racial ideologies being offered by both Europe and the United States were connected to imperialist policies that may have played a role in subjugating Cuba to neocolonial

status. Because of Cuba's neocolonial dependency, they concluded that Cuba needed to embark on a new set of cultural politics that would liberate it politically and culturally from the United States and Europe. The political developments of the first quarter of the twentieth century and the contradictions at work within Cuban society itself forced some Cubans to create countercultural alternatives regarding the definitions of racial and national identity that would stand out in contrast to those being offered to Cuba by the United States and Europe. Cuba's failure to deal adequately with the question of race in the first quarter of the twentieth century provoked some Cuban intellectuals to examine the question of race and the definition of Cuban identity. This movement eventually redefined Cuban national identity so that it included African religions and Africanity. This objective within the Havana Afrocubano movement

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led to a centering of Africanity that was different from the employment of Africanity in the Harlem Renaissance. The Havana Afrocubano movement, led principally by mulattoes and whites, inverted a social and psy-

chological preference among some Spanish elites and criollos that preferred and revered *hispanidad* (Spanishness) and *pureza de sangre* (blood purity).

The unusual aspect of the Cuban project was that it was led primarily by mulatto and white intellectuals who consciously tried to create a new national identity linked to racial inclusion. The principal leaders of this movement were Gustavo Urrutia, Nicolás Guillen,

Fernando Ortíz, Ramon Guerra, and Lydia Cabrera. From approximately 1928 to 1940, Cubans engaged in a significant debate within Cuba to define the racial composition of the new Cuban nation. Cuban intellectuals had examined European and American paradigms of race relations and rejected them in favor of a paradigm that specifically sought to merge the Spanish and the African cultural traditions. In effect, they created a very different paradigm of race relations.

Gustavo Urrutia began this movement when he initiated an editorial column entitled "Ideales de una raza" in Cuba's largest-selling newspaper, *El Diario de la Marina*. The editorial series began in 1928 and continued until 1933. In this series, Urrutia and other sympathetic writers wrote articles about the need for cultural proximity between Africans and Europeans. They also wrote about the need for improving the economic conditions for recently liberated African slaves. Most important, they wrote about the need to redefine the meaning of what it meant to be Cuban. They concluded that "descendants of Martí" (criollos) and the "descendants of Maceo" (mulattoes or blacks) were to be included in the definition of what it meant to be Cuban.¹¹ This meant explicitly and implicitly that criollos and Africans were entitled to Cuban nationality. The founding fathers of the Cuban nation (Martí and Maceo) were a white man and a black man. Therefore, their heirs—the whites and blacks born on the island—were more entitled to be Cubans than the Spanish and Americans born abroad. Similarly, the racial views of the Europeans and Spanish, which only served to divide the Cuban nation, were to be rejected because they impeded national unity and contributed to the continued dependency of Cuba, particularly upon the United States. They argued that those recent arrivals—those from Spain and the United States—did not really belong to the definition of the Cuban nation.

The Americans' views regarding the derogation of the black race may have been acceptable in many parts of North America, but from the Cuban writers' viewpoints, they were inconsistent with the Cuban social experience. In 1929, Nicolás Guillén wrote in "El Camino de Harlem" that the North American paradigm of race relations was to be avoided in Cuba:

We are terrified when we reflect upon the essence of the problem, which is grave and sensitive, we are separating ourselves one from the other when we should be uniting. And as time passes this division will become so profound that there will not be room for a final embrace. This will be the day when every Cuban city and town—all of them—will have a "black ghetto" as exist with our neighbors in North America. And this will be the road that all of us—those of us who have the color of Martí and those of us who have the color of Maceo—must work to avoid. That is the road to Harlem.¹²

Fernando Ortíz was a central figure within the Afro-Cuban movement. Ironically, this white lawyer and ethnographer initially began studying the African religion in Cuba because, as a criminologist, he believed that there was a link between African religious practices and criminality. His first book, *Los Negros brujos*, amounted to a condemnation of Cuban-African religious traditions. The more he studied African religions, however, the more Ortíz underwent the conversion from critic to disciple of the religion. His immersion in African religion and music led him to adulation of the African tradition both in his personal and his academic life. His studies moved him to create the Society for Afro-Cuban Studies, which served as the locus for intellectuals who began reimagining a new Cuban national identity.

The intellectual objective of the Society for Afro-Cuban Studies was explicit. José Antonio Ramos wrote in the first issue in his article entitled "Cubanity and the Mixture of Races":

Cuba will comprise a mixture of races . . . or it will not be Cuba.

