The Production of Racial Logic in Cuban Education:
An Anti-Colonial Approach

by

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Abstract

This work brings an anti-colonial reading to the production and maintenance of racial logic in Cuban schooling, through conversations with, and surveys of Cuban teachers, as well as through analyses of secondary and primary documents. The study undertaken seeks to contribute to the limited existent research on race relations in Cuba, with a research focus on the Cuban educational context. Teasing and staking out a middle ground between the blinding and often hollow pro-Cuba fanaticism and the deafening anti-Cuban rhetoric from the left and right respectively, this project seeks a more nuanced, complete and dialogical understanding of race and race relations in Cuba, with a specific focus on the educational context. With this in mind, the learning objectives of this study are to investigate the following: 1) What role does racism play in Cuba currently and historically? 2) What is the role of education in the life of race and racism on the island? 3) What new questions and insights emerge from the Cuban example that might be of use to integrated anti-racism, anti-colonialism and class-oriented scholarship and activism? On a more specific level, the guiding research objectives of the study are to investigate the following: 1) How do teachers support and/or challenge dominant ideas of race and racism, and to what degree do they construct their own meanings on these topics? 2) How do teachers understand the relevance of race and racism for teaching and learning? 3) How and why do teachers address race and racism in the classroom? The data reveal a complex process of meaning making by teachers who are at once produced by and producers of dominant race discourse on the island. Teachers are the front line race workers of the racial project, doing much of the heavy lifting in the ongoing struggle against racism, but are at the same time custodians of an approach to race relations which has on the whole failed to eliminate racism. This work investigates and explicates this apparent contradiction inherent in teachers’ work and discourse on the island, revealing a flawed and complex form of Cuban anti-racism.
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For the lucky student a dissertation is in many ways a group effort. I have been very lucky.

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For my father, Randall Kempf
Chapter One. An Introduction

1.0 Introduction

Late on a July Friday night I find myself playing a sticky guitar and singing with a group of new acquaintances (I’ve lost the people I came with) on the Malecón, Havana’s famous eight kilometre sea wall which runs from one side of the city to the other. We are at the corner of calle 23, which on most Friday and Saturday nights is a public party for the city’s queer community. By two or three in the morning the group has dwindled to about fifteen or twenty and we’re sitting and talking (and drinking) quietly as the Malecón empties for the night. I tell the group about how such gatherings would be impossible on a weekly basis in most places in Canada, due to both alcohol laws and sexual regulation of public space. The freedom to do so in Cuba is new, someone explains, and would have been impossible ten years ago. When I ask what had changed, my new old friends explain that the community organized to challenge homophobia in both health care and policing, and that although there are no official gay bars, public space has opened up for queer people in Cuba. The cops, they explain, leave them alone. We talk some more about that change, and before long the topic is sufficiently boring for most of the group to leave. The two people who remain, however, turn out to be activists within the healthcare field, specifically with regard to anti-homophobia and AIDS awareness campaigns. They describe the mobilization that was needed and the radical transformation that had occurred (in law and on the street) in just the past decade. They explain that the primary work still to be done concerns the way people think about sexuality and heteronormativity, the way sexuality works in the epistemic and discursive private spaces of Cuban life. These are critical people who understand equity issues on the island. After listening to a highly critical examination of hegemony, an in depth and nuanced look at the contours of oppression and resistance, I asked, “so, what is the role of racism in Cuba?” My friends exchanged curious stares until one said, “racism... there is no racism in Cuba.”

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Cuba is perhaps the most egalitarian society on earth. It has the best educated black population on the planet, with the highest percentage of people of African descent owning their own homes and graduating from high school and university (Sawyer 2006, p. 180). As a whole, the Cuban population enjoys infant mortality levels, life expectancies, and nutrition levels at equal or better rates than those in developed countries, while Afro-Cubans live longer, have higher literacy rates and are better represented in professional employment than African Americans in the US and Indigenous People in Canada (see Sawyer 2006, p. 180; Uriarte 2004, p. 106; and Statistic Canada 2005). Paradoxically, however, Cuba is and has been for some time, both a racist and an anti-racist place. Despite the massive gains in racial equality made by the Cuban Revolution, racism in Cuba is a current and historical reality, which has gone largely under-addressed on the island itself, and which has been perhaps over-addressed beyond Cuba’s borders as one line of attack by capitalist scholars, activists and politicians. Although the Revolution has had overwhelming success with institutional reform as far as formal racial equality, the resurgence of public racism as a result of market liberalization in the past 20 years demonstrates a failure to infiltrate the private spaces of Cuban life (both physical and discursive) on the part of governmental institutions. In other words, measures to counter racism have stopped short at the doors of private spaces. Institutional sites (government policies, laws, buildings, actions etc) and private sites (homes, non-governmental organizations, conversations, families, businesses etc.) are related but distinct spaces. The equality-oriented policies of the Cuban Revolution have led to racial transformation of many of the institutional spaces but have failed to adequately affect the private sphere. While it can be argued that the Cuban government has gone far enough in its influence on the thinking of its citizens (both passively and actively) there is no context in which governmental/institutional support for equity and equality is unnecessary in the fight against racism.

The 1990s is characterized by Cubans as the Special Period, wherein the Cuban economic project of the previous 30 years fell apart due to the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
(USSR) and thus near overnight termination of trade with the superpower. The Cuban government was unable to provide for its people as it once had, and the people returned the favour as far as the authority granted to the government on a host of discursive matters; among them race. The re-emergence of public racism in the wake of ebbing government legitimacy during this period provides compelling evidence that meaningful and lasting social change must take place on institutional, individual and systemic levels. To varying degrees in every state and every polity, governments are charged with the task of defining a formal and informal set of rules relating to race (acceptable/unacceptable language, behaviour, privilege, punishment etc). The increasingly public face of racism has produced an increasingly public critique of racism among many Cubans, in traditional and non-traditional spaces, from the government on one hand to the urban hip hop communities on the other. Although the Special Period is over, the government has not, and likely will not, come to play the central role in Cuban life that it once did. The increase in private business, tourism and remittances from abroad has produced a Cuba dependent on a wider range of sources than ever before; and simultaneously a Cuba less beholden to its officials. A great deal stands to be lost, and gained in the racially tumultuous era that is the beginning of the 21st century.

Although severe cut backs in almost every area of government spending were necessary during the 1990s, health care and education were the exceptions. The two pillars of the Revolution remained intact, as did the larger skeleton of the socialist structure. There are no private schools, no World Bank imposed structural adjustment programs and indeed no debt crisis. On the discursive front, Cuba is relatively free of American cultural media influence, a key aspect of US imperialism. Indeed the government faces little competition for public mental space. The influence of corporate media and non-governmental organizations (both national and international) is nowhere near comparable to that in capitalist economies. Among the various faces and interfaces of the Cuban government, there is no more important point for the transmission of government thinking (from institution to individuals and
the home) than schools. Cuban education is the primary access point between the institutions of the state and the private lives of Cubans. In a time of market liberalization, which brings with it increased racial power and punishment, schooling has become a powerful agent of equality — a protector of the racial norm against increasing racism. A paradoxical role of schooling thus emerges. On one hand, as a segment of Cuba’s institutional framework which is charged with reaching into the socio-moral fabric of the home, schools can assist in preserving many of the numerous gains made by the revolutionary program on race and race relations. On the other hand, there are limitations to this as schooling itself is currently and historically insufficient as far as countering racism in Cuba. Further, schools, as part of the governmental institutional framework, are implicated in, and partially responsible for, existing racism and race discourse in Cuba. Thus, a dualism runs through the role of schooling and race relations in Cuba, both currently and historically. If racism continues to increase on the island, and at the same time so too do public discussions of race, teachers (and the positions expressed here) will be at once increasingly both necessary and antiquated: the task of rupturing racism in the private spaces of the nation will be ever more urgent while a continued denial will be ever more alienating for young people who wish to speak race. A nuanced reading of the paradoxical function of schooling with regard to race is thus needed to better understand the current state of race, and the production thereof. This preliminary chapter lays out and introduces this study; undertaken to investigate race and education in the Cuban context. The first section of this chapter identifies the learning and research goals of the project, and briefly situates the work within and among existing literatures. In this section I also locate myself socially in relation to the project and discuss what brings me personally to it. The second section describes the study through an overview of the following eight chapters, briefly introducing each and sketching the narrative arc of the work.
1.1 Objectives, context and location

Euro/North American-centred anti-oppression theories are unequipped to understand contemporary race relations in Cuba. All knowledge is contested, fluid and political. Nowhere is this truer than in the study of Cuba. Cuba is generally either loved or hated, understood as a stifled tyranny or as a heroic socialist paradise. The traditional anti-Cuba position, expressed most forcefully by US legislation (and ultimately by American voters) is no more misguided than highly rhetorical and empty romanticizations embodied in ‘Che’ T-shirts and blind praise for Cuba’s people and its leaders. While some scholarship has taken a more empirical approach to understanding the island, the vast majority of literature, from travel guides, to history books, to academic papers, is derivative of one of these Manichean positions — the study of race on the island is often no exception. While race is a topic of great pride in Cuba, it is also publicly understood most commonly, through official silences on race related questions. Writing in 1991, Brock and Cunningham argue:

For many years, there has been a need for rigorous scholarship on the question of race in revolutionary Cuba. Intellectuals on the left have traditionally praised Cuba as a nation free of all aspects of racism. From the right have come a small number of blacks, such as Carlos Moore and John Clytus, who portray Cuba as a dogmatic Marxist country thriving on racism against a population that is largely black. (p. 171)

Although almost 20 years old, the passage above describes the present just as well as the past. In a recent letter drafted by Afro-Cuban Carlos Moore (mentioned above) we hear the right wing call described above as he writes “wherever we look in socialist Cuba our eyes are confronted with a cobweb of social and racial inequities and racial hatred against black people” (Moore 2008a, ¶9). A recent letter from a group of prominent Afro-Cuban scholars and artists defending the Cuban racial project against these and other charges by Moore, argues:

In 1959 the Cuban Revolution found the majority of the population in desperate conditions. Cubans of African descent, who had been among the victims suffering the most from the neocolonial model on the island, immediately benefited from the battle waged by the revolutionary government to eradicate all forms of exclusion, including the cruel racism that marked Cuba at that time. (Morejón et al 2009, ¶9)
Cleary the ideological binary has persisted and so too has the paucity of scholarship on race in Cuba, particularly by Cuban scholars. Even clear demographic data on the racial makeup of the population is hard to come by. According to the 1980–1981 census figures, the racial breakdown is as follows: 66% white, 12% black and 21.9% Mestizo and 1% Asiatic (Sawyer 2004, p. 71). The next census was not conducted until 2002 and it reported similar numbers: 65.05% white, 10.08% black, 23.84% Mestizo, and 1.02% Asian. This is likely inaccurate. A report of the Institute for Cuban and Cuban American Studies puts the percentage of Afro-Cubans and Mestizos at 62% (Miami Herald, 2007, ¶ 30).1 Numerous Cuban scholars have also estimated the percentage of non-whites to be far higher (see Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs 2000, and Robaina, 2009). Sawyer (2004), de la Fuente (2001) and others have argued that the there is a historic under-representation of Afro-Cubans (numerically) in national census’, which has served to downplay race-based concerns at the political level. In addition to using self-identification to gather the numbers on race, Sawyer points out that enumerators were mostly white, and he argues that the misrepresentation is part of constant efforts in the whitening of Cuba, whereby Cuba is “best represented” by a highly white population (2004, p. 71). On the convergence of race, whitening and survey self-identification, Professor Esteban Morales of the University of Havana adds:

The problems related to “whitening” still exist within our societal reality. What else would explain why so many people who are not white are unwilling to identify themselves that way? This distorts the census figures and moves the question of race into a realm of deception and hypocrisy, making it absurd to think that mestizism might be the solution, when what has to be mixed is various forms of consciousness in order to create a consciousness that makes color disappear so that, as Nicolas Guillen says, we come to “Cuban color.” The attitude of many black or Mestizo people toward their own pigmentation indicates that they do not find it advantageous to identify themselves as such. (2009, p. 97)

Only a handful of studies have been conducted (quantitative or qualitative) on race in Cuba during the past 20 years. Morales (quoted above) explains in a recent article that: “There are very few contemporary writings on the subject of race in this country” (2009, p. 95). Indeed Morales, along with

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1 The racial terms laid out in the census are questionable from the start. Many Cubans use a complex seven point scale for racial classification of Afro-Cubans. From darkest to lightest it is as follows: negro azul, prieto, moreno, mulato, trigueño, jabao and blanconaso.
Tomás Fernández Robaina and Sandra Morales, is himself, one of the few to do this work. Scholars from abroad are similarly few with Carlos Moore, Alejandro dela Fuente, Aline Helg and Mark Sawyer among the only academics looking at race in the revolutionary period (1959 onward). In keeping with the general all-or-nothing thinking on Cuba, very little analysis exists which is simultaneously pro-Cuba, and highly critical of any of the nation’s actions or policies.

It is only within the last 10 years that I’ve pulled myself away from the latter of the two highly ignorant positions on Cuba which I describe above. Although I have never worn a Che shirt, Cuba has occupied an abstractly divine place in my imagination. Like many white North American leftists, I have long held a special place for Cuba in my heart. I am an anti-capitalist who has too often allowed Cuba’s socialist project, its brilliant anti-colonial revolution and its success in countless areas of governance to conceal (in my own analysis) its limitations in other areas: namely race. This is a common trend in leftist knowledge production. A few years ago however, in light of countless conversations during numerous visits to the island, as well as a close reading of the excellent research of de la Fuente (2001), the moving if distorted polemic of Carlos Moore (1988) and various other works, my blanket defence of Cuba became untenable. I am a committed anti-racist student, teacher and researcher. When I bring a race analysis to class politics in the education field, I am often confronted with a particular brand of class essentialism which tends to subsume race under the banner of class. Racism, goes the argument, is a product of capitalist relations, rather than an independent and objective area of social relations. Although a number of contemporary class scholars have broadened the gaze to include and give credence to other sites of oppression (see Athreya 1993, Cole et al 1999, Hill 2001) some have done so by positing that race is little more than a subset of oppression within class-based systems of power relations. Just as some anti-racists argue for the saliency of race subsuming class under a race banner, some class theorists argue for the saliency of class, and in so doing, subsume race under the class banner (see Allman et al 2003, Cox 1976, Miles 1993, Miles and Torres 1996, Solomos 1986, Solomos
Having undertaken this study, it seems clear to me that Cuba holds among the greatest potentials for addressing racism inclusive of its political economic dimensions. That I spend a good deal of time explaining how it has not lived up to this potential does not deter from this claim. This is the case despite the fact that, as we shall learn more about below, official obfuscation, denial, and the fear that difference divides rather than unites a people, (hand-in-glove with geo-political isolation, trade

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2 Some theorists arguing for the saliency of class in the US context, like Cox in 1948, did so when blacks were in many cases legally prohibited from occupying the same space as whites; when roving gangs of clansmen were regularly murdering black people; and when Cox himself would likely have had all white neighbours, colleagues and mentors. One wonders just what world he was looking at when he argued that black and white workers faced the same struggles.
sanctions and what evidence establishes amounts to conditions of not only extreme austerity, but we could say warfare as well) acts to contain this potential.

Racism and race privilege have countless discursive hiding places in every national context, and Cuba is no exception. In approaching this research project, I bring a race analysis to a context upon which racelessness has been conferred internally (by the government) and externally by class essentialists for whom Cuba is ‘proof’ that race is a subcategory of class. It has also been my experience that left wing North American and European scholars from the academy (wealthy by global standards) are quick to insist on the success of the Cuban project, as well as on the inherent superiority of (their) socialism to (our) capitalism. Among those vehemently in support of the moral pre-eminence of the Cuban political project, few have spent extended time in Cuba, and none that I have met (or read) have ever abandoned their Babylonian abodes for the noble terrain of life and work under the Cuban flag.³ Many Cubans, on the other hand, seem to have missed the insights of Northern academics and have left Cuba for the pathological terrain of European and North American capitalism.

This work brings an anti-colonial reading to the production and maintenance of racial logic in Cuban schooling, through conversations with, and surveys of Cuban teachers, as well as through analyses of secondary and primary documents. This project seeks to contribute to the limited existent research on the production, operation and maintenance of race relations in Cuba, with a research focus on the Cuban educational context. Teasing out, and perhaps staking out a middle ground between the blinding and often hollow pro-Cuba fanaticism and the deafening anti-Cuban rhetoric from the left and right respectively, this project seeks a more nuanced, necessarily more incomplete, and dialogical understanding of race and race relations in Cuba, with a specific focus on the educational context. In the end, these two positions align in so far as they both fail to take Cuba and Cuban race relations seriously, for to do so requires not only closer readings of history, but also a willingness to have one’s analysis

³ On the other hand, persecuted African American activists often fled the US for Cuba from the 1960s through the 1980s and some, such as Assata Shakur, remain there today.
work sometimes, and not others, in some places and not others; that is, an undermining of
universalizing theory. This study seeks to understand Cuban teachers’ collective common sense
knowings on the topics of race and racism in Cuba. This is untidy work which produces untidy
conclusions. For the purposes of this project, ‘common sense’ is invoked, in the Gramscian sense, as
contested and historically constructed. On the relevance of Gramscian notions of common sense for
analyses of race and racism, Stuart Hall (1986) argues,

... [common sense] is the terrain of conceptions and categories on which the practical
consciousness of the masses of the people is actually formed. It is the already formed and taken for
granted terrain, on which more coherent ideologies and philosophies must contend for mastery;
the ground which new conceptions of the world must take into account, contest and transform, if
they are to shape the conceptions of the world of the masses and in that way become historically
effective. (p. 20)

So, in order to understand in the first instance the discursive workings of race and racial research, and to
begin, in the second instance, the conversation around transformation, teacher ‘common sense’ must
be accounted for and understood. Although limited existent theory and data exist on the topics of race
and education in Cuba separately, no one has taken them up simultaneously. In the creation of new
understandings pertaining to this largely under-researched area, Cuban teachers (via the data) will be
the knife that sculpts any emerging knowledge, and which shapes any new theory resulting from this
work.

With the above in mind, the questions guiding the learning of the study are as follows: 1) what
role does racism play in Cuba currently and historically? 2) What is the role of education in the life of
race and racism on the island? 3) What new questions and insights emerge from the Cuban example
that might be of use to anti-racism and class-oriented scholarship and activism? On a more specific level,
the guiding research objectives of the study are to investigate the following: 1) How do teachers support
and/or challenge dominant ideas of race and racism, and to what degree do they construct their own
meanings on these topics? 2) How do teachers understand the relevance of race and racism for teaching
and learning, both inside and outside of the classroom? 3) How and why do teachers (willingly and
unwillingly, intentionally and unintentionally) deal with race and racism in the classroom? The jump from general to specific questions is informed by the need for better ground up insights about the current state of race relations on the island, which arise out of the understandings and communications of people on the island. Morales (2009) writes that although “[t]here have been some publications abroad dealing with the subject [of race] on a contemporary basis... none of them share the vicissitudes of daily life in Cuba with us, and this can be seen in their writings, even though they make notable contributions...” (p. 95). There is thus the need for in-depth discursive analysis of the way people make meaning of race and racism — indeed the way they make race.

No other research to date has been devoted to Cuban education and race in anything but a gestural way, despite the massive role that teachers play in the life of race on the island. To travel this seemingly uncharted territory, we have to understand that the terra nullius doctrine does not in fact apply to understanding race and education — despite the fact that academics are yet to discover it. Indeed the meanings and understandings are there, among the teachers, students, administrators and community members that make up the world of formal learning. That Cuban race relations raise more questions than answers among those who study the topic makes sense in light of the paucity of research centred on the voices and knowings of Cuban people. This study is a step toward addressing this gap. It is admittedly a small step — small because racism is so big. Small because it is in essence a fraction (race in particular as opposed to all equity issues) of a fraction (some teachers, as opposed to all teachers) of a fraction (teachers as opposed to all educational stakeholders) of a fraction (education as opposed to all institutions) of a fraction (an institutional analysis as opposed to a total picture of individual and systemic racism). It is, however, an important fraction. As socially contingent phenomena, race and racism cannot be understood without careful contextualization and detail, and to this task the project is devoted (see Dei 1996). In the Cuban context where even a numerical sense of racial issues is elusive, an experience-driven analysis which looks toward experience, practices and discursive constructions is
indispensable. Further, to come to understandings which themselves can challenge, disrupt, and rupture systems of domination, research must look toward the way those victimised (or said to be victimised) understand the workings of power in their world. This project thus works with the anti-colonial discursive framework as far as research design, conduct and analysis, and as well in guiding the reading of Cuban race racial discourse which situates the current research undertaken here. Although Chapter Three discusses the approach at length, it is germane to mention that the research objectives above are designed with an anti-colonial emphasis on the roles of resistance, agency and local knowledge production of and by Cuban teachers as far as race and racism on the island. In many cases these are epistemological phenomena, understood in the first instance only through the quotidian life of particular social experiences and knowings. In order to understand, reflect, analyze and ultimately “share the vicissitudes of daily life” as far as race and racism this project attempts a holistic understanding of the little fraction. (ibid)

The research project as a whole is undertaken to support the critical voices who, although few in number, are doing important anti-racist work on the island. I chose, for example, to use the terms Mestizo and Afro-Cuban, rather than Mulatto and black (negro) in the survey, as part of an attempt to align my research and research methodology with a social corrective anti-colonial project, one underway in Cuba. ‘Mestizo’ as an alternative to ‘Mulatto’ is increasingly used by anti-racist academics and activists on the island such as Robaina, Morales and Pérez Sarduy, as well as foreign scholars to discuss Cubans of mixed race ancestry. Similarly, these same activists and academics use the term ‘Afro-Cuban’ as an alternative to ‘black,’ invoking a racialized identity that is not bound by the Cuban historical construction of race and collective identity, but rather speaks to current and historical quasi autonomous identity construction among Cubans of African descent. 4 These categories are fluid, contested and imperfect.

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4 The term Afro-Cuban was first used (in print) by Fernando Ortiz in 1842 (Robaina 2005, p. 171).
Doing any academic and political race work necessarily comes with challenges to the bodies undertaking any given study. I am white, and while it is my commitment to countering white privilege and racism that leads me to this study, my race also requires openness as a learner/researcher, as well as location of my privilege in relation to the topic and the research process. This is all necessarily personal. Albert Memmi (1965) writes:

[The colonizer who refuses] discovers that if the colonized have justice on their side, if he can go so far as to give them his approval and even his assistance, his solidarity stops there; he is not one of them and has no desire to be one. He vaguely foresees the day of their liberation and the reconquest of their rights, but does not seriously plan to share their existence, even if they are freed. (1965, p. 22)

I come to anti-colonialism, an approach that seeks to counter racial, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity and ability based oppressions, as a straight white guy, with no visible disability. I come with Memmi’s above critique as a permanent check against my intentions as far as discussing oppression, oppressors and oppressed people. Anti-colonialism necessarily works with the knowledge of the oppressed. So what do I bring to anti-colonialism? I bring various layers of latent racism and sexism. I bring what I assume is a full-scale misunderstanding of the struggles faced by people socialized/medicalized as disabled. I bring an overly dismissive attitude toward the oppression of queer bodies — especially those that are rich, white and male. I am by no means proud of the preceding basket of political goodies and I bring them up for a reason. These blind spots help to confer, at times invisibly so, various elements of my dominant privilege.

With regard to race and gender privilege in the Canadian academy, who is most often made to feel like a fish in water? Who is made to forget the water is there to begin with? In the North American context, I have all the tools to not only feel like a fish in many North American waters, but to also cash in my unearned markers at will. Among a few other things, I am a teacher. When students are reading a
text, I often ask them to imagine the author — to piece her or him together based on the writing. Allow me to save you the trouble. Picture a big white guy in front of a computer and you’ve got me — at least at the moment as far as the computer. I grew up in a working class family in Toronto, with two American ex-pat hippies who raised me as a good lefty. I quickly took up what I thought was an anti-establishment, anti-imperialist position. I went to alternative schools, I did social justice work in Latin America, and I became involved with a few small somewhat radical organizations in Canada. My politics reflected a working class and pro-working class-consciousness. This is my political heritage. While we did talk politics around the table, (about the many ills of the rich) we did not often talk about race or racial privilege. We talked about the forms of oppression affecting us, but not about the forms of oppression that we ourselves effected and enjoyed. The blinders of racial, gender, ethnic and ability-based privilege limited my early critical understandings — this is still the case, although I hope to a lesser degree. Through work with various anti-racism organizations in the Canadian context, as well as through my graduate studies, my gaze has increasingly turned to race. The analysis of Cuba undertaken here is the culmination, the full-circle homecoming of a Marxist cum anti-racist.

1.2 Overview of the study

In order to further lay out the study, and as well to guide the reader throughout the remainder of this work, this section provides discrete descriptions of each of the coming chapters.

Chapter Two: Situating Cuban education in the post revolutionary context: Structure, tenets and issues provides a brief overview of the Cuban educational system during the revolutionary period in order to anchor subsequent discussions and to contextualize the analysis undertaken by this project. Section one provides an introduction and overview of the Cuban educational system. It also investigates the early educational initiatives of the revolutionary government, and briefly lays out the results and implications of these efforts. Section two looks at the content of revolutionary education and its relationship to broader political imperatives. Section three takes a cursory look at current equity issues
in Cuban education, noting the distinct approach taken to issues of disability by both teachers and the Ministry of Education.

As mentioned above, this work undertakes its analysis using the anti-colonial discursive framework which brings a unique analytical lens for understanding resistance, oppression and change. Chapter Three: The anti-colonial discursive framework: Toward an application to the Cuban educational context fleshes out this approach and as well discusses its particular application to the context of race and racism in Cuba. Section one outlines the anti-colonial framework. By discussing key tenets and reviewing some of the primary anti-colonial works of George Sefa Dei, Franz Fanon, Aimé Césaire and Albert Memmi, four of the key anti-colonial thinkers, this chapter provides an introduction and overview of the anti-colonial approach. Drawing on the work of these thinkers, the second section dissects and investigates the operation of colonialism and anti-colonialism, with a look at the mechanics of domination and power. The third section discusses the distinction between anti-colonialism and both post and neo-colonial conceptions of colonialism. This section also examines the trans-historical nature of anti-colonial thinking and resistance.

Although a great deal has been written on Cuba from a variety of socio-economic disciplines, relatively little work has been done in the cultural and educational fields. While this thesis will draw on myriad resources on Cuba (data collection, academic, curricular and cultural knowledges) a few key resources stand out for detailed review and analysis. Chapter Four: Review of selected relevant literature investigates four works in particular (all of them books): Mark Sawyer’s Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba (2006), Alejandro de la Fuente’s A Nation for All: Race Inequality and Politics in Twentieth Century Cuba (2001), Pedro Pérez Sarduy’s and Jean Stubbs’ Afro-Cuban Voices: On Race and Identity in Contemporary Cuba (2000), and Carlos Moore’s Castro, the Blacks and Africa (1988). Although each of these works with its own data, perspectives and approaches, taken together these works provide a holistic, informative and up to date picture of race in Cuba possible, given a general lack of
research on the topic. Although a number of articles bring important analyses of relevant topics, it is arguable that the aforementioned full length works form a sort of informal canon on race in Cuba. Further, these works serve as key texts of particular approaches and/or understandings to/of race in Cuba. With the exception of Moore, the analysis of each of the four books thus ends with a mention of other relevant works which follow (to a degree) the same political and analytic direction.

While this study has as its chronological focus 20th and 21st century Cuba, an analysis of a far reaching historical trajectory of race relations and race discourse on the island is needed to understand the complex contemporary life of race and racism in Cuba, particularly because so much of the history centres the agency of people of colour and is shaped by their successes during numerous battles (in numerous forms) for racial equality and equity. Chapter Five: Race, racelessness and anti-Racism: An anti-colonial genealogy of race discourse in Cuba seeks to sketch the history of Cuban racial discourse — both its content and formation — in order to explain and contextualize contemporary race discourse.

The republic of course, was itself preceded by discourses of race and material struggles which informed Cuban identity construction throughout the 20th century. Before getting to that however, it is germane to go even further back, recognizing that race relations in Cuba, like relations in most of the Americas, has taken place on stolen land and has involved stolen people. The first section Stolen land, Stolen peoples, provides a very brief sketch of the earliest documented colonial relations on the island: the genocide of the island’s Aboriginal populations at the hands of European invaders. It then provides an overview of demographic trends, including the forced migration of enslaved Africans to Cuba, leading up to the 19th century. The second section, Founding discourses provides the introductory context needed to understand the role that race played in the anti-colonial movements which led to the establishment of the republic in 1902, as well as the development of race discourse in that era, which would establish the course of Cuban race discourse on which it remains today. The third section, The evolution of Cubanidad: Racial discourse in Republican Cuba (1902–1959) tracks the historical trajectory of Cuban
racial discourse formation with a focus on the notion of Cubanidad, from its invocation in the pre-republican era, to Martí’s use of the concept at the turn of the century, to the dawn of the Revolution in the 1950s. The fourth section, Race discourse in revolutionary Cuba, traces the development of race discourse from the onset of the Revolution in 1959, to the contemporary period in which ideas of economic essentialism have been discarded by many, and where, after many years of silence and denial race discourse is increasingly bottom up, and where as always, it remains fluid.

This project aims at once to find out something new, and at the same time to contribute in a supportive way to the Cuban conversation about race on the island. As Dei (2005); Brown and Strega (2005); and others have cautioned, in addition to the overt political intentions embedded in research, it is key to also consider the embedded offerings and hindrances the researcher brings to the research table as a result of my various social locations. How do my race, gender, ethnicity, language, sexuality, ability and my country of origin (a capitalist North American power with historical allegiances to Cuba’s historical adversary) play a role in research design as well as the results of that research? How does my membership in the western academy impact how, why and what I find out as a researcher? It follows that a satisfactory description and rationale for research methodology is possible only in light of these considerations. Put another way, to properly explain “what” I am doing, my explication must implicate who I am, why I am doing this, and what the relationship is between the two. Chapter Six Part One: Methods and methodology considers these questions alongside a detailed description of the research methods undertaken. The first section reviews the project’s key research questions, and outlines the areas of data collection. This section includes an overview of the data collection itself (qualitative/quantitative mix) demographics, location, and numbers. This section essentially outlines the “what” of the research methodology. Section two of this chapter briefly explains the political project guiding the conduct of the research described in section one. In this section I outline my political intentions, political considerations, and the implications of my location that bring me to, and affect,
both research design and research conduct. Following the notion that all knowledge production is subjective and serves some purpose (intentionally and/or not) this section spells out the “why” of the research undertaking, including explication and implication of both my social location and my social position. The third section assesses the strengths and weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to research design and implementation, and provides a rationale for the mixed research approach (qualitative/quantitative) undertaken here. In addition to extending the discussion of the “why,” section three addresses the methodological “how” of the research undertaken.

Chapter Six Part Two: Interview data analysis: Cuban teachers and general understandings of race investigates my conversations with 41 Cuban teachers over the course of four research trips to Havana in 2007 and 2008. The interviews reveal a complex web of assertions, questions, normative discourse, and inconsistencies. Section one of Chapter Six Part Two, Official stories, looks at the dominant racial narrative that teachers expressed and invoked to explain the role of race in contemporary and historical Cuba. The historical place of race as central yet unspeakable is re-affirmed in these reflections, wherein contradictions are marginalized to support the Cuban success story with regard to race. Section two, Instances of racism, looks at numerous examples of racism, cited by teachers, often following directly upon forceful denials of not simply the ubiquity of racism but the existence of racism at all in Cuban society. Section three, Conceptions and constructions of race, investigates teacher’s theoretical and practical understandings of race and racism, as both concepts and systems.

While Chapter Six Part Two looks at teacher understandings of the significance of race and racism in Cuba in general, Chapter Seven, Interview data analysis: Cuban teachers constructions of race and racial logic in Cuban schools narrows the focus substantially and takes an in-depth look at race and the educational context, as understood through the same 41 interviews described in Chapter Six Part Two. Section one: Official stories: Racism and denial, begins by outlining the mechanisms and spaces by
and within which, the significance of race is marginalized by Cuban teachers. By sketching the various
denials, dislocations and obfuscations used by teachers, the outline of the official race discourse
discussed in Chapters Five and Six emerges. This section then discusses teacher reflections and
descriptions of racial representations within both formal and informal curricula. The section then looks
at formal processes for addressing racist behaviour in teaching and in some cases by teachers. The
section concludes with a look at teacher reflections on the role of Cuban education in the national
struggle against racism. Section Two *Racism and Anti-Racism in the classroom*, outlines the strategies
teachers use to counter racism in the classroom. Despite the numerous denials of the relevance and
even presence of racism in education, this section demonstrates that teachers commonly see, deal with,
and think about race. Section Three *Pedagogical Responses and Opportunities*, looks at the unique
relationship between Cuban teachers and the parents of their students with regard to racial logic and
discourse. The section then moves on to look at teacher understandings of their own training with
regard to equity and teaching. It concludes with a discussion of teacher understandings of their own
curricular freedom, revealing both autonomy and stricture within teaching around race.

Chapter Eight: *Survey data analysis: Overview and analysis of survey responses* is the last of the
data analysis chapters. Although the sample of 150 respondents is by no means large enough to be
representative of Cuban teachers as a population, and of course even further from providing a picture of
Cuba as a whole, the numbers provide a much broader picture than that allowed by 41 interviews. With
the two approaches taken together however, a picture emerges in which the data from the interviews
can be better understood. The first section describes the basic demographics of the survey respondents,
and explains the process of racial identification in the survey as well as rationale for recruitment. The
second section describes teacher reflections on race and racism in education. This section also looks at
the degree to which responses on questions of race were differentiated by the race of the respondents.
The third section looks at the teacher responses to questions addressing race and racism in Cuba
generally, as opposed to specifically within the area of education. Like the previous section, this one also
looks at the degree to which responses on questions of race were differentiated by the race of the
respondents.

Chapter Nine: Conclusions briefly re-examines the key conclusions from Chapters 6–8 in light of
the learning and research objectives stated above. This chapter then suggests some areas for further
study and investigation resulting from this project.
Chapter Two. Situating Cuban educational in the post-revolutionary context: Structure, tenets and issues

True or False:
- Cuban women played a significant role in the war of 95.
- The ideas of Martí are useful in our Battle of Ideas.
- The Revolutionary Party of Cuba was created by Antonio Maceo

(Excerpt from Ms. Desonto’s grade 2 history quiz, 2008)

_Education transforms a little animal into a person. If we do not come to be human beings in the profoundest sense of the word, our species cannot survive. Your task [as teachers], and I think of you as you and us, is devoted to attaining those objectives with all our forces. That proposition defines the meaning of our Battle of Ideas and explains our tremendous efforts to create a general integral culture in our people, as something that no human community can do without._ (Fidel Castro, 2004)

2.0 Introduction

Alongside healthcare, Cuba’s universal public education system from pre-kindergarten to post-doctoral studies is the most famous achievement of the Revolution. Like much analysis of Cuba, scholarship on Cuban education tends to either strongly endorse the educational system (see Pérez 1995; Kozol 1978; Huberman and Sweezy 1969; Gasperini 2000, 2008; Kirk 2008 and others) or condemn it on either practical or moral grounds (see Cruz-Taura 2003, Provenzo and García 1983 and others). Nationalized in 1961, and beginning the same year with Cuba’s ‘Year of Education’, revolutionary education has been at the heart of the revolutionary project. In 1961 over 120,632 volunteer teachers, along with 147,788 trained and paid teachers participated in a nationwide literacy campaign which reduced the illiteracy rate from almost 24% to 3.9% (Huberman and Sweezy 1969, pp. 25–26).

This chapter provides a brief overview of the Cuban educational system during the revolutionary period in order to anchor subsequent discussions and to contextualize the analysis undertaken in this project. The first section provides an introduction and overview of the Cuban educational system. It also investigates the early educational initiatives of the revolutionary government, and briefly lays out the results and implications of these efforts. The second section looks at the content of revolutionary education and its relationship to broader political imperatives. The final section takes a cursory look at
current equity issues in Cuban education. As noted below, a paucity of research on equity in education persists for the Cuban case — necessitating the sort of interrogation attempted in this project.

2.1 Education and the revolution: Politics and structure

As mentioned above, revolutionary education in Cuba began with the literacy campaign of 1961. The unprecedented success in popular alphabetization was infused with a highly political revolutionary pedagogy. In addition to introducing the rural and disenfranchised populations to universal public education, people were simultaneously inculcated in revolutionary ideals of equality, collectivism and uncompromising support for the new government. Urban schools closed so that senior students could travel as Brigadistas, fighting in the campaign of illiteracy. In many ways, the literacy campaign was a continuation of the revolutionary struggle — against cultural poverty at the hands of imperialism, against the many challenges of building a new nation. A re-enactment of the Bay of Pigs invasion was staged wherein boatloads of uniformed Brigadistas ‘invaded’ the Playa Del Girón carrying giant prop pencils. In her favourable summary of the campaign, Joanne Elvy (2009) points out that for some, the campaign was akin to the coming of Jesus Christ. Under the revolutionary government, the racialized, gendered and class based inequities in previous educational models were attributed to the politics and ideology of previous governments (on the campaign see Gillette 1972, Garcia 1986, Kozol 1978, Sanders 1983, and Torres 1991). The new educational approach was overtly politicised and framed as a struggle in and of itself. The 1961 pamphlet given to the hundreds of thousands of instructors picks up this theme, stating in its introductory section:

5 Although the success and duration of the literacy campaign were unprecedented, the idea was not new. Schultz (2009) points out that the Cuban campaign of 1961 was modeled on previous literacy campaigns in Argentina, Brazil and other parts of Latin America.

6 The Bay of Pigs Invasion (La Batalla de la Playa Girón in Cuba), was an unsuccessful attempt (under US President John Kennedy) by a US armed and trained force of Cuban exiles to attack Cuba. The Cuban armed forces defeated the invaders in less than three days, and the event served to powerfully consolidate Fidel Castro’s position.
We are certain that people will not fail in the goals we have outlined. Therefore, we will begin this campaign with the assurance that in spite of all the obstacles we may have, in spite of all the aggressions we will have to face 'WE WILL WIN.' (Fagen 1964, p.24)

The specific politics of the literacy campaign were by no means abstract or hard to find. The instructor’s manual lists 26 political ‘themes’ meant to inform the pedagogy and context of teacher literacy instruction. Themes range from “Fidel is Our Leader,” to “This Land is Our Land,” to “Racial Discrimination,” to Imperialism,” to “International Unity,” to “Popular Recreation.” Volunteers were selected from largely urban populations of interested and literate young people. The campaign brought youth of colour, many of whom were women, into rural areas and positioned them in locations of discursive, and to a certain degree moral, authority. Over 80% of Brigadistas, as well as the teaching force directly thereafter, came from working class backgrounds (García 2009). Although class, race and gender barriers were by no means eradicated through this dynamic, the phenomenon of middle-aged white male farmers taking direction (on reading instruction and political ideology) from 16 year old black women would surely have been new to Cuba in 1961. De la Fuente writes:

Middle class citizens became personally involved in confronting poverty and ignorance. Blacks and whites joined in this effort, both as teachers and as students. Among the voluntary teachers participating in the campaign 30 percent were black or Mulatto. Adult education was also expanded and special schools created to address the needs of underprivileged groups such as domestic workers, a large number of whom were Afro-Cuban females. (2001, p. 275)

People of colour, women and working class people were positioned as knowers, possessors of the prized commodity of literacy and political enlightenment.

Alongside and related to support for the Revolution, was a new public morality of which education would be a transmitter. Kapcia (2005) writes:

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7 Complete List: Theme I, The Revolution; Theme II, Fidel is Our Leader; Theme III, This Land is Our Land; Theme IV, The Cooperatives; Theme V, The right to Housing; Theme VI, Cuba has Riches and Was Poor; Theme VII, Nationalization; Theme VIII, Industrialization; Theme IX, The Revolution is Converting the Barracks into Schools; Theme X, Racial Discrimination; Theme XI, Friends and Enemies; Theme XII, Imperialism; Theme XIII, International Trade; Theme XIV, War and Peace; Theme XV, International Unity; Theme XVI, Democracy; Theme XVII, Workers and Peasants; Theme XVIII, The People, United and Alert; Theme XIX, Freedom of Worship; Theme XX, Health; Theme XXI, Popular Recreation; Theme XXII, Alphabetization; Theme XXIII, The Revolution is Winning All its Battles; and Theme XIV, The Declaration of Havana.
Education and morality have been essential codes of the Cuban ideological apparatus since the victory of the Revolution in 1959. Rooted deep in the political traditions that created that ideology, drove the rebellion and shaped the Revolution, but reinforced by the following radicalisation and mobilisations, these interrelated codes also informed the seminal experiences of the 1960s educational revolution and underpinned the ethos of the ‘New Man.’ (p. 399)

Alongside universalization of education and literacy came profound reforms to the content and delivery of education. While the new direction of Cuban education sought to stabilize the normative values of the Revolution and its principles, it sought simultaneously to counter the political values characterizing previous educational forms in Cuba. This initial transformation was one of ideas as well as of people. Teachers were asked to think, teach and act differently within their capacities as citizens, role models and instructors. In a fascinating article that draws on interviews with self exiled Miami Cuban teachers, Provenzo and García (1983) describe the displacement experienced by teachers who refused to support the revolutionary discourse in education. Previously accepted texts were banned and revolutionary material was provided in their place and teachers reported feeling censored (Provenzo and García 1983). The teachers interviewed for the study describe the marginalization experienced by those who refused, or who were suspected by students, other teachers or parents of refusing to accept the political priorities of the revolution. Early retirement was encouraged for many, while others felt judged and limited professionally. Although many of those interviewed were initially neutral or even supportive of the Revolution and Fidel Castro, their professional experiences (likely in combination with other factors) often led them to a critical opposition to the Revolution.

