

Racial Politics in Revolutionary Cuba

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2009 marks the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, hailed in 1959 by the vast majority of the Afro Cuban population as a liberating movement. Having had to suffer slavery first (from the arrival of the first black slaves in 1513, until abolition in 1880) and raging discrimination later (both in the Colonial and the Republican periods), most Afro Cubans perceived the Revolution as an extraordinary opportunity to create the nation “with all and for all” envisaged by independence hero José Martí.

If immediately after the Revolutionary triumph an “unprecedented attack” on racial discrimination was evident, by 1962 Fidel Castro had declared Cuba to be a nation free of racism, and implemented a policy of silence. The mere discussion of racism in Cuba was perceived as counterrevolutionary, Afro Cuban organisations were dismantled and the topic all but disappeared from the public sphere. For the revolutionary leaders, racial discrimination had disappeared in Cuba.

However, in the 1990s, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ensuing crises, and the economic measures implemented by the Revolution had a very negative effect on the living conditions of the Afro Cuba population. More importantly, it led to a clear resurgence of racist attitudes which is still evident today.

In my presentation I discuss the racial policies implemented by the Cuban Revolution during the past fifty years, analysing to what extent they can be seen as a success or a failure.

Dr Carlos Uxó is a Lecturer in the Spanish Program at La Trobe University, Melbourne, where he teaches courses on contemporary Latin America, as well as English-Spanish translation and Spanish language. His research focuses on racial issues in Cuba, with a special interest in the Post-Soviet years, the so-called Special Period. Dr Uxó has published several articles and book chapters on Spanish and Latin American literature and on Computer Assisted language Learning. He has also edited a book of essays entitled *The Detective Fiction of Leonardo Padura Fuentes*, ed., Manchester Metropolitan University Press, 2006).