Objectively and subjectively, both realistically and spiritually, Cuba is neither white nor black. It is *mulata, mestiza*. . . . The first obstacle that confronts us is the development of Cubanity, this definite national spirit, within the larger colonial family, we must identify with this, and with our historical destiny that unites us.

One must truly be an idiot to ask, again, for another opportunity to create a white Cuba, which would please the bankers in New York who oppose our views on mixed race. Don't they secretly rely upon Hitler's help to create a pure Aryan race!¹³

What emerges from the writings of the Havana Afro-Cuban movement is the belief that both America and its system of race relations were direct threats to the formation of an independent Cuban nation. For Cuba to liberate itself from American neocolonialism and American and European paradigms of race, it had to redefine what it meant to be Cuban. This ideological project implied resistance to the "Colossus of North." The intellectuals within the Afro-Cuban movement argued for creating an alternate paradigm of race that would unite the Cuban nation against American oppression.¹⁴ For them, to be Cuban was to consciously create a culture that united the African and Spanish cultural traditions. This was the Cuban nationalist and patriotic project.¹⁵ Fernando Ortíz himself had a grander vision. While Guillen, Herminio Portell Vilá, Ramos, Guerra, and Cabrera focused on uniting Africans and Spanish into one Cuban nation, Ortíz went further to urge the inclusion

of mestizos and Chinese in the new definition of the Cuban nation. His definition of the Cuban nation was dynamic rather than static. It provided for the incorporation of multiple groups into the definition of Cuban identity.¹⁶

The Havana Afro-Cuban intellectuals who encouraged the inclusion of Africanity worked on fertile ground. Cuba, like Brazil, was a place where African religious traditions survived. Three factors can explain the vibrancy of African culture in these two countries: (1) the large number or proportion of Africans brought to those countries, (2) the long period of slavery (slavery was abolished in Cuba in 1886 and in Brazil in 1888), and (3) the possibilities for survival of African deities within the pantheon of saints of the Roman Catholic Church. Protestantism (embraced by the black churches in the United States), with its absence of a pantheon of saints, has not provided fertile ground for the survival of African religions in either North America or the British Caribbean. The roles of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, their different styles of Christianity, and their different potentials for the syncretism of non-Christian beliefs into Christian beliefs, have become crucial to the transcultural survival of African practices.

In Cuba, Yoruba culture is prevalent, perhaps dominant. Yoruba cultural dominance became possible because it was culturally flexible and structurally compatible with the other dominant island religion, Catholicism. Yoruba *orishas* (West African deities) merged with multiple saints of the Catholic Church, and in some cases, the practice included the Chinese gods San-Fan-Con (Gwan Gung in Cantonese) and the Buddha, forming a pan-ethnic religion. Yoruba cultural flexibility also incorporated its only serious African religious rival on the island (the religion of the Mayombé ethnic group).¹⁷ Yoruba influence is not only prevalent in Cuba. It is readily observable in Brazil's *candomblé* religious tra-



Santería ceremony inside a home in Matanzas. Photo by Chester Higgins Jr.

dition and to a lesser extent in Trinidad's *changó* religion and Haiti's *voudoun*. It is in Cuba, however, where it has been claimed that the Yoruba tradition has been most faithfully preserved.¹⁸

Cuban intellectuals and working-class Cubans fashioned and practiced a definition of Cuban national identity that included the African and Spanish traditions. Although racism and colorism exist in Cuba, the definition of what it means to be Cuban synthesizes these traditions. In the United States, a different course of identity formation occurred, due to a long history of entrenched American nationalism that centers on antiblack and anticolor politics.

The Harlem Renaissance

Definitions of "American," in terms of cultural nationalism and institutional politics,

were once and still are the discursive bastion of white exclusionary politics. The geographic entities that were first the English colonies of North America and that became the United States have been profoundly racist and exclusionary in their definition of who could become "American." From its inception, the predominant cultural paradigm for emulation in America was Anglo-Saxon Protestant society. Blacks by practice and by law were excluded from the definition of what it meant to be American. Early Asian arrivals were similarly excluded. Labeled "nagurs," a "new type of mulatto," and a "slight removal from the African race," they were denied the rights to citizenship, to own property, to testify in court, and to attend white schools.¹⁹ White non-Anglo-Saxons, including Irish and Italians, were initially marginalized before becoming integrated into the definition of "American." Even Catholics did

not really believe that they fully belonged to America. Only the election of President John F. Kennedy granted them the legitimacy they wanted. Most non-Anglo-Saxon groups in the United States have been excluded to some degree from the definition of what it means to be American. The Anglo-Saxon *ethnie* has been at the center of that definition.