While censorship and book banning may be red flag words for liberal ears, it is important to note the silent preponderance of such phenomena (in more and less subtle forms) in many public schooling contexts in a range of countries, in the past and at present. Previous to the Revolution there were of course, explicitly required courses and texts, as well as works considered inappropriate for the education of children (see Paulston 1974). Further, a corollary set of implicit and tacit structures and strictures existed governing the content and delivery of Cuban education (see Gillette 1972 and Pérez
This is the nature of state education. As a diversity of scholars from hooks (2003), Freire (1997), Dei (1996), Apple (1978), Bowles and Gintis (1976) and many others have argued, education tends to produce/reproduce the politics and social arrangements of the state. Education in the pre-revolutionary period supported the capitalist structure of Cuban society and relied as many educational systems have and continue to do, on top down models of information delivery by expert teachers to unknowing students: what Freire (1997) terms the banking model. The racial project of the state before the Revolution was supported as well, with a highly privatized system which resulted in a two tiered educational structure with rich whites in highly funded private schools and working class whites and Afro-Cubans in underfunded public schools across the island (de la Fuente 2001). This accounts in part for the dramatic transformation of education in the post 1960 period. The revolutionary government was seeking to displace previous political, economic and cultural paradigms as created and recreated through education. Louis Pérez, in his 1982 article “The Imperial Design: Politics and Pedagogy in Occupied Cuba, 1899–1902,” discusses the political and epistemic roots of the Cuban educational system in the pre-revolutionary period. Highly influenced by US imperial colonialism, the educational experience sought to promote awe and admiration for things American and disesteem and deprecation for things Cuban. Nothing in the decades following the inauguration of the Republic in 1902 discouraged the persistence of these attitudes. The view of the United Sates as a magnanimous benefactor, upholding values worthy of emulation, served to bind the island to the United Sates long after the more formal constraints of the 1903 Permanent Treaty [handing back sovereignty in name to Cubans] had been abolished. (Pérez 1982, p. 16)

Add this to the capitalist hegemony which characterizes education in most capitalist countries, and the actions of revolutionary authorities to fundamentally — and quickly — change the political context of education are better understood. While teachers certainly lost power, we should not make the mistake of assuming they deserved it to begin with, or that this power served the general interest of students and their families. Provencia and Garcia even mention that among the “exiled” Cuban teachers, there was an admission that things had become “less regimented” and “more open as far as students were concerned” (1983 p. 6). Further, we should consider the power relations at play, as some knowledges...
and approaches were legitimized and others delegitimized within the revolutionary project. Which bodies were empowered through this re-education process and which disempowered, and to what degree?

Thus, the use of public education for political purposes predates the republic period. Indeed, in the late 1880s and early 1890s, Spanish colonial authorities established planned communities for former insurgents and other displaced rural people to reside and farm. These communities, called poblados included schools for children that would impart dominant values of the governing power. The government, Ferrer notes, “would construct primary schools for the production of ‘useful citizens loyal to the nation’” (1999, p. 104). The politics of pre-revolutionary schooling surely provided dominant readings of history which allowed for specific cultural interpretations. For example, the following passage from a school textbook (between 1919–1939, no date on original) reads:

There were some sugarcane growers who mistreated the blacks, just as they did the Indians. So many of the blacks fled from the area of one plantation to that of another or hid out in the woods to rob and murder passerby, for which they were hunted down. (Corzo 2003, pp 12–13)

This is obviously a meaning laden paragraph. The pre-revolutionary student would have learned myriad things from the passage’s embedded historical wisdom, including: a) poor treatment of the enslaved was not an across the board practice, b) that poor treatment of the enslaved (rather than, suppose, good treatment of the enslaved) would be the only motivation for escape, c) that blacks people are murderers and robbers, d) that the agency of the enslaved was irrelevant beyond the exercise of criminal tendencies, and d) that black people, in the end, got what was coming to them.

Pre-revolutionary education was intensely ideological. The pattern of schooling in service of the state continued right up until the 1950s (Lutjens 1996). Despite the institutional racism of pre-revolutionary Cuba, de la Fuente (2001) and others have noted the high level of importance placed on education by Afro-Cuban peoples during the pre-revolutionary periods. The role of education in Afro-Cuban conceptions of the Revolution should not be overlooked. Dating back to the late 19th century,
education was a key terrain of struggle and exclusion for Afro-Cuban peoples. Universal public education, beginning with the literacy campaigns in the early 1960s, had particular significance for Cubans of colour who had for so long valued and struggled for education in the face of persistent exclusions.

In the late 1800s Cuban schooling was racially segregated and within black schools a restricted curriculum was followed. Afro-Cubans were prohibited from learning history, grammar, geography and drawing (Bronfman 2004, p. 70). In 1892, the Directorio Central de las Sociedades de color, was founded by journalist and politician Juan Gualberto Gómez. This was one of the earliest umbrella organizations coordinating the all-black societies of colour, whose aim was the advancement of Afro-Cuban peoples on the island and the eradication of racial inequality. Among the chief aims of the Directorio was the advancement of Afro-Cuban education. The focus within the Afro-Cuban population of formal education continued throughout the prerevolutionary period. Indeed among the 1910 demands of the infamously repressed Partido Independiente de Color (a black political party discussed in Chapter Five) was a call for universal public primary, secondary and university education (Bronfman 2004, p. 76). We can thus assume that universal literacy and education were highly valued and widely welcomed by Afro-Cubans, an assertion supported by the fact that by the mid 1980s, Afro-Cubans were indeed taking better advantage of the educational system than whites (de la Fuente 2001, p. 309).8

Education was thus indeed an early battle ground of the Revolution. It continues to powerfully serve the government as a tool for both hallowing the legend of its own successes, as well as for empowering its people with literacy and mathematical abilities which are, according to many, among the highest in the world (Carnoy & Marshall, Hunt 2003, Marquis 2001, the Task Force on Education, Equity, and Economic Competitiveness in Latin America & the Caribbean 2001, and Gasperini 2000).

Predictably, the early discursive battles in education were short-lived under the revolutionary

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8 By 1981, 11.2% of black Cubans aged 25 or over had graduated high school, while the figure for white Cubans was 9.9% (de la Fuente 2001, p. 310).
government. Cubans supportive of the new government and its political program soon dominated the teaching force and the uphill battle to build the capacity for sustained universal education began. The 1960s saw the consolidation of the Revolution within the nation’s institutions — including its educational system. The literacy campaign was oriented toward standardized results across the island with the initial aim of a minimum first grade reading level for all Cubans. This was dubbed the Battle for the First Grade, and was followed by subsequent ‘battles’ for higher grades as well as various workplace learning campaigns (see Pérez 1995 and Kozol 1978 for more on these campaigns and Sahoy 1978 for a larger review of early educational policy). The final such literacy campaign (the Battle for the Ninth Grade) was waged, and ‘won’ between 1980–1985 (Montalvo 2009). By 1989, the national literacy rate was above a ninth grade level (García 2009). These tremendous achievements in popular literacy were infused with political curricula which predictably supported the Revolution. Whatever conscientization occurred through the campaigns was oriented to support the revolutionary project. Further, Cuba’s international political-economic allegiances and priorities were reflected in the content of education. Curriculum outlined the ally and enemy statuses of the USSR and the US respectively. As Willinsky (1998) and others have noted, education policy is often reflective of current and historic political and economic trends at the national and/or regional levels. As elsewhere, this is true for the Cuban case.

While there were certainly periods of relative political quiet, as Sawyer (2006) notes with regard to race and the state, Cuban social policy and rhetoric did and do remain fluid — with ebbs and flows of official ideological engagements and forays into certain areas. Traditionally, this comes via increased attention and funding in a given area as a matter of policy. For example, as the economic crisis of the Special Period (1990–2001) challenged various elements of government legitimacy, Cuban scholarship on education increasingly focused in the relationship between identity/personality and schooling (see for example the state sponsored works of Mitjans 1995, García 1999, and González 1995). As part of a larger effort to preserve the educational system The Battle of Ideas, a large scale cultural and
educational project aimed to, among other things, reaffirm the ideals of the Revolution within an increasingly interconnected world, was launched based on extensive research at the University of Havana. As part of the Battle of Ideas, the principle of universal access to higher education was emphasized, and universities were established in areas where there were previously none, as part of a process called municipalización. The 1990s also saw the creation of the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM) in 1998, in Havana, which provides medical training for thousands of foreign medical students and specialists each year. These programs are at once excellent initiatives which have improved the material lives of Cubans as well as foreigners, and simultaneously provide key elements of legitimacy to a government that seemed at the time, to be losing its place. These programs continue in 2010, and the Battle of Ideas is the umbrella under which education policy around equity (among other areas) is developed and delivered.

Indeed as far as anti-racism in education, the Battle of Ideas is the most likely area in which we might expect to see equity infusion as far as both pedagogy and curriculum development. Lourdes Montalvo, an educational philosopher at the University of Havana, both recommends and predicts that a focus on sovereignty, economic growth, education and work, social justice and equity, and family and community connection will become parts of the Battle of Ideas within education (Montalvo 2009). She is not alone. Well known anti-racist Cuban activist, Tomás Fernández Robaina of the National Library, suggests that the Eurocentric basis of Cuban education needs to be challenged but is optimistic about the possibilities for equity based social justice reform (Robaina 2009). As discussed earlier, race is on the radar (officially and unofficially) as never before during the post-revolutionary period, and there is reason to think that race will be addressed within educational policy with markedly increased fashion in the coming years.
As de la Fuente (2001), Sawyer (2006), Kapcia (2005) and others have noted, during the Special Period many predicted the collapse of the revolutionary pillars of health care and education. Uriarte, for example, notes,

... many questioned whether continued financial commitment to the values of equity, universality, and government responsibility for social benefits would be possible and whether the wide range of benefits those values had spawned would survive under such a deep and all-encompassing crisis. (2004 p. 107)

With regard to education, austerity measures were implemented, in part due to sheer scarcity of material goods. Further, teacher retention became a significant problem. Uriarte continues:

Books were in short supply, as were pencils, paper, school uniforms, and all types of educational materials. Student-teacher ratios increased substantially as teachers abandoned education for other, more profitable sectors: during 1993 and 1994, for example, almost 8 percent of the country’s teachers made this leap (although close to one-third would later return). (2004, p. 113)

Surprising some, the Cuban government maintained education as a cultural and fiscal priority, investing heavily in new teachers, the production of new materials and in the extension and expansion of Educa a tu Hijo (Teach Your Child) a pre-Kindergarten program founded in 1987, which supports parents in early childhood education (see Kirk 2008). Weakened by the economic crisis, the re-investment in education served a corollary purpose of re-entrenching the ideological underpinnings of the Revolution within a public discourse increasingly disappointed with a government toiling under the profoundly crippling economic catastrophe that was the 1990s. Kapcia (2005) notes:

The same codes, somewhat downplayed in the late 1970s and 1980s, re-emerged out of the 1990s crisis and the Elián González campaign, to drive the post–2001 nationwide program of educational reform, with its explicit goal to reinforce the ideological (and therefore moral) impulse of the revolutionary process and to reinvigorate Cuba's youth as part of the current ‘Battle of Ideas.’ (p. 399)

The anxious excitement with which the capitalist world waits for Castro’s death, alongside the assumption that a political transformation will occur from within, perhaps before the body is even cold, may have provoked an orchestrated tightening of the ranks which is expressed through the continued ideological content of Cuban education. Cubans do not see Fidel’s imminent death as a bell tolling on
the Revolution, and indeed the steady hand of his successor, President Raul Castro, demonstrates the institutionalized functioning of the government as a whole, rather than a reliance on one man and his iron grip. Although a common perception among many North Americans, the view that the end of the Castro brothers will signify the end of the Revolution, is more symbolic than substantive. Nevertheless, as Cuba continues with the uphill battle of economic recovery, as well as with its efforts to address the social imbalances created by the Special Period and its reforms, education continues to be the primary avenue through which the Revolution proves its valour to the Cuban people.

Despite criticism from the American political right and centre (see Cruz-Taura 2003 and Blum 2008 respectively), the education system is by most accounts, back on track. Cuba devotes 10–11% of its GDP on education, an increase in total per student spending but a decrease in percentage of GDP. By way of comparison, this exceeds the 6% recommended by UNESCO and is generally high for the Caribbean and Latin American region (Gasperini 2008, p. 300). This also surpasses the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s (OECD) leader, Denmark at 7%, and well exceeds the OECD average of 4.8% (OECD Family Database). Further, Cuban teachers recently received an across the board raise to improve teacher retention (Acosta 2009). It is worth stating again that the highly political educational content and purpose is by no means unique to Cuba, although due to its outlier status in ideological terms it may appear more transparent in Cuba than elsewhere.

2.12 Structure

While the Revolution transformed the content, delivery and accessibility of Cuban education, the structure of schooling remained and remains relatively similar to that in prerevolutionary times. Education is compulsory for children 6–15 years old, and is organized in to Primary (ages 6–11/12), Basic Secondary (ages 11/12–14/15), Technological Secondary (ages 14/15–18), and Upper Secondary, also called Pre-university (ages 14/15–18). As mentioned above, the ‘Educate Your/The Child’ program is a non-institutional pre-K program for parents, and there are as well various curricula developed for child-
care centres across the island (both for children who attend while their parent(s) work(s) during the day and for children who are wards of the state). A second ministry, the Ministry of Higher Education is responsible for all post-secondary education, governing:

Policy in matters of undergraduate and postgraduate education. It controls teaching, methodology, courses and programmes and the allocation of student places, as well as the specialization courses offered by centres of higher education which come under the control of other ministries. (International Association of Universities 2009)

In the Primary program, the same teacher remains with the same class from grade one through grade four, with another taking over for grades five and six. This allows, in theory, for pedagogical continuity from one year to the next. This process has the potential to fundamentally undermine the institutional processing of children and forefronts at the same time the unavoidable unevenness of child development to meet the diverse needs and trajectories of learners.

Basic Secondary is a three year compulsory program for all students. The content for both Primary and Basic Secondary is standardized nationally. Students who qualify (through grades or other measures) can go on to either Technological Secondary or Upper Secondary (Pre-University). The former is for studies relating to technological and professional education wherein students prepare to work in specific fields. Working in one of 122 polytechnic institutes around the country, students prepare for their chosen careers. Upper Secondary (pre-university), according to the Cuban Ministry of Education, “is aimed at training graduates with the general principles of the Martian [of Martí] notion of work, with an active participation in the construction and defence of the Cuban socialist project...” (2009). From here, students go onto higher education in fields of their choice, from social and earth sciences to law and medicine.
2.2 The content of revolutionary education

*The Revolutionary Government wants to convert Cuba to an industrialized country. Many industries will be created. Many workers will have jobs. Unemployment will end.*

(Sample paragraph from a reading evaluation exercise used during the Literacy Campaign, Kozol 1978, Appendix)

The content of Cuban education has been highly political throughout the past century. This is reflected not only in the near deification of national heroes such as Jose Martí, Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara and Antonio Maceo, but also in the heavy emphasis on technological and scientific education which came in response to the scarcity of Cuban scientific professionals (from doctors and engineers, to chemists and biologists) at the beginning of the 1960s. In addition to a prerevolutionary reliance on foreign training and foreign professionals in these areas, many of Cuba’s scientists left the island before, during and after the Revolution. This pragmatic educational response was a political departure from pre-revolutionary educational priorities.

Basic numeracy and literacy skills are of course at the core of K–10 schooling in Cuba. Like many North American models, K–10 education in Cuba involves a physical activity component, as well as basic home economics, social studies and civics. As mentioned above, within these foci comes content which is explicitly supportive of the political and social projects of the Revolution. The following suggested arithmetic problems from a 1960s teacher handbook illustrate this approach:

- A family’s bill for electricity used to be $8 monthly, and after the reduction in rates ordered by the revolutionary government it is $3 less. What is family’s present monthly expenditure for electricity?

- In record time the government printing office has printed 2 million “We Will Win” Literacy Booklets and one million “Let’s Alphabetize” Teaching Manuals. Write these two quantities out in figures and indicate the total number of booklets and manuals printed for the literacy campaign undertaken by the Revolutionary Government.

(Quoted in Fagen 1964, p. 64 and 67)

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9 A situation not unique to Cuba: South Africa, for example, is still suffering from a post-apartheid ‘brain drain’ whereby the noble (white) professionals of the nation suddenly found their homeland undesirable with the loss formal racial power.
Such examples, while clearly political, were also highly philosophical. The same manual explains the
politics of such a blatantly political approach to curriculum:

... It is essential to get into the habit of scrutinizing social life objectively and quantitatively. It is not
enough, for example, to know that every day many persons in the world die from hunger and from
cold. We should know precisely as possible how many children, men and women are going hungry
despite the fact that food surpluses exist. And not only should we know the world total, but also we
should know what the proportion in each country is in order to arrive at intelligent conclusions and
to explain to ourselves why these things happen and to what forces and interests they are subject.
(from Fagen 1964, p. 60)

While teaching children about successes of the Revolution during a math lesson may appear overly
political to some, teaching children about electricity prices as well as the scale of the nation’s literacy
project serves the material purpose of educating children about particular material realities of the
world. With this in mind, the following arithmetic problems from the same manual point to these goals
— it states:

- About two fifths of Cuba’s cultivatable land is devoted to growing sugar cane. What fraction of
  arable Cuban land is used for other crops?

- The annual per capita income of Latin America is $280. That of the United States, on the other
  hand, is more than $2,000. What is the difference in per capita income between Latin America and
  the United States? To what do you attribute this contrast in wealth?

- If one can of chicken produced in China costs 40 cents, how much will we pay for 3 cans?
  (from Fagen 1964, p. 65,67)

These questions in particular, might remind us of the powerful effects of the US Blockade on the
Cuban economy. It is worth asking to what degree any curricular approach or philosophy works with the
lived reality of students’ lives and knowledges. The political struggle of Cuba is to a large to degree the
political struggle of Cubans. So while these questions may have an Orwellian flare to them, they
nonetheless are dealing with issues that are alive and well in the lives of Cuban students. We need only
consider the average (un)learnings of American children about Cuba to see that the Island is not alone in
its invocation of education to situate students and knowledge in relation to their local and international
surroundings, for better or worse.
In the mid 1960s, Cuba more explicitly embraced a Marxist-Leninist approach to education, and the divide between work and learning came increasingly under fire. Work, of all kinds, was emphasized as a noble and necessary element of supporting La Patria (the fatherland). The development of a love of work became a priority in order to challenge both the physical/mental binary as well as the historical divide between rural and urban Cuba. A fairly well known program, Cuba’s Escuela al Campo (School in/to the Countryside, or EAC) sends Basic Secondary students from urban areas to rural areas for work-education placements aimed at developing both abilities and appreciations for work and work based learning. The EAC is linked to in-class learning which takes place before and after the trips to the campo. Denise Blum writes:

The classroom curriculum, in many ways, prepares students for the EAC. For example, in the mathematics textbooks, word problems use the agricultural context for learning arithmetic. In the civic education textbook, “El amor al trabajo” (the love for work) is a prominent theme; young people are portrayed as heroes in different types of work, including daily life—defending the patria (fatherland), in construction, sports, education, and culture. One photo [in a school text book] shows a teenager aiming an AK–47, and other pictures depict the young people active in the field experience. Another shows Che Guevara cutting cane. Under the pictures are statements such as “The defense of the socialist patria is the greatest honor and the supreme duty of every citizen,” “Work in socialist society is a right, a duty and a motive of honor for every citizen,” “Voluntary work, the cornerstone of our society,” and “Che: The impulse for voluntary work in Cuba.” (2008, p. 143)

This comes as part of a larger goal of eliminating barriers between schooling and work specifically, and between schooling and society more generally (Cheng and Manning 2003). This has brought the relationship between national economic trends (and requirements) into clearer focus.

This approach is heavily influenced by Marx, and specifically as Juan Marinello notes, Marx’s (1875/1970) Critique of the Gotha Program which argues, among other things, for the combination of productive work with education (Castro 1975a, introduction.). Today, as part of the required curriculum, elementary students have 480 hours of work education (out of a total of 5,680) while students in Basic Secondary have 280 hours of labour education (of a total of 5,799) (Gasperini 2000, p. 17). This is supported today in curriculum documents from the elementary to the pre-university levels, wherein references to education and productive work in service to Cuban socialism are emphasized (see
Ministerio De Educación 2005, 2008). One sixth-grade, labour education booklet features (with illustrated examples of each) such phrases as: “My Parents do useful work,” “I Love my family,” “I work to take care of my body” (Ministerio de Educación 1988, p. 6, 5, 7). These pronouncements are buttressed by social correctives on working hard, not taking the toys of other children and treating the environment and animals with respect. The 60 page reader also features disparate diagrams of the body, pages on different forms of communication (this section is titled “How do we communicate?” and features illustrations of postal carriers mailing letters, operators speaking on phones, and journalists writing stories) (ibid p. 46). It also contains pages with isolated historical facts and quotes, as well as the dates of various holidays and tributes to the Cuban flag. Labour education, in this document and elsewhere (see Ministerio de Educación 1992) is thus by no means a separate or even corollary aspect of schooling, but rather an integrated aspect of the curriculum which relates to social sciences, history and civics — and more abstractly to national morality and identity. Where in the US Christian context, cleanliness may be next to godliness, for Cuban sixth graders, cleanliness is next to Cubanidad — a contribution to the national project.

As mentioned above, immediately following the Revolution, a push to increase science education was needed. Subsequent to that, identified needs in agriculture and industry again determined the direction of educational policy. In the face of declining post-secondary enrolment, the Special Period saw yet another policy re-tooling with the necessary rise of tourism. Social insertion, the linking of students (well before graduation) with specific jobs and their subsequent placement in those jobs, became more difficult with fewer and fewer jobs. This impacted student understandings of the utility of school and many reacted with their feet: inequality was exacerbated in the work force. Black students for example, were disproportionately displaced by/from education during the Special Period according Lourdes Perez Montalvo, who argues that since the Special Period, blacks continue to be at the highest risk of being either out of school or unemployed (Montalvo 2009). Employment in the
tourism sector was increased tremendously, as demand in the sector grew (see Wood and Jayawardena 2003).

Alongside workplace oriented purposes of Cuba’s educational system is the socio-political identity formation which happens in Cuban schools. In addition to the focus on basics and labour, the development of the moral character of the Cuban man (the socio-political development of the student) is the other piece of the Cuban educational puzzle. Cheng and Manning write “… these [education] policies relied on a strong moral sense: they were intended to realize social equity, especially in terms of eliminating the division between city and countryside, elites and commoners, and mental and physical labor” (2003, p. 360). Literacy, numeracy and the intentional melding of the work/learning paradigm come in mutual service to the development of patriotic, socialist citizens committed to the defence of the fatherland and the Revolution. An essay question from a Basic Secondary examination asks students, “Why should we be like Che? What are the lessons he has taught you personally about your duties to your fellow Cubans and the Revolution?” (Castillano 2008, p. 2) Another asks, “Are we winning the Battle of Ideas? Explain your answer with objective examples” (ibid). Although we can presume to know at least the general leaning of the correct answer to the latter, these are not simply regurgitation questions. The students are being asked to reflect. It is, perhaps like all reflexivity, intended to take place within certain confines, but it is reflection nonetheless. Critical thinking as well as the praxis which the work/study program is intended to provoke, thus take place within the discursive parameters of revolutionary discourse in Cuban education. To whatever degree the prescribed Cuban man is to emerge from a process of consideration, it is in this vehicle of political reflexivity which he is to travel along the road to national identity fulfilment. This is not to suggest identity is formed this way exclusively, as indeed there are many prescribed paths to identity as well, but rather that if any official discursive path to identity formation exists, it is meant to follow these directions.
The function of schooling as far as identity formation is by no means a covert practice or purpose of education. The Revolutionary Government was and is explicitly attending to the project of social transformation, which necessarily involved re-education via formal and informal schooling. An aptly titled theory paper written for the Ministry of Education in 1989 is titled “The Personality, its Education and its Development” (see González and Mitjans 1989). An early revolutionary statement on education puts it plainly:

[Educational training] involved furnishing or refurnishing the minds of the students with the historical, ideological and political images which the regime felt were appropriate to the new social order. This was attempted within the formal framework of the teacher-student relationship. The crucial point is that the citizenship was taught as a subject matter just as reading and writing were taught. (Fagen, 1964, p. 12)

Educational content thus includes the political education received by students, and this remains true today. In the Cuban context, this is nothing short of an intentional refashioning and application/development of hegemony. Che Guevara (1964) argued that within the pedagogical life of the Revolution, one would never “wonder what you should be doing. You will simply do what at the time seems to make the most sense” (Quoted in Holst 2009, 3). This approach was enriched by the broad purview assigned to the Ministry of Education which was charged with directing not only K–12 education, but also overseeing the country’s leading cultural institutions, including the National Theatre, the National Council of Culture, the National Publishing House and the National Institute of Art (de la Fuente 2001, p. 285). The broad reach of the Ministry enabled it to exercise powerful influence over the cultural politics and the political culture of the island, controlling much of the social infrastructure in support of the revolutionary project. If we accept the notion that all education has political content and works toward political and social goals, the explicit expression of these purposes must be commended when compared to the silence conferred on such matters by governments who choose to conceal these educational aims.
2.3 Equity issues in Cuban education

There exists very little scholarship treating equity or inequity in education during the past 30 years.¹⁰ As far as statistical indicators (number of teachers, students, schools; comparative test results, literacy rates, graduation rates; and spending per student, spending as a percentage of GDP, and spending on teacher training) very little analysis from the Ministry of Education or elsewhere has come out of Cuba. One key question which arises from looking at both pro-Cuba and anti-Cuba analyses, is the degree to which revolutionary education delivered on its promise of critical, Freirean-influenced pedagogy. While the Cuban Ministry of Education has long acknowledged the limitations of the banking model of education (see Borroto López 1999), and while any accurate application of Martí’s or Che’s educational philosophy would necessarily involve critical problem-posing pedagogy over rote learning (on Martí, see Foner 1979; and on Che, see McLaren 2000) the degree to which students are indeed taught to think critically and to which teachers are required to stick to the official script is difficult to determine. While there is no shortage of critical Cuban education scholarship and educational scholarship citing the works of Vygotsky, Freire and others, the degree to which policy-level theory trickles down to the classroom is another matter (see Hernández 1997, González 1995, Rico 1996, Rico y Hidalgo 1997, and Ministerio de Educación 1998). Similarly, in the late 1990s teacher training curriculum was heavily constructivist (see Zilberstein and Silvestre 1997, Hernández 1997, and Rico and Silvestre 1987) but it remains is difficult to assess how clear and effective the transition from theory to practice might be.

With regard to equity issues in Cuban education, the paucity of scholarship increases even further. Beyond the assertion that education is the great equalizer (a common assertion in many other countries as well) discussions of equity and education are limited. The official story on education is that issues of race, class, religion, sexuality and gender are mitigated or eliminated through education (see

¹⁰ Equity in the educational context refers to individual, institutional or systemic mechanisms which work to ensure equality of access, treatment and outcomes to education and educational processes.
Disability is an exception and is acknowledged by many educators as an area in need of accommodation within Cuban education. If there is a social issue at the heart of the Cuban equity zeitgeist, it is a burgeoning recognition of the inequalities affecting people with disabilities. This was represented in education policy documents beginning in the late 1990s and has continued to the present (Castellanos 1999 and Simons et al 2006, and others). Despite numerous access initiatives which are scarcely available in most other Southern Economy countries (e.g. teachers making home visits to children unable to leave their home, the operation of 425 special education centres throughout the Island, supplementary attention for students with special needs within existing schools) there is an increasing critique from in and outside of Cuba with regard to educational access for students with disabilities. This stems in part from notions of ‘special’ or ‘separate’ education for these students. Lavini Gasperini’s (2000) “The Cuban Education System: Lessons and Dilemmas” is one of the few articles to address equity issued in Cuban education. In it she writes: “while the mainstream of educational thought emphasizes the integration of children with special needs into regular schools, Cuba continues to maintain separate facilities for many of its special needs students” (p. 16). The Cuban position, while acknowledging the imperfections of the system, argues that the separate approach is indeed the best way to address equity in education as far as disability. Referring to the Director of the Latin America Special Education Reference Center (CELAEE) in Havana, who represents Cuba’s official position, Gasperini writes:

He criticizes those who advocate integrating special needs children into regular schools as adopting an ‘integrationist facade’ (fachada integracionista), denying the culture of diversity. These policies are in direct contrast to a growing consensus among special educators in the rest of the world. (2000, p. 16)

The point for me here is not so much one strategy versus another, but rather the existence of a debate around an issue not declared ‘solved’ by the Revolution, as has often been the case with race. A cursory

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11 One exception is a state sponsored article by Blanco (1999), which provides a highly critical examination of economic inequality and schooling in Cuba.
analysis of Cuban educational curriculum as listed on the Ministry of Education website reveals only broad assertions about diversity and says nothing about race or contemporary racism. Race is addressed with regard to the bad old days of pre-revolutionary and pre-independence Cuba, but is only mentioned with reference to the post 1959 period as a problem all but solved by the Revolution (Ministerio de Educación 1995). A disability discourse which is both fluid and evolving stands apart from official conversations about race, class, sexuality and gender which are frequently understood as over and done with. In the same article, Gasperini provides one of the only analyses of race and Cuban education in the post revolutionary period, describing the issue of gender and racial representation in the nation’s elite schools. In the case of one top school, The Centro Vocational Lenin en Ciencias Exacta, she reflects on conversations with the school’s director about the overrepresentation of white and male students. She writes:

Unfortunately the school population was not representative of the national population in terms of gender and race. The school director, when asked why there were so few Afro-Cuban students in the Center, answered that cultural, social, and economic transformation takes a long time, that the school still reflects families’ cultural and social backgrounds. (Gasperini, 2000, p. 18)

Gasperini suggests that Cuba’s top down approach (with regard to both traditional curriculum and the political content of education) is the key dilemma facing Cuba’s schools — including the struggle for equitable education. While this may or may not be an accurate description of the situation, this particular occurrence also points to the need for deeper analysis of issues of the institutional life of race in Cuba to better understand the failure of these schools to represent the racial breakdown of wider Cuban society. Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight take up this challenge as the project undertaken here seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the discursive relations of race in education on the island.
Chapter Three. The anti-colonial discursive framework: Toward an application to the Cuban educational context

3.0 Introduction

This work undertakes its analysis using the anti-colonial discursive framework. The anti-colonial approach brings a unique analytical lens for understanding resistance, oppression and change. Contemporary Cuba brings a unique set of circumstances in which to analyze these same phenomena. Working with select principal texts within anti-colonial literature, as well as with an anti-colonial articulation formulated by the author, this chapter seeks to address, discuss and ultimately answer the following question: What is the anti-colonial discursive framework, and what are some of the initial ramifications of it for interrogating race relations in the Cuban context?

Anti-colonial and anti-racist education theorist George Sefa Dei (2006) argues for a radical and important re-consideration of the notion of the ‘colonial.’ He writes, “[Colonial] refers to anything imposed and dominating rather than that which is simply foreign and alien” (p. 3). This is a departure from previous conceptions of colonialism constituted simply by various forms of territorial imperialism, or of state/cultural control through direct and/or indirect mechanisms. Applied to the complex context of Cuba generally, and to Cuban education specifically, Dei’s anti-colonial theory allows for a holistic critical analysis of race and inequality, impossible with any other discursive framework. The anti-colonial approach is closely related to an integrative anti-racism approach, with both focusing on the power, knowledge and agency of the oppressed on one hand, and the challenge of accountability and responsibility for dominant bodies on the other. The notion of accountability is used in this project in the anti-colonial sense, pointing to the notion of individual, institutional and systemic responsibility for acts and systems of domination.12

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12 This departs from the neoliberal invocation of the term which argues for the need for disadvantaged groups or individuals to take responsibility for their disadvantage. This approach lends itself to cultural deficit theories and indeed obfuscates the call for accountability by dominant groups.
Post-revolutionary Cuba (the period from 1959 onward) is an anti-colonial project which continues to unfold. The revolutionary period of 1957–1959 was a large-scale project of national liberation, with the central aim of overcoming of oppression, imposition and domination. Cuba’s pursuit and construction of a new nation, a new man, and a new socialism over the past 50 years have come however, with various forms and instances of both imposition and domination. This paradox is evidenced in Cuba’s approach to understanding and governing race and race relations. The application of the anti-colonial framework to this context seeks to flesh out race discourse among Cuban teachers generally, and more specifically to understand the relationship of race to schooling and educational practice. The anti-colonial framework provides, uniquely, the discursive tools necessary to understand the intersections between different sites and forms of oppression and resistance, as well as the sometimes dialectical relationship between oppression and liberation — between colonialism and anti-colonialism. Through anti-colonial research design as well as an anti-colonial reading and analysis of the collected qualitative and quantitative data, this work focuses on the way marginalized people have resisted, shaped and understood race discourse on the island with a historical focus in Chapter Five and a look at current relations in the subsequent data analysis chapters.

The first section of this chapter outlines the anti-colonial framework. By discussing key tenets and reviewing some of the primary anti-colonial works of George Sefa Dei, Franz Fanon, Aimé Césaire and Albert Memmi, four of the key anti-colonial thinkers of the past century, this chapter provides an introduction and overview of the anti-colonial approach. Drawing on the work of these thinkers, the next section dissects and investigates the operation of colonialism and anti-colonialism, with a look at the mechanics of domination and power. The final section of this chapter discusses the distinction between anti-colonialism and both post and neo-colonial conceptions of the colonial. This section also examines the trans-historical nature of anti-colonial thinking and resistance.
3.1 Introducing the anti-colonial framework

Colonization: bridgehead in a campaign to civilize barbarism, from which there may emerge at any moment the negation of civilization, pure and simple. (Césaire, 1972: 40)

This section seeks to flesh out the contemporary meanings and workings of anti-colonialism, within a trans-epochal history. The term anti-colonialism brings to mind different things for different people. For some it is the African struggles for independence against European colonialism in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Others conflate it with terms such as neo-colonialism and post-colonialism. While the African liberation movements of the twentieth century are key sites of anti-colonial resistance that produced and inspired key literature on the topic, anti-colonialism has a much broader history in regions and spaces around the globe. Further, although anti-colonialism draws on certain post-colonial and neo-colonial works, it is by no means synonymous with these approaches — a departure discussed below.

First and foremost, anti-colonialism brings a newly holistic reading to domination and resistance, raising important questions around the intersections of class, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, racial, linguistic, and religion-based oppressions. This approach challenges the normalizing gaze of the dominant in the construction of what constitutes valid and invalid knowledge and experience (see Dei 2006). While anti-colonialism is in many ways a language of resistance for and from the oppressed (see Dei and Asgharzadeh 2001), the dominant must also participate in the anti-colonial struggle, as the colonizer is no less colonized than any of his victims. Where anti-colonialism is a tool used to invoke resistance for the colonized, it is a tool used to invoke accountability for the colonizer. In both cases, it serves to reveal and challenge the assumptions, silences, and common sense of dominant relations.

Working with, and extending the theoretical implications of early anti-colonial works by Memmi (1965), Fanon (1967a and 1967b), and Césaire (1972), this chapter foregrounds dominant accountability alongside resistance as a key tenet of anti-colonial thought. In the Cuban revolutionary context, gender and class were interrogated in this dual-pronged way while the revolutionary analysis of race, as
discussed in Chapter Five, lagged somewhat and never moved to an interrogation of white accountability for anti-black racism.

By focusing on relations of resistance and domination in both the physical and discursive spheres, anti-colonialism challenges all relations of domination. As Dei (2006) has argued, all domination and imposition constitute a form of colonization. Although this approach begs certain questions concerning the operations of these relations, Dei’s redefinition allows for an expansion of our ideas of colonization, from nation-on-nation Euro-American-style colonization to more subtle, intricate, sophisticated, and nuanced forms of colonial oppression. While the examples of the most recent US invasions and occupations of Haiti, Iraq, and Afghanistan are clearly indicative of colonial relations at work, so too are the myriad epistemological battles and contestations taking place in those countries and in the United States. The anti-colonial approach brings a complex reading of history, possibility, and resistance and invokes a literacy of resistance — this is to say a reading against domination and imposition. The Cuban Revolution was itself an anti-colonial struggle and victory, but this did not insure that domination or imposition was eradicated through subsequent governmental politics on the island. Following a broad reading of colonialism, we can note colonial domination everywhere. In the Cuban context, the anti-colonial lens applied to the post-revolutionary era is needed to address the intra-national conflicts and inequalities that have survived under and within the Revolution.

As a formal discourse anti-colonialism emerged in the mid twentieth century as an expression of the voices of the colonized, and as an interrogation of the nature of colonial/anti-colonial relations, and was highly influential for Cuban revolutionary leaders. Writers like Fanon, Césaire, Cabral, Memmi and others arrived organically at their understanding of oppression. Their entry points, although characterized to a certain degree by a colonizer/colonized duality, stemmed largely from their experience of oppression and from their resistance to colonialism. For a dominant body/person (like me) one key entry point is resistance to the perpetration of colonialism. While anti-colonialism works with
the knowledge of the oppressed, it also works with a holistic understanding of oppression and resistance. The oppressor must resist, a fact often understood by dominant bodies but denied with a vehemence matching the oppressor’s sense of guilt. For privilege to function, it must create the conditions for its own invisibility. Resisting privilege means countering that invisibility, as well as the resulting privilege. For dominant bodies and for analyses of dominance more generally, the issue of accountability is paramount. Dominant bodies must work primarily against the oppression by which they are privileged and in which they thus participate. This is the essence of an entry point because it, by its very nature, involves the simultaneity of the theoretical and the practical, the saying and the doing. This is relevant in the Cuban context in order to understand the degree to which domination can happen (does happen) even in non-dominant spaces, movements and politics. Anti-colonialism at the personal level has to come about whenever possible, however, through engagement in a wider community. For a white male like me, an engagement with race cannot be a purely individual thing. It must involve becoming a transformative member of my community, and not pulling the plug on my analysis as I reach my front door.

My entry point into an anti-colonial analysis is through a critical analysis of white privilege — a privilege which interlocks and intersects with a number of other markers of social location and position including: gender, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, language, religion and geographic/immigration status. Although critical whiteness has emerged as a field of its own over the past 20 years (with such works as Jensen 2005, Frankenberg 2004, Gaine 2000, Gallagher 2000, Hayes 2001, Macintosh 1988, Lawrence 1997, Maher and Tetreault 1997, Scheurich 1997, Twine 2004, Wildman and Davis 2002, and Wise 2002) many of the salient ideas at the core of critical whiteness, such as focusing on accountability, confronting Eurocentricity, assessing the cost of domination to the dominant, holding systems as well as individuals to account for racial privilege and punishment, and analyzing the epistemic underpinnings of racial punishment and privilege, are found decades earlier in some of the key anti-colonial thinkers.
3.11 Key thinkers and works: Dei, Fanon, Césaire and Memmi

One of the first and most important articulations of anti-colonialism as a discursive framework comes from George Sefa Dei (1999) and George Sefa Dei and Ali Asgharzadeh, in their 2001 article entitled “The Power of Social Theory: Towards an Anti-Colonial Discursive Framework.” Although they stand on the shoulders of the anti-colonial thinkers discussed below, their formulation of anti-colonialism as a resistance-based discourse, aimed at countering the epistemological Eurocentric hegemony, is original in its orientation.13 It comes at the dawn of the 21st century, born in a world that has had almost a half century to digest the notion of modern anti-colonial struggle. Their article reflects the new discursive world in which theories of change now must exist. Dei and Asgharzadeh give us the first anti-colonial rejection of post-coloniality, and construct a framework that is at once original and reactive to the plague of infinite subjectivities affecting and affected by a “post” everything world. It is this work that provides the primary basis for the anti-colonial framework described in this paper. Although the investigation of colonialism and anti-colonialism which follows below turns its attention to the notion of accountability and looks at anti-colonialism and its implications for the colonizer, Dei and Asgharzadeh provide the epistemological axis upon which further theorization rests. Seeking to create both a bridge and a vessel between/for academics and activists, and marginalized groups and individuals more generally, the anti-colonial framework brings the colonial struggle into the academic world and thereby transforms the strictures with which it comes in contact.

Discussing anti-colonialism as a discursive framework they write, “its goal is to question, interrogate, and challenge the foundations of institutionalized power and privilege, and the accompanying rationale for dominance in social relations” (2001: 299). Although institutional power in the Cuban context was revolutionary by nature, it nonetheless came with the ‘rationale for dominance’

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13 To a lesser and different degree, their work also draws on post-colonial theorists like Bhabha (1995, 1994, and 1990) and Spivak (1999 and 1988).
described by Dei and Asgharzadeh. Dei and Asgharzadeh envision the anti-colonial framework as an epistemology of the oppressed (Dei 2000), wherein/whereby agency replaces hierarchy and whereby processes of knowledge validation proceed from the proverbial "bottom up." By bringing the anti-colonial struggle into the academy, Dei and Asgharzadeh are attempting to re-anchor discourse in such a way as to remedy a glaring absence of voice within the academy. The oppressed, or those Fanon terms the wretched of the earth, have had no place in the academy. Dei and Asgharzadeh write:

From Plato's Republic, Marx's communistic society, and Derrida's deconstructed/post-structuralist world down to post-colonialism's "hybridized, ambivalent state of being," nothing represents "the wretched of the earth" except for a terrifying "lack." The anti-colonial discourse is a realization of such a repressive "lack" and an attempt to help fill it up. (2001: 311)

The attempt to help fill the gap described is not just an academic exercise but also a reconfiguration of the notion of agency and a re-positioning of the role of resistance. Resistance lies at the heart of the anti-colonial framework, and for Dei and Asgharzadeh it constitutes, simultaneously, a discursive starting point and an analytical place of departure. Such an approach guards against a hierarchy of oppressions, as well as against any overly essentialist analyses, which may lose sight of the interlocking and intersecting nature of oppression. They write:

From this clear point of departure, the anti-colonial thought forwards a notion of critical gaze that which could be maintained on any single category such as race, class, or gender, at the same time can refrain from subduing or subordinating other categories and sites of oppression. Such a gaze is not concrete and fixed. It is fluid and transparent. It constantly sees and observes colonial relations of power and domination, shifts from one site onto the other, resists all of them, but maintains a relatively heavier presence on any chosen category in a strategic gesture to be more effective. (2001: 308)

This is highly relevant for understanding early approaches to race relations in Cuba which were grounded in class essentialism and which presumed an inevitable elimination of racism as a result of economic equity and equality. The strategic gesture and engagement to which Dei and Asgharzadeh refer, represent a departure from both anti-racist approaches (which hold race in a fixed place of salience) as well as class essentialist approaches (which often subsume race under the broader umbrella of class struggle). They write:
The anti-colonial discursive framework views race as an independent (and yet co-determinant) category that, while maintaining its autonomy, interrelates and interconnects with such other autonomous sites as class, gender, and sexuality. Following certain Marxist thinkers such as Althusser and Marcuse, some respected scholars seek to assign to race a relatively autonomous status in relation to the material base. (2001: 306)

So, although the works of Memmi, Césaire and Fanon have profound implications for intersectionality, Dei and Asgharzadeh provide the most direct articulation about the relationship of race specifically, to other sites of oppression. They continue:

The anti-colonial discursive framework realizes the need to go beyond the notion that race and racism are relatively autonomous social phenomena; it acknowledges the irreducibility of race and racism to class and economic relations. It views race as an autonomous category standing independently of other categories such as class and gender. At the same time, it sees race as interconnected with those other categories, particularly in forming a common zone to resist oppression. (2001: 312)

It is the “common zone” that we risk losing when essentialism of any kind serves to subsume a given site of oppression or resistance. They argue: “Any attempt to subordinate a social fact as significant and as pervasive as race to class struggle can be an intellectually limiting act with no concrete tactical or strategic aim for mobilization, solidarity, and collective action” (2001: 306). It is this action oriented approach to solidarity — perhaps well understood as a shift from theory to discourse, which paves the way for the invocation of the anti-colonial framework as an activist lens through which to radically learn, argue and know: a challenge never fully taken in up by revolutionary Cuba, as discussed in Chapter Five.

Finally, Dei’s and Asgharzadeh’s most important contribution for the purposes of this work is their full scale redefinition of the colonial, mentioned in the introduction. Reflecting on the explosion of the “post” in the academy, they write:

Now that everything is subject to diversification and hybridization, could not the definition of the very term colonial follow the same logic? Can we not redefine the term "colonial" to include all forms of dominating and oppressive relationships that emerge from structures of power and privilege inherent and embedded in our contemporary social relations? Of course we can. (2001, p. 305)

Writing in 2006, Dei goes further, arguing: “[The colonial in anti-colonial] refers to anything imposed and dominating rather than that which is simply foreign and alien.” It is this radical re-formulation which
allows a re-centring of objective assessments of power relations, of the myriad ways which colonialism has shed its skin only to re-emerge in a new form — shape shifting to accommodate the needs the colonizer (newly and broadly conceived). It is this reformulation that allows for a re-centring of the agency of the colonized. And, highly relevant for this work, this reformulation raises important questions with regard to accountability. In the Cuban context, the notion of accountability is relevant as far as the revolutionary government and its continued reluctance to take responsibility for the persistence of racism on the island, on its watch.

In *Toward the African Revolution* (1964/1967), Fanon argues: “Racism is not the whole but the most visible, the most day-to-day and, not to mince matters, the crudest element of a given structure” (1967a, p. 32). Commenting on the failure of phenotypical explanations of race differentiation and racism, Fanon continues:

> [T]hese old fashioned positions tend in any case to disappear. This racism that aspires to be rational, individual, genotypically and phenotypically determined becomes transformed into cultural racism. The object of racism is no longer the individual man but a certain form of existing. (1967a, p. 32)

Although we might question whether these ‘old fashioned’ positions do indeed disappear, we can extend this to notions of performing whiteness, whereby what Fanon calls ‘certain forms of existing’ are preferred over others. Existence in this sense includes the physical, spiritual, and mental elements of day-to-day life. We see this locally in the histories of shadism, passing, and the voluntary/involuntary performance of whiteness in Canada and the United States, and internationally as Africans for example, throughout the Diaspora, are now asked to perform the dominant trope in the public (and sometimes private) sphere of their existence. In many countries around the world, finding skin whitener is easier than finding a pack of cigarettes, while Euro-American cultural norms continue to permeate via media, colonial education, and colonial civil structures.14

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14 Skin whitening in service to imperial ideals and control is an old colonial idea, well documented by McClintock (1995) and others.
In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952/1967) Fanon discusses the oppression of Africans in the Antilles and the colonial notion of ascending to the dominant culture: “Every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its cultural originality — finds itself face to face ... with the culture of the [dominant] mother country. The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards” (1967, p. 18). With a focus on language specifically, he continues: “[T]he Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter — that is, he will come closer to being a real human being — in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language” (1967, p. 18). In colonial contexts around the world, language continues to be an important barrier, keeping some people in and others out. Think of American or UK television English and the “neutral” white accents used to perform and define cultural norms for people around the world. The British Broadcasting Corporation’s formal policies and training on accent provide a potent example of this process. What does the voice of power sound like? What does the voice of the margin sound like? The ability of the colonial to adapt to (and adapt) any available space (be it physical or discursive) is reflective of the transhistorical imperative of the present contained in the colonial moment. In *Wretched of the Earth* (1961/1963), Fanon writes:

[C]olonialism is not content to impose its rule upon the present and the future of a dominated country. Colonialism is not satisfied with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. This work of devaluing colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today. (1963, p. 210)

Indeed all societies are characterized by official and unofficial discourses of memory, with holy memories dialectically duelling and defining (and being defined by) their heretical counterparts. This comes with both demonic and angelic bodies, with saviours and saved. Colonial imposition is not simply a closed door on the histories of the oppressed, but a ravaging of the legitimacy of all that exists behind that door — a condemnation in abstentia of all that existed before, alongside banishment to the past of “pre-colonial” cultures which have had the audacity to survive Europe’s genocidal march toward totality.
In the Cuban context, racial accountability has been largely absent, and despite a century of racial gains, Cuba’s white leadership (responsible for some of these gains, and most of the limitations of these gains) has never publically, critically, interrogated the privilege which has preserved white dominance and ultimately limited the development of full racial equality on the island. Thus, struggles against what Dei (2007) has called cultural closure, as well as against what Fanon (1967) termed amputation, are indeed anti-colonial in nature. In the Cuban context race and nation have been mutually constituting and constituted for over a century; with ‘progress’ often coming at the expense of historical recognition and epistemic legitimacy.

Aimé Césaire’s famous polemic *A Discourse on Colonialism* (1955/2000) was one of the first published works to centre critically on the colonial question. Césaire brings questions of systemic accountability to bear. His indictment of the journalists, academics, intellectuals, pundits, and all others engaged in the colonial moment either actively or passively, and who sometimes appear to be the good liberals of the day, instructs us to train the gaze of accountability on all levels and to think critically around the entire spectrum of our epistemological building blocks. He argues:

> Therefore, comrade, you will hold as enemies … not only sadistic governors and greedy bankers … but likewise and for the same reason, venomous journalists, goitrous academics … and in general, all those who performing their functions in the sordid division of labour for the defense of Western Bourgeois society … split up the forces of [revolutionary] progress. (2000, p. 54)

The problem for Césaire is not simply the individual colonialists or their intentions — be they right or wrong — but the structure within which they perform their duties. He continues:

> And do not seek to know whether these gentlemen personally are in good or bad faith. ... Whether personally — that is, in the private conscious of Peter or Paul — they are or are not colonialists, because the essential thing is that their highly problematical subjective good faith is entirely irrelevant to the objective and social implications of the evil work they perform as watchdogs of colonialism. (2000, p. 55)

For Césaire, then, one’s position dictates the impact of his or her existence on others. Until subverted, one’s position trumps one’s intentions. The same can be said about the way whites are structurally
positioned as dominant bodies — racist, until that position is subverted. As I have argued elsewhere, any white person who does not actively subvert his or her racial privilege and the racism around him or her is racist (Kempf 2007). The key is to reveal race’s hiding places. Anti-colonialism must answer mechanisms of obfuscation with counter mechanisms of resistance and accountability.

Bringing the mutually constituting relationship between colonizer and colonized into focus, Césaire further inverts the creative/destructive paradox whereby, in Césaire’s time, Europe was in effect created by the third world which it was busy destroying. In 2008, the global South creates the Euro-American North. In A Poetics of Anti-colonialism, Kelly notes: “[T]he colonial encounter ... requires a reinvention of the colonizer” (2000, p. 9). There is nothing subjective, benign, or obfuscating about this binding together of colonizer and colonized, however, and Césaire is quick to demonstrate the myriad forms of domination emerging from these relations. In Discourse, he looks at the degree to which European colonizers, Belgians in particular, integrated themselves (in their own minds) into the spiritual and political hierarchies of the Bantus as a way to justify European presence and involvement in African Bantu homelands. In the European conception, explains Césaire, they were received by the Bantus and assumed a place at the height of the local hierarchy. Thus the European was loved and honoured by the Bantu, while the Bantus were left accountable for European domination. This presumes a simultaneous and related domination and holiness in the colonial/colonized relationship. Following this, inadequacies of the colonizer (like “they ruined our society”) are really a matter of the locals placing divine expectations on the European saviours (Césaire 2000). Césaire also critiques the psychological and theological aspects and approaches of colonialism, arguing that they are false ontological spaces wherein notions of dependence and freedom are manipulated and constructed.

This is evidenced in the twenty-first century as the practice of colonialism continues to be a process that pulls the colonizer and the colonized ever deeper into barbarism. This is by no means an abstract concept but one evident in the world’s richest nations and their activities in their colonial in-
posts and outposts. So with the United States in Iraq (outpost), we get the heinous abuses at the Abu Gharib prison, while with the United States in New Orleans (in-post) during the Katrina disaster, we get roving bands of white vigilantes hunting African-American “looters.” The Cuban government has been quick and effective in its criticism of these very events in the US and Europe, while for most of the post revolutionary period an official hush has characterized governmental discourse on race domestically, and thereby imposed a similar silence on the general Cuban population.

Finally, Césaire provides one of the first *classed* anti-racist articulations and one of the first *raced* anti-capitalist formulations. He works with notions of intersectionality and racist colonialism, as trumping simple class analyses. Simultaneously, his anti-racism is deeply rooted in an anti-capitalist critique. He stayed true to his communist roots while formulating an inclusive race-based analysis of colonial relations. While he is vehemently anti-capitalist, his entry point via colonialism is largely but not exclusively centred on race. He demonstrates the way race can be used as an entry point without working to the detriment or exclusion of other sites of resistance/oppression. Negritude, as theorized by Césaire, was a liberation philosophy (and movement) that centred on race but worked powerfully against other forms of oppression. Manthia Diawara, quoted in Kelly (2000, p. 26), describes this phenomenon:

> The awareness of our new historical mission [enabled by Negritude] freed us ... it freed us from race and banished our fear of the whiteness of French identity. To be labelled the saviours of humanity when only recently we had been colonized and despised by the world, gave us a feeling of righteousness, which bred contempt for capitalism, racialism of all origins, and tribalism.

Indeed such a race-based analysis may have been necessary to get to the anti-capitalist position described therein. Similarly, for the racially dominant, a class-based analysis may be the gateway to a better understanding of anti-racism. A 1932 letter by the Surrealist Group of France, of which Césaire was a member, charts the progression from a class-based analysis to a race-based analysis. It states:

> In a France hideously inflated from having dismembered Europe, made mincemeat of Africa, polluted Oceania and ravaged whole tracts of Asia, we surrealists pronounced ourselves in favor of changing the imperialist war, in its chronic and colonial form, into a civil war. Thus we placed our
energies in the service of the revolution — of the proletariat and its struggles — and defined our attitude toward the colonial problem, and hence toward the color question. (Surrealist Group of France 1932)

The final phrase “and hence toward the color question” speaks to the nature of intersecting and interlocking oppression and resistance. The anti-colonial framework engages the materiality of these intersections between class and race, as well as between and among other sites of resistance/oppression. Despite the many limitations of the colour-blind Cuban approach to race, the tremendous successes in racial equality are owed to the socialist commitment to the entire proletariat — comprised largely of Afro-Cuban people.

Tunisian theorist and writer Albert Memmi provides a crucial analysis of the epistemic workings of colonialism in his seminal anti-colonial work, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1965/1967). Extending Césaire’s analysis of the mutually constituting relationship between the colonizer and the colony, Memmi investigates the psychology of the colonizing mind, arguing: “the colonialist realizes that without the colonized, the colony would no longer have any meaning. This intolerable contradiction fills him with a rage, a loathing, always ready to be loosed on the colonized” (1967, p. 66). Memmi’s look at the colonized, the colonizer, and the ambiguities of such strict dualism make *The Colonizer and the Colonized* one of the key texts in anti-colonial literature. Further, Memmi provides some of the clearest links between anti-colonialism and accountability.

The book’s first section, “Portrait of the Colonizer,” fleshes out some of the key epistemological functions of the colonial paradigm, many of which directly parallel the workings of (among other things) white privilege in the European and North American contexts. He writes: “[T]he most favored colonized will never be anything but colonized people, in other words... certain rights will forever be refused them and certain advantages are reserved for [the colonizer]” (1967, p. 9). In a foreshadowing of Peggy Macintosh’s famous 1988 work, he continues: “[F]rom the time of his birth [the colonizer] possesses a qualification independent of his personal merits or his actual class. He is part of a group of colonizers
whose values are sovereign. The colony follows the cadence of his traditional holidays, even religious holidays” (1967, pp. 12–13). The idea of unearned racial privilege is at the heart of critical whiteness. Like Césaire and Fanon before him, Memmi points to the deterministic role played by the system of colonial relations, arguing:

Whether he expressly wishes it or not [the colonizer] is received as a privileged person by the institutions, customs and people. From the time he lands or is born, he finds himself in a factual position which is common to all Europeans living in a colony, a position which turns him into a colonizer. (1967, p. 17)

Applied to an analysis of racial oppression, we see the conferred inescapability of race. At birth, race inexorably confers privilege, punishment, or sometimes forms of both simultaneously. Memmi also points to a moral imperative for the dominant. He continues:

If every colonial immediately assumes the role of colonizer, every colonizer does not necessarily become a colonialist. However the facts of colonial life are not simply ideas, but the general effect of actual conditions. To refuse means either withdrawing physically from those conditions or remaining to fight and change them. (1967, p. 19)

Applied to race and racism, the colonizer is of course the racial dominant. According to Memmi, the colonizer has sees options for refusal: leave or fight to change the system. Only those choosing to leave, however, truly exercise refusal. For those who remain, even reluctantly, their decision to participate (passively or otherwise) in the colonial project is clear. Memmi elucidates the mechanisms used to obtain, maintain, and reproduce myriad forms of power by those who choose to stay.

The colonizer, he argues, “endeavours to falsify history, he rewrites laws, he would extinguish memories. Anything to succeed in transforming his usurpation into legitimacy” (p. 52). The colonizer, for Memmi, is thus aware of his own illegitimacy. Race is powerfully invoked by the colonizer to delegitimize the humanity of the colonized, and to confer an inverse worth on the colonizer (himself) for which he is so desperate. Memmi writes: “All efforts of the colonialist are directed towards maintaining the social immobility [of the colonized], and racism is the surest weapon for this aim” (1967, p. 74). The implications of Memmi’s work for an intersectional analysis are slightly different from those emerging
from Dei, Fanon, and Césaire. For Memmi, race is a weapon used to protect a larger power — colonial power. This power has many elements but is largely made up of economic privilege and oppression. This is the very charge levelled by Carlos Moore and others against the Cuban state. Memmi perhaps misses that race takes on a life of its own; that the weapon inevitably comes to guard itself and its own legitimacy, as much as it protects that for which it was originally unsheathed to look after. Once this has been achieved, race and racism can thus no longer be distinguished from each other or from the general schema of oppressive relations. People are understood in a way that justifies the assumptions of racialized discourses — people are made in the image of a monster and indeed cannot be understood any longer without a nod to the beast. Once perhaps only a symptom, race becomes a disease — one requiring a remedy befitting its unique discursive and material pathology. In the Cuban context, this advanced stage of the social disease has largely been avoided due the sustained resistance and inclusion of Afro-Cubans in the Cuban nation building project.

3.2 The operations of colonialism and anti-colonialism

In your excitement you have forgotten what we have been considering. We brought the English, and we keep them. Why do you forget that our adoption of their civilization makes their presence in India at all possible? (Mahatma Gandhi 1997, p. 74)

Following Dei’s (2006) conception, the anti-colonial framework casts a critical gaze wherever imposition occurs. Epistemologically, anti-colonialism identifies and is in turn guided by the knowledge of the oppressed and is informed as well by the drive for the accountability of the oppressor. Axiologically, it works with the contextual, temporal, and historical determinants of a given situation in order to establish values in relation to a course of resistance and social transformation. Ontologically, it works from the premises that change is possible; that oppression exists and can be overcome; and that the tools for such liberation lie in the mental, physical, and emotional/spiritual abilities of oppressed people. Anti-colonialism is a strategic approach to decolonization. In order to understand oppression in a concrete sense, the anti-colonial approach looks at the day-to-day material and immaterial operations
and manifestations of oppression. Having said all this, however, anti-colonialism can really be understood only by first coming to terms, literally, with colonialism.

3.21 Mechanics

Modern colonialism is not simply something Europe did to the rest of the world between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries. Nor is it reducible to the ongoing global expansion and penetration of Euro-American culture and priorities. Although these instances provide important examples of the act of colonization, these acts in and of themselves do not provide quite enough information. Such parameters might for example exclude post revolutionary Cuba from analyses of colonialism and anti-colonialism. Dei (2006) has defined colonization as anything dominating or imposing. This directs us to look more closely at the ways in which colonialism functions via domination and imposition. More specifically, what is the terrain upon which imposition proceeds? In what structures (and what kind of structures) does oppression proceed? Anti-colonialism is a resistance-oriented lens for understanding history, politics, education, and power relations more generally. To confront oppressive power relations we must understand them. This means looking at various sites of oppression including race, class, gender, ethnicity, ability, sexuality, religion, geographic/immigration status, etc., as well as their interconnectivity. All of these are, of course, abstract concepts. They become concrete when they are operationalized to confer power and/or punishment. This operationalization is the colonial moment.

Colonization is the process whereby abstract social locations become sites for concrete oppression. The concrete includes material and nonmaterial elements of existence. What Fanon (1967a) calls amputation, what Wing (1997) calls spirit injury, what Dei and Asgharzadeh (2001) describe as dehumanization and what Marx famously identifies as alienation fall into the category of the concrete nonmaterial. Anti-colonialism is thus the de-operationalization of social locations as sites of concrete (material and nonmaterial) oppression. The colonial moment occurs when behaviour, based on social
location, has concrete negative consequences for one actor or group, and concrete positive consequences for another. See Fig. 1 below.

Figure 1: Operations of Colonialism and Anti-Colonialism

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**Concrete Implications of Oppression**

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<tr>
<th>Material Implications</th>
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<th>Sites of Difference</th>
<th>Colonial Moment</th>
<th>Non-Material Implications</th>
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<th>Anti-Colonial Moment</th>
<th>Colonial Moment</th>
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To flesh out this idea, the case of Ghana’s liberation from Britain provides a useful example. Ghana’s independence in 1957 marked the first successful anti-colonial struggle in West Africa. Ghana’s was a liberation won from the blood, sweat, and ingenuity of the Ghanaian people. While self determination and sovereignty are crucial victories in an anti-colonial struggle, they are not the final chapter in the story of decolonization. Rather than assuming that liberation has come to the oppressed and then leaving our analysis there, we need to continue the interrogation. What changed as a result of the transformation from foreign to local rule? The rise to power of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, although important as an act of representation, by no means ensured radical anti-colonial transformation of systems of power. What made the struggle of the Ghanaian people, as well as their new government, anti-colonial? In other words, how were sites of oppression de-operationalized as such? How was concrete oppression ended along material and nonmaterial lines?
Two major areas stand out among the many sweeping changes brought forth by the Nkrumah government: one, formal racial barriers were largely dismantled (de-operationalizing many sites of racial oppression); and two, state resources were enriched and redistributed to the people (de-operationalizing many areas of class oppression). This is to say that not just any revolution (or revolutionary) will do. A simple change of hands — or a simple change in the colour, class, or gender of those hands — is inadequate in and of itself. I suggest that the 2009 election of the United States’ first African American President Barack Obama, for example, must be understood in these terms. While representation, colour, and bodies matter, these are insufficient in and of themselves. The salient markers are the content and character of the change as well as the way the dynamics of privilege and punishment are recreated by a given transformation. This applies to international revolutions as well as the smallest interpersonal encounters. The deconstruction of oppression reveals the links and the locks between different sites of oppression.

For the Cuban context, this reveals the possibilities for racial change even by an overly white government, while at the same time pointing to the responsibility of that government to reconstitute itself more equitably and in better concert with the racial breakdown of the state. While the anti-colonial prism is focused on multiple sites and locations, it is also crucial to note and challenge the tendency of race to disappear when different sites of oppression assemble for the purpose of disassembly. As anti-racist scholarship has long cautioned, material, economic, structural and gender analysis are too often undertaken to the unnecessary exclusion of race (Brandt 1986; Miles 1993; Omi and Winant 1994; Crenshaw et al. 1995; Delgado and Stefancic 2001; Dei 1996). This should not, however, prevent an embrace of a multicentric approach. In the US and Canadian contexts, black feminists have argued that mainstream (white) feminism currently and historically excludes the struggles and concerns of black women (see Hill-Collins 1990; Wane et al. 2001). Subsequent to the organization of a black feminist discourse, queer theory scholars argued that black feminism excluded
and delegitimized the struggles of lesbians of colour (hooks 2000; Lorde 1984; Silvera 1992). So the reproduction of colonial relations (of inclusion and exclusion) takes place even in progressive discursive activist contexts — necessitating a holistic multicentric approach from the onset. Anti-colonialism is necessarily holistic, transformative and focused on accountability — a necessary series of starting points for integrative and transhistorical analysis.

3.22 Saliency and entry points

The notion of privilege is crucial to anti-colonialism because it provides us with an avenue for assessing accountability. Interrogating privilege provides a guide for anti-oppression — to undo the colonial relations around us as well as those in which we play a role. We can thus outline an anti-colonial categorical imperative whereby, in addition to resisting the ways we are oppressed, we should first enjoy only those privileges that do not punish others; and second, at the individual and societal levels we should actively seek to undo any privileges, which punish others. Another way of putting it is to say that we must use the means at our disposal to effect the elimination of colonialism and colonization.

The vast majority of the world’s population enjoys some form of colonial privilege at the expense of somebody else. So, although white men like me are most in need of a critical analysis of their privilege — particularly in the North American context, anti-colonialism is an approach which applies to any privileged body, to anyone positioned to oppress another person or group. This has important ramifications for critiquing the Machismo and Leninismo approach to social movements which, in the Latin American context had marked limitations, including the frequent marginalization of Indigenous peoples.15 By looking at the links between different components of the colonial structure (at any level) we can better theorize resistance to them. Oppression is assembled. It thus needs to be disassembled. This is only possible if we understand each of the parts that make up the sum, as well as the way they

15 Machismo and Leninismo is a term used by Andrea Smith (2010) and others to refer critically to the model of national socialist liberation popular in Latin America from the 1930s to the 1980s whereby small bands of (mostly male) soldiers would launch military offensives from rural hideouts. Critics point to the exclusionary conditions of the approach.
work together. For instance, how do the politics of the home and of the personal impact the politics of a national revolution, consciousness, and transformation? Like integrative anti-racism theories (Dei 1996), this approach recognizes the interlocking and intersecting nature of different sites of oppressions. Unlike anti-racism, however, which argues for the saliency of race within critical analysis (Dei 1996), anti-colonialism argues that the saliency of one issue over another must be temporally and contextually determined, working with the material and immaterial effects of oppression and domination as dictated by what is most pressing and most strategically viable. Further, extended and detailed analysis of particular phenomena is needed to better undertake a well-informed integrative approach (see Dei 1999).

It is crucial here to stress that an integrative approach is necessary when conceiving of oppression and resistance to oppression. The notion of saliency is best understood as an entry point. Every context demands a contextual analysis to determine the entry point that best responds to the lived reality (meaning the material and nonmaterial consequences) of oppression and privilege. For the oppressor, this means looking at the ways we most oppress, as well as any connections to other relations of oppression. It also means determining where we can be most useful in effecting change. No one form of oppression will be the most pressing in every context around the globe — further, the title of “most pressing” site of resistance is often contested. From region to region, country to country, city to city, and home to home different types of oppression are salient. This conception works closely with an integrative anti-racist approach which recognizes the multiple forms of oppression affecting and effected by people (See Dei 2008, 1996). Race may not be the most pressing issue in Cuba, but it is the focus of this work and such analysis is needed to understand not only Cuban politics as a whole, but also to better inform other analyses such as gender and class based readings of social relations on the island.

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16 Anti-racism recognizes a multiplicity of issues facing bodies, and indeed focuses on race in recognition and honour of the severity of issues faced by racialized peoples. As Dei has said in a personal conversation with me, if race cannot be front and centre in anti-racism then it cannot be front and centre anywhere.
Colonialism, of course, is not confined to individual actions or reactions — it works on various interactive levels: nation to nation, person to person, region to region, etc. Colonialism is also at play in intra-sectional contexts: intra-national, intra-regional, and intrapersonal. These different levels are often mutually supportive — and mutually constitutive. The US invasion of Iraq, for example, involves an international imposition of material and nonmaterial objectives. This is nation-to-nation colonialism. The project is supported by corollary intra-national battles for hearts and minds in both the US and Iraqi contexts. A certain amount of US domestic support (be it passive ignorance or flag-waving enthusiasm) for the occupation of Iraq is key to the maintenance and reproduction of the mission. What passage or phrase in a textbook is required in Minneapolis for American soldiers to bomb a school in Teqrit? What must power relations look like in Tulsa for Americans to rape and photograph prisoners at the Abu Gharib prison facility? What truths and common sense are necessary for a nation to stand by a colonial war with benefits invisible to the average American? The colonial project is no greater than the sum of its parts. There is no magical synergy, economy of scale, or organic colonial inertia propelling the project forward on its own steam. Rather, domination occurs through individual, systemic, and institutional acts, and at times, differing levels of consent to those acts. Individually, we may oppress at one level and fight oppression at another. The ways in which we understand ourselves in connection to the relations of domination in which we participate are crucial.

3.3 Part Three: Anti-colonialism and trans-historical analysis

3.31 From post-colonialism to anti-colonialism

(1965, 1972), Sangari (1999), and Sara Suleri (1992) have offered important analyses of various colonial encounters. Foregrounding issues of hybridity and identity, post-colonial theorists have flushed and fleshed out many of the complexities of colonial relations. The implications of post-colonialism for an anti-colonial approach are broad and varied. Indeed, many post-colonial theorists can also be called anti-colonial thinkers (Said and Wa Thiong’o stand out in particular). The connections between post-colonialism and anti-colonialism are therefore as important as the disconnections. Having said this, an anti-colonial approach challenges the implication of the ‘post’ in post-colonialism and asserts that the colonial encounter is transhistorical rather than historical — arguing that it persists in colonized and colonizing nations.

Colonialism is alive and well in our classrooms, curricula, popular press, and popular culture. It is not only under the instruction of invading colonizing regimes that people find themselves excluded from the format and content of dominant culture and norms. Anti-colonialism posits that people are made foreigners in their own lands by way of the colonial encounter, and that numerous markers of difference (class, ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, ability, and others) serve as the basis for exclusion from/by dominant pedagogical, political, and cultural practices (Kempf 2006). With a focus on resistance and accountability, anti-colonialism is interested in the complexities of identity only as far as they serve these ends — be it through offering a better understanding of power relations or through specific strategic offerings. Further, a politics of identity — or a politics of essentialism — often offers what Dei (2006) has called a slippery slope toward re-colonization with certain issues dominating at the expense of others. As mentioned above, class essentialism, expressed through official racelessness, was dangerously invoked by Cuban officials resulting in the suppression of critical race discourse in Cuba.

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17 Post-colonial studies has itself been highly self-reflective, and numerous post-colonial scholars have problematized the notion of the post-colonial (see McClintock, 1992 and Bahri, 1995).
Another term commonly associated with anti-colonialism is neo-colonialism. Although the two are related, a distinction is worth making: Neo-colonialism refers to new forms and instances of colonialism, while anti-colonialism refers to a resistance-based approach to understanding and countering colonialism. Further, it is useful to ask whether or not there is such a thing as new colonialism. At its essence, colonialism describes relations of domination and resistance. Although colonialism may adapt or demonstrate new levels of sophistication and nuance, we should not confuse evolution for a new species altogether. The colonial workings of European empire through the ages demonstrate this point.

Classical Athens, still regarded by many (including many in Cuba) as the jewel of Europe’s ancient past, provides a model by which colonial powers operate today. With one third of its population enslaved, and women of all classes severely oppressed, Athens was ripe with internal colonial relations. Externally, it was the leading European imperial power of its time, rivalled only by Sparta. Despite popular misconceptions, Athens was a highly repressive society with a largely illiterate and disenfranchised population (Freeman 1996, pp. 206–207). It was not without its apologists however, in whose charge lay the task of creating favourable socio-historical narratives. To reconcile the lofty rhetoric of Athenian democracy with the unsightly but ubiquitous institution of slavery, we find the work of ruling-class philosopher Aristotle and his famous defence of slavery. A slave owner himself, Aristotle argues that certain people are slaves by nature (Aristotle 1976, Books III–V). For the requisite adulation on the international front, Athens had ruling-class historian and sycophant Thucydides (1982), and his epic *The Peloponnesian War*, which lent posthumous glory to Athens’ aggressive imperial exploits by detailing Athens’ triumph over Persia and fellow Greek city state, Sparta. Despite the near-official musings of the apologist literati, Athens was a society rotting from within — with wealth, education, and rights reserved for the few; and poverty, illiteracy, and marginalization reserved for the rest. One key

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18 The degree to which Athenian culture and philosophy was indeed even European is also questionable as Asante (2000) and Bernal (1996) have demonstrated.
notion for an anti-colonial approach to this history is that such inequity was by no means an aberration of an otherwise good system — the point of the system was just such inequity as far as it served the interests of the tiny ruling class. The pattern continued into Roman times. A centralized system of oppression spanning three continents needed its very own epistemic justificatory pillars. Among its apologists were the poet Virgil who canonized the divine origins of Rome and its emperor Augustus in his famous work the *Aeneid*, as well as the famous senator and orator (and racist slumlord) Cicero, who worked incessantly to discredit and villainize Rome’s popular reformers like Cataline.

Bequeathed to its continental brothers to the north via the Holy Roman Empire and subsequent Ottoman expansionism and middle feudalism, the ancient European colonial found a home in the modern world. Indeed, this colonial evolution has been at the core of Europe’s development over the past 500 years. Working to manufacture subjects at home and abroad, with insider/outsider paradigms between and within the metropolis and the periphery, little has changed as far as the colonial model. In fact, the current US war of/on terror, has employed a 2,500-year-old Athenian tactic. In 477 BC, an international military and economic organization was established called the Delian League. Its formal purpose was to provide a unified military defence against invasion from neighbouring Persia. Athens was the most powerful member of the new alliance, providing the vast majority of its military and economic force. Athens also appointed all treasurers and enjoyed an unofficial status as head of the organization (Freeman 1996, pp. 197–199). Under the guise of a multinational initiative, Athens expanded its power and influence, as well as enriched its treasury. The US-led “coalition of the willing” is a fitting parallel of this ancient colonial phenomenon. The morality of the US cause is further supported by sycophantic media and teleological reconstructions of the nation (the glory of the founding fathers).

If we understand colonialism in a trans-epochal context, neo-colonialism is somewhat bereft of meaning. If we understand ancient Greek and Roman colonial exercises as fruit from the same tree which bore later European colonialism, to be thus called by the same name, then colonial relations of
the twenty-first century need no new name. The evolution of our response is more important than that of the nomenclature.

3.32 Anti-Colonialism and history

... [F]rom the west’s vantage point, the discovery myth is true. The history of the other side is also mythic. But while Western myths are triumphalist, those of the ‘losers’ have to explain and overcome catastrophe. If the vanquished culture is to survive at all, its myths must provide it with a rugged terrain in which to resist the invader and do battle with his myths. (Wright 1993, p. 5)

[Decolonization can only be understood as a historical process that ultimately culminates in changing the social order. (Dei and Asgharzadeh, 2001, p. 298)]

Although we may wish to bear in mind the argument from scholars as diverse as Noam Chomsky (2003) and Franz Fanon (1967) that there can be no domination without some degree of consent, we should add that the same is true of resistance — there can be no domination without it. Domination produces the circumstances of its own rejection. Colonialism thus has as its corollary, anti-colonialism. The history of colonialism brings with it the history of resistance to colonialism. Michael Parenti (2001) has pointed out that Aristotle’s defence of slavery (found in his work The Politics) by its very existence provides evidence of resistance to slavery. Why else, Parenti asks, would a defence be necessary?

Oppression should never be taken for granted as a product of its time, or a product of necessity. Although little written evidence of anti-slavery sentiment in Classical Athens remains, Aristotle alludes to those in his time who were opposed to the institution. He writes:

Against this right many of those versed in law protest that [slavery] is in fact contrary to law, which should exercise restraint upon violence. They hold it to be indefensible that a man who has been overpowered by the violence and superior might of another should become his property. (1976: 35)

Another group, the enslaved, consistently oppressed by slavery voiced its objection with its feet — through constant attempts at escape and revolt. It is safe to say that very few enslaved people (from any epoch) would argue for the necessity of slavery, or that any enslaved person would be content by arguments for historical relativism (Parenti 2001).
The immorality of oppression is transhistorical. Slavery for example, is neither more sensible nor more excusable in some situations or times than others. The enslaved boys and girls tortured by Alexander the Great, faced the same evil as their enslaved sisters would 2000 years later at the hands of famous statesman and rapist, Thomas Jefferson (see Leyton-Brown and Cleveland [1992] for Alexander; and Stevenson [1996] for Jefferson). When Spartacus assembled 60,000 enslaved men and women (of different races and from various places within the empire) to overthrow the Roman government, they were battling the same iniquity as Toussaint L’Ouverture and others in the late 1700s, who fought and won the first third-world revolution in Santo Domingo (present day Haiti) (see Freeman [1996] for Spartacus and James [1963] for L’Ouverture). While Spartacus may be the most famous unsuccessful revolutionary in the western record, the Thracian hero is perhaps the only anti-imperialist celebrated by dominant history. As Zinn (1999) points out, historical interpretation and distortion are ideological rather than technical phenomena.

Anti-colonial struggles and ideas have been, through processes of omission, denial and marginalization largely written out of dominant history. The anti-colonial response must counter and resist not only these processes (of denial, omission and marginalization) but also the fruits of these processes — which is to say the dominant narratives of mainstream history. Marginalized perspectives must be brought to the centre of our understanding of history. History need not be the spoil of the “victor.” Anti-colonial history speaks not only of the margins but also from them. The human impulse to resist oppression must be rescued from the margins of the dominant narrative.

Fanon (1957) and Dei (1996) have discussed the amputation resulting from colonial educational and cultural processes, which severs the colonized from her past (and thus present and future), and Albert Memmi describes it as follows:

[T]he colonized observes all [of the colonizer’s] religious holidays. These holidays are located at the beginning of history, rather than in history. From the time they were instituted, nothing else has happened in the life of that people. There is nothing particular to their own existence which deserves to be retained by the collective consciousness and celebrated. Nothing except a great
void... The history which is assigned [the colonized] is not his own... Far from preparing the adolescent to find himself completely, school creates a permanent duality in him. (1969: 104–106)

As scholars and activists like Said (1985), Wright (1993), Asante (2000), Parenti (2003) and Zinn (1999) have done in the cases of the Middle East, the Americas, Egypt, ancient Rome and the US respectively, we must tell new truths about the past, alongside critical interrogations of the old ones. We must contest both the content and the telling of dominant history.

Colonialism and anti-colonialism of course, are by no means exclusively European phenomena — there are perhaps no populated parts of the planet untouched by colonial oppression. Although there is no race, class, gender, religion or ethnicity that has not oppressed others along one or more lines of difference, this discussion has focused primarily on European colonialism historically and trans-epochally because we are living in an era defined by white supremacist US/European colonialism. While other cultures and peoples have dominated and have been dominated, it is the historical construction of the present that guides the critical lens of this work. If I were a privileged Akan living at the height of Ashanti dominion in western Africa, my critique may have very little to do with Europe and whiteness. We are living, however, in an age bequeathed to us by Europe's earliest colonizers. So while history may teach that nobody is above domination or racism, the hegemonic domination and racism of our time are not Ashanti, Aztec, Mohawk or Maori phenomena, and nor do they serve these peoples. Although race and racism have been mobilized for oppression by segments of numerous non-dominant groups (e.g. Tutsis, Hutus, Croatians, Israelis) the scale of impact is delimited internally, and is thus incomparable to Euro/American colonial relations.

Further, as far as accountability, it is not Hutu discrimination against Tutsis for example, that directly affords me a global racial privilege. Interrogating my privilege, my participation in colonialism and my potential for anti-colonialism involves making the connections between my day to day race, gender, ethnicity and ability-related advantages and the historical circumstances which produce them. For example how does European epistemological universalism, alongside contemporary US
exceptionalism, provide a foundation for various types of privilege, as well as the conditions for the invisibility thereof? My colonial power for example, is defined in part by all the things I am not: gay, a woman, black, from the global South etc. How do I understand myself in relation to these variables and the people who inhabit them? And vice versa? I cannot be white unless I know who’s/what’s not. I cannot be a man, unless I know who’s/what’s not. It was the Macedonians that allowed the Athenians to construct the idea of the superiority of their civilization (a civilization with beautiful philosophical prose for even the ugliest social institutions). It was the serfs who allowed the lords to define their place at the helm of the feudal economies. It was the ‘savages’ of Asia, Africa and the Americas who gifted civilization to European colonists. What is America without Afghanistan and Iraqi? Only an enslaved person can make someone else a master. The anti-colonial gaze brings a critical reading to these mutually constitutive binaries, revealing just how important it is that they be subverted when understanding human history and its implications for the present and the future.

One discursive mechanism necessary for a colonial understanding of history is the conflation of ubiquitous human activity, with human nature. A common argument for domination is a pronouncement on human nature claiming that people are intrinsically inclined to dominate and be dominated. This idea generally posits that once freed from their oppression, the dominated will themselves dominate once given the chance. While it is true that humans enjoy a history often characterized by oppressive relations, this same history reveals a constant opposition to these relations. Following the logic that domination is natural because it is found throughout human history, so too then is resistance to that domination. All inhabited continents have gone through some form of anti-colonial struggle. In just the last five hundred years (a tiny fraction of human history) the people of Africa, North America, South America, Australia, New Zealand, Asia, Europe, Central America, the Caribbean, Polynesia and the Indian Subcontinent have all engaged in anti-colonial struggle. The Cuban case is of

19 As mention in Chapter Nine, none of the Cuban teachers with whom I spoke raised or supported this line of thinking.
course among them, and it continues its anti-colonial struggle externally against empire and its
trapings, and internally against racial and other forms of inequality to a far lesser degree. It is in this
paradoxical simultaneity of colonial and anti-colonial — racist and anti-racist that we find the challenge
and wonder of understanding Cuban social relations.

A complete history of anti-colonialism is well beyond the scope (and reach) of this work and
perhaps beyond the capabilities of the written word. Delimiting a portion of this history is similarly
difficult — the twentieth century for example, saw nationalist anti-colonial struggles throughout Latin
America, Africa and Asia.\textsuperscript{20} Alongside these we find social, local, regional and intra national struggles
throughout the world. Thus, in place of a complete history of any epoch, I propose the following
heuristic: human history heretofore is the history of anti-colonialism. This is a normative truth, the
validity of which is established not just by the events of the past but also by the way we chose to read
and understand those events. It is thus with an anti-colonial historiographic approach that I have
undertaken my examination of Cuban race discourse over the past 150 years, with a focused attempt at
a retelling that centres local agency, resistant knowledges and discourse construction, as well as at
rupturing dominant understandings. Before moving to this in Chapter Five however, Chapter Four
provides a review of relevant literature on the Cuban context specifically.

\textsuperscript{20} Although many of the anti-colonial struggles in these regions focused on issues of class inequality, the anti-
colonial revolutions of the twentieth century were not, on the whole, exclusively socialist. Gamal Nkrumah (1999)
points out that many aspects of various anti-colonial struggles were explicitly unaligned with socialist economic
philosophy. In many cases, cultural transformation was made salient, with economic policy a secondary concern.
Chapter Four. Review of selected relevant literature

4.0 Introduction

Ambiguity is what best defines the evolution of race relations in Cuba. (de la Fuente 2001, p. 10)

Although a great deal has been written on Cuba from a variety of socio-economic disciplines (economics, political science, international relations, sociology etc) relatively little work has been done in the field of race and education. While this thesis will draw on myriad resources treating Cuba (data collection, academic, curricular and cultural knowledges) a few key resources stand out for detailed review and analysis. This review investigates four works in particular (all of them books): Mark Sawyer’s Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba (2006), Alejandro de la Fuente’s A Nation for All: Race Inequality and Politics in Twentieth Century Cuba (2001), Pedro Pérez Sarduy’s and Jean Stubbs’ Afro-Cuban Voices: On Race and Identity in Contemporary Cuba (2000), and Carlos Moore’s Castro, the Blacks and Africa (1988). Although each of these books works with its own data, perspectives and approach, taken together these works provide the most holistic, informative and up to date picture of race in Cuba possible, given a general lack of research on the topic.

Although a number of articles bring important analyses of relevant topics, the aforementioned full length works form a sort of de facto canon on race in Cuba. It is difficult to write or read about the topic without coming across the work of Moore, de la Fuente, and Pérez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs; while Sawyer’s more recent work is quickly becoming indispensable for any analysis of race in Cuba. Further, these works serve as key texts of particular approaches and/or understandings to/of race in Cuba. With the exception of Moore, the discussion and analysis of each of the four books thus ends with a mention of other relevant works which follow (to a degree) the same political and analytic direction. As the analysis of Moore and his work make clear below, his is a path down which little further reading is required in the pursuit of a better understanding of Cuban race relations in the post-revolutionary era. His work is largely polemic and research highly anecdotal. Further, Moore represents the only key
literature in this activist vein of scholarship. While various anti-Castro organizations echo many of the same themes (particularly Cuban American organizations) these are generally not academic writings, and in any case do not inform this thesis with either relevant analysis or data.

This review examines these texts with a focus on the following three questions: 1) What does the literature say on the topic? 2) What are the strengths, gaps and weaknesses of these works with specific reference to the overall research project undertaken herein? 3) What are the key points of departure and interrogation between these works and this project?

4.1 A Nation for All: Race Inequality and Politics in Twentieth Century Cuba

Alejandro de la Fuente’s (2001) *A Nation for All: Race Inequality and Politics in Twentieth Century Cuba* is the most important academic work treating racism in 20th century Cuba. It is by far the most exhaustive, thoroughly researched and widely cited work on race and racism in Cuba. De la Fuente traces the development of Cuba as a nation state, with a specific focus on race and racism, attempting to provide a considered articulation of Cuba’s racial history, as well as offering powerful analysis of preceding scholarship on Cuban history and race relations. De la Fuente is Associate Professor in the Department of History at the University of Pittsburgh. Trained in law at the University of Havana, de la Fuente was originally an academic in Cuba, teaching and researching at the University of Havana (the nation’s pre-eminent post-secondary institution). Once in the US, first at the University of South Florida at Tampa, and then in Pittsburgh, de la Fuente was active in Cuban academic circles, working in various editorial capacities with the journal *Cuban Studies*, as well as other publications and academic organizations focused on Cuba specifically and Latin America more generally. De la Fuente’s grounding in Cuba, and in Cuban politics and culture reads as highly personal, and it appears from his own references and acknowledgements that at the time of writing *A Nation for All*, he was able to draw on the support of family members living in Cuba. Although the book is not written from a first person plural perspective as in “we” = “Cubans” this book would be very difficult to write as a non-Cuban. While there
is no author self-location the work is clearly reflective of profound connections to the island. De la Fuente neither appears nor identifies as Afro-Cuban, and we are left wondering as to his racial (and class) positioning in relationship to the text as well as to his academic project. While the socio-epistemic origins of any text are relevant to its meaning, *A Nation for All* is such a comprehensive historical record (a historical transcript of sorts) that for the purposes of research and a deeper understanding of race in Cuba, these omissions can be set aside.