With this paradigm already in place, the writers and artists of the Harlem Renaissance movement engaged in cultural and political objectives that were dissimilar to the tactics and strategies undertaken by the Havana Afrocubano movement. Intellectuals of the Afrocubano movement worked on the project of cultural inclusion. The principal leaders in the Harlem Renaissance did not work toward cultural inclusion but rather toward cultural comparability and parallelism. After the Harlem Renaissance had transpired (arguably with a denouement by James Baldwin), America underwent a cultural process that empowered and culturally "legitimized" the African American. Nevertheless, the Harlem Renaissance did not change the systemic realities of a national culture based on profound separatism and exclusion from the seventeenth century onward.

After the Harlem Renaissance, America had two admirable cultures: one Anglo-Saxon American, the other African American. This process, it was hoped, would result in two cultural Americas that would examine each other with respect, something that is still in contention today. Principal proponents of the Harlem Renaissance movement wanted, in the words of Alain Locke, to move in a direction of creating a "New Negro" who would be acceptable to the dominant society. To accomplish this, the New Negro's culture had to be high bourgeois culture, mostly divorced from "low" grassroots culture or African folk tradition. The principal leaders of the Harlem Renaissance attenuated aspects of culture that were explicitly African. The

New Negroes marginalized those who tended to emphasize African folk culture in their work, like Zora Neale Hurston. In their view, such work was too lowbrow and inconsonant with their aspirations. The leaders of the movement, by ascribing to "high" culture, were reconstructing Africanity selectively and symbolically, while avoiding the direct inclusion of African culture in what it meant to be African American.

Mainstream Harlem Renaissance theorist Alain Locke, in his work "The New Negro," emphasized uplifting the African American so that African-American culture would become admirable to whites in Europe and the Americas. Locke revealed his rationale for the emphasis on class, stating: "The particular significance in the re-establishment of contact between the more advanced and representative classes is that it promises to offset some of the unfavorable reactions of the past, or at least to re-surface race contacts somewhat for the future."²⁰ In his work, there was little discussion claiming Africanity. Rather, the New Negro, as a more socially and culturally "advanced" representative and class, was separable from the African. Locke venerated the African tradition while placing it in a category that was separable from and inferior to African-American culture. Locke described African art as "pure art" and "exotic art" that contributed to modern artistic movements in Europe, including cubism. Yet he rejected connecting African art to African-American art, calling African art "stagnant," "decadent," "dismal."²¹ In his article "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts," Locke also maintained that African-American art was severable from African art.

In his "The Criteria of Negro Art," W.E.B. Du Bois claimed that legitimate art is linked to propaganda that uplifts the race, but he did not include African art in his arguments.²² In the pages of *Crisis*, there was a preference for "highbrow" African-American art rather than

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"primitive" African art, which was relatively absent from the journal. Given this preference, one can understand how Du Bois's influential journal shaped African-American public opinion in the direction of respecting African-American art forms that were only indirectly related to African iconography. In contrast, the Havana Afrocubano movement specifically revered African, and usually Yoruba, art forms. Still, Du Bois began the initial deconstruction of Americanism when he wrote of the "two-ness" of the black man as being "American" and being "negro" in *Souls of Black Folk*. An Americanism equated with whiteness, as Du Bois pointed out, does not include the darker races. In the United States, the deconstruction of American identity and the "Africanizing" of America remained in question, while in Cuba, the Africanizing of Cuban culture had already begun. American people of color recognized and lived within Europeanized culture, but white Americans had yet to recognize the colored heritage of its national identity and culture.

Both Locke and Du Bois believed that they were among a vanguard of intellectuals who would serve as "the advance-guard of the African peoples" (this advance guard embraced being African American while rejecting African culture itself) and lead the way toward the restoration of legitimacy for African-American culture and people. This movement, however, could be devoid of a specific African cultural content. The New

Negroes spoke of pan-Africanism, yet they admired African culture without fully embracing it. Locke, Du Bois, and Richard Wright also rejected Zora Neale Hurston's alleged lowbrow "minstrelsy." To varying degrees, Hurston and others (such as Langston Hughes, Wallace Thurman, Jean Toomer, Aaron Douglas, Claude McKay, and John P. Davis) integrated folk culture and, in some cases, explicit references to Africa and Africanity into the experience of African Americans. In their "Negro quarterly of the arts" called *Fire!* they tried to distinguish themselves from the genteel New Negroes who eschewed "lowbrow" folk culture.²³ The New Negroes, Du Bois in particular, disliked the publication and roasted it because of its allegedly crude depictions of the African-American working class.²⁴ This literary and artistic vision of working-class black America was one that the New Negroes would have preferred had never been published.