Through a detailed analysis of ideology formation at both macro and micro levels from the late 19th century through the Special Period, de la Fuente argues that racial politics are trans-epochally implicated in all Cuban governmental affairs. *A Nation for All* posits that Cuba is historically racist and anti-racist and that the simultaneity of these phenomena extends from pre-independence Cuba to pre-revolutionary Cuba, to post revolutionary Cuba and the Special Period. De la Fuente is not only the original architect of this argument, but he is also the pioneering researcher on race relations in Cuba. As an academic first in Cuba and then in the US, de la Fuente delivers qualitative reflection and research alongside intensive empirical investigation (both his own and that from secondary sources) that combine to forcefully support his overall arguments. *A Nation for All* is strengthened by detailed archival searches that have yielded political cartoons, speeches and other artefacts heretofore unseen in an analysis of race in Cuba. De la Fuente’s work is chronological, tracing the trajectory of Cuba’s racial history as an independent nation.

In the first three sections of *A Nation for All* (there are four in total) de la Fuente works with the dynamic paradox characterizing the relationship between structure and agency in the development of race relations in pre-revolutionary 20th century Cuba. Examining the opposing, competing and related discursive approaches of what he terms the ‘dominance of racism’ and ‘possibility of integration’ theses, de la Fuente attempts to carve a space between the two. Proponents of the ‘dominance of racism’ thesis argue that structural, state/ruling class race-based oppression has oppressed Afro-Cuban
individuals and groups in a successful effort to dominate and exploit the ‘darker classes.’ Advocates of the ‘possibility of integration’ approach, view the history of the repression of Afro-Cubans as part of a dialogical continuum wherein Afro-Cubans have struggled for integration at times against and at times with the government and the ruling class.

The integration approach sees a slow progress and places a greater emphasis on the successful expression of Afro-Cuban agency. While the dominance of racism argument may lean more toward a structural analysis, its quarrel it seems is not with the relevance of Afro-Cuban agency, but rather with the efficacy and potential of that agency to make change in the face of highly repressive local (Cuban elite) and international (US imperialist) dominant forces. De la Fuente finds each approach insufficient when taken alone, and attempts the creation of third discursive space (perhaps located between the first two). He writes:

Polar explanations such as those discussed above are barely adequate to explain the complexities of Cuba’s racial politics and to account for the contradictory and often unexpected effects of the nationalist ideology of racial fraternity, formed largely in response to foreign influences. Neither unqualified racial integration nor linear exclusion characterizes the history of Cuba as an independent nation. (de la Fuente 2001, p. 11)

Attempting a more nuanced approach, de la Fuente devotes as much time to exposing the details which undermine Manichean approaches as he does developing a new articulation. One of his major contributions is then a de-simplification and complication of traditional understandings, provoking as many questions as he answers. De la Fuente tells a history which follows the rocky, awkward, precarious terrain of human existence, rather than providing tidy, closed analysis with a beginning middle and end. While the integration and racism perspectives are key, de la Fuente demonstrates the mutually inclusive nature of these two approaches, grounding his analysis in his exhaustive review of primary and secondary sources. Woven throughout his analysis as well, is the notion that politics and race in Cuba cannot be understood independently, and that the relationship between the two in Cuba is unique to the island and its history.
While the first three sections treat pre-revolutionary independent Cuba (1902–1958), the final section addresses the Revolution; the subsequent formation, development and operation of a socialist state; and finally, the Special Period of the 1990s. De la Fuente traces the implementation of the Revolution’s sweeping desegregation policies (many aspects of which built upon previous gains of the 1940 government) in keeping with Castro’s (and Martí’s before him) public mission of a Patria for all — a Cuba for all Cubans. De la Fuente also examines white resistance to these reforms — a backlash among white workers across the island. Race-based reforms were thus implemented strategically, within a carefully constructed and somewhat de-raced discourse of equality among people. Segregated social clubs were nationalized (even those formally belonging to workers) ostensibly in the name of the Revolution, with the consequence being integration of these spaces. While effective at integrating particular sites, this did little to challenge dominant thinking on race at the time. Further, as de la Fuente points out, Afro-Cubans were framed as needy but worthy individuals, asking for their fair share of the new nation’s wealth. The discourse of the poor Afro-Cuban was an intentional move away from a confrontational assertion of entitlement, rights and demands. In this context, race based identity formation among Afro-Cubans was discouraged and indeed prevented on a large scale. One concludes from de la Fuente that while the Revolution strategically changed the public behaviour of race for the better, the racist was respected throughout the process, and with the exception of desegregating social clubs, the private life of race was left to evolve on much the same trajectory as it had over the past 20 years.

De la Fuente’s discussion of the Special Period is in many ways a culmination of his preceding discussion of the Revolution’s approach to race relations. With significant but limited liberalization of Cuba’s economy, alongside the government’s inability in to sustain the nation’s infrastructure at past levels due to the economic crisis, the 1990s saw an increase, or what might be called a stepping out of the shadows of racism. De la Fuente points to the government’s inability to change the private racial
discourse of Cuban people between 1959–1989, resulting in a public presence of racism when the opportunity arose in the 1990s. The discursive power of the government eroded in the face of its inability to provide for its citizens. Increased reliance on the ‘black’ market, foreign remittances, tourism and tourist proclivities changed public life in Cuba, creating on one hand greater inequality and on the other different spaces in which to express racial logic. Further, as inequality increased during the Special Period, so too did racialized justifications for that inequality. The formal and institutional gains made by the Revolution in the arena of race and race relations have been linked to the efficacy and legitimacy of the Revolution’s institutions; as this legitimacy was questioned, so too were the truths held in place by those institutions.

The key strength of de la Fuente’s work comes from his authoritative presentation of his extensive research on the topic. Although the work mainly draws on secondary sources, it is such a thorough survey of what is out there that new information emerges in the sum of the parts. Reading A Nation for All, one is given the impression that de la Fuente has done all of the heavy lifting of academic work — leaving out few relevant historical details, no matter how small and thereby deepening the picture he paints and the strength of the arguments he makes. De la Fuente treats the what, why, where, who and how of the events he describes. If Castro ‘once said’ something for example, de la Fuente is sure to tell us not only what he said, but also when and where, thus offering the possibility of understanding why. The book is well organized and attempts to reveal both the structural forces at work in the life of race and racism, as well the significance of the resistance by Mestizo and Afro-Cubans in Cuba’s national conversation on race.

The result of both the accessible style and the detailed approach to the telling of Cuban history is a unique contextualization of the backdrop against and within which the story of race has proceeded in 20th century Cuba. While many readers may disagree with the politics of the project, a point I take up below, the strength and utility of de la Fuente’s work do not require the political assent of the reader.
The complexity (rather than ambiguity) he brings to the topic of race in Cuba is impossible to ignore and the sheer breadth of his data collection is indispensable to any study of race in Cuba. This success is a result of two factors: scope and balance. The enormity of the task, a rigorous investigation of a century of complex social history, necessarily reveals the complexity of that history, and creates the discursive soil on which a trans-epochal analysis can emerge. Thus when de la Fuente describes racial formation in the Special Period, the reader is able to link these events to the years following the inauguration of the first republic (1902–1910) — or at least de la Fuente’s analyses thereof — to better understand the degree to which race and racism are embedded in historical as well as political and social phenomena. The work is also balanced, in as much as it stays away from polemic — unlike much of the highly polarized work on Cuba to date. Although taking a side is key, and although privilege is often both maintained and expressed through claims of objectivity and impartiality, de la Fuente’s choice to avoid conclusive pronouncements in favour of analysis of the dynamic simultaneity of racism and anti-racism on the island, through successive regimes and political-economic systems, creates a far more important historical record than any scathing anti-racist, or apologist treatise ever could.

De la Fuente’s attempt at a nuanced interpretation that avoids polarized understandings informs my work on this project as a whole. While inspiring as an approach, reading de la Fuente raises questions about the limits of the balancing act which works such as his undertake. Working to avoid the ‘integration’ and ‘racial dominance’ perspectives, as either/or analytical positions, de la Fuente could do more to demonstrate and explicate the way the two theses are mutually inclusive at various times and places Cuban history. The integration trajectory has been impacted by various facets and forms of racial dominance over the past 150 years. This is only a small problem however, and it is mitigated by the fact that de la Fuente’s work reads more as historical description and analysis than as a work devoted to answering a specific research problem.
On the whole there are few gaps, or missing pieces in de la Fuente’s work. If the 449-page book were any longer, it would become a challenging read, and any new investigations could easily challenge the fairly consistent delimitations of the book. With this said however, a more intensive investigation of the role of US imperialist foreign policy played in the development of revolutionary (1959 onward) race politics would have been useful. If we take de la Fuente’s claim that politics and race in Cuba are mutually constituting, and trans-epochally related, alongside his argument that the Cuba’s national and international histories create a racial formation unique to the island, then a greater look at US policy is needed. Of particular importance is the degree to which revolutionary consciousness was created and maintained within an ongoing discursive battle between US capitalism and anti-Cuban rhetoric on one side (driven in part by self-exiled, ruling class Miami Cubans) and Cuba’s new man and new Patria on the other. To bolster its anti-Cuba campaign, the US created the Blockade, repeatedly launched overt and covert military operations against the island, and attempted over fifty assassinations of Fidel Castro. The sum of these parts is, by design, a relentless pressure on the Cuban government to continually prove its legitimacy in the face of its Davidian battle with Goliath. In this case however, David’s struggle has not been to slay the giant, but rather to survive as an autonomous polity. As discussed in Chapter Five, Cuba’s racial paradigm has evolved in light of this relationship — in light of this struggle. De la Fuente does not omit this point; in fact his own continued insistence on the relevance of Cuba’s international question fuels this very commentary. The role of the US and even Spain is taken up with regard to early independent Cuba, but the international analysis appears somewhat withdrawn in the discussion of the post 1959 US-Cuba relationship. It seems de la Fuente has made the choice, as he must, to stop somewhere and this is understandable, particularly given the highly non-controversial and perhaps non-aligned nature of the work. The US-Cuba relationship is in many ways a topic unto itself, and to treat it with the same attention to detail as A Nation for All does other matters would explode the work — perhaps irreconcilably.
Although de la Fuente’s decision to not frontload his politics in *A Nation for All* contributes to the work’s utility for readers across the political spectrum, this fine book on race is not a critical anti-racist work. Indeed, de la Fuente works with a fairly liberal white notion of anti-racism (if such a thing is possible). Inclusion, for de la Fuente, means a certain degree of racelessness. Racelessness tends to lead certain bodies to be more ‘raceless’ than others (see also Goldberg 2007, James, 2007, and Powell 1999). De la Fuente views race-oriented, or race-based organizations (like the Afro-Cuban Party) as evidence of a failing of the Cuban state to properly address racism, rather than as a potential tool for the creation of a nation for all. So while de la Fuente does look at resistance and agency, his overall notion of inclusivity involves the eventual goal of a colour-blind politics. This may also lend itself to an obfuscation of the notion of Afro-Cuban agency, whereby claims of racism are seen to deny the struggle, experiences and resistance of Afro-Cuban individuals and groups. Although this is not de la Fuente’s claim, by any means, and nor should we believe it is his intention, his reluctance to embrace race-based struggle (or race-salient struggle) as a necessary step in the march to a Cuba for all Cubans is troubling. It may explain the near even-billing he gives to the ‘racism’ and ‘integration’ perspectives described above.

This brings his lack of self-location back into question. Where is he coming from and why? To what degree do his own racial logic, identity and experience factor into the liberal approach implied by *A Nation for All*? Further, how do de la Fuente’s experiences in Cuba inform his work and his understandings of Cuba generally and the revolutionary government specifically?

A final critique of the work deals with what Helg has called “methodological problems” in de la Fuente’s work (Helg 2002, p. 387). There is a paucity of methodological explanation throughout the presentation of his primary research. *A Nation for All* draws on various surveys and census’ which use inconsistent racial measures (for example race categories vary from one source to another) making a clear picture of the statistics in question, at times difficult to see (Helg 2002). Although clarification of some of the research used in *A Nation for All* appears in de la Fuente’s earlier (1997) article “Are Blacks
Getting out of Control? Racial Attitudes, Revolution and Political Transformation in Cuba” (co-authored with Grasco), within A Nation for All, he provides little explanation of how he arrives at (or derives) a number of the statistics he uses to support his analysis, even though these are in a number of cases, his own studies. Nevertheless, his analysis does not rely merely on numbers, but rather on the narrative backdrop of Cuban history that he creates through the synthesis of various analyses of countless texts, images, studies and ideas. Despite the limitations mentioned above, the strengths outweigh the weaknesses as far as the utility of the work. The author has given us the first comprehensive inventory of the Revolution’s race successes and failures in the 20th century.

Although the project undertaken here focuses on education during the post-revolutionary period, de la Fuente’s in depth analysis of the education and inequality from 1900–1950 will provide a key historical analysis for framing the post-revolutionary context of race in Cuban education. The highly detailed analysis of education and racial inequality in this period is among the many unique contributions of the work, although it is extremely focused on the role of education in social mobility generally, and more specifically on the creation of an Afro-Cuban professional class. De la Fuente looks at the scarce numbers available on student enrolment by race, and similarly, lists specific numbers of Afro-Cubans among various professions such as lawyers, teachers and doctors. His race-based analysis of education deals not with content but rather access. There is no discussion of what was learned but rather who was permitted to learn. Although the data are highly relevant, de la Fuente’s treatment of education is fairly blunt. He suggests that universal public elementary education was available as early as the turn of the century and that Afro-Cubans surely “took advantage” of this opportunity (2001, p. 141). De la Fuente discusses neither the political content nor direction of this education, although he implies that education could and often did, lead to corollary professional advancement. As far as analysis of evidence and findings regarding access/outcomes and educational content, de la Fuente’s work says very little as this is by no means at the centre of his analysis. While de la Fuente describes
some of the socio-political underpinnings and motivations for integrated public schooling in Cuba, he is less concerned with the role of education in the cultural lives of the Afro-Cubans who ‘took advantage’ of free schooling. He writes:

... [F]or different purposes, the need to create schools and expand education was recognized by nationalists and the US Government alike. The former saw education as a way to overcome Spain’s legacy of colonialism; the latter, as an instrument to socialize Cubans with Anglo-Saxon values, which American authorities deemed indispensable to achieve progress and stability. (2001, p. 140)

While clearly aware of the not so hidden cultural curriculum of Cuban education at the dawn of the 20th century, de la Fuente analyzes neither the content of this hidden (and formal) curriculum, nor the impact this curriculum would have on Afro-Cuban students, families and communities.

This thesis moves from de la Fuente’s equality of access analysis to the first half of the 20th century, to extend an analysis of equality of treatment, as well as equality of outcome in education during the second half of the century. Chapter Seven argues that while the Revolution’s remarkable gains in formal institutional racial equality make a race-based analysis of simple school enrolments almost unnecessary in contemporary Cuba, the story of race in education cannot be told without a look at what education means to and for different bodies, as well as how difference is or is not taken up in the classroom. The Cuban Revolution’s exclusive reliance on formal and institutional reforms has, to a degree, privatized racism, forcing us to look beyond the rules, regulations and policies of schooling to understand the cultural manifestations and impacts of schooling. Where de la Fuente stops on education, another analysis can begin which centres the racial content and outcome of schooling (rather than simply access). Another key departure, relevant here, is the economic basis of de la Fuente’s analysis of race and education. While he is concerned with notions of mobility in a traditional capitalist sense, the Cuban economy has largely (but by no means entirely) decommissioned the racialized employment hierarchy that characterized the pre-revolutionary period (1902–1959). Thus the percentage of Afro-Cuban doctors in 2010, while high, carries different significance than the same statistic from a century earlier, and cannot be taken as proof of racial equality more broadly. Again, it
therefore behoves us to look to new measures (such as race in the tourism industry and/or race and foreign remittance payments) to understand the way race works and is understood in contemporary Cuba. In the case of education specifically, we must investigate the production, reproduction and maintenance of racial logic.

Another key departure (and connection) from *A Nation for All* results from de la Fuente’s focus on asking questions rather than finding answers. Although he works around (and toward) a liberal notion of inclusiveness which I do not embrace, his explication of the race and anti-racism as concurrent phenomena, opens up space for a nuanced analysis of these forces in light of more critical anti-colonial and anti-racism forces. More than one phenomenon can and do occur simultaneously — even when these phenomena seem highly contradictory. It is in these seemingly intricate moments that we are sometimes able (analytically) to recognize resistance. During interviews with teachers, for example, we often see moments of racism and anti-racism teaching woven into the same narrative descriptions of the classroom. De la Fuente creates a historical backdrop against which such critical analysis is possible (and necessary).

Finally, because de la Fuente’s analysis traces discursive phenomena which extend along a trajectory spanning various political (colonial, democratic and dictatorial) and economic (mercantile, capitalist and socialist) modes, his work has huge implications for the analysis of race outside of a class essentialist framework, one to which many of Cuba’s apologists ascribe. As far as an analysis of contemporary Cuba, an epoch which seems to demand change of an island in perpetual transformation, de la Fuente’s trans-epochal approach points to the analytical strategy needed to understand the limitations of class politics to solve the problems of racial inequality by revealing the trajectory of race-relations as related but distinct from the trajectory of economic relations. A number of relevant works support de la Fuente’s rejection of Cuba as a racial democracy yet acknowledge, as does de la Fuente, the dynamic role Afro-Cubans have played the creation and transformation of racial discourse on the
island. These include Nadine Fernandez and her 1996 article “The color of love: Young interracial couples in Cuba”; Sara Blue, in her 2007 article “The Erosion of Racial Equality in the Context of Cuba’s Dual Economy; Aline Helg, in her essential 1995 book, Our rightful share: The Afro-Cuban struggle for equality, 1886–1912 and most importantly Ada Ferrer in her seminal full-length (1999) historical analysis Insurgent Cuba: Race, nation and revolution, 1868–1898. Were Ferrer’s work not so historically specific, it would have been a focus of this review due to both the detailed and exhaustive research therein and the powerful analysis of the formative years of Cuban race discourse.

4.2 Afro-Cuban Voices: On Race and Identity in Contemporary Cuba

For years now, Cuban scholars — black and white — some better than others, have been bent on the enormous task of rewriting major parts of another, hidden history. They have been reconstructing the lives of people without a history. (Pérez Sarduy 1990)

Pérez Sarduy’s and Stubbs’s Afro-Cuban Voices (2000) is a groundbreaking collection of writings and interviews with prominent Afro-Cuban professionals conducted by the editors in the late 1990s. Their work is reflective of a deep engagement with the racial life of Cuba. Pedro Pérez Sarduy is an Afro-Cuban poet, writer, journalist and broadcaster living in London, England. He was active as a print and broadcast journalist in Cuba and the US before moving to London, and he remains active in the political affairs of the island — particularly those concerning the Afro-Cuban community. Pérez Sarduy was an early supporter of the Revolution, attending rallies in the late 1950s and early 1960s. He is an anti-racist who remains a supporter of the Revolution, both through powerful and complex works such as Afro-Cuban Voices and through his intellectual activism, publicly challenging such thinkers as Carlos Moore (discussed below), as well as contributing regularly to publications around the world on issues of race in Cuba. Jean Stubbs and Pérez Sarduy, who are partners, have published numerous works together on the subject of race in Cuba, including Afro-Cuba: An Anthology of Cuban Writing on Race, Politics and Culture (1993). Stubbs is a white academic. She is Professor of Caribbean Studies at London Metropolitan University, and Director of the Caribbean Studies Centre. Stubbs spent 19 years living and researching in
Cuba. In addition to her work with Pérez Sarduy, she has published three works on Cuba and is co-editor of the online *International Journal of Cuban Studies*. As *Afro-Cuban Voices* demonstrates, between the two of them, there is little ground uncovered with regard to the topic of race in revolutionary Cuba.

*Afro-Cuban Voices* is a collection of interviews with prominent Afro-Cubans discussing various elements of race and racism in Cuba. Although the book features discussions with Afro-Cubans from disparate backgrounds and treats numerous aspects of race-relations on the island, the narrative arc of the work is consistent and effective, and the book serves as the closest thing to an Africentric text on the Cuban context that currently exists. The authors speak with various artists, medical professionals, media personalities and other well-known Cuban professionals. Emerging from this is a powerful discussion with an eye toward home-grown solutions for home-grown problems. Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs have created a multidisciplinary conversation on race in Cuba, with a focus on the epistemic saliency of racialized Cubans. The work is divided into three sections: Part One, “The Lived Experience of Race,” Part two “The Representations of Race,” and ‘Part Three “Race and Identity.’”

Part one includes the stories of Reynaldo Peñalver, a famous journalist, tracing his pre-revolutionary struggles with poverty and his subsequent success during the early years of the Revolution; the story of a family whose members discuss their work and schooling experiences through a race-based lens; and finally an interview with two Afro-Cuban doctors about the state of ‘Black Health’ on the island. Part two includes a discussion with journalist Marta Rojas, who tells the story of the Moncada trial (as a journalist at the time); an interview with scriptwriter Eliseo Altunaga about the way Antonio Maceo has been taken up over time as far as race; an interview with activist actor Elvira Cervera, who created an all-black theatre group; a discussion with Alden Knight who critiques the lack of representation in Cuban media; and finally an interview with poet Georgina Herrera, who describes the gender and race dimensions of her writing (including the use of Santería in her work), as well as her own struggles to reconcile her discursive world with that around her. Part three includes a discussion with
filmmaker Gloria Rolando who describes the institutional roadblocks to the development of Afro-Cuban artistic agendas and subject matter; an interview with journalist and artist Guillermina Ramos Cruz who charts the development and struggles of an artist’s group treating themes of identity; an interview with Martínez Furé who interrogates what he sees as the racialized nomenclature surrounding ethnic identities in Latin America; and a discussion with author Nancy Morejón who critiques the notion of national identity in Cuba and elsewhere.

All told, the authors have assembled a diverse and varied collection of firsthand accounts of racism and resistance on the island. The work comes out of the authors’ recognition of the paucity of scholarship and literature on the topic of race and racism in Cuba. The interviews are prefaced by an extensive introduction, which provides an overview of the racial landscape of Cuba since the late 1950s, sketching not only major events, but the ways in which race (and racial events) have been understood in Cuba and abroad. Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs trace the tightening of the discursive noose, undertaken by the government to control dissent at the onset of the Special Period, and look as well at the disproportionately negative impacts of the economic crisis for Cuba’s Afro-Cuban population. They trace the relationship between material struggle and social perception, whereby Afro-Cubans are increasingly forced into illegal activity to make ends meet, while simultaneously white Cuban understandings of crime and deviance become increasingly racialized. With increased economic inequality between black and white Cubans, the white privilege and black marginalization are justified along meritocratic and moral lines.

In addition to sketching the historical trajectory of race in Cuba, the authors also delineate the workings of race in contemporary (1999/2000) Cuba, identifying three major “broad and parallel” trends in race relations 2000, p. 7). The first is a pathologization of Afro-Cubans by white Cubans, stemming from the Revolution’s portrayal of Afro-Cubans as “humble and dispossessed” (ibid, p. 7). Out of this historical image comes the idea that Afro-Cubans without heavy state support (and supervision) can
only journey from slave to criminal when left to their own devices. This mental pre-criminalization justifies the rising economic inequality in as much as the ‘haves’ surely deserve what they have while the ‘have nots’ surely deserve their lesser lot — each circumstance owing not to structural racism or class inequality but instead to the cultural nature and character of the haves and have nots.

The second major trend identified by Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs is the cultural (mis)appropriation of Afro-Cuban cultural forms, icons, and expressions. Although some of the new value assigned to Afro-Cuban culture and heritage may be part of an effort to address the ongoing racial inequality characterizing the island, Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs argue that the new state embrace of heretofore ignored (or even prohibited) cultural forms often comes with “white Cubans spearheading art forms, movements, and institutions related to black Cuban culture” (ibid, p. 7). The dominant perspective justifies this hijacking, the authors write, under the auspices that “given the extent of cultural and biological race mixing on the island...” Afro-Cuban culture is essentially Cuban culture, with no one Cuban any more qualified than any other to represent it (ibid, pp. 7–8). This implies a highly colour blind approach which negates the relevance of how people are positioned and (dis)empowered in relation to their social location. It also furthers the trend of white overrepresentation in positions of authority in Cuba.

The third and final trend is “the need expressed by Afro-Cubans to articulate a black perspective” (ibid, p. 8). This trend in particular, they argue, is “what this book is about” (ibid). The politics of the introduction seem to inform the methodology of the work as a whole. The work offers a counter discourse to dominant understandings of race on the island in order to challenge both the persistence and rise of racism in contemporary Cuba. The collection of interviews, through both the selection of subjects, as well we might imagine through the editing process, provides a counter discourse which challenges contemporary and historical dominant understandings of race on the island. In addition to revealing the tremendous gains of the Revolution for Afro-Cubans, the interviews
dismantle the discursive divide between the Afro-Cuban population and the Revolution implied in the work of Moore and others highly critical of post–1959 Cuba. This is a constructive first step in any discussion about race on the island, as Afro-Cubans were central to the Revolution, affecting its outcome and course every bit as much as being affected by it. The work tells the story of a people embedded in a continued struggle for national and racial liberation and the Revolution indeed emerges as part of this process. Stubbs and Pérez Sarduy have not, however, created an apologist text for the Revolution. The dominant version of history they seek to correct is two-fold: on one hand they establish their narrative as coming from within the ongoing Cuban revolutionary project; on the other, they present a series of arguments, stories and conclusions which challenge the racial silence produced in the revolutionary era, and bring a complex reading to race as a response to the incomplete history identified in the introduction. Indeed the collection affirms a longstanding tradition of Afro-Cuban agency, resistance, and intellectual work which make up a hidden history on the island, but which have nonetheless been produced in and by the revolutionary epoch.

The editors close the introduction with an important and detailed review of relevant literature, which allows for a sense of the conversation that has unfolded (outside of Afro-Cuban Voices) on race in Cuba and the rest of Latin America. Too often Cuba is seen in relation, comparison, or in light of the US racial project. The decision by the editors to depart from this commonly Manichean discussion is certainly intentional, and is indicative of Cuban national self-identification not as an isolated nation with a history linked to the US exclusively, but as an important part of the Latin American community of nations and peoples, both currently and historically. This section serves to highlight the variety of work by people of African descent throughout the America’s, over the better part of the past century, and as well to contextualize their myriad contributions, demonstrating on one hand the diversity of perspectives and approaches within academic analyses of Cuba, and on the other, just how scarce Afro-Cuban voices have been in the dialogue about Cuban race relations. In this alone, Pérez Sarduy and
Stubbs have changed the conversation by centring the voices and agentive potential of Afro-Cubans in what is generally a highly normative discussion of race on the island.

_Afro-Cuban Voices_ has a number of major strengths. Although the work recognizes the lack of research on questions of race in Cuba, its very existence and content attest to the fact that such work is feasible — that critical academic work on race in Cuba is both possible and permissible, and further, that the tools for transformation lie primarily in the resistance and knowings of Afro-Cubans themselves. As the authors demonstrate in the final section of the introduction, there exists a strong but under-referenced history of Latin American race relations written by Africans. This work is thus not alone in the regional context of Latin America and the Caribbean, but it is highly unusual in as much as it speaks from within contemporary Afro-Cuba. Although Pérez Sarduy no longer lives in Cuba (and although Stubbs is non-Cuban and white) the text belongs to those interviewed whose narratives are the essence of the work. The subjects of _Afro-Cuban Voices_ are diverse in their backgrounds, ethnicity and perspectives; and they bring raced, classed and gendered analyses to the centre of their reflections on their own histories, as well as the history of their country. This diversity of opinion creates a dialogue within the work and serves as a holistic conversation about race in Cuba. This is important for what it is, and also for what it is not.

This is not a book about whether or not Cuba is good or bad, whether the Revolution has failed or succeeded, or whether or not Cuba is racist. Instead, it is a highly considered, nuanced and intellectual discussion on the workings and experiences of race in contemporary and historical Cuba. It locates race and race relations in the present, and as epistemologically anchored in the understandings of Afro-Cubans on the island. Race (and Cuba itself) is for Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs, fluid and ongoing; understood along the axes of knowledge, resistance and past success. Divorcing the issue of race from the issue of Cuba’s legitimacy as a nation, allows for a deeper analysis of racism itself, both on the island and throughout Latin America. Perhaps owing to its variety of standpoints this book is also more
believable as an organic expression of multiple perspectives rather than an intentionally assembled
army of stories, selected and formatted to support an editorial position. This too is no doubt intentional.
The point, for the editors, is the open conversation. If there is any polemic woven through the
collection, it comes in the critique of the paucity of diverse Afro-Cuban conversations and it is thus
pointed at the wider discourse that treats race in Cuba. In a sense, they are answering their own
challenge and doing what they say needs to be done. They rupture the notion that race is a closed topic
in Cuba. This book is a highly critical look at race, revealing the gains, limitations and complexities of
race relations on the island. So not only is race in many ways a public discourse in Cuba, it is one
understood and articulated by Afro-Cubans from a diversity of backgrounds in a diversity of ways.
Although the presence of racialized people understanding and articulating racism should come as no
surprise and indeed is no rarity, it flies in the face of traditional presumptions about Cuba as a
discursively totalitarian space, where an official position on race is sacrosanct. These resistant voices,
many vehement pro-revolutionaries (some revolutionaries themselves), must be honoured in any
reading on race in Cuba.

Afro-Cuban Voices is an anti-racist work (ushering in perhaps, the notion of contemporary Cuban
anti-racism) which moves past liberal notions of equality and colour-blindness, to questioning racial
categories, formations, representations and politics. The work problematizes traditional notions of racial
divisions in Cuba, drawing into question the validity of terms such as Cuban and Afro-Cuban. Further, it
interrogates notions of blackness and whiteness, situating the emergence of these notions within the
history of dominant race relations in Cuba specifically and Latin America more generally. As mentioned
above, the work is an attempt at redress, an attempt to destabilize dominant understandings of history
and power. The persistent attention to racial constructions (particularly in Part Three) extends the
authors’ focus to address notions of Cuban identity as a whole. As described in Chapter Five, Cuban
identity since the mid 19th century has been profoundly linked to social constructions of both race and
nation. The editors of *Afro-Cuban Voices* critique this process, for example challenging the notion and implication that *mestizaje* (the purported celebration of racial mixing) is proof that Cuba is a racial democracy. Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs thus bring a broad theoretical challenge to dominant thinking about race on the island.

By weaving through the various personal and political narratives explored in the book, the reader is able to sketch a wide and detailed terrain of race in Cuba — both longitudinally and latitudinally. By speaking with Cubans of varying ages, the book establishes a historical analysis, which extends from the pre-revolutionary era, to the Special Period. As all good writing does, this book shows rather than tells. The importance of race in Cuba is revealed not because the authors say it is so, but rather through the narratives emerging from the interviews. This is done so carefully however, with a powerful balancing and integration of the personal and the political.

There are few gaps or weaknesses within *Afro-Cuban Voices*, although the almost exclusive selection of well-known and ‘professional’ Afro-Cubans begs the question as to whether perspectives from more diverse social strata might bring different questions and answers to the work. The interview subjects, particularly those in the parts two and three, are fairly well known Cubans, and their experiences cannot be taken as typical. As part of the (informal) cultural elite, their Cuba is distinct from that of the average Cuban’s. There is of course, no average Cuban however, and it could well be argued that being a member of the elite allows for a freer tongue in discussing controversial matters. Further, the fact that many of those interviewed have a first-hand sense of the world beyond Cuba’s physical and discursive borders, adds to the depth of their understanding of social relations on the island. Be these uncommonly privileged voices or not, what we find are racialized people reflecting critically, publically and profoundly on race in Cuba. This in and of itself is highly relevant. Further, the success of those featured in the book nationally, internationally and in their ability to impact race and race relations on
the island testifies to the presence of diverse forms of contemporary epistemological and cultural agency among Afro-Cuban peoples.

As a largely pro-Cuban anti-racist text, *Afro-Cuban Voices* stands apart from most other work out of Cuba, and lends itself well to the anti-colonial and anti-racist approach undertaken for this thesis. Chapters 12 and 13 in particular, bring a Cuban reading to traditional understandings of ethnicity and race in Cuba. Rogelio Martínez Furé (Chapter 12) argues against the historical and discursive validity of the terms Latin American, Cuban, and Afro-Cuban, pointing to the racism implicit in each. According to Furé, the terms “Latin American,” “Cuban,” and even “Afro-Cuban” imply a cultural, historical, and ethnic unanimity which is not only inaccurate, but harmful to the development of inclusivity and multiculturalism. In the Cuban case, national discourses of racial unity revolve around a lack of diversity — a single, unified Cuban subject, who as Martí argued, was above race and greater than black or white.

Nancy Morejón (Chapter 13) echoes Furé’s critiques of the racialized (and racist) development and formation of national identity. These authors contribute to a discursive backdrop against which racial formation (particularly in the Special Period) can be understood. Morejón contextualizes the Afro-Cuban conversation within the Afro-Latino discourse, something unique in scholarship treating Cuba. Generally speaking, comparative approaches to race in Cuba deal with international relations at the national rather than cultural levels, with specific focus on the US and the African military struggles to which Cuba contributed troops. Morejón’s cultural comparative allows for a more Afrocentric understanding of national identity formation in Cuba specifically and Latin America more broadly. This allows on one hand, for a discursive rupture of the binary *Cuba good/Cuba bad* approach undertaken by many, and on the other for a comparative look at Cuba which does not foreground the US/Cuba relationship in the analysis of cultural formation.

Additionally, Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs bring a critical reading to Cuban literary fiction dealing with race. Alongside politics, literature has long formed a parallel stream through which race has been
shaped and understood. The book deals heavily with aesthetic philosophy and its race implications in and for the Cuban context. While this thesis does not directly investigate literature and race in Cuba, literature has long been one of the custodians of Cuba’s racial logic, as well as resistance to racial ‘common’ sense. The narratives presented by Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs provide a deeply analytical primer on the intersection of race and the arts. *Afro-Cuban Voices* is the only work to do so. For almost two centuries, Cuba’s racial story has been told (and to a certain extent instructed) by various artistic formations. Guevera (2005) writes:

> As early as the 1830s the novel played a central role in a national drama that mirrors Cuba’s contemporary political and cultural reality… *blanqueamiento* [whitening] functioned as a rhetorical metaphor aimed at solving Cuba’s race problem. However, while promoting whiteness these novels also reveal the incorporation of black musical and dance forms into previously white genres, like the *danza*. (p. 121)

With a discussion of canonical Afro-Cuban authors such as famed Afro-Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén, alongside interviews with contemporary Afro-Cuban artists such as Georgina Herrera and others, a holistic picture of the degree to which race lives in the arts — and can to a certain degree be understood through the arts — emerges in this work. This points to the need for an analytical departure from purely sociological approaches to understanding race in Cuba. Further, the place of race in the arts is particularly relevant when read against the rising commodification of Afro-Cuban heritage, as well as the commandeering of Afro-Cuban cultural projects by white Cubans. As ‘Africa’ is consumed by mainstream Cuban artistic expression, what might the future hold for the place of race and Afro-Cuban expression within the arts? This is particularly relevant given the role of the hip hop community in articulating new racial critiques of the state. How does nationalist/racial democracy approach become solidified with the whitening of the dissemination and consumption of Afro-Cuban culture? How have Afro-Cubans become performers of their own culture, at the behest of dominant cultural production and consumption (e.g. performances at resorts, Cuban dance companies traveling abroad and Cuban music being taken up in
North America and Europe)? How are these phenomena taken up as progress? How are these cultural celebrations read as proof positive of Cuban racial integration?

Because Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs do not deal substantively with the issue of education in the post-revolutionary period, *Afro-Cuban Voices* has some limitations as far as its application for the thesis. Most relevant however, is the focus on agency, resistance and local race-based epistemologies which *Afro-Cuban Voices* offers at the centre of its narrative. The lack of a direct discussion about education is thereby entirely out-weighed by this unique and important offering and approach. In addition, as in the case of Mark Sawyer’s work, discussed below, Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs provide some useful methodological elements which are informative for this work in two areas. The first is their interview protocol, four questions given to each of the 16 people interviewed: What is it like to be black in Cuba? How has the Revolution made a difference? To what extent is that difference true today? What can be done?

These, because of how profoundly different they are, allow me to better understand the nature of my own research. This work helps to spell out many of the things my work is not. While *Afro-Cuban Voices* centres the personal and creates the political (based on that personal centre) through testimony and retelling, this project works toward a broader understanding of the logic and operation of race within an institutional setting (schooling) and a professional body (teachers). This is not just a case of different sites of analyses. The simple and personal questions used by Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs, when compared to the approach taken here, demonstrate a potential limitation of my work. Data analysis of the interviews in particular has proceeded with an eye for resistance and agency, for a basis of understanding which respects the knowings of the teachers interviewed. Although testimonials certainly cannot tell us everything about social phenomena, Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs are instructive as far as the task of connecting stories to explications of the workings of race. *Afro-Cuban Voices* works closely with the personal narratives of its subjects while my work offers a much less intimate portrait and
engagement. This thesis nonetheless attempts to follow the political engagement of the book, and I have worked to ensure that this work nonetheless contributes to the dialogue on race already underway in Afro-Cuban Voices. This has had implications for my selection of secondary materials for analysis, both historical and contemporary. I have, for these reasons, worked with Afro-Cuban sources (voices) wherever possible, and have attempted to challenge dominant analyses throughout the writing of the thesis — including the binary readings of Cuba (US/Cuba, Cuba good/Cuba bad, integration/racism etc.) which too often characterize the discussion and limit the possibilities thereof.

Secondly, I have used Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs racial categorization model, which in keeping with usage by some activist Cubans, as well as the ways in which race as discourse works in Cuba currently historically, collapses black and mixed Cubans into the category of Afro-Cuban. This is no more precise than any other system of racial labelling, however it is reflective of the material life of race and racial logic on the island. This is admittedly, imperfect. A more complex reading of ethnicity would undoubtedly lend further assistance to this project. Mark Sawyer’s analysis of Cuba’s informal, unique and complex racial classification is instructive on this matter and is described in the final section of this chapter. Other relevant works which centre Cuban understandings of race on the island, and which, although critical of Cuban racial politics maintain a largely supportive position in relation to the revolutionary government include: Jafari Sinclaire Allen’s 2009, article “Looking Black at Revolutionary Cuba”; Rodrigo Espina Prieto and Pablo Rodríguez Ruiz’s (2006) article “Raza y desigualdad en la Cuba actual”; several selections21 from the edited collection Reinventing the Revolution: A Contemporary Cuban Reader by Brenner et al (2006); Gabino La Rosa Corzo’s historical investigation Runaway Slave Settlements in Cuba: Resistance and Repression (2003); Nadine Fernandez’s (2001) article “The changing discourse on race in contemporary Cuba”: and finally Sujatha Fernandes’ book Cuba Represent: Cuban Arts, State Power and the Making of New Revolutionary Cultures. Fernandes extends the investigation of

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21 One of the chapters concerning race is by Alexandro de la Fuente, discussed above. In it, his assessment of race is more clearly informed by the agency, work and power of Afro-Cubans on the island than in his previous works.
culture and race undertaken by Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs, into Cuba’s hip hop culture which represents
the critical edge of race discourse in Cuba today. Like Afro-Cuban Voices, Fernandes’ work emphasizes
the agency of Afro-Cubans organized outside of and through the state, encapsulating the paradoxical
push and pull which informs dominant and non-dominant race discourse on the island.

4.3 Castro, the Blacks and Africa

Few of these born again black men and women who saw themselves emancipated by the racial reform
would have viewed the revolutionary government’s policy of opening up new employment and education
opportunities to blacks as “a belated and only partial compensation for past discrimination in Cuba.”
Rather, grateful black workers were willing to overcompensate their new white rulers with an
increasingly unflinching loyalty. A spontaneous ‘racial contract’ had emerged between Cuba’s domestic
Africa and the white revolutionary regime. (Carlos Moore 1991, p. 53)

Carlos Moore’s Castro, the Blacks and Africa (1991), is a controversial work which has come
under fire for its unforgiving and highly personal attack on Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution — a
historical moment which as far as race relations, was far from revolutionary according to Moore. Tracing
the history of anti-black, white racism in the early development of the Spanish colony, Moore argues
that the story of racism in Cuba was largely uninterrupted by the rise to power of the revolutionary
government in 1959. For Moore, another elite had simply taken up the reins — another in a series of
white cadres governing a state which he and others estimate is easily 50–75% black (see as well Pérez
Sarduy and Stubbs 2000, p. 6). Among the procession of white leaders who have been empowered by
the very racism they have promised to change, Castro has had more than sufficient opportunity to make
the change he has promised, given the lack of contestation (internally) for power, and given the
elimination of the middle and upper class electoral constituencies who traditionally held up major
government and civilian initiatives to promote racial equity on the island. No government has enjoyed
the power Castro’s has to implement reforms almost at will, and with the support of the nation’s
majority at almost every turn. The persistence of racism in Cuba, despite early claims of its elimination
by Castro, is thus for Moore, unforgivable given the objective conditions for change. It is not however,
unexplainable.
The author traces Castro’s personal racial history, and concludes that the leader’s upbringing in a wealthy estate owned and operated by his violently racist father, explains Castro’s limited understanding and interest in the experiences, lives and rights of Afro-Cubans. As a child who attended all-white private schools, Castro’s primary interactions with Afro-Cubans were with his personal and family servants. This dynamic, in drastically different form, reproduced itself in the context of the Revolution. Castro’s integrated forces, while highly interracial, served under the watchful, commanding and directive gaze of Fidel Castro. Into the 1960s and 1970s Moore argues, integrated Cuba was a place in which blacks were still to be grateful for the absence of formal segregation and the myriad types of oppression characterizing the pre-revolutionary period (1902–1959).

The Gracias Fidel syndrome was a carryover of plantation discourse by which the dominated was to be thankful for every scrap of bread from the master’s table. So while integration for Castro meant the removal of formal barriers (de-segregating social clubs, public beaches, workplaces, etc) this approach fell far short of full equality. After Fidel’s great change, the under-representation of blacks in the higher ranks of government and business persisted (and persists) alongside the corollary over-representation of blacks in the lower paid sectors of working life. This point has been well understood by Afro-Cubans for some time, and indeed is the fulfilment of the worst fears of many working class blacks who were sceptical of the white revolutionaries from the beginning. The many Afro-Cuban professionals, politicians and business people comprising the black elite (a group which had developed from 1902 on — with numerous hurdles along the way) had a different understanding of integration which went beyond formal equality, to notions of total inclusion, not just in the program of a new state, but in the design of the program itself, on terms articulated by the Afro-Cuban community.

When the very notion of a community united by race was deemed by Castro to be counter-revolutionary, the basis for the most important race-based gains of the early 20th century had been eliminated — pronounced anti-Cuban. The consolidation of national identity under the banner of class-
based conceptions of Patria, Moore argues, struck an intentional blow to the development of Afro-
Cuban agency on the island. The black middle class which historically played a role (albeit to varying
degrees) in electoral politics advancing the cause of Afro-Cubans, was stripped of its ability to organize
and support black communities. The decommissioning of race-based organizations was both abstract
and concrete. On one hand, the discourse of the new Cuban, more than black or white as Martí
famously decried, defined the terms of acceptable articulations of race. To make the point a little more
firmly, the Coloured Societies, a collection of groups that had historically served as key rallying points
and support networks for the advancement of Afro-Cubans, were forcibly disband. Famous Afro-
Cuban author and activist Rene Betancourt, who was the national coordinator of the Association of
Societies of Colour, was forced into self-exile for both his early warnings against a colour-blind approach,
and his subsequent critiques of the implementation thereof. This two-pronged assault, according to
Moore, devastated the most well-established Afro-Cuban population, rendering race-based approaches
to change heretical, and leaving only subservient blacks in limited positions of power within the new
society.

As with all writing on race and power, understanding the author’s social location can often
deepen an understanding of her work. In the case of Carlos Moore, his location is central to
understanding his work, at all levels. Moore is a Jamaican-Cuban. He was born on the island and has
lived extensively abroad. Moore moved to Harlem as a child and returned to Cuba as a young man after
the Revolution, to assume a rightful place as an equal citizen in the newly liberated Cuba. What he
found upon returning home was for him, very much the same set of racial politics which had
characterized the island in the preceding republics. Jailed twice for his activism in Castro’s Cuba, he
eventually sought asylum in the Senegalese embassy and self exiled to Africa. The Revolution was for
him, personally disempowering. While living in Africa, he spent time in Senegal working closely with
Cheik Anta Diop, one the grandfathers of Afrocentrism. *Castro, the Blacks and Africa* was published by
UCLA’s Center for African American Studies and was quickly embraced by a US audience on the left and the right. Many opposed to Cuba understood the work as first hand proof of what they already expected about the evils of a communist state. Many on the critical and anti-racist left found in *Castro, the Blacks and Africa* a scathing critique of white supremacy, heretofore unwritten with regard to the Cuban context. Indeed even Maya Angelou wrote the forward to an early addition to the book. Although he published *Castro, the Blacks and Africa* in 1988, he continues to be an unabashed critic of the Cuban government and Castro.

Upon the assumption of the presidency by Raul Castro in 2008, Moore penned a highly formal letter of advice, published in the Miami Herald, demanding many of the reforms which he sees as key to the advancement of a truly inclusive Cuba, including: the rehabilitation of all black historical figures and banned black thinkers (dead or silenced throughout the history of Cuba); the official condemnation of the genocide perpetrated by the Cuban state in 1912 against the black population; approval for the creation of autonomous national body of black Cubans, in the form of a national foundation for promoting economic development of the black population; the adoption by the Cuban state of new measures with regard to the remittances from abroad, an estimated $1.5 billion yearly, of which less than 15% reaches the hands of the black population (Moore 2008a, ¶ 16–25). In another recent public letter, Moore suggests that the election of US Preseident Obama should indeed give the Cuban regime cause for concern, as the historical binary of US racism used to demonstrate Cuban progress on race as compared to entrenched US racism, is eroding in the face of a racially liberating US. On the potential lifting of the US travel ban to Cuba (which as of March 2010, looks likely) Moore writes:

Lifting the current ban on travel to Cuba and on sending of remittances to the island would incite hundreds of thousands of these moderate Cuban Americans, as well as other U.S. tourists, to travel to the island and spread the news about a changing America where whites will be a dwindling minority in the coming decades, where democracy works and where minorities are making healthy strides toward gaining power and wealth while creating the basis for a truly multi-racial society. (2008a, ¶13)
As troubling as his assertion might be that US democracy works, of greater concern is Moore’s intimation that the US is well down the road to a post-race moment. This is perhaps the most dangerous interpretation of the Obama presidency and speaks from a liberal position highly different from that applied to Cuba’s race-relations scenario. His critical lens seems absent in his analysis of the US scenario. Indeed, in that same letter, Moore discusses racially disproportionate land ownership and employment numbers in Cuba. Moore’s America is rife with such contradictions, yet these go unmentioned in his comparative analysis. This informs our reading of his analysis of Cuba. Although Moore’s analysis is highly critical, Moore’s investment in the US racial politic (or at least his willingness to engage in precisely the same binary obfuscation as that which he accuses Castro of invoking) raises questions about his perspective on Cuba. His work is generally under referenced. The qualitative and quantitative data on which he relies in his letters and in Castro, the Blacks and Africa, are often difficult to substantiate and he is widely accused of exaggeration in his provision of both statistical and historical fact (see Pérez Sarduy 1990).

While objectivity is by no means a standard that I require as a researcher or a writer, Castro, the Blacks and Africa is a highly polemic work, anchored in the author’s anger and personal experience. We get the sense that any factual inaccuracies may well serve this approach to analysis. This is indeed one of the strengths of reading the book as an account of Cuba, rather than as a total picture (no work can be charged with the task of creating a complete picture of anything). A highly polemic style has a role to play in political writings, from Marx in 1848, to Césaire in 1955, to Cabral in 1970, to speech writers around the world in 2010, the effusive, passionate polemical approach to political writing has an

22 Moore, is correct however, in as much as the very tropes of colour blind politics, functioning democracy, and other mainstays of US mythology would certainly make their way into Cuban discourse (more than they already have) via increased tourism and informal trade if the travel ban were lifted. True or not, these dominant discourses would be the first exported via Americans travellers as well as other means.
important role to play in reaching readers. In Moore’s case, however, it serves as a roadblock when applied to systemic analysis of power, privilege and investigations of racial logic. Further, for some Afro-Cuban activists and authors, the personal stake brought to his analysis of Cuba is nearly as fallacious as his hyperbolic pronouncements of the plight of Afro-Cubans on the island. In a public letter to Moore, Pérez Sarduy (1990) writes:

I don’t deny the fact that many of us expected something more constructive from your writing, no matter what the discrepancies, no matter how critical, precisely because you were a black born in Cuba though you have lived three quarters of your life abroad — and because of your intellectual credentials in the Afro-American world, as ‘bien leído y escrito’ [well-read and well-written]. But my conclusions from reading your book are that what could have been an academically important work becomes just one more piece of irrational diatribe to be hurled against us, presenting us as intellectual maroons. (¶17)

Not incidentally, Pérez Sarduy is listed by Moore among the victimized yet talented poets and artists who were thrown scraps of authority within benign government agencies to placate the Afro-Cuban community — a description Pérez Sarduy rejects wholeheartedly (Pérez Sarduy 1990). Moore’s limitation of black agency to the Gracias Fidel syndrome, as well as in the assignment of docility to Afro-Cubans supporting the Revolution, points the reader to an almost impossible conclusion: that blacks have had little to do with race in Cuba over the past 50 years beyond the roles allowed by Castro and his minions. When Afro-Cubans reject the Revolution however, (for example during the 1994 exodus of mainly black Cubans to Miami) Moore has no trouble recognizing the power of Afro-Cubans to think and act for themselves — to shape and create their own realities (Moore 2008a).

Although Moore is quite clear in his pronouncement of the maintenance of racial logic in Cuba we do not get a sense of how people (both dominant and non-dominant) create understandings of race. Although he locates the genesis of the Cuban race paradigm in colonial times, he does not allow for racial epistemic agency outside of Cuba’s long-term discursive racial structures — i.e. in the forms of

Further, the ‘passionate account’ is routinely dismissed within Eurocentric tropes of reason and rationality, where the angry victim (woman, person of colour etc) is dismissed for simple passion in the face of dominant (white) reasoning and truth.
people’s own understandings and articulations. Another exception to his method however, comes in Moore’s analysis of Afro-Cuban involvement in the communist party before the revolution. In a rare attribution of power and agency to Afro-Cubans, he writes: “Comprising the bulk of the bulk of the workers in Cuba, blacks had spearheaded every major struggle from colony to republic.” If we were to stop there, we might get the sense that Afro-Cubans knew what they were doing and why. He continues however:

Socially excluded and discriminated against, bearing the heaviest brunt of economic and cultural oppression throughout Cuba’s history, black laborers stood out as a permanently available force for radical agitation and revolutionary enterprise. From the 1920s onward, the Cuban Communist Party found its most receptive, durable and enthusiastic clientele among blacks. (1991, p. 51)

The communists, it seems, were feeding at will on the black population who were a ready and waiting reserve army for social movements they supported but did not direct. Indeed Afro-Cubans were a “durable” commodity that receptively and enthusiastically played its part at the behest of more powerful organizing forces.

The same paucity of focus on agency holds true for his analysis of middle and upper class Afro-Cubans. Although Moore points to the gains made by Afro-Cuban professionals into the highly white middle class, we are given no sense of how race was at play in the formation of that middle class. Although we are told that Afro-Cubans made limited in-roads into traditionally white professional areas, we get no sense of the alignments of that middle class. Was the Cuban black middle class working for the betterment of Afro-Cubans generally, or for the interests of their middle-class colleagues (black and white)? Moore’s structure-oriented analysis relies as well, on the assumption that Fidel, the individual man, is highly responsible for the limitations of racial gains and the preservation of the status quo. If we accept the estimates of Moore and others that the Afro-Cuban population is indeed the racial majority in the island, we have to dispose of black agency in order to accept Moore’s thesis. This involves rejecting the overwhelming support Afro-Cubans have shown for the Revolution (both as soldiers during its fight and as citizens thereafter) as legitimate epistemological activity (Zeitlin 1970, p. 53). Instead, we
are to assume that Afro-Cubans have been duped and oppressed into a docile ontology of quiet
acquiescence and fear. While perhaps these phenomena are at play to limited degrees, can they truly
account for all of the support offered by a majority of Cuba’s Afro-Cuban population? As the interviews
and data suggest, a great deal more thinking, analysis and action are taking place through people’s
understandings and lived experiences of race than Moore would have us believe. Cubans of all races
(and not just the middle class of the pre-revolutionary republic) have always created racial logic — not
necessarily as they choose and certainly in relationship to governmental and economic structures — and
have been responsible, nonetheless, for the creation of their own knowledge and understandings of
race. Moore’s offerings on the development of Cuba’s racial logic are thus insufficient and singular —
relying on the dictates of the strictures, structures and schemes of the post-revolutionary government at
the expense of a nuanced or detailed analysis of Afro-Cuban voices and lived experiences. This provides
a caution for this work when considering the pitfalls of speaking for a people — a task by no means
undertaken here.

Applied to questions of power and privilege, this same analysis reveals that Moore’s attack on
the government is not sufficiently comprehensive to reveal the workings and complexities of race and
power in Cuba. Although Moore looks at the failings of the Revolution as far as race, he pays little
attention to the ways in which class, gender, employment or party politics have aggravated or mitigated
the relationship between race, power and privilege in Cuba. By closing this door, Moore conceals the
day-to-day life of race and resistance: the navigation and operation of racialized life by Cuban people of
all races. While Moore points to the failure to extend desegregation to something resembling full
inclusion, he gives little consideration to actual people — their thoughts, interpretations, forms of
resistance, injuries and victories. This exclusion results in omitting the content of private/personal
thought, space, resistance and knowledge — the very terrain in which race, racism and resistance take
concrete form and are operationalized. As Crenshaw et al (1995) argue, race lives in the minutiae of
circumstance and quotidian happenings that shape our lives. Although race power and privilege of course have institutional life/lives, racism cannot be understood without a consideration of people’s understandings and actions in relation and resistance to that structure. This amounts to a selective and colonial reading of Cuban history, producing at best, an incomplete picture of people’s lived experience and organic knowledges. At worst, Moore disempowers and undermines Afro-Cuban agency and participation in a great many aspects of their own successes.

*Castro, the Blacks and Africa* is the original critical work on race in Cuba, a book which attacks the Revolution and its leaders on all aspects of social relations. For Moore, Cuba’s progress on race and racism is negligible and ultimately ill-intended by the Cuban government. Positing that socialism is fundamentally inorganic, Moore argues that an a priori tension exists between Cuba’s economic system and racial progress. The same contempt that Moore brings to his criticism of Castro’s domestic race politics is found in his pathologization of Cuba’s attempts to export the Revolution and revolutionary socialism. Indeed, Moore’s critique begins as an anti-racist analysis of Cuba and evolves into an anti-Castro treatise, with his analysis of Cuba’s foreign policy embedded as much in an anti-Castro standpoint as it is in an anti-racist standpoint. He writes:

> The more defined the policy of exporting the revolution became, the wider grew the sphere in which the Cuban model was deemed applicable... Castro’s definition of the Cuban model as the ‘idea,’ the intellectual force for revolution in the Third World, was consistent with the elitist and messianic nature of Castroism. (1991, p. 144)

Even the race-based improvements that have been made, the work argues, were a result of a conniving Castro who periodically duped unsuspecting Afro-Cubans into thinking they have been helped. The work is largely under researched and analyzed, and its conclusions are often illogical. Indeed the degree to which it holds up as an academic work has been called into question by some (see Brock and Cunningham 1991). As mentioned, the work is under-referenced, with large tracts of fact-laden text unsupported and an over reliance on unnamed sources. His data is a mix of memory, assumption, primary, secondary and polemic sources.
Although Moore is trained as an ethnologist, he makes no mention of oral history or popular culture, and indeed makes no statement on methodology at all. The work is thus unclear in both its aims and its method. *Castro, the Blacks and Africa* is a study of history and like all such endeavours it is a selective telling, but the rationale for selection remains unclear (e.g. why are Afro-Cubans cast as valiant resisters in every conflict with white authority up until the Revolution, during and after which their efforts are those of duped victims of the racist Caudillo?). Without a clear question, clear data or clear methodology, we are left with the political project of the book as the key decision making (and indeed conclusion producing) tool; a political project which is relevant, but easily reducible to a particular and limited anti-Castro position — one adopted by anti-Cuba militants in the US and elsewhere, and which is more reactionary than academic.

Moore’s work is perhaps best understood as part of a conversation on race in Cuba. Although Moore has not presented his work in a particularly dialogical way, it has by all means created a discussion. Pérez Sarduy’s and Stubbs’ *Afro-Cuban Voices*, is in many ways a response to Moore — not necessarily to the man, but to the problems with his work. Their edited collection and powerful introduction re-centre the black Cuban voice in the conversation on race in Cuba. Indeed Pérez Sarduy has written openly to Moore, as indicated above, challenging his key assumptions and even his status as a native Cuban (Pérez, 1990). Having lived “three quarters of [his] life abroad” as Pérez argues may cloud both memory and perception of the Cuban race paradigm (1990, ¶17). To whatever degree this is or is not the case, Moore’s distance from his homeland may also allow for a comparative clarity not afforded to those on the island. While Pérez Sarduy has also lived abroad, and Stubbs is European, their political alignment with the Revolution has surely affected their interpretation of revolutionary change and discourse. Similarly, Moore’s antithetical location in relation to the Revolution surely carries a certain degree of intellectual momentum; behoving him to read revolutionary Cuba negatively at every turn. This may be needed to keep an eye on race. There may be a clarity offered by his highly subjective
and detached understandings. He is alone in his vehemence and success as a Cuban anti-Cuban scholar and activist treating race. Although he may pull the conversation in a direction that many studying Cuba would rather not see it go, his work is necessary as there needs to be a public discussion and airing of the questions he raises. The delicacy of the Cuban Revolution owing to its underdog war with US aggression over the past half century cannot justify a silence or a failure to create a public and reflexive discourse on race in Cuba.

Although Moore “was a translator for Angola’s Holden Roberto whose FNLA was funded by the CIA” and although “during Roberto’s exile in the US... [Moore] spent a lot of time with Roberto as he traveled back and forth between Washington and Miami” his politics do not seem to have found him an easy home in any political camp (AfroCuba.net 2009). Moore was no more supportive of the Miami lobby and pre-revolutionary racism than he was of the Havana boys and post-revolutionary race relations. It appears that a certain degree of courage was thus necessary to write a work that would certainly find him in permanent opposition to the cultural community of his childhood. However reckless, Moore’s critique is not entirely baseless. It elucidates the power of denial as far as preserving racism in the shadow of the silence created around it. As the title suggests, Castro, the Blacks and Africa brings an international reading to post-revolutionary race history. Castro has continually defined racism in relative terms, invoking abstract notions of racism elsewhere in an attempt to deny its persistence in Cuba. Moore was among the first to critique this idea with regard to Cuba. As Morales (2007) and others have pointed out however, Moore’s particular race critique is mobilized in the interest of anti-Cuban US politics, whether Moore likes it or not.

4.4 Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba

Within the dialogue that emerges between Pedro Pérez Sarduy and Carlos Moore, Mark Sawyer’s Racial Politics in Post Revolutionary Cuba occupies part of the vast middle ground separating the two, and attempts to fill in some of the empirical blank spots characterizing that discussion.
Sawyer’s (2006) work is academically the most instructive of the works selected for this review. *Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba* appears to be the culmination of many years of thesis writing and researching, and provides a detailed account of Sawyer’s multi-year study and analysis of race-relations in Cuba, as well as an explication and application of Sawyer’s “Race Cycles” theory, which is explained through analyses of current and historical data and literature on race in Cuba. According to Sawyer, the advancement of race relations in post-revolutionary Cuba has proceeded for pragmatic rather than moral reasons, with the Revolution’s leaders understanding race more as an important tool for the retention of power than as a pressing social issue entrenched in the continued marginalization of Afro-Cubans on the island.

The Race Cycles model argues that in times of state crisis (military, economic, social etc) power relations generally, and race relations specifically, are often exploded and re-configured during subsequent periods of state power consolidation wherein new social power equilibriums are established. This model challenges the notion of linear racial progress and posits a fits and starts formation whereby, despite various gains made by racialized Cubans, racial progress is not inevitable, and gains are by no means fixed or permanent. This tumultuous racial formation serves the government in as much as its leaders are able to re-stabilize a shaken and vulnerable population and thereafter take responsibility for any gains ‘afforded’ the Afro-Cuban population. Sawyer’s Race Cycles formation is intended as a more nuanced alternative to what he identifies as the three approaches generally undertaken when analyzing race in Cuba: Latin American exceptionalism, the Marxist approach, and the Black Nationalist approach. The first, Latin American exceptionalism has developed in the larger context of colonial South and Central America, most notably in Brazil (see Winddance Twine, 2005). This approach argues that Latin America has developed as a collection of racial democracies, whose racial paradigms are regionally unique and incomparable to Euro/American race relations formulations. Due to generations of racial mixing, race is of less importance in Latin America than it is elsewhere. He writes:
“The Latin American Exceptionalist viewpoint implicitly treats racism as a dichotomous variable that either exists or does not” (2005, p. 22). Widespread miscegenation is often taken as proof of the absence of racism. Further, this analysis, according to Sawyer, tends to treat the saliency of class relations above that of race and racism. While some from this camp argue that integration was well underway ahead of the Revolution (see de la Fuente 2001) and that the Revolution has maintained and hastened this process, other Latin American exceptionalist theorists, according to Sawyer, argue that Castro’s engagement with race as an early priority of the Revolution was actually disruptive to the historical trajectory of integration, miscegenation and equality. According to Sawyer, Castro’s accusers have argued that by engaging in race politics Castro has unnecessarily inflamed racism to the benefit of his own entrenched power.

The Marxist\textsuperscript{24} approach, as identified by Sawyer, understands race as little more than a tool and bi-product of economic inequality. Race then is produced by capitalist social and economic relations. It follows that when class inequality disappears, so too do issues of racism. The early revolutionary transformation and desegregation of public institutions, private businesses and public space are indicative of a Marxist approach to end racism through formal equality. According to Sawyer, de la Fuente (2001) Moore (1991) and others, the failure of the battle against racism to penetrate the private spaces (physical and discursive) of Cuban people is equally indicative of the Marxist approach — a flawed program in which racism is given refuge in the homes and private conversations of the Cubans, safely reproducing from one generation to the next. As discussed in Chapter Nine, the notion that socialism is antithetical to racism, cannot be conflated with the idea that socialism necessarily puts an end to racism.

\textsuperscript{24} Although Sawyer and others describe the Marxist approach as largely equivalent to a form of class essentialism in the Cuban context, neither Marxism as a tradition nor indeed Marx as a thinker can be rightly pigeonholed in this reductive fashion. While class essentialism often relies on the Marxist tradition the reverse is not so. The use of the term ‘Marxism’ in this section thus follows Sawyer’s use to describe class-essentialism.
The final approach, the Black Nationalist perspective, argues that Cuba was racist before the Revolution and still is. According to Sawyer, this is the most marginalized of the three perspectives, but offers the most powerful and poignant critique of race and racism under the Revolution. This is perhaps the most anti-racist of the three approaches, arguing that race is the key social issue in the political development of Latin America. Tersely rejecting the Latin American exceptionalist perspective, the Black Nationalist approach argues that Castro and the Revolution have never engaged Afro-Cubans as epistemically agentive members of Cuban society on their own terms. The notion of an Afro-Cuban perspective is not only unwelcome in Cuba, but impossible according to the Black Nationalist perspective because Castro and other leaders fail to recognize the cultural distinctiveness and validity of Afro-Cuban peoples on the island.

Using the Race Cycles model, Sawyer argues for an alternative formulation: inclusionary discrimination. Sawyer’s idea attempts to bring both a more subtle and accurate reading to Cuban race politics than the three leading formulations. Accepting the potential simultaneity of inclusion and discrimination, Sawyer attempts a balance of the previous three frameworks with a non-linear approach to understanding the development of Cuban race relations. The inclusionary discrimination analysis allows, according to Sawyer, for an understanding of race in Cuba as fluid and dynamic, unfixed and changing. In so doing he moves past the limitations of the all or nothing boundaries of the Marxist and black Nationalist approaches, while maintaining a more critical reading than that provided by the Latin American exceptionalism model. After setting out the theoretical framework for the piece, Sawyer applies his theory to modern Cuban race history. Beginning with an analysis of pre-revolutionary Cuban history and moving to analyses of various crises and periods of consolidation, Sawyer sketches the ebbs and flows of Cuban race politics, with a highly critical eye on governmental motivations behind moments of racial progress and regression. Sawyer also devotes an entire chapter to the relationship between US Black Nationalists and the regime. He notes the disillusionment of US activists upon arriving in Cuba and
seeing the life of race on the island — typified perhaps most symbolically by the banning of the ‘Afro’
hairstyle at the time of Angela Davis’ visit. Sawyer then moves into an analysis and application of his
research findings. He devotes a chapter each to his qualitative and quantitative findings, offering a
method and methodology for both, and fleshing out what he calls “Race and Daily Life in Cuba During
the Special Period.” Sawyer collects his data during the tail end of a period of state crisis, and indeed on
the cusp of a period of consolidation. His survey and interview work demonstrate the degree to which
race is relevant in/to the hearts and minds of Afro-Cubans (particularly during the Special Period).
Documenting widespread implicit and explicit experiences of racism, Sawyer’s data (and methods) are
presented clearly and concisely, providing some of the most up to date and transparent information on
the operations of race and power in Cuba. He closes the book with an analysis of racial politics in Cuban
Miami. This is a taste, at best, of a larger conversation on Miami Cubans and the trans-epochal politics
and relations surrounding their interaction with the US and Cuban regimes and the relations between
the two.

Sawyer is an African-American, an associate professor at UCLA, cross appointed to the
department of Political Science and the Bunche Institute for African American Studies (of UCLA). The
Bunche Institute was founded in 1969 as the Center for Afro-American Studies (CAAS). The CAAS
published Carlos Moore’s Castro, the Blacks and Africa. Indeed in his book Sawyer thanks Moore as a
“pioneer in the discipline” who was “critical to [his] own development as a scholar” (Sawyer 2006, xi).
The degree to which Sawyer’s institutional affiliations affect his work is not something about which I can
speculate. I mention this as backdrop to a critical analysis of Sawyer’s critique of Cuba. A number of
strengths are worth mentioning first however, as these outweigh any limitations of Sawyer’s excellent
work. First, Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba provides unique, relevant and current qualitative
and quantitative data on race and racism in Cuba — something few other scholars have accomplished.
Government data is scarce and some have argued unreliable (de la Fuente 2001, Sawyer 2006, D’Amato
2007 and others), while a paucity of academic data collection persists despite the efforts of scholars like Moore, de la Fuente and Pérez Sarduy. Further, perhaps partly in response to de la Fuente’s reluctance to do so, Sawyer lays out his research findings, as well as his methodology.

Second, Sawyer provides a race-centric historical and international analysis from (or within) which a macro-understanding of racism in Cuba can emerge. This is something common to the works selected for this review, but rare among the general work on Cuban politics and within much of the literature on inequality in Cuba in particular. Gender, sexuality and class fill as many pages as race at the best of times, and usually more. Certain analyses reduce race to negligible sections, treating the years immediately following the Revolution and thus supporting an ahistorical approach to understanding race in Cuba, and implicitly asserting an end to the race question in the early 1960s. (The latest biography of Castro treats race for all of seven of its 700 plus pages [Castro, 2007].)

Third, Sawyer’s methodology is clearly explicated, detailing his research rationale and conduct, in light of current political conditions and with reference to existent research on race on the island. This responds (perhaps intentionally) to the lack of methodological explication and location within the works of Moore and de la Fuente. Sawyer explicitly sets forth his intention of generating new data on race in Cuba. He points out that his study is only the second survey of public opinion about race in Cuba (the first being de la Fuente 2001). Fourth, Sawyer provides a ‘state of the field’ assessment through his discussion of existent research. By drawing a picture of current research on race in Cuba, he demarcates the edges and content of what is ‘known’ outside of the island, thereby indicating what work might broaden the field and support Afro-Cuban people. Fifth, Sawyer provides a relatively honest account of where he is coming from, stating his politics and location up front — allowing the reader a better understanding of the intent of his project.

Honest expressions of subjectivity are as close as researchers and writers come to objectivity. Sawyer’s politics, like Moore’s, lend themselves to a highly pro-American articulation of an anti-Cuban
position. So while I commend his honesty about his political project, I disagree with the project about which he is being honest. Although balanced, Sawyer’s work is not supportive (politically or pedagogically) of the Cuban project as a whole. Here, he and I differ. There is little that is constructive about the work — and no investigation of the successes — simply what Sawyer sees as the failures.

There is no allowance for the possibility of a redeemed Cuba under the socialist control of the regime. While Moore’s enemy is clearly Fidel Castro, the man, Sawyer’s more nuanced approach makes his foe more difficult to locate. Looking closely however, *Racial Politics in Post Revolutionary Cuba* reveals a reading of the Cuban state as a highly pragmatic and essentially heartless machine, responsible for the maintenance of racial oppression throughout the latter half of the 20th century. Like de la Fuente (2001) and others, Sawyer makes compulsory mention of the tremendous gains in racial equality produced by the Revolution, but stops short of identifying, investigating, or analyzing the significance of these gains.

As far as the daily lives of Afro-Cubans, as D’Amato (2007), Isaac (2006) and others, as well as the qualitative and quantitative data from this project demonstrate, these gains are highly relevant for understanding race as it is lived by Cuban people. Although reviewers have praised Sawyer’s transnational approach to understanding race relations in Cuba (e.g. Walker 2007), Sawyer only goes half way with this analysis.

In chapter four, “Match Made in Heaven or Strange Bedfellows: Black Radicals in Castro’s Cuba,” Sawyer describes the connections and disconnections between Cuba and numerous revolutionary Black Nationalists from the US — mostly members of the Black Panther Party for Self Defence, many of whom visited the island as honoured guests — if not celebrated heroes. Sawyer does an excellent job of pulling the curtain back to demonstrate the limitations of the Cuban racial project in the eyes of the African-American visitors, some of whom were less than impressed with “Castro’s Havana.” Sawyer makes important points, and does not hesitate to mention that many were very

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25 The very phrase Castro’s Cuba speaks to a particular lens invoked most enthusiastically by Moore in his labeling of Castro as the ego maniac, all powerful Caudillo of Cuba.
impressed and some stayed. Sawyer’s international analysis is one sided however. While Fidel is revealed as (and reviled for) having used the US as proof that Cuba was indeed a superior society in terms of race relations, Sawyer fails to mention that Cuban racial politics by any progressive standard were indeed far in advance of those in the US. Thus Sawyer’s transnational analysis is limited to Castro’s use of international comparisons to bolster the regime’s position and conceal inadequacies of the Cuban system. We learn how Castro strategically positioned Cuba in opposition to the US as far as race politics, as well as how he welcomed US Black Nationalists who were under attack in their home countries to expose Cuban superiority in matters of race relations. The international element of the analysis stops there and is in no way comparative, beyond the emphasis on US Black nationalists who felt Cuba was not the racial paradise it was cracked up to be. We do not learn of the potential for discursive exchange in those moments — of reflexivity or transformation. Sawyer argues “[t]he approach of this book... is explicitly transnational — transnational both in the sense that international factors drive racial politics and in the sense that racialization is frequently thought of and experienced in transnational and comparative terms” (xix). This is entirely sound but Sawyer pulls up short after analyzing the former, thus leaving the latter — the comparative — untreated. This is particularly the case with his treatment of Cuba’s involvement in Africa.

Scholars on the left (Isaac 2006, D’Amato 2007, de la Fuente 2001 and others) and right (Moore 1981, Clytus 1970) have pointed to the importance of Cuba’s military, development and diplomatic involvement in various African conflicts. Sawyer’s transnational analysis devotes no significant attention to these key international moments. Such an omission (repeated in this work) would be understandable were it not invoking the notion of a transnational comparative. The disapproval of US Black Nationalists must be contextualized before it is invoked as even anecdotal proof that Cuba’s government was little more than self serving in its work on race relations.
As far as points of departure and interrogation between Sawyer’s work and the work undertaken for this project, *Racial Politics in Post-revolutionary Cuba* is highly relevant. Although Sawyer only briefly addresses the notion of racelessness so central to this overall thesis, his focus on post-revolutionary Cuba, with a general look at racism and race relations is the only one of its kind. This allows for a detailed and centred analysis of the post–1959 period of race relations. Although the notions of Cubanidad and racelessness under consideration for this thesis trace their respective development to pre-revolutionary Cuba (indeed to pre-independence Cuba) and in this sense, Sawyer’s work may not be relevant for much of the historical analysis undertaken herein, his data from the Special Period as well as the 1960s and 1970s in particular, is very useful for this analysis. There are of course limitations to these connections. Like Moore’s *Castro the Blacks and Africa* (1991) and to a lesser degree de la Fuente’s *A Nation for All* (2001) *Racial Politics* also comes up short in its attention to resistance and agency. Despite Sawyer’s attempt to let the voices of Cubans guide the epistemology of the work, there is little discussion of the existent and/or potential agency of Mestizo or Afro Cubans. The highly structural analysis provides a powerful look at hegemony in Cuba, but pulls up short as far as an investigation of resistance. The same is true of the notion of privilege. An investigation of political accountability is nowhere to be found in this work. Having said this however, Sawyer has constructed no obstacles to an analysis of resistance and privilege, and has perhaps simply not gotten that far, as there are necessarily limitations to all academic and analytical undertakings.

So while this project repeatedly crosses paths with Sawyer’s, the overall trajectories are substantially different. As mentioned above, these disparate trajectories stem from differentia politics as well as differential foci. Despite this distance however, Sawyer’s work serves as a site from and in which to investigate the role of education in Cuba’s racial discourse. Sawyer’s Race Cycles Model, as well as his framing of the three traditional approached to understanding Cuban race politics, serve as important reference points for connection and departure, and allow for a broader connection to North
American anti-racism and critical race theory paradigms as far as they may or may not apply to Cuba. Sawyer’s demarcation of the three dominant approaches to understanding race relations in Cuba (Latin American Exceptionalism, the Marxist Approach and the Black Nationalist Approach) provides an important theoretical entry point for the research undertaken here. Indeed, how is the colour-blind approach challenged or supported by these paradigms? How does the production of racial logic proceed within these frameworks, and how does each allow for the valuing and centring of resistance and agency?

Latin American Exceptionalism for example, powerfully promotes the colour-blind approach through simplistic notions of racism as a thing of the past, of race mixing as the final chapter in race politics and through the condemnation of race-salient analysis, whereby addressing racism is confused with creating racism. The Marxist (class essentialist) analysis, which subsumes race under the banner of class relations, virtually disallows the possibility of racism under a socialist banner (an illogic of sorts which also supports the racelessness approach). The Black Nationalist perspective is most closely attuned to anti-racist principles, but stops short of a centring of Afro-Cuban agency in Cuban state and political formation. The Black Nationalist perspective offers an insight into the workings of Cubanidad as a prescriptive and restrictive discourse, whereby race is silenced in Cuba. Afro-Cuban identity (and thus, validity, outside of state conceptions thereof) are rendered impossible in the face of hegemonic nationalist identity formation. There are limitations as well however, to Black Nationalist approaches. Carlos Moore, discussed in detail above, is not the only author to invoke the nationalist approach in an attack on Cuba. John Clytus, in Black Man in Red Cuba: The First Complete Account of a Black American’s Experiences in Cuba (1970) invokes a similar analysis, with many of the same missteps. A pro-American lens is, in the first instance, insufficient for an analysis of Cuban race-relations. This is by no means an appeal for Latin American exceptionalism, but rather a caution against US epistemological universalism.
Finally, Sawyer’s methodology is most instructive for the research design undertaken herein. Sawyer uses a mixed method (qualitative [interviews] and quantitative [surveys]) approach that serves in many ways, as a model for the research undertaken by this project. Although I have attempted to sketch and implement an anti-colonial research methodology where Sawyer’s approach is perhaps more positivistic, the relationship he proposes between his qualitative and quantitative data is one I follow here (this is described in Chapter Six Part One). By recognizing the limitations of quantitative data generally, and survey data in particular, Sawyer sees the survey research as supporting the qualitative interviews, serving as a backdrop for the themes emerging from the qualitative data. Although I draw on my interviews to a much greater degree, I take a parallel approach as far as the use of a mixed methodology.

As mentioned above, the clear and detailed explanation of his methodology is in stark contrast to the lack of such attention in de la Fuente’s *A Nation for All*. In as much as Pérez Sarduy’s and Stubb’s *Afro-Cuban Voices* is in dialogue with Carlos Moore’s *Castro the Blacks and Africa*, so too are Sawyer and de la Fuente’s books. While Moore and Pérez Sarduy enjoy an antagonistic relationship — Sawyer is largely responding to de la Fuente, doing with his work what he seemed to find lacking in the work of de la Fuente. The political project of the book however, seems to take up Moore’s position, and again answer many of the criticisms of *Castro, the Blacks and Africa*. His analysis is grounded in his empirical findings, and he has taken a highly impersonal approach to his critical analysis of Cuba. Sawyer locates the Revolution’s race-politics failures in self-serving pragmatism rather than the personal evils and deep seated racism of Castro the Caudillo. Sawyer gives us a palatable version of Moore’s critique, both more accurate and convincing. Other works which offer excellent anti-racist and/or anti-oppression criticism of Cuba but which do not extensively consider the construction and function of local racial logic (Afro-Cuban racial logic) currently or historically, include: Denise Blum’s (2008) article “Socialist consciousness raising and Cuba’s School to the Countryside Program”; D’Amato’s (2007) article “Race and Sex in Cuba”;

The focus in this chapter has been on works which lead to better understandings of race, racism and race discourse on the island either currently, or transhistorically. The four books discussed here, as well as the numerous other works which fall roughly into the terrain staked out by each, create a number of dialogues and discussions on race in Cuba to which this thesis hopes to contribute with a focus on education. This review has taken up key texts concerning race in the post-revolutionary era, and only Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs take up a political project which is in keeping with mine. The works do provide however, an initial picture of race on the island, and allow for careful reading thereafter, with detailed period analyses such as that by Ada Ferrer (*Insurgent Cuba*) and Aline Helg (*Our Rightful Share*) mentioned above. These four works provide a compass as much as a map, with which to navigate the broader and detailed existing literature and against which to contextualize the research undertaken here. My point of departure from these works is to create a work which is politically supportive of the Cuban project but which pulls no punches in its analysis of racism on the island: a work that puts Cuba’s race politics on trial rather than the Cuban revolution itself. This is based on my belief that the Cuban revolution is largely a project by and for minoritized Cubans, who best understand both the problems they face and who as well, hold the key to sustainable anti-racist and anti-colonial change on the island. Further, as mentioned above, a scarcity of data on race in Cuba exists, with a particular lack of analysis treating the educational context. Cuban voices are needed to both join and inform this conversation, and this project is a step in that direction, as far as centring as much as possible, teacher understandings of race and anti-racism on the island.
Chapter Five. Race, racelessness and anti-racism: A genealogy of race discourse in Cuba

5.0 Introduction

The idea that one forms of man, to be sure, is never totally dependent on economic relations, in other words — and this must not be forgotten — on relations existing historically or geographically among men and groups. (Fanon 1967, p. 40)

A few years ago, historians were very proud to discover that they could write not only the history of battles, of kings and institutions but also of the economy; now they are all amazed because the shrewdest among them have learned that it was also possible to write the history of feelings, behaviour and the body. Soon, they will understand that the history of the West cannot be disassociated from the way its ‘truth’ is produced and produces its effects. (Foucault 1988, p. 112)

Contemporary Cuban race discourse is the product of struggle, dialogue, resistance, domination and intellect. Racial constructions and understandings, both the official stories and their unofficial siblings, have been negotiated, fought for/over, and have for the last two centuries been in constant flux. Ada Ferrer (1999), Bronfman (2004) and others have identified and investigated the simultaneity of racism and anti-racism on the island. Indeed if there is a permanent aspect to the material and intellectual life of race and racism on the island, it may well be the permanent state of paradox which characterizes race and racism in Cuba. Dominant gender, economic and racial power has devolved as often as it has evolved, in the face of perpetual and powerful resistance, as well as sophistication and struggle on the part of non-dominant Cubans and allied dominant peoples. The notion that Cuba is both racist and anti-racist refers not to a fixed stand written into a static code or document, although the statutory life of race is relevant to race discourse on the island. The paradox is due instead to the constant discursive struggle that has been bloody at times and even lethal for some, between those fighting for racial equity and those fighting to maintain, re-entrench and/or increase dominant power.

While all discourse and ideology are perhaps the result of force, and of negotiation sometimes on the most base levels, Cuban race discourse has for most of the last 200 years been debated publically, and for most of that time people of colour have been central actors within those mainstream public discussions, representing a variety of positions. Indeed race has been the central political and
social issue of the past two centuries. On a local level, this is so because people of colour have resisted racial domination through physical, intellectual and emotional means. This is so because revolutionary anti-racist whites have struggled alongside them. In a more macro sense, this is so because racial unity has been a convenient political tool for politicians (both for local application and in various struggles against the US). This is so because production practices changed and to a limited degree undermined the need for an economy based on enslaved labourers. This is so because neighbouring Haiti underwent the first revolution led by enslaved people and set the Americas on a course of decolonization. This is so because white people were taught to hate black people. This is so because black people taught whites not to. This is so for countless reasons owing to historical, social, economic, geographic, foreign, local and political factors which separate certain stories from others. Race has been front and centre in the Cuban experiment and people of colour have been principal investigators of that study. As much as anything else, Cuba is an African story.

This history of Cuba’s people of colour by no means requires a fishing expedition wherein we must counter-read dominant texts to find wisps of the agency of the oppressed and then try our hardest to read resistance into every historical space in order to assert/speculate the role of non-dominant bodies in the production of racial tropes. Although such an undertaking would certainly deepen potential understandings of Cuban history, it is not needed to assert the central and formidable role of African peoples in the political racial project of Cuba. Cuban discourse has been formed dialogically since its inception, and while we should of course read against the dominant, the Cuban race conversation is itself the product of critical engagement with history and it has been so for 200 years.

While this study has as its chronological focus late 20th and early 21st century Cuba, an analysis of the historical trajectory of race relations and race discourse on the island is needed to understand the complex contemporary life of race and racism in Cuba, particularly because so much of the history centres the agency of people of colour and is shaped by their successes during numerous battles (in
numerous forms) for racial equality and equity. This chapter seeks to sketch the history of Cuban racial discourse — both its content and formation — in order to explain and contextualize contemporary race discourse. The republic of course, was itself predated by discourses of race and material struggles which informed Cuban identity construction throughout the 20th century. Before getting to that however, it is germane to go even further back, recognizing that race relations in Cuba, like relations in most of the Americas, has taken place on stolen land and has involved stolen people. The first section of this chapter, Stolen Land, Stolen Peoples, provides a very brief sketch of the earliest documented colonial relations on the island: the genocide of the island’s Aboriginal populations at the hands of European invaders. It then provides an overview of the production and demographic trends, including the forced migration of enslaved Africans to Cuba, leading up to the 19th century. The second section, Founding Discourses provides the introductory context needed to understand the role that race played in the anti-colonial movements which led to the establishment of the republic in 1902, as well as the development of race discourse in that era, which established the very course of Cuban race discourse on which it remains today. The third section, The Evolution of Cubanidad: Racial Discourse in Republican Cuba (1902–1959) tracks the historical trajectory of Cuban racial discourse formation with a focus on the notion of Cubanidad, from its invocation in the pre-republican era, to Martí’s use of the concept at the turn of the century, to the dawn of the Revolution in the 1950s. The fourth section, Race Discourse in Revolutionary Cuba (1959-present), traces the development of race discourse from the onset of the Revolution in 1959, to the contemporary period in which ideas of economic essentialism have been discarded by many, and where, after many years of silence and denial (through revolutionary reification of Cubanidad via ideas like Che’s New Man) race discourse is increasingly bottom up, and as always, remains fluid. Before jumping into the history however, the notion of discourse requires a little unpacking for clarity.
5.01 A note on discourse

Discourse is understood for the purposes of this work, as a body of knowledge (see Foucault 1970). This is a critical Foucaultian approach which moves away from formal and/or empirical approaches treating texts or linguistic analyses (see Harris 1952 and Mitchell 1957) to a look at what people understand, as well as the boundaries of that understanding. So rather than a focus on language, or even social interaction, discourses are read here as well-bounded areas of social knowledge (McHoul and Grace 1993, p. 31). Racial discourse here refers to the way people understand race and racism, and the way the borders of these understandings produce inclusion and exclusion of various forms. So we are looking not only at common sense among certain groups, but the ways in which common sense is made. In the Cuban context, dominant discourse has been produced by competing forces, and expressed in competing ways. Since the late 19th century, the voices of the marginalized have consistently been present (to varying degrees of course) in the process of racial meaning making. The diverse voices of Afro-Cubans have indeed formed various discourses over the past century, as I explain below, and these distinct (but not discrete) bodies of knowledge have unhappily combined with competing and often opposing discourses, and been reformed and reproduced as dominant race discourse. The analysis undertaken in this chapter thus seeks to understand the rules according to which Cuban understandings of race have been produced (see Foucault 1972). This chapter as a whole seeks to provide a sense of the socio-epistemological history in which teacher understandings of race are embedded: the historical discursive conditions which have produced contemporary sets of knowledges.