In his essay "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Langston Hughes criticized "Nordicized Negro intelligentsia," praised Toomer's *Cane*, and urged the creation of a true Negro art in the United States that would provide expression for "truly racial art" and "the low-down folks" who were being excluded from the emerging definition of the African-American identity.²⁵ Hughes wrote of "the man in the ditch."²⁶ Hughes's close colleague Hurston went further to incorporate folk culture and the vernacular into her writings, to make linkages

between African-American culture and African culture, and to observe Caribbean culture.²⁷ She linked African-American images of angularity to African sculpture, claimed African shields as the only "true Negro painting," and observed that African-American folklore was rooted in West African culture.²⁸

The dancer and choreographer Kathleen Dunham also linked Africanity to her work. She researched African religious and cultural traditions in the Caribbean and included these traditions in her choreography, creating forms that embraced African culture. By so doing, she incorporated Africanity into the meaning of what it meant to be African American. Perhaps no one focused as much as Dunham did on the inclusion of African traditions. Both Hurston and Dunham had anthropological training and were willing to use those techniques to reinvigorate their art with respect to African culture. However, the politics of sexism and class within the Harlem Renaissance marginalized both women. "Any discourse that contradicted the ideology of the New Negro was excoriated, silenced, or otherwise dismissed."²⁹ Hurston's rural, radical voice that invoked a possibly African past was incompatible with the projection of an African America as bourgeois. Langston Hughes suffered criticisms from traditionalists but ultimately did not suffer as much.

Still, neither the "radicals" such as Hughes, Hurston, and Dunham nor the "mainstreamers" such as Locke, Du Bois, or Countee Cullen really examined the long-range implications and possibilities of incorporating Africanity into what it meant to be African American or what it meant to be "American." Here is a consistent point of departure between the Havana Afrocubano movement and the Harlem Renaissance. The activists in the Afrocubano movement embraced cultural, religious, and racial boundary crossings involving African and European

cultural and social endeavors. The intellectuals in the Harlem Renaissance, because they were placed in a radically different social, political, and cultural milieu, struggled with issues involving class and race, "highbrow" and "lowbrow" art and culture, "American" and "African" identity. In the end, the Harlem Renaissance intellectuals created an African-American culture that became "comparable" to Anglo-Saxon culture while maintaining its separateness.

Conclusion

The success of the "New Negroes" had significant implications for future identity movements in the United States. Because of the success of those in the Harlem Renaissance and their descendants (principally Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, and James Baldwin), the definition of American nationality remains grounded in racial and cultural separateness. The African-American identity movement's progeny—the Latino movement and Asian-American movement—have similarly established identity and cultural discourses that have been implicitly based upon racial and cultural separation and the politics of "authenticity." These movements—because of the operation of the law, the development of history and politics, and the role of the intellectual—have not created an intercultural paradigm for the definition of national identity. They operate under the paradigm of cultural separateness (and even conflict). The cultural project of racial separateness has become reified by dominant structures of power and image making. This paradigm is understood under the code word "multiculturalism," a term of derision for conservatives and celebration for liberals. We need to critically examine how the multicultural movement continues to disempower people of color and racialize the discussion of what it means to be American. The Cuban approach of cultural

inclusion has not been discussed as an option because it has not been understood by most Americans as an alternate cultural and identity model. Furthermore, the Cuban model may not be replicated due to the obvious factors of American demographics, size, and so on. The Cuban model may not even be desirable to some. Nevertheless, it can be critiqued for future discussion of racial and national identity in the new millennium. For African Americans, emerging from the legacy of North American slavery with the systemic destruction of the African family and traditions, the African-American path toward its own cultural nationalism has been substantially severed from Africanity, at least from the perspective of Cuban and Brazilian culture. Now, more than 130 years after slavery and a half century after the Harlem Renaissance, with changes in racial politics, economic and cultural globalization, and the significant impact of diasporic peoples of African descent from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa, we can reassess the relative inflexibility of this political and cultural model.

Notes

1. Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), p. 56.
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