Foucault argues, “[P]ower comes from below; that is there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between ruler and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix — no such duality extending from the top down...” (1979, p. 94). While the agency of those ‘below’ is always important, and while we should be careful to never obfuscate understandings of oppression and privilege through the use of the logic of infinite and competing subjectivities, this notion is particularly
germane to the Cuban race conversation given the prominent role of Afro-Cubans in the historical and contemporary production of race discourse. It is precisely because of the dialogically constructed nature of Cuba’s racial truths that I have stayed away from the notion of ideology in this section, and have opted instead for discourse. This is by no means a rejection of the concept or relevance of ideology for understanding a given society, but rather a choice which compliments this particular research project, which focuses more on fluid and interactive bodies of knowledge than on formal structures. Where ideology might identify a top down set of necessary truths, discourse as invoked here deals instead with fluid, contested and participatory bodies of knowledge and processes of knowledge production. Were this project focusing for example on curricula, an argument could perhaps be made that focusing on the notion of ideology would be a more suitable choice. Even in this case however, the negative role class determinist understandings of race have played in Cuba, as well as the degree to which Cubans, if they are subjects at all, have produced themselves as such, point to the advantages of discourse analysis, rather than a focus on ideology, for better understanding race on the island.

5.1 Stolen land, stolen peoples

Academic sources are scarce on the island’s earliest populations. Cuba was first populated in approximately 1000 BC, by the Ciboney-Guayabo Blanco (Pérez 1995). Semi-nomadic, the Ciboney most likely emigrated from South America, and relied on fishing and gathering to survive, establishing little or no agricultural production (Osgood 1942). Arawak peoples, emigrating from South America and other islands in the region, eventually displaced, enslaved and ultimately decimated the Ciboney population. In two waves, Arawak groups called the Sub-Taínos and the Taínos, established control of the island “without resistance” from the Ciboney people (Pérez 1995, p. 16). The expansion of the second wave, the Taínos, was halted by the arrival of Europeans in 1492, and their subsequent invasion and occupation in 1494 (Rosell 1937 and Pérez 1995). The Taínos’ resistance was fierce and sustained. In the early 1500s, the conflict came to a head when the Spaniard (and future governor of Cuba) Diego
Velasquez both encountered and extinguished local resistance to the invading Europeans. The Onaway Trust, a British-based Indigenous rights group, provides the following account:

On landing [Diego Velasquez] was resisted by Taíno Indians under a chieftain, Hatuey, already a witness to Diego's atrocities elsewhere. For some time, they valiantly defended the island, skilfully making sudden attacks on the Spaniards and then retreating to the hills. Eventually, however, Spanish military power overwhelmed them. Defeated, they were subjected to barbarous tortures. (2009, ¶7)

A widespread massacre of the Taíno (and presumably remaining Ciboney peoples) was thereafter perpetrated by the Spanish. The famous Spanish Catholic priest Bartolomé de la Casa recounted in his journal the atrocities he witnessed.

A village of around 2500 was wiped out. They (the Spaniards) set upon the Indians, slashing, disembowelling and slaughtering them until their blood ran like a river. And of those Taínos they kept alive they sent to the mines, harnessing them to loads they could scarcely drag and with fiendish sport and mockery hacking off their hands and feet and mutilating them in ways that will not bear description. (Quoted in Onaway Trust 2009, ¶9)

Although scarcely beyond the ordinary within the colonial bag of tricks, the sheer barbarism of the Spanish speaks not only to the profound immorality of the Christian invaders, but also to the degree to which we can infer the Taíno were resisting colonial occupation and domination: such was the force deemed necessary by the invaders to subdue Cuba's first (or second) peoples.

According to Pérez (1995) and others, Cuba's indigenous population at the beginning of the sixteenth century was at least 100,000. Spanish dominion of the island was calamitous for the indigenous populations. Slavery, torture, forced labour, rape, murder, alienation, systemic impoverishment and other indignities against Indigenous People by the Europeans virtually arrested reproduction in indigenous communities. Suicide became rampant among the Taíno peoples. Spanish troops reported coming across Taíno settlements in which every member had committed suicide simultaneously. By 1550, the indigenous population was reduced to fewer than 3000 people, less than 3% of the population at the turn of the century (Pérez 1995, p. 27). This genocide ranks among history's
most intensive and far reaching. The Taíno People lived across much of the Caribbean and parts of continental America. Their uninvited dance with the Spanish continues however in many areas today. As Churchill (2009) and others point out, the struggle of the Tainos for territory, recovery, self-determination and recognition continues into the twenty-first century.

The task of providing a context for Cuba’s race discourse in the 21st century thus begins with a nod to the trans-epochal life of race and domination on the island. Within the scholarship that has emerged in the past 20 years on Cuba, almost none of it deals with the island’s first peoples, whose holocaust is typically confined to short introductory sections (like this). Indeed at Cuban studies conferences there is little or no mention of the historical or current role and presence of Indigenous Peoples on the island. Within Cuba, the same silence persists; although blacks, whites and Asians were included, Indigenous People were not even counted as a racial/ethnic group in the most recent (2002) national census. The discussion of race relations taken up in this work falls into a trap common to Euro-Canadian and US scholarship whereby the race terrain under study is in fact stolen land to begin with. As Churchill (1996) argues, in Canada and the US specifically, popular race relations discourse (e.g. the 1960s civil rights movements in both countries) has focused on racism against black and more recently Latino peoples, to the exclusion of the discussion of Indigenous rights and self-determination (see also Amadahy and Lawrence 2009). Indeed when at a recent conference I asked a leading Cuban race scholar about some possible sources for researching the Taíno Peoples, she responded that there was little to be found on “pre history Cuba.” Perhaps noticing the look on my face, (perhaps not) she corrected herself, and said, “sorry, Pre-Columbian peoples” with a smile. When histories begin with the euphemistic “contact” episode, or are demarcated as pre-colonial and colonial, groups like the Ciboney and Taíno peoples are assigned to the historical, and thus to the discursive, margins — along with background details like climate and topography. Although not among the learning objectives of this
study, any complete history of race on the island would address (extensively) the current and historical relations of the Ciboney and Taíno peoples with Europeans and Africans.

The scarcity of willing workers, which in many Asian and African regions was avoided through the colonization, enslavement and/or indenturement of the indigenous population, would eventually be solved in Cuba by enslaved Africans. By 1650, of Cuba’s total population of approximately 30,000, enslaved people numbered approximately 5,000 (Bergad 2007, p. 15). The first reliable population data would not be collected for another 124 years. In 1774, Cuba’s total population exceeded 170,000. Of those, 44,000 (or 26%) were enslaved (ibid). The people’s rebellion in San Domingo (present-day Haiti) of 1791–1803, as well as the production disruptions leading up to it created a greater demand for Cuban sugar cane, and by extension workers to grow and harvest it (on the Haitian revolution see James 1989). Between 1762 and 1792, land devoted to sugarcane production increased from 10,000 hectares to 150,000 hectares (Bergad 2007, p.17). This period saw a dramatic general population increase, and a corollary percentage increase in the portion of the population enslaved. By 1792, the population had grown to 270,000, with 31% or 85,000 people enslaved (ibid). The expansion of the sugar economy continued in Cuba, with an increase in the total free and enslaved populations. By 1846 the general population had grown to almost 900,000, 36% of whom were enslaved (ibid, p. 18). By the late 19th century Cuba was the world’s largest exporter of sugar, with Latin America’s most advanced railway system, and with a highly advanced industrial economy. Wealth was maldistributed in both social and geographic terms, with the majority of the population impoverished and a tiny capitalist minority heavily enriched. Due to the emergence of Western Cuba as a centre of commerce and trade, wealth was concentrated in the western and central region of the island, with the eastern areas largely impoverished — a pattern that persists, albeit to a much lesser degree, to this day. Cuba’s tremendous industrial success relied almost entirely on the vigorous and intensive trade and exploitation of enslaved African peoples.
5.2 Founding discourses

The Cuban anti-colonial and anti-racist struggles of the 18th and 19th centuries are located at the celebrated heart of contemporary Cuban race discourse. As the 19th century approached, Cuba was a powerful Spanish colony, prospering on the captivity and exploitation of enslaved workers, as well as the colonial trade relations established throughout the Spanish Empire. The rise of local elites with little need or patience for the unbalanced terms of trade applied by Spanish colonials, as well as the profound social and economic inequality on the island led to calls for resistance to Spanish colonial rule. By mid century, people of colour outnumbered whites on the island, and while the enslaved struggled for freedom, elite whites struggled to maintain control (Ferrer 1999, p. 2).

Each group watched Haiti closely, and indeed among whites, the future of Cuba lay in one of two imagined racial options: Spanish Cuba or African Cuba. Enslaved peoples had of course, rejected the terms of Cuban social relations from the beginning. In the late 1860s, the Ten Years’ War (1868–1878) broke out, marking the official beginning of the Cuban struggle for independence. Militant nationalists rose up against Spanish rule, and although unsuccessful in its quest for national liberation, the war marked (and produced) the discursive and conceptual beginning of the Cuban nation. The dream of a Cuba Libre, a free Cuba, was born. The Ten Year’s War also marked the start of Cuba’s modern race discourse. The revolutionary republican forces, during both their military struggle and in their subsequent hypothetical assertions and definitions of the new free and independent Cuba, declared the abolition of slavery. Facing mass desertions among their ranks, and in response to a budding abolition movement in Spain, the colonial government began the process of abolition (following suit in a bid for the loyalty of liberal whites, free people of colour and enslaved blacks). The concept of a free and independent Cuba has thus been linked the notion of racial equality since well before the successful realization of an independent state in 1902. The linking of nation, fraternity and racial equality persists today, having lived through early independence movements, the Spanish American War, the 20th
century Republican Period (1902–1959), through the revolutionary epoch, and well into the socialist Cuba of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Although white academics and independence fighters were central to the struggle for abolition, the most important epistemic roots of any slavery abolitionist movement are always to be found among the enslaved. In addition to an international dialogue on slavery and abolition which was gaining steam in Europe in the mid 19th century (due in part to local resistances by the enslaved peoples suffering under European colonialism around the world) the revolution in neighbouring San Domingo offered a powerful example to the enslaved and their captors about the frailty of slavery’s grip on the reins of power. Internally, African peoples, both those who were free and those enslaved by the Europeans, powerfully and consistently organized against slavery, through both active and passive forms of resistance. As far as subtle, or ground up resistance, enslaved people were engaged in the day to day rejection of the conditions of their lives through work slow-downs and stoppage, production disruption “dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, poisoning” and sabotage of tools and equipment (Childs 2006, p. 15). The most desperate and extreme form of individual ground up resistance was suicide, a practice common enough to have merited a sophisticated and standardized punishment. As Corzo (2003) notes, enslaved people who had taken their own lives were strung up in public, to be eaten by birds, insects and other creatures and thus denied the burial which many African peoples believed was needed to return their spirits to the ancestors. Though brutal and unbalanced, this management technique reflects the fact that the relationship between captor and captive was dialogical, with each working to undermine the agency of the other.

On an organizational level, enslaved people were constantly escaping and indeed once free many participated in the construction of networks to support other escaped prisoners as well as potential escapees (Corzo 2003). Scholars have documented organized resistance by enslaved people as
early as the mid 16th century (see Pérez de la Riva 1952, and Corzo 2003) when the enslaved were the island’s Indigenous Peoples, most likely Taínos. Early collaboration between escaped and free Taínos, and escaped and freed Africans produced a series of clandestine settlements. With the rise of the African population and the simultaneous genocide of the Indigenous populations, settlements of escapees (called *palenques*) were soon comprised almost entirely of Africans, and indeed by the late 1700s *palenques* were spread throughout the island, with a heavier concentration in the eastern regions (Corzo 2003).

Nearing the end of the 18th century, many settlements were small but near fully functioning economic units, self-regulating and self preserving (Sanchez Guerra, Guilarte Abreu and Dranquet Rodríguez 1986). Although clandestine by design and necessity, many of the settlements were known to government officials and were attacked (often unsuccessfully) over the course of years by government and private militia troops. The scale of, as well as the threat posed by these settlements was such that a major government agency was created in 1794 with, among its chief responsibilities, the charge of hunting fugitive escapees and their settlements. Corzo explains:

> Working from its seat in Havana through its consular representatives in the main centres in the rest of the country [the Board of Development] directed and administered the network that hunted down, captured and returned runaway slaves to their owners. In the western and central parts of the island, bands of men who were paid a fixed wage to make daily tours of the areas assigned to them were in charge of bringing back runaway slaves and destroying their settlements. (2003, p. 4)

Although the pedagogy of resistance was not one the colonial authorities were happy to have publicised, the primary value of the enslaved person was that of a commodity — rather than say, an enemy to be simply killed as had been the case with most persecuted Indigenous people. Enslaved escapees could be killed only selectively, as the paramount purpose of capture and settlement destruction was the return of the captive worker to his/her original captor. In addition to the settlements, men and women formed roaming armed bands of escapees, many of whom constructed
temporary shelter sites for others to rest and hide on their way to the larger and more permanent settlements.

Resistance by the island’s enslaved population was by no means exclusively defensive, although all efforts against slavery are indeed acts of self-defence by the enslaved. The Aponte Rebellion of 1812 is the most famous Cuban example of organized resistance to slavery by its victims. Heavily influenced by the Haitian revolution, free people of colour and enslaved blacks organized to challenge the power of the ruling elite. From January to April of 1812, insurrections broke out within enslaved populations across the island, as well as within urban neighbourhoods dominated by free people of colour. José Antonio Aponte, a freeman of colour, was identified as the rebellion’s leader, based on questionable testimony collected from other ‘suspects’ and on the discovery of what the arresting officer described as a “book of various plans and drawings, hidden within clothes in a dresser” (quoted in Childs 2006, p. 3). According to the authorities, the book contained maps, military plans, illustrations of black soldiers defeating Spanish colonial officials (including the Spanish King Carlos III), images of African kings from Abyssinia, and portraits of Haiti’s revolutionary leaders (ibid). Although the book has never been found, it is a living symbolic artefact in as far as it represents the discursive thrust of the rebellion.

Although the degree to which Aponte’s personal involvement, as well as the scope and scale of the rebellion itself, may have been exaggerated to strengthen the government’s subsequent crackdown on the liberty of Africans on the island is unclear, the immediate and transhistorical significance of the rebellion was key to race discourse on the island. In the 30 years preceding the Aponte rebellion between 300,000 and 500,000 enslaved Africans were brought to the Island (for these estimates see Childs 2006, and Bergad 2007 respectively). Childs (2006), Ferrer (1999) and others point out that this demographic change had profound effects not only on the relations of production, as it had become a racialized plantation society in just over a quarter century, but as well on race relations more generally.
Racial identification was increasingly invoked as a divisive tool, privileging some and punishing others. At the time of the insurrection, the population of enslaved and free people of colour was greater than that of the island’s white people. The rebellion, represented largely by the testimony (gathered under duress) of captured rebels and by police recollections of the famous notebook, served thereafter as a reference point for the racial tension boiling under, at and above the surface on the island. For whites the name Aponte became an idiomatic insult, invoked in literature as a comparative, “that evil woman is worse than Aponte” (See Childs 2006, p. 9). With Haiti fixed in their peripheral vision, the possibility of a black uprising in their sights whites constructed a defensive veil of justification for the power imbalances which served them so well in the decades following the rebellion. At the first available opportunity, the enslaved and their free brethren would not only demand their freedom violently, but would destabilize the nation and everything in it if given the chance. This sense may well have underpinned the reluctance of elites on the island to engage in anti-colonial struggles during the 18th and early to mid 19th centuries. Among the many European colonies in the Americas, Cuba was one of the last to struggle for independence. Childs (2006) and others have argued that this was attributable to white fear of black insurrection. Spain was the most ambitious participant in the international trade of enslaved peoples, and the local colonial authorities represented the best insurance against insurrection.

For African peoples on the island, the extreme reaction by government authorities (the brutally violent response to the revolt) took a heavy toll on both free and enslaved communities of colour. Many of those involved in the insurrection may have been surprised by the government’s presentation of the incident, and further disempowered by the government’s use of the rebellion to consolidate and mobilize anti-black sentiment to further in-trench dominant race power. The rebellion, had however (along with the myriad other forms of resistance) further cemented the dialogical nature of Cuban race discourse; its significance going forward confirmed that black people on the island would play a central role in the way race was understood. Further, the degree to which Haiti had played a role in the uprising
for both white and black Cubans was crucial. The rebellion had clearly looked to Haiti, to the notion of a black republic, to strengthen its resolve. It was even rumoured that Haitian soldiers had travelled to nearby Cuba to support the efforts of the rebellion — unfounded gossip upon which the rebels were happy to capitalise. For many whites, the neighbouring examples of racial equality and economic collapse hardened internal and external racist positions — inspiring a discursive digging in of the heels.

There was thus a rich variety of resistance by enslaved African peoples: from subtle and passive individual acts, to active internal rebellions, to escape, to formations of radical armed bands (with the goal of assisting other enslaved peoples) to temporary settlements, and to permanent settlements engaged in prolonged military struggles with the colonial authority. There was also support and resistance offered by free people of colour who, increasingly marginalized, often lent support (as demonstrated by their central role in the Aponte rebellion). Indeed, the tenser race relations became, the more free people of colour sought race based networks for support and solidarity. These were found for many in the numerous black social and professional associations (called cabildos de nación) which they formed during the late 18th and 19th centuries. Taken as a whole, the notion of a dialogue, between oppressor and oppressed becomes clearer, and indeed the rise of the abolitionist movement in the late 19th century is best understood as part of a trans-epochal struggle around race and power on the island, which indeed begins with and in part results from, resistance to slavery from the very beginning of the practice on the island. By the late 19th century, the persistent advancement of capitalism, alongside persistent destabilization of production by enslaved workers threatened the relations of production on the island.

By the time the Ten Years’ War began (and thus by the time of the republican call for abolition) in 1868, slavery and palenques were in decline. Corzo writes: “... the decline of the runaway slave settlements began with the crisis of slavery” (2003, p. 12). Resistance continued however, and rumours
of further insurrection, as well as the fantastic race-baiting which surrounded media and government
descriptions of potentially rebellious blacks, were prevalent up until at least 1864, when the *El Cobre*
rebellion was ‘discovered’ in which enslaved people were said to have organized a violent attack on
whites in pursuit of their freedom (Ferrer, 1999). Resistance is thus comprehensively woven throughout
the period. We can locate the beginning of the Cuban abolition movement with the introduction of
slavery to the island, particularly if we understand its primary actors as the Africans who suffered under
the yoke of colonial slavery and who fought on so many levels to dismantle the system by which they
were oppressed.

Although The Ten Years War represented a continuation of this historical trajectory of
resistance, it produced a new discourse of tremendous significance to race relations and national
identity on the island. The traditional contours of the back and forth struggle between oppressor and
oppressed were disrupted and the anti-racist position was linked with the aspiration of republican
independence. Within, and in response to the multiracial revolutionary forces, an anti-racist discourse
was born — imperfect but nascent.

While racism within the rebel forces persisted, black Cubans insisted on the fulfilment of the
revolutionary promises of equality, assuming positions of power throughout the revolutionary forces.
These men and women fought two battles, one against Spanish colonialism and one against the racism
of their new ‘equals’ who often expected their servitude within the rebel camp. The paradigm of Cuban
racial democracy, with its powerful rhetoric of inclusion supported by a powerful reality of exclusion,
emerged on one hand through the elite’s response to the resistance of the oppressed; and on the other,
from the resistance by free and enslaved people of colour over the centuries preceding the anti-colonial
struggles of the late 19th century. Indeed the participation of free and enslaved people of colour in the
anti-colonial struggle is an extension and continuation of the anti-racist struggles of African peoples
dating back to capture at the hands of others on the continent. These two phenomena combine in an ugly marriage of inconvenience to thereafter link racial equality to all subsequent discourses of nation and national identity. The product of this union was and is by no means a fixed idea, in either time or content, but rather an evolving dialogical struggle between racism and anti-racism, the essence of the trans-epochal discourse of race in Cuba.

The Ten Years War brought with it attempts to form its own historical teleology, and the Aponte rebellion was invoked as a political antecedent of the wars for independence. The Ten Years War was the first of three anti-colonial struggles. The second was the Little War (La Guerra Chiquita) 1879–1880, and the third was the War of Independence 1895–1898. Taken as a whole, the anti-colonial struggle is in-divorceable from the formal (rhetorical) struggle for racial equality. Beginning with a two volume treatise by Justo Zaragoza on the uprising, published in the middle of the Ten Years War, historians invoked the Aponte rebellion as part of the multiracial struggle and revolutionary past, supporting the anti-colonial struggle as a multiracial coalition working toward the formation of a new nation in keeping with these trans-epochal Cuban phenomena. Cuban history was framed to support the political project of the time. In the broadest strokes, little reframing was needed.

Aponte’s rebellion had indeed been an anti-colonial undertaking, one opposed to slavery and servitude via a rejection of empire and colonial dominance: to be sure, Aponte’s declaration read in part “At the sound of a drum and a trumpet, you will find us ready and fearless to end this empire of tyranny” (quoted in Childs 2006, p. 156). Indeed, the process of historical reconfiguration continued well into the revolutionary period. Noted historian José Luciano Franco’s extensive history of the rebellion was abridged and re-released by the government in 1977 for formal and informal pedagogical purposes. As Perez notes “the national past served as a form of moral subsidy, conferring on the process of revolution a sense of continuity” (quoted in Childs 2006, p. 11). The revolutionary vision of a raceless
nation, neither white nor black, is at the core of dominant racial discourse to this day. As Ferrer (1999) notes:

The nationalist movement gave rise to one of the most powerful ideas in Cuban history — the conception (dominant to this day) of a raceless nationality. In rebel camps and battlefields, as well as in newspapers, memoirs, essays and speeches, patriot intellectuals (white and non-white) made the bold claim that struggle against Spain had produced a new kind of intellectual collectivity... a new kind of nation in which equality was so ingrained that there existed no need to identify or speak of races... (p. 7)

This popular idea makes clear the constructed nature of race, and indeed challenges the material implications of race in racist societies. It also has the potential (much like interpretations of Barack Obama’s election to the US presidency as the dawn of the post race era) to assign a fait-accompli-status to the struggle against racism. As discussed below, the class essentialist position of the early revolutionary government (1960–1980) powerfully mobilized this interpretation to silence race-based claims on the part of black Cubans. Alongside the necessary irrelevance of race was the general acceptance of race as a series of social and political phenomena. For dominant actors on both sides of the anti-colonial struggle, race became a tool, a concept in flux, mobilized, formed and adapted to serve political aims. In the process, another powerful aspect of Cuban race discourse was established. In an effort to define the historical antecedents of an independent and free Cuba, public understandings of racial identity became a key plane of the revolutionary struggle, with the character, morality and intentions of the black man at the centre of the battle for the hearts and minds of all Cubans.

The binary of two imagined, opposing Cubas, one Spanish one African, represented an obstacle to anti-colonial forces. In the years following the Ten Years War a body of literature emerged (both fiction and non-fiction) which served to not only align Cuban history with the revolutionary vision of the Cuban future, but also to redefine Cuban racial identity. To move past racial division and the binary of black and white, blackness and black people were redefined in relationship to the Revolution and as well in relationship to white people. In terms of the relational politics of difference, race and history were
forged as political positionality. As part of a larger push for discursive redefinition in retellings of famous battles, white newspaper articles and popular fiction writers such as Manuel de la Cruz, Ramón Roa, Manuel Sanguily, the Dominican born Máximo Gómez and others created the powerful image of the deferent black Cuban: a figure loyal to the Revolution which had gifted him his freedom and to which he was determined to remain a faithful servant in perpetuity. Indeed the pro-Cuban black man had not only rejected Spain (keeper of the bonds his enslavement) but had traded anger for devotion, strife for servitude and a revolutionary epistemology for a thankful acquiescence to a Cuba in which race was neither allowed nor relevant.

This new imagined black man represented the antithesis of his former self: the angry, irrational, hateful, sexually aggressive and simple African of the European colonial imagination. These powerful tropes defined the prevailing colonial parameters of blackness. Elite white support for racial equality required a counter narrative. This silencing discourse, this veiling of the leadership and contributions of black Cubans to the anti-colonial struggle (intellectual and physical in nature) was the price of the revolutionary ticket. Cuban racelessness, indeed the popular white acceptance of revolutionary leader José Martí’s colour-blind vision required a neutered black identity, alongside the trans-epochal erasure of black agency. The role of race in the past, present and future was thus rendered fixed. With Cuban history delimiting the past of its peoples, Cuba’s present was defined by the politics of independence, and Cuba’s racial future was caged within the discursive strengths and weaknesses of a colour-blind approach. The new docile black man was in many ways the very person expected by the white revolutionaries at the start of the anti-colonial struggle. As mentioned above, racism persisted within rebel ranks, and the expectation that blacks serve whites in a gentler parallel of dominant relations, was common. The Revolution was cast as the mother to newly freed black Cubans, who came from nowhere, had no history, and were born naked via the womb of the Revolution in the doorstep of an independent
Cuba. As Ferrer and others\textsuperscript{26} note, José Martí was among the revisionist historians, castigating those whose freedom he is credited for securing (1999, p. 122).\textsuperscript{27}

The redefinition of black Cubans served as well to recast their white counterparts. It was whites after all, to whom blacks owed their freedom. If the new black Cuban was thankful, the new white Cuban was benevolent. This served to not only cleanse the white elite of the sins of slavery which the new Cuba viewed as wrong (and in which they participated vehemently right up until they didn’t) but also to differentiate the morality of pro-independence Cubans from the immorality of colonials who had not saved the people of colour and who were therefore not cleansed of the ills of slavery. The reconfiguration of history and racial identity (thereafter perpetually intertwined) was undertaken by prominent black Cubans as well. Ferrer (1999) notes:

Like their white counterpoints, writers of color — foremost among them Juan Gualberto Gómez, Rafael Serra y Montalvo, and Martín Mora Delgado — extolled the war, in general, and the black insurgent, in particular. But as in the writings of black nationalists, that insurgent, though invariably heroic, also inherently unthreatening... they constructed a black insurgent incapable jeopardizing the nascent republic. (p. 125)

The risk of a Cuban Haiti, or of overt agency along racialized lines was thereby quelled, with any deviation cast as a vote of support for colonial rule (and racism). The victory of anti-colonial forces was by no means a foregone conclusion however, so we may also understand the choice of black intellectuals supporting this picture as a highly strategic decision, one which essentially understood independence as the key mechanism for the development of racial equality — one worth the high price paid within the revisionist history of their people.

As was the case previously however, many black Cubans resisted these forms of domination. While a major aim of the discursive construction of the new passive black revolutionary was to increase

\textsuperscript{26} See the various works of Pérez and Iglesias
\textsuperscript{27} José Martí is discussed in detail in the following section.
the buy-in of whites to the independence movement, alongside the call for raceless conceptions of nation, came an increase in the number and size of black organizations, many of which were advocating that people of colour organize for their own advancement (Ferrer, 1999). In response to persistent racism in the late revolutionary/early emancipation era and in perhaps a defensive foreshadowing of freedoms not to come, black civil societies embarked upon a civil rights campaign in the 1890s targeting formal and informal discrimination against black Cubans. Many of these efforts were co-ordinated through the Directorio Central de las Sociedades de Color, founded in 1892 by famed journalist and politician Juan Gualberto Gómez. This was one of the earliest umbrella organizations of its kind, and through it emerged a widespread call and focus on better education for Afro-Cubans. Although calls for formal racial equality were widespread and popular at the time, getting a cup of coffee at many white-owned restaurants was another matter altogether.

From calls for desegregation of public space, to outlines for affirmative action, to campaigns for public awareness about racial discrimination, black Cubans (the very men and women who fought for Cuba’s independence) were by no means the passive acquiescent non-agents they had been made out to be. The civil societies often produced independent media, and the papers produced by, and targeted at, people of colour made up an important sector of the media. Resistance continued in these forms, and the dialogical nature of racial politics and identity formation continued — for black and whites — even within the dominant recasting of blacks. Racelessness, the vision of a colour-blind Cuba was widely held by Cuban blacks from various backgrounds, and indeed those involved in the race-based civil society organizations generally undertook such organization in pursuit of racelessness. While all agreed that race should be of no importance in the new free and independent Cuba, disagreement arose over whether or not the irrelevance of race was still an unfolding process requiring continued social engineering. While dominant whites tended to argue that race as a problem was solved with the new republic, intellectuals of colour argued for the need for a continuing effort and dialogue in pursuit of
racial equality (a notion supported by the existence of the civil societies of colour). Black Cubans thus played an important role in the development, implementation and understanding of the notion of Cuba as a raceless nation. In addition to being the original revolutionaries fighting for racial equality (a struggle that spanned two centuries before it had any white takers), through contestation and resistance black Cubans continually negotiated dominant meanings and applications of racelessness on the island.

It is vital to remember that this whole reconfiguration of both black and white identity, although premised on dangerously inequitable ideas, was part of the anti-colonial discourse of the time. These competing understandings were among those opposed to slavery and European colonial domination. These contestations emerged from a multiracial fighting force with upwards of 40% of its officer corps being people of colour (Ferrer 1999, p. 156). Black and white Cubans understood the anti-colonial struggles in racially distinct ways, from personal relations in early rebel camps, to visions of national racial identity in the period of republican consolidation. These differences existed as a dialogue that formed Cuba’s race discourse from that time on.

5.3 Discursive republics in transition and the birth of a nation: Republican Cuba (1898–1912)

Cubans gave birth to a new Cuba (one both real and imagined), and in turn, the new Cuba gave birth to a new Cuban (also both real and imagined). In April 1898, the US invaded Cuba, contesting Spanish rule on the island and launching the Spanish-American War. Although the Spanish would concede before year end, the US remained in Cuba until 1902, and handed back control only after Cuba (i.e. Cubans) had, to US satisfaction, proven its ability to govern itself. In the simplest terms, ‘proof’ was offered in a guaranteed preferential trade relationship going forward, along with a stabilized economy capable of benefiting neighbouring US interests. Ferrer (1999), de la Fuente (2001) and others point out however, that in addition to securing the trade interests of the Americans, Cubans were asked to
demonstrate their civilized nature for a period of three years to the on-looking US authorities. At the
dawn of the 20th century US race relations were backwards by any standard. As Cuba was celebrating an
anti-racist and anti-colonial victory by a multiracial fighting force, the US was intensifying its epistemic
and physical agendas of segregation and institutionalised racism. Many independence leaders, Ferrer
notes, were shocked at the poor treatment of black revolutionary fighters (national heroes by right) at
the hands of the US occupying forces. Anti-racism does not appear very civilized to a racist. Cuba’s
ability to appear capable of governing itself was threatened by the very foundation of its national
identity — racial equality. This downward pressure on equality served to stifle much of the momentum
achieved by the anti-racism platform near the end of the 19th century. US notions of race and racism
were by no means abstract, from immigration policy, to treatment of Cubans under occupation, to US
involvement in Cuba’s republican constitutional process, American racism had a powerful impact on the
budding nation. Ironically however, the US investment in segregation allowed for the continuation of
efforts by black Cubans to organize race-based societies and organizations.

As the elite was formed in post revolutionary Cuba, racialized notions of who and what
civilization meant (read Eurocentric cultivation and formal education) came to distinguish the white
upperclassmen of the revolutionary forces from their black and relatively uneducated brethren. This,
combined with lingering white racism against blacks, set the stage for the emergence of an overly white
ruling class which would take the reins of power at the moment the US deemed them fit. Once again,
blacks were strategically disempowered. And once again, the situation was complicated in as far as that
disempowerment was invoked to expel a racist foreign power, which like the Spanish, had only
oppression to offer Cubans blacks.

After what were thus extensive racial, cultural and political negotiations under the US
occupation, a post-colonial, independent republic of Cuba was proclaimed in 1902, under the presidency
of Tomás Estrada Palma. Despite the upward pressure on racism during the US occupation, black, white
and Mestizo soldiers had alike fought the wars of independence and the notion of a republic for, of and by all was too powerfully centred within the anti-colonial rhetoric to allow a US style of overt formal racism to gain a footing. As mentioned above, poet, journalist and revolutionary military leader José Martí (1853–1895), as well as some Afro-Cuban revolutionary leaders, linked national independence with a limited form of racial equality and this was evident in successive constitutional frameworks addressing racial equality (Martí 1977). De la Fuente writes:

The first constitution of Cuba Libre (1869) had stipulated that all the inhabitants of the Republic were free and equal, but it was not until 1871, when the last ordinance approved by the revolutionary authorities concerning freedmen was annulled, that abolition and equality became dominant themes in nationalist rhetoric. (2001, p. 26)

Leading up to independence, race had taken on a new and salient significance in Cuba (see Schidt-Nowara 1995, and Ferrer 1991). The independent republic’s first constitution guaranteed that all Cubans were equal before the law. The republic extended universal male suffrage throughout the island. Due to the limitations of the revolutionary racial vision however, as well as subsequent colonial interference from the US, those of the ‘darker classes’ had in many ways fought a war to liberate their own oppressors, creating a world which valued them little more than that which had existed previously (see Benjamin 1997). Helg writes:

Eager to bring about change and to prove their nationalism, Afro-Cubans had joined the Liberation Army en masse. Yet with the advent of the republic, they found that the old socio-economic structures were not so easy to transform. Moreover, they discovered the stereotypes of inferiority attached to them by the Spaniards had not been erased by their role in the war. (1991, p. 102)

Republican Cuba was a white supremacist place. Efforts among Afro-Cubans to organize and advocate for equality (politically, socially, etc.) were, under the republican government, discouraged and in many cases outlawed (de la Fuente 2001). As noted above, these organizations, or societies of colour, predated the Revolution and were a key source of strength and solidarity for many black folks on the island. While the Spanish no longer governed in title, a racist Eurocentric hierarchy persisted in public and private life. Afro-Cubans were denied many of the rights and privileges enjoyed by their white
sisters and brothers, while Euro-Christian values dominated the newly ‘liberated’ Cuba. In Article 26 of the new constitution for example, the state set out its perhaps well-intentioned but incomplete freedom of religion provision stating “All religions may be freely practiced, as well as the exercise of all sects, with no other limitation than respect of Christian morals and public order” (quoted in Bronfman 2004, p. 3). People were indeed free to practice their chosen religion, as long as they so chose in keeping with, or with respect for, Christian principles. The consequences of this Christian privilege were racialized in the Cuban context. The only non-Christian practice in Cuba were those of African and Indigenous Peoples, whose faith and ethos were, by virtue of this deviance, criminalized in Cuban law.

According to Castellanos and Castellanos (1987) Afro-Cubans originated from five geographic areas on the continent: the Northwestern sub-Sahara, Upper Guinea, Bight of Biafra, Lower Guinea, and Mozambique — a total area far larger than North America. This diverse cross-section of the African Diaspora on the island had not only retained indigenous cultural and religious practices, but had developed a variety of localised Afro-Cuban forms of spiritual and cultural expression and belief. These included regla ocha (Yoruba-Cuban), reglas de congo (Bantu-Cuban), as well as “regla arara and regla abakuá (male secret societies, sometimes called ñáñigos by Cuban ethnographers and law enforcement officials)” (Bronfman 2004, p. 20). Cuba’s Christian secularism had specific implications for cultural and racial inclusion and exclusion. The role of spiritual practice in linking one’s present to one’s past and future is often vital for cultural survival, particularly in cases of forced migration and enslavement. The validity of African history was thus challenged via religious regulation, and the discursive parameters around acceptable versus acceptable Cuban history were further and more finely tuned.

An early investment in formal post-secondary education followed a European universalist pursuit of knowledge production, legitimization and dissemination. On the ground, the sustained

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28 Although largely eradicated in Cuba by the socialist government of the 1960s and 1970s, this form of Christian privilege, couched in a pseudo-secular guise is indeed common today across Europe and North America, particularly in public educational contexts (see Blumenfeld 2006, Goldstien 2000 and Zine 2001).
impoverishment of Afro-Cubans led to lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality rates and higher rates of criminality, as well as racist dominant interpretations of these phenomena. Read with a survival-of-the-fittest racist lens, these statistics were proof not of structural inequality, but of biological inferiority. Black people, went the racist logic, had been given a fair chance and inequality thereafter was attributable to cultural and/or individual shortcomings of blacks themselves. The development of academic understandings of social relations as dominant truth, was accompanied by the development of republican jurisprudence on the island, which “offered new modalities in which to shape racial theories and practices” (Bronfman 2004, p. 33). ‘Objective’ and ‘fair’ policing and judicial systems would privilege and punish according to ‘neutral’ conceptions of public good, normalcy, morality and behaviour. Social problems were thus surveyed through the dual lens of academic social sciences and law enforcement. This resulted in a myth of meritocracy, emerging from the confluence of social science, jurisprudence and transhistorical racism, which combined to challenge Cuba’s potential as a racial democracy by all and for all. Indeed, this assessment of individual behaviour delinked social conditions from social relations, resulting in the pathologization of Afro-Cubans via cultural criminalization and structural marginalization. This provides a powerful parallel of contemporary race discourse in Cuba, addressed at the end of this chapter. This type of thinking, alongside selective racist immigration policies served as part of a discursive whitening of the nation.

During the earliest years of the independent republic, Cuba’s elite strived to define Cuba as white. The discursive power of the elite stemmed from the precarious results of the US occupation. Although the US provided the military and political might needed for an expeditious expulsion of the Spanish, this had not translated into a rejection of local elites, or of local anti-independence landowners, who were treated very well by US forces (Ferrer 1999). As far as racial and economic politics, the US had more in common with local elites than with the celebrated heroes of independence. The American quarrel had been with the Spanish. In observation of Monroe Doctrine politics, the US had
sought to displace the European power and re-organize Cuba to suit its own political and economic agenda. Although it is impossible to know what would have occurred had the US not joined the anti-colonial struggle, it is certain that victorious supporters of independence, and particularly the mixed race fighting force of the late 1800s, would not have preserved the power of the elite to the degree to which US occupation ensured. In the early republic, the colonial racism of the traditional aristocrats thus blended with conservative sentiments among many independence supporters to provide a substantial challenge to the anti-colonial notion of a nation for and by all.

The various negotiations which made up racial discourse during the first half of the 20th century were unique on an international scale. While anthropometric analyses of race and race relations were underway, and were indeed central to popular and scientific understandings of race in North America and Europe, Cuban social scientists mobilized rejections of such analyses as part of the anti-colonial struggle for Cuban independence — this despite the newly consolidated racism on the part of Cuban elites. As Bronfman argues, “neither racial transcendence nor the science of inequality enjoyed hegemony in the early republic” (2004, p. 10). The revolutionary promise and premise of a nation for, by and of all, alongside universal male suffrage provided a counter balance to overt racism.

Although the academy and the process of legitimizing academic knowledge followed colonial patterns in the early twentieth century, Bronfman points out that even this form of control was subverted by the anti-colonial and anti-racist sentiment of many of the island’s people. She writes: “Social science played a role in as much as it produced (and consumed) knowledge and social categories. Yet it could not maintain complete control of the knowledge it produced” (2004, p. 6). Afro-Cubans and white allies were ceaseless in their resistant attempts to create formal and informal racial equality. These efforts were international in nature, with Martí and others based abroad in North America and Europe. In addition to active and well-organized formal political participation, black Cubans continued the formation and development of societies of colour which were organized in many ways to provide
otherwise unavailable opportunities for blacks (such as networking, solidarity concerning issues facing black people, professional associations, professional advancement programs, etc) which existed by default for whites. Bronfman continues:

Numerous intellectuals of color — artists, journalists, political activists — explicitly engaged, contested and redefined theories and categories that purported to define and describe them. These critical dialogues with particular understandings shaped the social and political aspirations of many black and Mulatto intellectuals. (ibid)

It follows that in addition to being shaped by these dialogues, these groups shaped these dialogues as well. This in turn was resisted by whites, as it was a threat to the self-image that white Cubans had manufactured of themselves, and because it was a breach of the racelessness script prescribed by the dominant discourse of the day. A debate emerged among black Cubans, as well, wherein many argued for an integrationist trajectory and felt racial equality was best achieved through vigorous black participation in the mainstream parties. Others felt that autonomous organization at both local and national levels was needed to best address racial inequality. In 1908, this approach culminated in the formation of what would be the Partido Independiente de Color (PIC), an all black political party aimed at improving the lives of Afro-Cubans on the island through political representation and struggle. Black societies and black political parties were, for many, a more direct route and by all means fell within the task of creating a nation for and by all.29

The guarantee of universal suffrage in the republican constitution, a measure ensured by the anti-colonial rhetoric of a nation for all and of all, meant that no matter what the approach taken as far as formal mobilization, Afro-Cubans were central to the politics of the early republic. In 1907, 32% of voters were non-white (de la Fuente 2001, p. 58). Despite the powerful racism of the times, politicians were thus beholden (at least around election time) to a diverse public. This had demographic implications for government representatives as well, among whom Afro-Cubans numbered over 6% in

29 These two approaches have parallels in a number of liberal contexts, both currently and historically. In the US for example, the positions attributed to Martin Luther King Jr, vs. those attributed to Malcolm X come to mind, while in Canada, popular debates within Toronto’s black communities with regard to Africentric schooling are pertinent.
1906, and over 22% in 1908 (de la Fuente 2001, p. 64). Afro-Cubans used this, as well as a variety of informal organizational tools to challenge racism on the island. De la Fuente (2001) and Bronfman (2004) note that a 1906 uprising which brought the US back for a brief re-occupation and led to the 1908 elections, was precipitated largely by Afro-Cuban veterans dissatisfied with the government of the time. The rise of race-based organizations was thus linked to the destabilization of Cuban independence. By 1910, Afro-Cuban leaders had requested US recognition of the PIC. For those invested with and in the dual trope of white fear and Cuban racial (raceless) democracy, such attempts by black leaders fed the notion of an African Cuba at the same time as they threatened Cuban autonomy in the face of potential further US intervention — clearly the Cubans can’t control their race problem! Although race-relations during the first decade of republican Cuba were largely peaceful, this changed in 1912 when the velvet glove came off of the discursive iron fist, and over 4000 Afro-Cubans were massacred in what is known as the ‘Guerra Doce’. In order to understand the discursive context of the violence however, it is germane to turn briefly to the construction of Cuban identity in relationship to racial discourse. A brief look at the notion of Cubanidad, which encapsulates the meaning of Cubanness (both on personal and national levels) sheds light on the way nation, race and individual were understood in the republican era, via a teleological invocation of the anti-colonial past.

5.31 See no, hear no, speak no: Cubanidad, silence and denial

There can be no racial animosity because there are no races. (José Martí 1977, p. 93)

No political change occurs in Cuba without a corresponding discussion of race. In the lead up to independence in the late 19th century, race took on new significance for the ruling and working classes of Cuba, due to multiple re-framings of Cuban racial identity as part of the struggle for independence. Following suit, the Revolution emphasized the liberation of Afro-Cubans as a key pillar of the revolutionary platform. While no homogenous or unanimous understanding of race or racism exists among Cuban peoples, official discourse developed during the early republican period with a similar
teleological narrative as it had during the anti-colonial wars of the late 19th century. Cuban racial identity was born with its own history (as all racial constructions are) which dated back to the revolutionary ideals of racelessness. This position on race is perhaps the most enduring of the past century. Martí’s Cuban man, as Che’s would be sixty years later, was immaculately conceived — a wise elder at birth, older than the new nation with his lifeblood the very essence of the nation, neither black nor white, and indeed greater than either. Raceless identity was thus understood as superior to raced identity. It is clear though, that being white with no race was a great deal easier than being black with no race. This new Cuban man was the new Cuba — an ideal summed up in Cubanidad: the essence of what it means to be Cuban, and the guiding principle organizing official understandings of race. This raceless conception was needed to marginalize the contradictions aroused by pervasive racism which people of colour and the associations powerfully pointed out and resisted. The PIC was not only a potential threat to white government power, it was a threat to the narrative and thus the logic of being Cuban for some white Cubans.

5.32 Saco’s Cubanidad

Cubanidad originated in the work and philosophy of José Antonio Saco, in the mid 19th century. Saco, a ruling class academic, sought to define Cuba and Cubans as distinct from other populations and societies, particularly those of the US and to a lesser degree, Europe. Cubanidad served as a form of nativist ideological defence against cultural change from abroad. Saco’s primary concern was that Cuba and its culture not be subsumed by colonial (Spanish/European and US) culture and politics. He writes:

We must never forget that the Anglo-Saxon race differs greatly from our own in its origins, language, religion and in its manners and customs; and that since it knows itself to be capable of overwhelming the Cuban population by sheer force of numbers, it must aspire to taking over the political direction of the affairs of Cuba. (Quoted in Opatrný, 1994, p. 49)

Saco’s Cubanidad was a natural rallying cry for the independence movement, which sought to define Cuba on its own (anti-colonial) terms. While Saco’s philosophy represented a break from dominant
relations externally, it served to consolidate racial power internally. Saco’s conception of the Cuban man was white or Creole, and ruling class. Although Cubanidad was meant to depart from European and US cultural tropes, it did not abandon the Eurocentric values of racial hierarchies — whiteness remained at the top of the food chain. Afro-Cuban identity was to be subsumed and assimilated under Cubanidad; ironically, this was the very threat Saco felt Cuban identity faced at the hands of Europe and the US. Despite this overt failure to address the concerns (and existence) of Afro Cubans, Saco’s Cubanidad became a bedrock for Cuban cultural identity formation. Opatrný writes: “Although Saco himself excluded the Negro population from this [Cubanidad] his conception became the foundation that later generations built upon when considering the question of origins and the existence of the Cuban nation” (1994, p. 39). Rarely can the creation of a founding myth be so clearly pinpointed in a nation’s history. This early Cuban ideology and idea is now an a priori portion of what it means to be Cuban, and of what “Cuban” means. Although Cubanidad would evolve through the work of José Martí and later Ernesto “Che” Guevara and other revolutionaries, this early racism is the ideological great grandmother of Cuba’s present day philosophy of race relations.

5.33 Martí’s Cubanidad

If there is an undisputed hero of Cuban history, it is José Martí. Born in Havana in 1853, Martí is the father of Cuban independence. His father was a low-ranking Spanish official and his mother worked in the home. A visit to his natal residence in downtown Havana reveals the relatively humble beginnings of the future leader. Martí was a child of radical times, and it had been his teacher and mentor, Rafael Maria de Endive who had first taught Martí to link the emancipation of enslaved peoples, with Cuban independence from Spain (Pérez 2003, p. 23). Slavery did not end until Martí was 33 years old. His conceptual development of Cubanidad has defined, almost entirely, Cuba’s official position on race since 1902. Like Saco before him, Martí was a staunch nationalist. Unlike Saco however, he was aware of the dangers of any nationalist identity formation that excluded Afro-Cubans. De la Fuente writes: “Martí and
other nationalist leaders understood well that unity was a precondition to launch a successful new war for independence. Unity, however, would not be achieved if race continued to separate Cubans” (2001, p. 27). The Spanish meanwhile, had successfully mobilized white fears of black insurrection. Indeed, after the Spanish were driven out, many white Cubans welcomed the Americans as a defence against a possible black uprising (Helg, 1991, pp. 101–103). “The challenge then” de la Fuente continues, “was to create a new notion of Cubanness that conciliated racial diversity with white fears” (2001, p. 27). Martí argued for a Cuba in which race did not matter, a Cuba in which people were more than black or white, and in which colour was of no value, and worthy of no mention or notice.

When people of a dominant race try not to see race however, it is often only the politics of their own colour that they make invisible. Martí looked to Cuba’s recent history (specifically the Ten Years War against the Spanish 1868–1878), to advance his colour-blind strategy. He writes: “A man is more than white, black or Mulatto. A Cuban is more than Mulatto, black or white. Dying for Cuba on the battle field, the souls of other negroes and white men have risen together” (1977, p. 313). Cubans of all races had indeed fought and died for a new Cuba, and this was proof of the Cuban ability to move forward together, regardless of racial differences. Just as activists and writers had mobilized a teleological foundation for the Ten Years War, Martí marshalled the Ten Years War itself as a compass with which to navigate racial discourse in what would be a newly independent Cuba. Martí’s Cubanidad invoked the notion of one people, descended from Spanish and African blood, united under the Cuban banner. Many in Cuba and elsewhere feel that Martí’s vision created a century of harmony — a unique achievement in the 20th century. Cuban academic Herbert Pérez waxes sentimental about the achievements and significance of Martí’s work and ideas:

Martí had devoted his entire life with all the force of his mind and actions to build the fraternal republic, ‘with all, and for the good of all’ where a national identity would supersede colour. This was Martí’s legacy. His ideas survived his death and became a rallying point for all progressive political action in the last one hundred years. What has been achieved in that time of creating a colorless society we owe, in a very special way, to him... (2003, p. 31)
Cuba of course, has never been a colourless society. As Godfried explains, the canonization of what Martí is taken to be and represent, confers a political perfection on the man, he writes:

The official discourse uses a form and style which tends to mystify and extrapolate him and his ideas... Many authors rush to declare the impeccability of José Martí on issues related to racism. They *a priori* deny that he was in any sense contaminated by racism. (Godfried 2004, ¶ 1–2)

This of course is unlikely for anyone and near impossible for a white man of his time and place. The drive to a colourless or colour-blind society comes with risks along the way. Because race has always been a tool for power and punishment in Cuba, race has always mattered in Cuba. The will to make race irrelevant cannot be expressed through an insistence that it has no relevance. Saying that children should never hurt themselves makes them no safer or accidents any fewer. I am not concerned with Martí’s racial intentions. His ideas were powerful in his time, and were uncommon among his white peers. Racelessness and colour-blindness are seductive discourses — they taste good — especially to racially privileged palates. As I hope the previous section demonstrates, Cuba’s century of racelessness has had an awful lot to do with race and racism. Under consecutive governments during the First Republican period (1902–1958) Martí’s ideological flag was raised to silence concerns voiced by Afro-Cubans facing racism. He writes: “The Negro who proclaims his racial character...” is as culpable as the white racist for the existence of racism, and indeed the “negro racist and white racist must share the blame” (1977, p. 312–313). It is difficult to address racism when the very mention of race is sacrosanct.

Although racial divisions hold no natural scientific merit, the socio-material consequences of race are clear, demonstrable and relevant. An official doctrine of racelessness thus worked to confer invisibility not on race per se, but on racism in Cuba. Colour-blindness comes with colour-deafness, and colour-muteness, as people who cannot see race may also not hear or speak it. We now can return to The Partido Independiente de Color, which, by virtue of its very existence, breached the normative code
that was the discourse of racelessness. The strategic power, privilege and punishment extended by the strategic invocation of racelessness were most powerfully demonstrated in the national response to PIC.

5.34 The PIC and the Massacre of 1912

*History teaches us clearly that the battle against colonialism does not run straight away along the lines of nationalism. For a very long time the native devotes his energies to ending certain definite abuses... It so happens that the unpreparedness of the educated classes, the lack of practical links between them and the mass of the people, their laziness, and, let it be said, their cowardice at the decisive moment of the struggle will give rise to tragic mishaps.* (Fanon 1963, p. 148)

While Fanon’s famous critique in his chapter entitled “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness” (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 1963) took aim at the post-colonial states of the mid twentieth century, Cuba would by that time have heeded his warnings and Fanon would be a discursive anchor for many Cuban revolutionaries. Fanon’s critique of bourgeois domination and dictatorship were understood through the experiences of the early republican years, wherein national identity (via Cubanidad and racelessness) was mobilized by the dominant to oppress Afro-Cubans. As described above, this happened in myriad forms and was always met with resistance. The most infamous of Cuban racial incidences however, provides a highly informative look at the discursive power of official racelessness.

Afro-Cubans formed the Partido Independiente de Color (PIC) in 1908, in the easterly area of Oriente. Although it was a black party, its aims were national and cross race in nature, including a call for universal public education at all levels and agrarian reform. Other demands of the PIC included jury trials, abolition of the death penalty, fully integrated military recruitment, and a government commission to settle disputes between workers and management (Bronfman 2004, p. 76). Among its ranks the PIC counted veterans, politicians and individuals from throughout the Afro-Cuban community. It was formed as a political organization to address (through formal political representation) the issues facing Afro-Cubans in the new republic. Helg describes the race relations of the times: “In the early 1900s, Cuban society was indeed divided along racial and social lines, with whites having better
positions in all sectors than blacks... Some jobs were overwhelmingly reserved for whites, others for blacks and Mestizos” (1991, p. 104). Segregation was not limited to employment. Helg continues:

Public education was integrated, but private schools generally did not accept dark skinned students, thus limiting blacks’ and Mestizos’ access to the university... Entertainment was segregated, some restaurants would not serve Afro-Cuban customers, and many organizations were restricted to whites only. (ibid, p. 104)

PIC members felt stronger political representation was crucial to solving these problems. From its inception, the PIC came under fire for addressing race as a salient issue in Cuban public and private life. Whites, and many liberal Afro-Cubans who were invested in Martí’s raceless creed, saw the PIC as harmful, rather than helpful.

To this day, in Cuba and elsewhere, those who draw attention to racism are often the first to be labelled as racist. Although segregation existed in almost all areas of life, the idea of a black party that indirectly called white racism into question was too much for Cuba’s white elite. By 1910, the party was officially criminalized through a government act known as the Morúa Law. The massacre occurred when in May of 1912 the PIC openly protested the law, and the state answered with brutal repression. The incident was dubbed the ‘Guerra Doce.’ The discursive moral authority of the government came as a result of the sins of the PIC. De la Fuente writes, “The PIC and its leaders were labelled ‘racist’ — that is, a group that placed ‘race’ above national identity” (2001, p. 73). The Liberal government at the time saw the PIC as a threat to its political power, as the PIC had limited allegiances and connections to the Conservatives (who were the Liberals’ only viable rival). Under the discursive guise of a colour-blind racial democracy, the liberal government responded to protests with widespread repression, resulting in the murder of over 4000 people in eastern regions of the island. The PIC was cast as racist, and racialized violence against Afro-Cubans across the island was justified as a defensive measure meant to safeguard against racialized social relations on the island.

Although many Afro-Cubans had been against the PIC, as well as its protests of the Morúa law, the vehemence of the response both revealed and rekindled widespread and indiscriminate bias against
black Cubans across the island. The power of colour blind discourse cannot be overlooked in this historical moment, or indeed thereafter. As described above, official treatments of race were largely subsumed by the revolutionary struggle for independence, as well as during the US occupation, wherein Cuba was racially tested by the occupying Americans. Invoked originally by Martí as a strategic and constituent element of Cubanidad, racelessness was at once a progressive idea informed by the multiracial independence efforts of the late 19th century and at the same time a tool used to declare racism solved. Despite the comparatively progressive nature of the Cuban project at the turn of the century (particularly when we consider US Jim Crow measures of roughly the same time period) the existence of the PIC is testament to the insufficiency of the raceless approach, in both material and non-material terms.

The racist brutality of white Cubans provides further proof that racelessness, in addition to being insufficient, was a myth; one quickly abandoned at the first sign of a threat to white power. Ironically however, it was the discursive tool used to justify the race-based violence. Further, the terms of racelessness (as with the terms of integration in contemporary Canada and the US) were racially differentiated. Whites already had white political parties, white institutions and white spaces, and thus had no need for explicitly race based organizing. The notion that Cuban identity would trump white and black racial locations thus had different meanings for those who were asked to be more than their race. While for extreme white racists the racial equality implied by racelessness was certainly an affront to their sense of racial justice, racelessness would not have required much of moderate whites, or for whites who placed Cuban independence above racial ideology. For these people, racelessness was far less of a sacrifice than it was for Afro-Cubans. As mentioned above, the construction of racelessness was founded teleologically on the deference of blacks to Cuban independence, and therefore to liberal

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30 Paradoxically, the response to the PIC was itself an example of race based organizing; an example which demonstrates both the potential danger of race-based organizing and the comparative success of Afro-Cubans at building race based coalitions and movements which were in no way racist and which in fact represented, in most cases, a commitment to an eventual raceless social reality.
whites. The raceless black man was indebted to the raceless white man. Racelessness in Cuba was thus not an entirely embedded or unconscious ideal or common sense in this epoch, but rather an epistemological device summoned to serve specific racial and political goals: both for better (as a tool to counter colonial notions of inherent racial difference) and for worse (as in the justification for anti-PIC sentiment and mobilization, in support of the broader maintenance of the Cuban racial hierarchy).

Afro-Cubans had again learned the consequences of piercing Cuba’s deafening silence on race. The immense racism among whites, many of whom took up arms and hunted their black countrymen in support of their raceless nation(hood), followed familiar patterns of fear and blame: the blacks were once again aiming to take over, violently. The spectre of an African Cuba was raised again and vigilante justice was a common outlet for venting these fears. Xenophobic violence and outcry are popular terrains for racial and racist logic: the Jews in Germany were taking over, the Muslims in Europe are invading, and indeed the African Americans in New Orleans were ‘looting’ during hurricane Katrina. As in these cases, the 1912 episode led to an increase in racial violence against non-whites, specifically for the years immediately following 1912. Racelessness was the most important discursive tool used by Cuban whites to oppress Cuban blacks. Martí’s Cubanidad, for the first half of the 20th century, was invoked by successive governments to continually produce, maintain and reproduce racial power and privilege — placing both the cause and effect of racism at the feet of those victimised by it. For the 12 years following (1913–1925), the revolutionary goals of integration, brotherhood and equality were in decline. Racial exclusion of Afro-Cubans in both public and private spaces increased, while overall socio-economic conditions worsened. During the mid 1910s, conflicts frequently erupted when white store keepers refused service to black customers, attempting as de la Fuente notes, to formalize a previously informal practice of segregation, while during the same period violence erupted in various cities when Afro-Cubans were accused of impinging on white only space in public areas such as parks (2001, p.79). In
traditional fashion however, Afro-Cubans continued their struggle for equality, and for the fulfillment of the Cuban promise of racial democracy.

Within five years of the massacre, a number of new societies of colour had formed, and many old groups had reformed. Among the largest were the Club Atenas, formed in 1917, as well as the Unión Fraternal founded originally in 1890 (Bronfman 2004, p. 89). Among the new and re-emerging societies, there was an increased focus on education, and on the professionalization of black communities. Although inequitable educational access meant the focus on learning and training was needed within Afro-Cuban communities, another motivation persisted. Afro-Cubans were again in a process of redefinition, this time as civil minded — and indeed civilized — citizens, nothing like the black man of the white imagination and nothing like the divisive militant who once organized against the discursive order of the nation. Where once deviant religious oddities marked blackness, professionalism and capability, in the most dominant sense, now stood in. This redefinition came from within the Afro-Cuban community and it was widely understood as a strategy for upliftment. This was resistance, as usual, in a dialogical fashion, sacrificing while surviving, performing while struggling for racial equality and a truly free Cuba. These struggles produced debate among Afro-Cubans as well, particularly where religion was concerned. The Spanish had not failed to impart Christianity widely and deeply to Cubans of all colours. Victimized by the dual pronged colonial notions of Christianity and civilization, many Afro-Cubans frowned upon African religion and customs, and were quick in their desire to disprove the internalised sense of barbarism with which they characterized Afro-Cuban and African histories and customs (Bronfman 2004).

A diversity of opinions on these matters permeated all sectors of the Afro-Cuban population. Indeed out of the newly formed and re-emerging associations, radical and unequivocal anti-racist criticism of racial inequality emerged as well. Members of the Club Atenas released a manifesto in 1919, which sought a counter-discourse to that which cast blackness as savage and other, instead identifying
white violence against blacks as the true barbarism of the day. Bronfman writes: “The manifesto articulated a complex notion of identity affirming the link to people of African descent, but at the same time refusing dominant categorizations that criminalized and denigrated them” (2004, p. 103). The document brought into question the notion of heterogeneous categorizations of Afro and non-Afro-Cubans, and yet spoke to systems of racial oppression which had common effect on non-whites. The Club Atenas declaration also turned away from the conciliatory approach taken by the PIC, and did not support the integrationist trajectory as guaranteed by the goodwill of Cuban whites. Bronfman continues: “It pulled apart more radically than before the association of whiteness with civilization, tying barbarism to whites through lynching while affirming the existence of the civilized black” (ibid, p. 103–4). This discursive resistance, while by no means a unanimously accepted proposition, ruptured the possibility for hegemonic binaries of good and evil, white and black relations, and preserved the dialogical pursuit of racial equality through discourse.

The rise of US backed General Gerardo Machado in 1925 marked a new era of institutional gains for Afro-Cubans. Despite the despotic nature of his rule, Afro-Cubans reached unprecedented numbers within local and national legislatures. De la Fuente writes: “Blacks remained heavily underrepresented in power structures, but they had regained political visibility in the national government” (2001, p. 92). Machado’s time was also marked by massive investments in the sciences, and this brought with it further attempts at scientific explanations of race, race relations and racial inequality. Cuban scientists, and the widespread popularity among them in both positive and negative eugenics, made Cuba a leader in the field, and indeed a number of significant conferences were held in Cuba on the topic, including The First Pan-American Conference on Eugenics and Homiculture, the Sixth Pan-American Conference on Hygiene, and the Fourth International Conference on Eugenics. The prevailing logic of the evolving ‘science’ of eugenics argued not only for a distinction between inferior and superior races, but against the mixing of the two. These ideas had a hard time taking root in Cuba, a
nation characterized and often defined by racial mixing. Bronfman points out however that by the early 1930s, Cuban immigration policy had been racially revamped with eugenic concerns in mind, and immigration from neighbouring Caribbean (read black) countries was restricted (2004, p. 124). Racial mixing was critiqued from another angle as well. Many Afro-Cuban intellectuals, including anti-racist author and activist Gustavo Urrutia, and famed poet Nicolás Guillén, rejected the notion of mestizaje, the celebrated racial mixing central to Cuban identity and the Cuban narrative of racial democracy, as harmful to the progress of Afro-Cubans. Discourses of mixing were for them, part of a whitening process that brought with it an othering of Afro-Cuban culture and history — an internal exoticization whereby a white Cuban centre/norm was defined by a non-white periphery (Bronfman 2004). Blackness, in relationship to the national project thus emerged from a variety of black voices, and worked in dialogue with dominant perspectives to contribute and affect dominant racial discourse.

As a corollary to the slow rise of racist science, Machado, while cracking down on workers across the island, had promoted many Afro-Cubans to office, and had offered material and discursive support to a number of prominent societies of colour. Again, within Cuban race discourse, racism and anti-racism persisted at the same time and place. As the societies gained power, activism increased; activism which was increasingly needed to challenge racist scientific understandings being produced with the same federal funding which supported the societies of colour. While more and more professionals found their concerns represented by the societies, (for example Afro-Cuban lawyers and doctors could challenge inferior wages compared to those received by their white peers) the working class under Machado was increasingly de-racialized as the number of poor whites increased.

The Great Depression expedited the fall of the Machado government, and as conditions worsened for all of Cuba’s poor, the negative effects were disproportionately felt by Afro-Cubans. A series of strikes, revolts, and protests by the public and the military forced Machado from office in 1933. In the next seven years, Cuba had nine presidents, and was ruled in large part by the military forces of
Fulgencio Batista, who himself assumed the office from 1940–1944, and then again from 1952–1959. From 1933–1939, the Cuban government did little to stem private or public racism and segregation, and Afro-Cubans found themselves continually excluded from a freedom they had helped secure for the island. Again however, due to universal suffrage as well as the continued resistance and organization of Afro-Cubans, race would take centre stage in the constitutional reforms of the 1939–1940 period.

Political, social and economic instability during the 1930s led to calls for the re-drafting of the constitution in 1940. Using various societies, associations and the press, Afro-Cubans organized to play a role and have their concerns and voices heard during the drafting of the new document. Publications such as *Adelante*, an Afro-Cuban monthly founded in 1935, ran regular columns by Cuban anti-racist activists, as well as by writers such as WEB Du Bois and Paul Robeson. This active attempt at discourse making was central to the ways in which people understood the racialized marginalization of Afro-Cubans. The societies also played a role in this process, by attempting to redefine black identity in contrast to the racist tropes which juxtaposed blackness and civilization, through the study of, and dissemination of information regarding, Afro-Cubans. The Sociedad de Estudio Afro-Cubanos worked to establish “diverse definitions” of the Afro-Cuban people, in response to racist pigeon-holing (Bronfman 2004, p. 168). By the late 1930s Afro-Cubans had established the Committee for the Defense of Blacks, the National Federation of Societies of Cubans of the Race of Color, and other organizations which aimed to fight racial inequality and advance the interest of all Cubans. The success of these myriad efforts is best represented in their formal and informal contributions to the constitutional process which culminated in a new measure “declaring illegal and punishable all discrimination based on race, color, sex and religion” (Bronfman 2004, p. 162). This was a markedly different discursive approach than that taken by article 11 of the 1901 constitution, which simply asserted the presence and a priori nature of racial equality.
The new measure breached the racial democracy contract in so far as it pointed to the existence of inequality and the presence of those who would practice it. A colour-blind nation would need no such punitive law addressing racism and discrimination. This gain on paper however, did not correspond to progress on the ground. The efficacy of political inclusion and representation in the constitution was to be measured not by new words, but by change on the ground which never materialized. The 1940 constitution represented perhaps the most progressive racial legislation in Cuban history to date, and yet the document would govern Cuba during one of its most racially divided epochs. This gap between official race politics and the quotidian life of race for both black and white Cubans persisted throughout the first half of the 20th century. Dominant discourse was in many ways an uncomfortable compromise between racism and anti-racism, thus explaining the sustained and fixed simultaneity of the two throughout Cuba’s early history as a nation. Pulled from each side, dominant discourse has always operated along a shifting axiological base, which satisfied neither the anti-colonial and anti-racist dreams of Afro-Cubans and progressive whites, nor the colonial fantasies of racist elites. See Figure 2 below:

Figure 2
Race Discourse as a Product of Dialogical Tension: 1902–1959

In addition to being fluid and often contradictory (e.g. evolving notions of racelessness as anti-racist one moment and place and racist the next) dominant discourse also failed to consistently correspond to the life and logic of race on the ground. Cuba has never been an entirely racially equitable
place, yet it has always, on the whole in one form or another, struggled to be so and has consistently progressed through the efforts of Afro-Cubans and progressive whites. While official discourse during the pre-revolutionary period reflected neither of these realities, it was produced by them. Despite the radical transformations brought by the Revolution of 1957–1959, this paradigm would remain, in various forms, at the core of Cuban race discourse and indeed is reflected in the interviews and surveys with teachers discussed in Chapters Six, Seven and Eight.

5.4 Race discourse in post revolutionary Cuba, (1959-present)

In an under-developed country an authentic national middle class ought to consider as its bounded duty to betray the calling fate has marked out for it, and to put itself to school with the people: in other words to put at the people’s disposal the intellectual and technical capital that it has snatched when going through the colonial universities. (Fanon 1963, p. 150)

Once again we must keep before us the unfortunate example of certain Latin American republics. The banking magnates, the technocrats and the big businessmen of the United States have only to step on to a plane and they are wafted into sub-tropical climes, there for a space of a week or ten days to luxuriate in the delicious depravities which their ‘reserves’ hold for them. (Fanon 1963, p. 154)

Leading up to the revolutionary period of the 1950s, Afro-Cubans had disproportionately poor access to housing, education, health care, employment, and public and private space (due to formal and informal practices of segregation) (de la Fuente 2001). Alongside this came continued racist immigration policies and denials of the existence and persistence of racism on the Island. Like all major political movements in Cuba, the Revolution (1957–1959) treated race and racism as key issues within its political and cultural efforts. With the promise and hope of the 1940 constitution a fiction, the revolutionaries came to power promising a transformation of all relations. As de la Fuente notes, the failure of previous governments to consolidate the constitutional change undertaken almost 20 years earlier, provided an a priori legitimacy to the nascent political project of the revolutionary forces. The Cuban Revolution overturned the dictatorship of Batista, as well as the US neo-colonial grip on the island’s affairs. The gains of the Revolution as far as racial equality were massive and historically
unparalleled. Martí’s notion of equality and brotherhood was once more invoked by a Cuban government, and teleological tellings of the present were again grounded in the past.  

Reforms in education, housing, employment, and healthcare were undertaken, and the revolutionary government embarked on the project of desegregation of all public space. By the time the Revolution turned ten, Afro-Cubans enjoyed almost full formal equality where once there had been virtually none. The success of these gains was a subject of great pride for Cuban revolutionary leaders, indeed Fidel Castro declared in 1966, that “Discrimination disappeared when class privileges disappeared, and it has not cost the Revolution much effort to resolve that problem.” He was, of course, wrong. Despite immense gains in the areas mentioned above, inequality persisted into the revolutionary period. Despite the massive change which the revolutionary government represented, the racial transformation of the island, as well as the limitations of these changes were a product of the same discursive tug of war which had guided the racial policies of previous governments. In an effort to consolidate democratic power, the government attempted to balance the needs and priorities of different interest groups. The Cuban revolutionary victory was fragile and its continued success depended on broad-based multi-sector support. Cuba’s landed and mostly white elite held a great deal of power during the early years of the revolutionary period. It was during this same time that Cuba set the course for its race-relations policy and philosophy.

What was new about this political arrangement was that poor whites and Afro-Cubans of all classes now had the political clout owed to their need and share of the population (a majority on the island). While previous governments had performed this same balancing act, working class people and non-whites had never played so central role in the legitimacy and stability of the government. While this

31 Martí’s political suitability to the revolutionary cause has been challenged by numerous scholars who assert that his political vision was far from that entertained by the revolutionary government. Ripoll (1994) in particular, argues that he has been ideologically falsified by numerous administrations to serve political purposes which were far from the politics he wrote about or practiced. Others go further and have accused Martí of racism, pointing to his late writings (see Godfired, 2004).

32 Quoted in Lockwood 1967, p 128.
new cast of main characters is a testament to the transformation represented by the class and race oriented politics of the Cuban Revolution, it did not eliminate the historical role of the government as middle man for opposing social movements and ideas, but instead powerfully re-arranged it. Dominant racial discourse was once again a product of mediation, negotiation and compromise. As was the case historically, dominant racial discourse in revolutionary Cuba was not the product of government power but one of many efforts to produce, maintain and secure state power. Dominant racial discourse has always been fluid and incomplete; contested and ever-evolving. The result was a government that sought to quell outrage on both sides with progressives demanding faster and deeper change, and the conservative racists demanding slower and less far reaching action on race relations. Figure 3 demonstrates.

Figure 3
Race Discourse as a Product of Dialogical Tension: 1959–1989

This tension resulted in a solution which pleased no one entirely, but on the whole served the interests of Afro-Cubans over those of hard line white racists, many of whom self-exiled to Miami. De la Fuente notes that whites accounted for 87% of Cuban exiles in the US during the 1960s and 84% — during the 1970s (2001, p. 303). As the power of the landed white elite eroded however (e.g. much of their land was redistributed) the pace of change did not quicken, and indeed the intensity of the race campaign had waned significantly by then end of 1962 (de la Fuente 2001, p. 278). While racial inequality
remained (albeit severely mitigated) racism was declared a thing of the past, a truth whose antithesis became heretical. Treated as a trace of the past, as the smell of an animal long gone, critical approaches to race became taboo in revolutionary Cuba. Declaring it solved, Castro marginalized the significance of race. The non-confrontational approach had served on one hand to allow the racial progress to occur successfully and without much opposition, and on the other to insure the security of racism in the private spaces of Cuban discourse. In the early 1960s the revolutionary leaders were heavily concerned with consolidating the legitimacy of the Revolution. By speaking out on an issue declared solved by the Revolution, one ran the risk, as Moore (1988) points out, of being seen as counter-revolutionary, and indeed as being opposed to the positive changes which were underway; including desegregation of trade unions and workplaces; integrated universal schooling which disproportionately served Afro-Cubans who had 50% lower high school graduation rates than whites before the Revolution; and formal equality initiatives for housing policy (de la Fuente 2001, p. 144).

5.41 Cubanidad and the new revolutionary man

Although Cubanidad has had enormous consequences for popular (and unpopular) conceptions of race in Cuba, its meaning is broad and it is has implications for areas other than race. By the end of the Republican period, Cubanidad had become a framework for understanding Cuba and for conceiving of life therein. Kapcia describes Cubanidad as,

a series of ideological ‘codes’, such a code being understood as a ‘set of related and cognate beliefs and principles that can be grouped together to make a coherent belief in a single, given, value... as one of the building blocks of the wider ideology. In Cubanidad these codes referred to values seen as integral to the Cuban character, to a nationalist reading of Cuban history and to the links between past and present. (2005, p. 403)

Cubanidad had become an epistemological and axiological component of Cuban identity: both a lens and a space for understanding the world. It became both a process of internalization (a set of understandings and a way of viewing and acting) and externalization (the means, or tools, through
which reality is not merely absorbed but actively created), as well as a medium (discursive/institutional) over which both of these generalized processes occur.

The worsening of Cuban society between the late 1920s and the beginning of the Revolution in the early 1950s had proceeded on economic, social and cultural terms. Cuba was facing a moral crisis involving corruption, crime, prostitution, gambling, etc. The public service was rotten from the inside out and Cubans were fed up. In the face of social erosion, Cubanidad was invoked as an ethical anchor from which to heal a wounded morality. Kapcia writes: “Cuba’s post-independence experience (from 1902) merely served to link that code to morality, as the pre-independence hopes degenerated into endemic political corruption, which increasingly focused radical dissent and politicised many” (2005, p. 404). The Revolution, perhaps quite organically, invoked the moral ontology of Cubanidad as a rallying point for a new society. It was partially through this channel that pre-revolutionary conceptions of race survived the Revolution and became constituent elements of post-revolutionary Cuba. Cubanidad was revived for the revolutionary epoch and was “the inevitable basis of the early policies and actions of a process whose blueprint was still imprecise” (ibid). Morality was a key terrain of the Revolution and Martí’s Cubanidad was a holy player in the secular drama of revolutionary Cuba. Cuba’s new man (embodied posthumously by Che) was above all, a revolutionary — and eventually a socialist.33 The newly idealized Cuban was, like his predecessors envisioned by Saco and Martí, above race, more than black or white. The Revolution’s invocation of this notion was far more powerful than that of previous governments however. The Cuban Revolution worked toward a profound epistemic and ontological shift at a national level, for which the educational system was the most important tool. The extensive and intensive re-education programs during the early years of the Revolution were aimed at creating a common understanding of Cuba (its past, present and future), an understanding laden with a moral

33 For a critical look at the New Man, see Kapcia (2005).
ontology meant for uniform consumption. For the first time, through universal and compulsory education, Cuba was redefined for everyone in the same way.

As with the wars of independence, the Revolution had been a racially diverse effort with whites at the helm. Castro and others were well aware of the persistence of racial discrimination against Afro-Cubans thereafter. Early speeches by Fidel Castro reveal repeated attempts to challenge racism (at least in word) in Cuban society; speeches which created fear and frustration among many whites reluctant to give up racial privilege (de la Fuente 2001, pp. 260–270). The early gains of the Revolution were immense and disproportionately high for Afro-Cubans (Meerman 2001). Formal segregation ended, and gains in education, healthcare, employment and other areas all contributed to better lives for Afro-Cubans across the island. Indeed race was one of the key political issues for the early revolutionary authorities.

Their concern arose from the widespread demand among communists, socialists, Afro-Cuban organizations and the general public that racism be stopped on the island. Saney (2004) and de la Fuente (2001, 2005) argue that the call to address race came from diverse groups across the island. Racial discrimination was outlawed and declared counter revolutionary, and it would later be forbidden under the constitution. Almost 4000 private schools were closed or made public across the island, a measure that not only eliminated the two tier aspect of public schooling but also closed the door to de facto segregation of children, as Afro-Cubans made up less than 10% of the student body of private institutions and accounted for less than 5% of the teachers (de la Fuente 2001, p. 144). The literacy rate for non-white males increased from 64% to 99% between 1953 and 1981, and for non-white women the rate increased from 74% to 99% during the same period (Sawyer 2006, p. 70). Between 1960 and 1981 life expectancy in Cuba increased by 15 years for Cubans (to 71) as a whole and the gap between black and white Cubans was reduced substantially to just one year (as opposed to over six in both Brazil

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34 Article 42 of the 1993 constitution states “discrimination because of race, colour, sex or national origin is forbidden and punished by law” (quoted in Saney 2004, pp 101–102).
and the US) (World Bank 2010, Sawyer 2006, p. 70). In employment, racial equality in law, teaching, medicine and other professions was achieved by the early 1980s with 23% of Mestizo’s, 22% of whites and 22% of Afro-Cubans employed in these fields. While this was an increase for all groups, Afro-Cubans benefited the most (de la Fuente 2001, 311).

Cuban authorities were quick to pride themselves on these accomplishments, alongside well-known successes with education and healthcare. These measures were accompanied by the desegregation of public spaces and facilities (all of Cuba’s beaches are public to this day) as well as pressure put upon private businesses to adopt affirmative action programs for women and Afro-Cubans. A great deal of these undertakings were prefaced and grounded in the notion of equality (rather than equity) and aimed only indirectly at racial progress. In material terms, the results were no different than if the campaigns had been more race-specific. As far as public understandings and discourse however, the language of a Cuba for and of all that insisting that the unworthy were now worthy, did not adequately challenge the privilege of whites, specifically middle and working class folks whose attitudes remained insufficiently disturbed with regard to the race question. The internalized racist sense of superiority was left unchecked and even supported in some cases, in the government’s campaign to win over the conservative white racists to the Revolution’s racial equality program.

In a campaign reminiscent of the turn of the century, Afro-Cubans were cast, in public service advertisements, as needy, grateful and incapable (de la Fuente 2001, p. 271). An infamous poster (reprinted in de la Fuente 2001, p. 270) features a young Afro-Cuban boy (perhaps four or five years old) with up turned hands and eyes, asking “am I not a child as well?” Aimed to soften the heart of white racists, this powerful representation ties the beautiful black child’s innocence to his neediness, and indeed to white benevolence. As had been the case during the US occupation 60 years earlier, revolutionary whites had recast Afro-Cubans as worthy of the help for which they were so politely asking whites. As it did the first time, the discursive redefinition of the Afro-Cubans conferred corollary
qualities on white Cubans: generous, decision makers, empowered and superior. Further, with Afro-
Cubans positioned as the recipients of the Revolution’s generosity, their role as revolutionaries —
equally important members of the holy struggle — was diminished.

Racism thus persisted, and Afro-Cubans thus continued their resistance. In addition to making
immediate use of newly available social freedom, employment, education and employment channels,
Afro-Cubans were quick to mobilize their power in the struggle for a more complete equality.
Reminiscent of early post-independence government policy however, most black organizations that had
existed before and during the very early period of the Revolution were forcibly disbanded by the late
1960s. Famed lawyer Juan René Betancourt led many of the earliest closures and takeovers of the
societies, and oversaw an amalgamated umbrella organization in their place. By 1961, however,
Betancourt was highly critical of Castro and the country’s budding communist movement, and he
eventually fled into exile. Writing in the Crisis in May 1961, he offered the following in-depth critique:

Public announcements of the Castro regime would make it appear that racial discrimination is
something to be established or eliminated on the basis of government decree. Castro’s regime
ignores the historical, economic and social factors which are the genesis of discrimination and which
continue to perpetuate it. Nor does the government seem aware of the truth that it may, by its
policies and practices, create an ambiance favourable to racial equality. A mere governmental fiat,
however, does not meet the problem. Hence Sr. Castro’s assertion that his government has
eradicated racial discrimination in Cuba is not only false but is bleating demagoguery. (p. 271, italics
in original)

By invoking the morality and history of the Cuban independence movement as a complete historical and
moral package, the Revolution had thus invoked the racial underpinnings of the movement and its
struggles which although progressive for their time, were inadequate seventy years later in the mid to
late twentieth century. Afro-Cuban intellectuals, writers and activists such as Walterio Carbonell
challenged the white supremacist content in government versions of the heroic struggle for
independence, citing the fact that many of the nation’s early heroes (as codified by the Revolution) were
enthusiastic slaveholders (de la Fuente 2001, p. 287). Afro-Cubans did at the time and have always
contested dominant notions of race, and have among themselves produced competing perspectives on
questions of equity and inequality — a great many of whom did and do stand by the Revolution in all of its actions. The struggle was in many ways taken out of the hands of the strugglers, of black people on the island whose problems were said to be solved, or in the process of being solved by others who neither sought nor required their help. Under early Cuban revolutionary governments, anti-racism fell exclusively under the purview of the state and was, in a sense, nationalized. Revolutionary racelessness could not allow race as a stand-alone issue, and this of course precluded race-based organizing and organizations. Organizations and ideas aimed to work toward racial equality breached the raceless contract of revolutionary Cubanidad.

While colour-blindness was the prescription for domestic understandings of race, Castro and other leaders were very vocal about existent racism in other geographic and other chronological contexts. The Revolution has often been defined as much by what it is not, as by what it is. Castro was quick to cast his gaze back to the bad old days of racist Cuba. In a 1968 speech describing the heroic struggle of the Afro-Cuban General Antonio Maceo, Castro argues:

But at the time, Maceo, reduced to being chief of a part of the troops in Oriente Province — Maceo, black, when there was still a lot of racism and prejudices — naturally could not count on the support of all the rest of the revolutionary fighters. For, unfortunately, reactionary and unjust prejudices still prevailed among many fighters and leaders. This is why, though Maceo had saved the flag, saved the cause, and carried the nascent Cuban people’s revolutionary spirit to the highest level, he could not, despite his tremendous capacity and heroism, continue waging that war. He found it necessary to pause, awaiting the conditions which would permit him to renew the battle. (Castro 1968a)

By locating racism elsewhere (in time), Castro positioned the Revolution as an equalizer, and thus revolutionary society as equitable. Although it is important to remember that in the 1960s few other national leaders in the West would have formally praised a military general of African descent from the 19th century, it is important to recognize the negative role such obfuscation can play in addressing current manifestations of racism. The past was not the only place to which Castro dislocated racism. The Revolution also defined itself in opposition to imperialist forms of racism, like that in the US and colonial Africa.
In a 1960 speech to the Intercontinental Congress, he argued:

What the peoples have most in common to unite the people of three continents and of all the world today is the struggle against imperialism; the struggle against colonialism and neo-colonialism, the struggle against racism and, in short, all the phenomena which are the contemporary expression we call imperialism, whose centre, axis, and which are principal supporters of Yankee imperialism. (Castro 1960)

In a 1968 speech commemorating the Bay of Pigs Invasion, Castro takes specific aim at the US, arguing:

The society of exploitation and racism is creating a crisis in internal order. Events have become linked together. Events — the criminal war against Vietnam and the intolerable racial discrimination — have contributed to the gradual awakening of broad sectors in the United States, creating an awareness in the very heart in the United States, and the Negro movement has acquired an impressive combativeness... (Castro 1968b)

It is worth noting here that Castro is praising the race based civil rights movement in the US while having decreed against race-based organizations in Cuba. Again, by locating racism somewhere else (in the world and in the political continuum) Castro positions Cuba in opposition to racism: he functionally dislocates the local reality of racism. The persistence of racism in the US, as well as US racism expressed in foreign policy around the world, provided a near permanent counter to claims of racism in Cuba. Although there is no way to know for certain, the juxtaposition of Cubanidad and US racism may have created the opportunity for a certain degree of complacency on the part of the Cuban government with regard to race and racism on the island. Cuba’s narrative was constructed by its leaders, and its people, along certain ontological lines. With Cuba so heavily characterized by this binary, Cuba simply cannot exist in the form it claims to represent if racism is prevalent on the island.

Cuba’s story does not allow that particular truth. None of the preceding however can serve to deny or undervalue the gains made in racial equality under the revolutionary government. De la Fuente writes:

[B]y 1981, life expectancy in Cuba was not only close to that of developed countries in absolute numbers but was almost equivalent for blacks and whites... [I]nequality in education had disappeared even at the university level. The proportion of blacks and Mulattoes who had graduated from high school was in fact higher than the proportion of whites. (2001, p. 309)
Life got better for Afro-Cubans as a direct result of the Revolution. Indeed the gains for most Afro-
Cubans were greater than those experienced by most whites and Mestizos (see Sawyer 2006 and
Meerman 2001). A gap persisted however, as Afro-Cubans continued to be underrepresented in Cuban
politics, culture and religion. As far as politics, Afro-Cubans have never been numerically represented in
Cuban government, although as Adams (2004) points out, tremendous gains were made at numerous
levels of government leading up to the late 1980s. As far as culture, even as Afro-Cuban heritage, culture
and customs were increasingly commodified as ‘Cuban’ in nature, their acceptance as important, worthy
and relevant was limited. As far as religion, Santería was deemed primitive and counter revolutionary,
while Afro-Cuban culture was treated as artifactually relevant at best (see D’Amato 2007, pp. 53–55).
The rise of a national Marxist Leninist orthodoxy in the mid 1960s brought further scorn upon all
religions, thus flushing out a traditional repository of African culture which had for centuries sustained
many Afro-Cubans.

By the late 1970s the government assumed a less strict approach to religion but as de la Fuente
points out, African forms of spirituality were quietly characterized as irrational throwbacks to another
era, all under a colour-blind framework. He writes: “The party’s orthodox and conservative language
made no explicit reference to race, but terms such as ‘primitive’ and ‘cultural level’ had clear racial
implications and were rightly interpreted by the population as veiled references to blackness” (2001, p.
295). Without explicit reference to race, traditional racial lines were honoured and preserved under the
colour-blind framework. Afro-Cubans were also underrepresented in elite schools and other public
institutions, while remittances from abroad allowed (primarily white) Cubans to get ahead in relative
economic terms. More importantly however, formal equality under socialism had not sufficiently
penetrated the minds of Che’s new men and women. As Moore argues: “The new outlook proposed to
all Cubans as ‘non-racial’ and ‘universalist’ was in effect distinctly European. Marxism, imposed as the
national ideology, was the most accomplished version of the Western rationalist tradition” (Quoted in
Sawyer 2006, p. 33). Although we should distinguish between dialectic thought and rationalism, the predominance of Eurocentric cultural academic values remains a key part of Cuba’s understanding of itself as a liberated nation. As the next section addresses, the myth of a raceless society, of a Cuba bigger than black or white, of Cubanidad, failed to address the ongoing oppression of Afro-Cubans at the hands of white Cubans. Despite this inequality, by the end of the 1980s, Cuba had reached what might be called the pinnacle of its race relations trajectory to date. In late 1986, at the Third Congress of the Cuban Communist Party Castro addressed the lack of racial representation of Afro-Cubans in government and other areas of society, and pointed to the need to address racial (and gender) inequality on the island — the need to speak race. This marks the formal end of class essentialism at that level of government on the island.

The response was a dramatic increase in Afro-Cuban representation in government, as well as a new and more direct language used in official circles to address issues of racial inequality. Despite this however, racism was still treated as a phenomenon of the past — a function of an old system whose solution lay in the acceleration of the new one. In this conception the potential for accountability to be stymied is great, as evolution takes its course on ‘passive’ actors in a prescribed play. Nonetheless, there was no more racially equal or equitable time in Cuban history. The Special Period would change everything.

5.42 The Special Period (1990–2001)

*Everywhere that the national bourgeoisie has shown itself incapable of extending its vision of the world sufficiently, we observe a falling back towards old tribal attitudes, and, furious and sick at heart, we perceive that race feeling in its most exacerbated form is triumphing.*

(Fanon 1963, p.58)

Cuba’s Special Period was so named by the government to describe the period in Cuba directly following the collapse of the Soviet Bloc and its subsidy-oriented trading relationship with Cuba. It is said that the Cuban men lost their bellies, (and only now have them back) as an economic crisis crippled the country, forcing a series of government led austerity measures affecting every aspect of Cuban society:
from wages, to food allotments, to electricity usage to unemployment insurance (Uriarte 2004). The tourist economy, once reviled by the Revolutionary government was revived, and government money was allocated from Cuban paycheques to construct the infrastructure for tourists (Sawyer 2006, pp. 107–108). At the same time, limited foreign investment was newly permitted, and in the late 1990s, a liberalization of the state economy was undertaken. For Afro-Cubans, this meant receiving an already small piece of a shrinking pie. Sawyer (2006), de la Fuente (2001), Sarduy and Stubbs (2000), and others point out that the Special Period’s belt tightening led to an increase in tangible racism on the island. Due to existent inequalities, many Afro-Cubans were disproportionately forced into poverty, crime and marginalization. With this came racialized explanations of these phenomena, for although the Revolution had opened public institutions and space to people of all races, it had not eradicated racism from the hearts and minds of many of its citizens.

Sawyer (2006) quotes one Habanero as saying the Special Period was in fact the “Real” Period, with false subsidies gone and Cuba’s dependence laid bare (p. 107). While the reference here is to economic structures, the same can be said of specifically racialized structures — with fewer cultural subsidies available, a cultural economy of equality was more difficult to maintain. The dam holding racism in its tidy little corner had burst, and race was revealed for its true/’real’ relevance on the island. Blue (2007) notes: “The restructuring of the economy has created new social divisions that, due to enduring racial prejudices in Cuban society, are reconstituting racial hierarchies that three decades of socialism were unable to eliminate” (p. 36). Alongside the compounding disadvantages faced by Afro-Cubans came a series of financial and cultural advantages increasingly experienced by whites and Mestizos. The rise of the tourism industry led to a highly profitable new sector in which race is/was highly at play. As some scholars have noted (see D’Amato 2007, and Cabezas 2006, and others) the tourist industry privileges light skinned people in myriad ways. Whites and Mestizos are generally over-represented within the industry; and within particular sites, a classic front of the house/back of the
A house divide is present whereby the best jobs (in terms of physical requirements, salary, opportunities for gratuities, etc.) go mostly to whites and light-skinned Mestizos (Cabezas 2006). On the whole, the private sector exploded during the mid nineties. Between 1993 and 1996 the number of Cubans employed in the private sector increased 1300%, from 15,000 to almost 210,000 (Henken 2002, p. 6). At the same time, racism increased on the island, according to Sawyer and others and in one shocking piece of data by 1998, less than a third of white Cubans agreed that different races were equally “decent” and less than two thirds agreed they were equally intelligent (Sawyer 2006, p. 142). The shift was not only attitudinal as Afro-Cubans experienced marginalization in a range of areas (for example black political representation in the Council of State decreased by 40% in the early 1990s (Adams 2004, p. 173). The historical dominance of private farming by whites, going back to pre-revolutionary land holding patterns, became increasingly relevant as food was in decreasing supply.

As another component of a liberalizing economy, Cubans with the means to purchase the necessary license were given the opportunity to open small businesses under certain conditions. As tourists venture past the resorts into the “real” Cuba, the demand for small hotels and home stays in “casas particulares” has increased, allowing Cubans with the necessary license to draw salaries in tourist dollars. Houses can remain in families for generations, and couples privileged to have two, often rent the extra to tourists. Privileged family history can often be traced to pre-revolution wealth, as well as to pre-revolutionary racial privilege. Money generated by whites is, likely, generally used to disproportionately further the fortunes of other whites in the family. As the Special Period has given way to a new chapter in Cuban economic history, the relatively unregulated nature of market liberalization has allowed for a re-entrenchment of racial power and punishment. This is further intensified by remittances sent from the US Cuban community, which is overwhelmingly white and Mestizo (See Sawyer, 2006 and Greenbaum 2002). Cubans receiving money from relatives abroad are thus very likely to be white, and many whites are thus floated by foreign dollars — protected from the ‘real’ economic
period/paradigm mentioned above. Indeed according to a 2007 Miami Herald article, “a study in 2000 by UM’s Cuba studies institute found that the average white Cuban received $81 a year in remittances, compared to $31 for non-white Cubans” (¶ 39). Amid widespread reliance on tourist dollars and foreign remittances due to an increase of state employment and remuneration, Afro-Cubans are disproportionately forced into precarious, dangerous and sometimes criminal activities, and are vastly over-represented in Cuban prisons (Sawyer 2006, p. 118).

Afro-Cuba has not recovered. In particular, the over representation Afro-Cubans driven into the prostitution sector has contributed to the re-essentialization of African women’s sexuality as submissive and yet passionate, and African men’s as untamed, primal and childish. While sex tourists are mainly white, the workers in the trade are mainly black. In and outside of Cuba this has contributed to an association of sexual deviance and criminality with blackness. De la Fuente writes: “[R]acism is a self-fulfilling prophecy: it denies opportunities to a certain group due to their alleged insufficiencies and vices, and in turn, lack of opportunities creates the very insufficiencies and vices used to justify exclusion” (2001, p. 329). While this work makes no statement about the morality of any of the informal sector work in which Afro-Cubans are overrepresented, these jobs tend to be precarious, dangerous and often criminalized. A scarcity of lucrative employment across the island prompted many easterners (a larger number of whom are Afro-Cuban) to migrate west during the Special Period, which swelled the ranks of displaced and underemployed Afro-Cubans in the traditionally overly white and affluent western metropolitan region. This again contributed to an increase in negative racialized perceptions during the Special Period identified by Sawyer (2006) and others. As mentioned above, the negative racial shift trickled upward as well, whereby Afro-Cuban representation in government decreased in many areas in the late 1990s (Adams 2004).

The economy alone cannot be blamed for these tremendous changes however; as de la Fuente argues (2001), the disastrous effects of the Special Period on race and race relations in Cuba were not
inevitable. Although racial gains are inextricably linked to Cuba’s socialist platform and economy of the last 50 years, it was the colour-blind approach to economic reform that allowed race relations to develop as they did in both the Special Period and the 30 years leading up to it. By allowing race and racism to sort themselves out among a struggling people increasingly divided economically, the government made a grave error — but again, it was not new. This was the same approach practiced during previous periods, but with different results owing the more equitable economic system, stronger overall economy and the greater ability on the part of government to support and thus direct its people in the years preceding the Special Period. The challenge in the 1990s was much the same as that in the 1980s: affect discursive change in the private spaces of quotidian life. The difference came in the increasing inability of the government to meet this challenge and the consequences thereof. The change was thus in degree, rather than nature, as the problem dates back to at least 1962. The difference lay in the government’s ability to consolidate legitimacy in light of austerity measures which had in many ways served to distance the government from its people.

5.43 Nascent race in the public sphere: From the Special Period to the 21st century

There exists inside the new regime, however, an inequality in the acquisition of wealth and in monopolization. Some have a double source of income and demonstrate that they are specialized in opportunism. Privileges multiply and corruption triumphs, while morality declines. Today the vultures are too numerous and too voracious in proportion to the lean spoils of the national wealth.

(Fanon 1963, p. 171)

The Special Period brought with it widespread poverty and struggle. While the government may have hoped for a period of voluntary community asceticism (a great deal of which did occur) this was not the general response to the sweeping austerity measures. As stated above, the economic downturn disproportionally harmed Afro-Cubans. De la Fuente argues, “what disappeared from public discourse found fertile breeding ground in private spaces, where race continued to influence social relations among friends, neighbours, coworkers and family members” (2001, p. 322). Racism was thus alive and well in the private lives of Cubans. The Special Period brought heretofore hidden racism to the surface
through, among many other things, racialized interpretations and justifications of crime, 
impoverishment and general inequality — all of which increased during the 1990s. In keeping with 
century old tropes of blacks as criminals, Cuba as white, and whites as deserving/hardworking 
innocents, the 1990s laid bare the failings of the revolutionary program on race to penetrate the private 
epistemologies of white Cuban society. If it ever truly existed, the fraternal vision of raceless Cubanidad 
cannot be said to have survived the 20th century unharmed. Blue (2007) writes:

Racist attitudes and prejudices have become more open as the revolutionary taboo against racism 
has become less influential. A 1994 survey conducted on the island revealed that a majority of 
whites in Cuba opposed interracial marriages and considered blacks to be less intelligent and lacking 
the same “values” and “decency” as whites. The restructuring of the economy (particularly the 
creation of a dual economy) also has opened new public spaces for racism and discrimination to 
thrive. (p. 41)

This, alongside a growing reliance on remittances has brought with it a new class of moneyed 
whites, and a corollary set of justifications of racialized economic inequality. Privilege can never be the 
fault of the privileged. The less the government provides materially, the less it can demand discursively. 
The erosion of the government’s legitimacy as far as determining the content and contours of the 
country’s racial script, combined with activist and intellectual discussions about race and racism have 
created the perfect storm for a more public conversation about race. The role of the state as provider to 
the people has ebbed substantially since 1990. People no longer rely upon the state for the same host of 
things they once could. Increased private business and a sustained lower standard of living for many 
seem to be the new norm. While by many indicators, the country has recovered substantially, the 
government has not renewed the pre–Special Period levels of support for citizens. Of the many resulting 
phenomena, the erosion of state power as far as the regulation of discourse on race is highly relevant to 
the role of education and teachers. According to some, the state is unlikely to ever regain the access and 
power it once held over the way race is discussed publically (see Fernandez 2009). The private life of 
racism is stepping out from the shadows. For de la Fuente (2008), this represents a substantial cultural 
and discursive shift. He writes:
Given the actions and efforts of all these intellectuals, artists and activists, it is increasingly difficult to sustain, as was the case just a few years ago, that race continues to be a taboo in public discourses. The ‘social debate’ about this topic is no longer a ‘deferred battle’, to use Roberto Zurbano’s expression. This battle is being waged in Cuba today. Indeed, one of the unintended and perhaps one of the few welcome effects of the so-called Special Period is that it forced this conversation on the Cuban people. But it did so by giving race a social visibility, currency and importance that it had not enjoyed for decades. (p. 712)

Indeed the success and international notoriety of Cuban hip-hop artists (predominately Afro-Cuban), much of whose art critiques the racial politics of the state and draws attention to anti-black racism on the island, attests to the change de la Fuente describes. Sujatha Fernandes (2006) argues that these artists are forging new revolutionary culture, contesting the racial politics of the last fifty years with tools imparted through the Revolution and critical revolutionary education (see also West-Duran 2004). Indeed these forms of resistance and expression reflect the tension between the success of the Revolution insisted upon by revolutionary rhetoric, and the quotidian struggle to get by facing so many Cubans. The historical role of the arts as both a reflective and productive space for race discourse (discussed in Chapter Four) should be remembered here. Hip hop continues this tradition. While there have always been conflicting and divergent perspectives on race, the life of these perspectives is being newly charted. The government’s role as arbitrator however, between two divergent discursive positions remains the same. Cuban authorities are, as always caught, between a newly public racism and a newly public anti-racism, a role reminiscent of pre-revolutionary governments going back to the late 19th century. Figure 4 demonstrates:
As the mediator with the power to satisfy neither position, the Cuban government again occupies a destabilized discursive middle ground which pleases no one but which — while attempting to safeguard at least some of the revolutionary gains in race and economy — preserves the limitations of the traditional approach to race relations. Post-Special race relations are just now emerging out of this paradigm, and the role of hip hop is one of a number of markers indicating that a new cultural era has begun. While this is a product of time and of the inevitability of change, it is also a product of the sustained resistance and voice of Afro-Cubans as well as progressive whites on issues of racism.

Although few longitudinal studies exist on the topic, results are beginning to come in as far as racial effects of the discursive upheaval of the Special Period. Anthropologist Nadine Fernandez, for example, in her works from 1996, 2001, 2009 tracks a trajectory of race relations in which intermarriage is more acceptable now than it was during the Special Period. At a recent conference on Cuba, she explained that a dramatic shift had occurred in Cuban race relations — a statement supported by de la Fuente’s more recent (2008) work on the topic — and which necessitates new paradigms for understanding race on the island. A new generation of young adults, influenced as much by independent popular culture as by the state may well create new paradigms for race relations on the island.
As Sawyer (2006) and de la Fuente (2001) point out, despite the increased racism of the Special Period, Afro-Cuban support for the government has remained, for the most part, quite strong for the — in some areas even increasing. Simultaneously, increased dissatisfaction is evidenced in areas as varied as art and public demonstrations. Many Afro-Cubans continue to understand the Revolution as both a thing of their own making, and as a pragmatic form of governance which compared to other alternatives best serves their interests. The degree to which this seems irrational depends on our assumptions about political freedom and democratic access. Resistance and dissent are healthy parts of a democratic society. In this light, the simultaneity of public protest against government policy and strong public support for a given state might be taken as a sign of the healthy functioning of that state. It follows that to maintain power the government need only be better than the alternative. Within the revolutionary presentation of race and racism, the ‘alternative’ is constructed as many things: the past, the US, the exile community, etc. The government need only be better than the options people feel they have. And to be clear, these options are in many cases worse, or certainly no better.

As racism increases, Cubanidad looks more progressive every day. The very institutions which maintained and reproduced the silent Cuban racial hierarchy are becoming the pillars on which the eroding gains of the Revolution will stand. Simultaneously, however, the space to critique the system and the government with regard to racism on the island is increasingly available (to limited degrees). Perhaps ironically, this comes at a time when the system is at its most impotent as far as ensuring formal and informal racial equality. Any attack on ‘the way it is’ will hold in contempt a government with hands no longer so tightly grasping the levers of discursive power. Any calls upon the government for greater formal equality and equity, will find that same relative impotence disabling for the sort of progress which reached its height in the mid to late 1980s. Because the Cuban state has long identified itself with at the very least a rhetoric of anti-racism and because the appearance of such a commitment

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35 The so-called race riot of August 5, 1994, saw hundreds of protestors take to the streets in protest of the government cut backs. The majority of the protestors were reported to be Afro-Cubans (de la Fuente 2001a).
is increasingly difficult to maintain, the government, as Robaina (2009) and others have pointed out, has begun more frequently addressing issues of race and racism. This is a necessary response to a newly public conversation on the island which should not be read in an entirely pessimistic way. A government bending to the will, needs and demands of the people whose support it needs to stay afloat, is by no means a bad thing. The Cuban government is rebuilding its own legitimacy, in-keeping with increasingly open discursive space to critique race on the island. It is doing so on the shoulders of a complex relationship with the Afro-Cuban population. As Allen writes:

While it is debatable to what degree Cubans believe in slogans like “¡Venceremos!,” which proclaim eventual victory of the downtrodden brave enough to resist, it is clear that this seemingly quixotic rhetoric and the political education it represents have conditioned subjectivities of “entitlement” in Cuba. This entitlement is unmatched in the black diaspora. Cubans, especially young adults who have experienced the height of revolutionary society, feel that it is their birthright to enjoy human security (e.g., free health care, education, and subsidized food and housing), as well as to express themselves freely as human beings, even if material realities and political exigencies find them merely subsisting in spaces of lack and uncertainty. (2009, p. 61)

Entitlement however, is hard to eat and does not keep out the rain; and an overall worsening of the economic and social conditions on the island has accompanied much of the freedom to speak race and indeed to be racist — a change of which Cubans are uniquely aware. Cubans continue to make their own meanings about their lives, their government, their race(s) and their social relations. Dominant discourse on the island remains the result of a negotiation of these meanings, articulated more or less firmly by a government in search of potent middle ground.

Despite the significant changes with regard to racial discourse in both content and form, polar arguments from the past persist, which demonstrate the limits of the current transformation — at least thus far. A December 2009 open letter drafted by a host of leading Afro-Cuban and Mestizo Cuban artists, activists and academics, sought to respond to a published attack on race relations in Cuba by a group of African-American scholars. The US group included Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Dr. Molefi Asante, Dr. Cornel West, and Dr. Mark Sawyer, whose book *Racial Politics in Post Revolutionary Cuba* was discussed in Chapter Four. The US letter was organized by Carlos Moore, the well known anti-Fidel
activist and race critic also discussed in Chapter Four. As a focal point, the US letter addressed the
imprisonment of Dr. Ferrer, an Afro-Cuban activist and academic, whom they identify as a political
prisoner and who, according to them, stands to serve another 25 years for his political activities. The
letter casts a wide net condemning the current and historical practices of the Cuban Revolution as far as
race relations, and compares the US experience of racism to that in Cuba. Within a few short days, the
Cuban artists and scholars (mentioned above) responded. The response, written by many of the island’s
most critical voices on race, pulled on many of the problematic historical and polemic mechanisms and
denials for demonstrating the success of Cuba’s racial project. Although the authors make no reference
to Dr. Ferrer, they do point to the Revolution’s history of racial progress beginning in 1959, and largely
deny the charges in the US drafted letter. In one section they write:

If the Cuba of these times was the racist nation they want to invent, its citizens would not have
contributed massively to the liberation of the African peoples. More than 350,000 Cuban volunteers
fought against colonialism alongside their brothers and sisters in Africa. More than 2,000
combatants from our island fell on that continent. A figure of undisputed worldwide prominence,
Nelson Mandela, has recognized the role of those volunteers in the definitive defeat of the infamous
apartheid regime. From Africa we brought back only the remains of our dead.36 (Morejón et al 2009, ¶ 5)

This blast from the past offers up a racial illogic which has for too long characterized the Revolution’s
teleological laurels on racial progress: since we did A, we cannot be accused of B. That racism can persist
in a nation that fights anti-racist and anti-colonial wars is denied by this line of argument. This, despite
the home grown example in evidence in the Cuban case: the Cuban struggle for independence against
Spain and then the US was indeed anti-colonial and anti-racist and it nonetheless produced a racist
society thereafter. The reliance on particular narratives at the expense of real answers to tough

36 While careful not to read too much into what may have been intended only as a dramatic turn of phrase, that
Cubans brought back only the remains of their dead, as the quote indicates, may speak to a potential lack of
deeper connection to the continent, as well as any reflexive notions about Africentric versus Eurocentric forms of
governance and struggle.
questions (such as the case of Dr Ferrer) reveals the fissures in the Cuban response to race (and remember these are the critical thinkers). In another telling passage they write:

Genuine bearers of traditional musical culture much appreciated by American audiences, such as Los Muñequitos de Matanzas, Yoruba Andabo, and Clave y Guaguancó, would have to be working as poorly paid laborers on the docks, as parking lot attendants, shoe shiners, and domestic employees, had their extraordinary values not been recognized. (ibid ¶ 24)

This passage provides an example of well-known Afro-Cuban artists and groups who, the letter implies, are a valued part of Cuban culture and society and who would face a different fate in the US context. In addition to playing on the binary comparison that racism is worse in the capitalist US, this passage invokes the role of African culture as folkloric and performative — celebrated, but as icons of a static set of non-dominant cultural symbols.

On the flip side however, the Cuban response is not without merit, and the authors reveal important limitations in the analysis and perhaps political project of the US petition. The respondents point out the political context in which the US critique is embedded, writing:

Although the most intolerant political circles and the most powerful mass media have long tried to impose a distorted image of contemporary Cuban society on American public opinion, the reality comes through in the end, in one way or another... To say that among us there is a “callous disregard” for black Cubans, that they are deprived of “civil freedoms on the basis of race,” and to demand that “the unwarranted and brutal harassment of black citizens in Cuba who are defending their civil rights” be ended, would seem like delirious fantasies if there wasn’t, behind those fictions, a malicious intention of adding respectable voices from the Afro-American community to the anti-Cuban campaign that seeks to undermine our sovereignty and identity. (¶ 1–3)

Any analysis of these letters that ignores these current and historical political realities is incomplete. And far from denying the existence of racism on the island the Cuban letter challenges the US understanding thereof. In describing racism on the island they write:

It’s a process, as we know, that is not exempt from conflicts and contradictions, burdened by inherited social disadvantages as well as prejudices deeply rooted over centuries. Six years ago Fidel Castro, in a discussion in Havana with Cuban and foreign educators, commented how “even in societies like Cuba that arose from a radical social revolution where the people achieved full and
complete legal equality and a level of revolutionary education that demolished the subjective component of discrimination, it still exists in a different form.” He described it as objective discrimination, a phenomenon associated with poverty and with a historical monopoly on access to learning. Anyone who observes daily life anywhere in the country can see that an enormous effort is under way to overcome completely the factors causing that situation, through new programs aimed at eliminating any social disadvantages. (ibid ¶ 16–18)

While the authors fall into the trap of treating racism as inherited, Castro does not, and in defending Cuba the authors rightly point to work being done on the island which the US letter ignores. The letter states:

Blacks and Mestizos, as never before in the history of our country, have found opportunities for social and personal development in the course of the transformations carried out over the past half century. These opportunities have been backed by policies and programs that have made possible the rise of what Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz called the unpostponable integration phase of Cuban society... The Afro-American intellectuals need to know how their Cuban colleagues have dealt with these questions and how they promote actions from the prominent positions they hold in civil society. (ibid ¶15–16)

The authors point not only to the tremendous racial gains of the Revolution but to the persistence of those gains through increased formal equality by virtue of institutional egalitarianism on island. Further, by invoking the memory and work of Ortiz, they point to the existence and continued relevance of Cuban anti-racist formations (most of which come from Afro-Cuban thinkers currently and historically). And this is a key point. In the letter from the US, the authors write: “Racism in Cuba, and anywhere else in the world, is unacceptable and must be confronted!” (Moore 2009 ¶7). I agree, and so would most people, but firm understandings of the social and historical circumstances in which race and racism are produced, maintained and reproduced are needed for the effective confrontation to which the US letter refers. The US letter does not allow for an understanding of the progress that has been made and seems to dismiss the Cuban approach entirely. The letter seems not to consider what might be the best way to enrich or protect existing gains. Further, the US letter is unanchored by any reflection of the role of the US itself in the destabilization of the Cuban project. The letter makes no mention of the US Blockade of Cuba, the leading foreign socioeconomic issue facing Cuba in the past 50 years, and an issue which no
doubt has had ramifications for race relations on the island. While we can only speculate on what these ramifications might be in statistical detail, it is certain that any American political project which attacks Cuba and at the same time makes no reference to the sustained US targeting and destabilization of the island, is at best missing a big piece of the puzzle.

It seems that despite the evolution of a more complex racial formation in Cuba over the past 20 years (both increased racism and increased freedom to address it) the traditional poles of argument persist from both the Revolution’s detractors and its defenders. Missing from the great majority of scholarship, both defensive and offensive literatures, is analysis of the quotidian life of race and racism on the island — particularly in this new racial epoch. The analysis undertaken here thus comes at a precarious juncture in Cuban history. The teachers interviewed for this study are for the most part the very people said to be the racial victims of the Cuban state, and likewise of the emergent racism resulting from the recession of its power, and yet they for the most part, vehemently defend the Cuban racial project. We now turn to the methodological concerns as well as to the data analysis chapters to locate and analyze these teachers’ positions in relation to this trans-epochal trajectory of Cuban race discourse.
Chapter Six Part One. Methods and methodology

6i.0 Introduction

There is no such thing as knowledge for knowledge’s sake. Similarly, no academic undertaking proceeds on purely positivist or objective terrain. All research, writing and analysis work (either formally or informally) in the service of a political project — be it stated or unstated (see Dei, 2005; and Bulmer, Martin and John Solomos, 2004). The politics a researcher brings to her methodology are inextricably linked to the methodology itself. Although this project employs rather traditional western academic methods of data collection in the forms of qualitative one on one (or one on two) interviews and quantitative surveying, the protocol design (the questions posed within the survey and the interviews) reflects an anti-colonial approach to understanding the topics at hand, as well to understanding the knowings possessed by research participants. Post-revolutionary Cuba is a paradoxical context in which race and nation have met in ways unprecedented during the 20th century. This project seeks to better understand race and race relations, as well as the production of these relations within and by the Cuban educational context. Unlike most other critical analyses of race on the island, the research undertaken here supports the Cuban project as whole. Put more succinctly in the parlance of 21st century politics, I am pro-Cuba. I also believe deeply in an anti-colonial approach to theory, practice and daily life.

As I describe below, this project aims to serve Cubans, as well as assist in contributing to new and comprehensive understandings of race-relations on the island. This project aims at once to find out something new, and at the same time to contribute in a supportive way to the Cuban conversation about race on the island. As Dei (2005), Brown and Strega (2005) and others have cautioned, in addition to the overt political intentions embedded in research, it is key to also consider the embedded offerings and hindrances researchers bring to the research table as a result of their various social locations. How do my race, gender, ethnicity, language, sexuality, ability and my country of origin (a capitalist North American power with historical allegiances to Cuba’s historical adversary) play a role in research design.
as well as the results of that research, given the impact of social location on knowledge production and representation? How does my membership in the western academy impact how, why and what I find out as a researcher? It follows that a satisfactory description and rationale for research methodology is possible only in light of these considerations. Put another way, to properly explain what I am doing, my explication must implicate who I am, why I am doing this, and what the relationship is between the two. This chapter considers these questions alongside a detailed description of the research undertaken as well as the methods used.

The first section of this chapter reviews the project’s key research questions, and outlines the areas of data collection. This includes an overview of the data collection itself (qualitative/quantitative mix) demographics, location, and numbers. This section essentially outlines the what of the research methodology. The second section briefly explains the political project guiding the conduct of the research described in section one. In this section I outline my political intentions, political considerations, and the implications of my location that bring me to and affect, both research design and research conduct. Following the notion that all knowledge production is subjective and serves some purpose (intentionally and/or not) this section spells out the why of the research undertaking, including explication and implication of both my social location and my social position. The final section assesses the strengths and weaknesses of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to research design and implementation, and provides a rationale for the mixed research approach (qualitative/quantitative). In addition to extending the discussion of the why, section three addresses the methodological how of the research.

6.1 Description of research questions and areas of data collection

This project seeks to contribute to the limited existent research on the production, operation and maintenance of race relations in Cuba, with a research focus on the Cuban educational context. Specifically, the research seeks to investigate the following questions: 1) How do teachers support
and/or challenge dominant ideas of race and racism, and to what degree do they construct their own meanings on these topics? 2) How do teachers understand the relevance of race and racism for teaching and learning, both inside and outside of the classroom? 3) How and why do teachers (willingly and unwillingly, intentionally and unintentionally) deal with race and racism in the classroom? More generally, this project seeks to understand Cuban teachers’ collective common sense knowings on the topics of race and racism in Cuba and elsewhere. As mentioned in Chapter One, ‘common sense’ is invoked in the Gramscian sense as the place where philosophy (or indeed even policy) impacts and informs the practical operation of everyday life. Stuart Hall (1986) explains that common sense, represents itself as the ‘traditional wisdom or truth of the ages,’ but in fact, it is deeply a product of history, part of the historical process. Why, then, is common sense important? Because it is the terrain of conceptions and categories on which the practical consciousness of the masses of the people is actually formed. It is the already formed and taken for granted terrain, on which more coherent ideologies and philosophies must contend for mastery; the ground which new conceptions of the world must take into account, contest and transform, if they are to shape the conceptions of the world of the masses and in that way become historically effective. (p. 20)

So, in order to understand in the first instance the discursive workings of race, and to begin, in the second instance, the conversation around transformation, common sense must be accounted for and understood.

Working with a post-positivist, constructivist approach, the study employs two data collection methods: 1) qualitative interviews with Cuban teachers and 2) quantitative surveys with Cuban teachers. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 41 (N=41) Cuban teachers over the course of four research trips to Havana, Cuba, and its surrounding areas, in 2007 and 2008. While some of the interviews were conducted in varied locations including restaurants, hotels and on the Malecón, the vast majority were conducted in private homes in downtown Havana. Although a snowball method of participant location and recruitment was used to allow a necessary measure of discretion for participants, a maximum of one teacher per individual school was interviewed, and teachers from across the city and its outlying areas were included. Teachers from the elementary, senior and pre-university panels were selected in
roughly the same proportion. I conducted all of the interviews. Most interviews were recorded, except where participants requested they not be, or in cases where background noise was prohibitive. I conducted interviews in Spanish, with an English/Spanish translator present for needed assistance in case of confusion. Interviews were 30–60 minutes long (most closer to 30 minutes). A roughly equal number of male (19) and female (22) teachers were selected. Although a roughly equal number of Mestizo (15), Afro-Cuban (18) and white (8) teachers were selected, Afro-Cubans and Mestizos outnumbered whites. Teachers varied in age between 19 and 68, and had spent between two and 30 years teaching.

The quantitative survey was conducted in Havana, during the third research trip, by a team of Cuban researchers (teachers), assembled in Havana. Over a three-week period, 150 (N=150) teachers completed a six page, 30 question, Spanish language survey, with most questions using a Likert, forced choice, 5 point scale. The research team was comprised entirely of Afro-Cuban and Mestizo Cubans, who provided assistance to respondents with comprehension and completion of the survey whenever necessary. Teachers (participants) were approached at a summer teacher education institute in Vedado, Havana, at Cuba’s largest teacher education facility (Facultád Pedagógica, Instituto Enrique José Barona). Teachers there were drawn from all educational disciplines and levels, and represented all areas of Havana, Havana Province, and Pinar Del Rio (a small neighbouring, island province). Following Sawyer’s 2006 model, but on a smaller scale, special efforts were made to achieve racial, neighbourhood and income variability within the sample. After initial conversations with potential participants, researchers followed up with those interested at a later time and different location. The surveys were conducted wherever possible, in private spaces to allow for confidentiality and concentration — often at the homes of interested participants. Of those surveyed 66.9% identified as female while 33.1% identified as male. The racial breakdown of participants was as follows: Mestizo 58.4%, Afro-Cuban 19.5% and white 22.1%. Teachers varied in age, roughly between 18 and 65. Although the survey is reflective of a wide variety of
teachers (with differing demographics, academic specialities, and from different regions, neighbourhoods and schools) it is insufficiently randomized and has too small a sample size for a representative sample.

6i.2 Implicating the politics of the project and researcher location

6i.21 Politics of the project

The work undertaken by this project has multiple objectives. One concern is selfish; I personally wish to better understand Cuba, and specifically racism in Cuban education. Another concern is somewhat less selfish — I wish to contribute publicly to the general understanding of race in Cuba, from a standpoint which supports the Cuban socialist standpoint as a whole. Sawyer (2006) and others have pointed to the scarcity of formal studies on race in Cuba. Cuba needs to be better understood, by people on and off of the island, in large part because the story of race in Cuba is one from which the world can learn. In comparative international terms, it is in many ways a success story. So while my investigation of race will pull no punches, it also proceeds with the aim of supporting (and perhaps improving) the Cuban socialist educational project as it moves into a period of transition that threatens the undoing of many of the Revolution’s most important gains. Yet another objective of this work is to de-link the analysis of race in Cuba from an anti-socialist stance. Carlos Moore (1991), Alejandro de la Fuente (2001) and more recently Mark Sawyer (2006) provide the key works on race in post-revolutionary Cuba. Indeed along with Blue (2007) and D’Amato (2007), these three (Moore, de la Fuente and Sawyer) provide the principal empirical evidence attesting to the existence of racism on the island. This work is invaluable. The political projects of Moore and Sawyer however, (de la Fuente less so) appear to work with a general disapproval of the revolutionary project that undervalues the gains made with regard to race relations in past 50 years. So this work follows these thinkers only so far down the analytical road, taking a sharp turn when it comes to overall research intentions.
As with all research, this project is undertaken, designed and conducted in light of specific pre-conceived beliefs about the state of race and race relations. Namely that Cuba is a racist place; that Cuban education reproduces and maintains racism; that Cuba strategically invokes the trope of racelessness through its philosophy of Cubanidad; that racelessness as a normative lens for understanding race is the key trans-epochal discursive tool in the production, operation and maintenance of racism (see also Goldberg, 2007; James, 2007; Ansell, 2006; and Powell, 1999); that built into revolutionary rhetoric are the tools to deny racism in the post-revolutionary context; and that people sometimes consciously and unconsciously choose to use these tools. These points of critique stem from an anti-racist and anti-colonial analysis of key literature, preliminary primary research and my own experiences speaking with people in Cuba. Going into this, I have what Twine (2000) might call a racial ideology, with what I hope is a methodology reflective of that ideology. The risk here however, is falling into the assumption that the anti-racist and anti-colonial lenses can be applied anywhere at any time without a careful investigation of contextual considerations. Dominguez (2007) cautions that race and racism in Cuba are phenomena as unique as the history of the island itself. Although this is true of all discursive contexts, as the past is crucial to the operations of power in the present and future, Cuba is truly different in as much as it subverts many formations of race and colonialism investigated by anti-racist and anti-colonial scholars. Although this was taken up further in Chapters Three and Chapter Five, it is worth again mentioning the simple but paramount fact that Cuba is a socialist country whose modern state formation was founded upon groundbreaking notions of economic equity and racial equality.

The research embarked upon on here is not undertaken to study a marginalized group, although I do look toward marginalized knowledges and practices. Cuban teachers are generally well-educated, critical, well-read, professional, proud and knowledgeable people, suffering from relatively little current imposition of colonialism beyond the Blockade. They do not fit traditional definitions of a ‘third world’ or
marginalized research population (see Cook, 1998; Dei, 1994; and others). They are not, metaphorically, a fragile ecosystem at risk of being trampled underfoot by western researchers. Many Cubans are western researchers themselves and are highly educated and critical. All ‘truths’ are worthy of critical investigation. The “sympathy” called for by Smith (1999, p. 9) and others who outline anti-colonial approaches to methodology, is not something in which I am particularly interested (see also Max, 2005). While oppression exists in Cuba, I make no assumption that I am dealing with a group characterized primarily by oppression or resistance. Anything short of the presumption that they can see me at least as clearly as I can see them is condescending at best and dangerously erroneous at worst. A nuanced reading of the anti-colonial is particularly necessary for understanding Cuba on its own terms, while simultaneously avoiding the slippage into becoming an apologist for the limitations and failings of the Cuban system.37

6i.22 Researcher location

Colour, gender, class, ethnicity, geographic origin, cultural origin, language, sexual orientation, and ability have implications for the production, legitimization and dissemination of knowledge and research (see Smith, 1999, Dei and Johal, 2005; Okolie, 2005; Absolon and Willett, 2005; Parker and Lynn 2002; Kamler, Reid, and Santoro. 1999; Scheurich and Young, 1997; and many others). No matter how they have chosen to conduct their study, researchers come from an epistemological place and create an epistemological reaction among research participants. Academic research has a long-standing role as the official and unofficial librarian for Euro-American colonialism. Scores of researchers (from anti-colonial, anti-racist, Marxist, feminist, cultural studies, post-structuralist, post-modern and other perspectives) have pointed this out, sometimes in an attempt to justify the academic research they are about to undertake (see Shiva, 1997; Stanfield, 1985; Smith, 1999; Said, 1979; McClintock, 1995; Lester-
Irabinna, 1997; Hales, 2006; Thésée, 2006; Spivak, 1999; Dei et al, 2002; and many others). The academy has not only assisted Euro-American colonialism, it has made its very existence as a discursive form possible. The ‘other’ has long been explained (and thus created) by the academy. Power, through the creation, validation and dissemination of knowledges has been conferred by the western academy — with an inverse and corollary process of disempowerment through knowledge destruction, invalidation and silencing.

Research conducted within the western academy — no matter how anti-colonial, anti-racist, feminist, Marxist, or reflective — necessarily answers to this history and can never fully subvert it while working within western academic strictures. The sheer breadth of counter-hegemonic methodological approaches attests, on some level, to a desperation among researchers to fit a square peg into a round hole. Scholarship, for those fortunate enough to be positioned just so, is a job. The push to trans/re-form the academy is too rarely supplanted by the push to replace the academy, a pursuit that would leave many out of a job. Truly anti-colonial scholarship will always create (and be forced to mediate from the onset) a tension between content and context — between the form and the goal. Critical work in the academy must be accompanied by a call for accountability that is perhaps ultimately insatiable. While certain groups of scholars and knowledges that have traditionally been kept out of (and at odds with) the academy are key in the creation of progressive, responsible and liable academic projects, it is worth posing a heuristic as to whether the academy can ever shed the chains of its past. For white scholars in particular, membership in the academy (even at junior levels) represents a reciprocal commitment to an institution historically and currently devoted to defence and maintenance of the “white liberal framework” (James, 2007). It is in light of this ambiguity that I begin the discussion of my location within and outside of this research.

I am a researcher from the western academy. I am a very white, fairly straight, working class, six foot, English as a first language, man. I come to the research table with a set of privileges as well as an
ontology sometimes reflective of those privileges. As far as research design, a consideration of race was necessary alongside a consideration of language and citizenship status. In Cuba, I am a white foreigner with barely passable Spanish and there are certain ethnographic doors closed to me as a result. As I explicate further in the final section of this chapter, this motivated my decision to include the quantitative survey component, and have it conducted by local Afro-Cuban and Mestizo researchers. The chance of an answer not coloured by the gaze of the white foreign researcher was improved through these measures. While whiteness was a border in that sense, it was a passport in others.

Whiteness, I am quite sure, chauffeured me through numerous situations in downtown Havana. If my foreign clothes and mannerisms were insufficient for the task, my colour confirmed my innocence and right to be left alone in the highly policed Central Havana region. Culturally, my skin is agreeable to a relatively autonomous status in Cuba (and Canada). As a foreigner operating in Cuba, taking tapes and surveys in and out of the country, I was left alone. In my leisure time I was allowed virtually everywhere, and never given a questioning glance, something to which black researchers (e.g. Fernandes 2007 and Sawyer 2006) have pointed as part of navigating the terrain of researching in Cuba.

So while race is a methodological issue worth considering in the design and conduct of research, it also plays out upon the broader race landscape. The race paradigm was not just something I studied, but rather it was something in which I participated while in Cuba (as it is the moment I step out my front door in Toronto). Within the qualitative interviews, I had to consider my own privilege going in, and had to allow the revelation of that privilege to proceed as the participants saw fit. Few conversations ended without me answering questions about my salary, my partner’s salary, my partner’s race, whether or not I was racist, the price of my room, the price of my plane ticket, the cost and brand of my clothes etc. Although perhaps small points of curiosity on the surface, this questioning opened the door for a dialogical interaction about race, class and the relationship between the two — a conversation in which questions of my race, and of racism in Canada were included. Although the study is critical of Cuban race
relations on the whole, the study of race in Cuba is ultimately a pedagogical exercise, particularly in the
hands and mind of a Canadian whose country is by many measures, way behind Cuba as far as race
relations. I had to allow myself to be implicated in the topic and the conversation in order to begin any
subversion of the traditional one-way information exchange which has characterized so much academic
research. A two-way conversation also serves to validate the conversation as a site of knowledge
generation — in and of itself. As Hytten and Adkins (2001, p. 144) argue: “Dialogue is critical to
disrupting the normative power of whiteness because in order to see our own worlds differently, we
must learn to listen to others and to some extent, see ourselves through others’ eyes.”38 As a white
researcher, part of any perceived research authority that I have stems from, among other things, colour.
Displacing the usual contours of data collection is one, albeit small, way to get past notions of research
authority, as well as the raced power imbalances with which such notions come.

Although author/researcher self-location is key to destabilizing the false neutrality and a-
politicization implied by too many academic and educational texts, very little self-location, particularly
that by whites, serves to actually change race power. The same can be said about the power of the
western gaze and researchers working in countries not their own, who write beautifully about the
mutuality of knowledge creation, about their ‘friends’ in the research sites and/or about the families
that they became a part of while conducting their research. I have no doubt connections get made, but
even the most intimate relationships can involve hierarchies and power imbalances, and may indeed be
fuelled by the most instrumental of desires. When talking to teachers in Cuba, it was key for me to
acknowledge the embodied power differential in my own mind for starters, and when necessary in
conversation. Being respectful during my time with research participants meant being real: being rich,
being white, being ignorant, being needy and being open. Part of being ethical, meant owning these
things and their implications — sitting in spaces of irreconciled tension produced by glaring inequality.

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38 Quoted in James 2007, p. 127.
While part of subverting the highly raced, classed and gendered paradigm of researcher impartiality involves getting to know one’s participants, this in and of itself, accounts for but does not change power. I certainly have friends who I talked to for the study, and indeed there is a family of which I feel a tiny but now distant part, in Central Havana. All of this however, as well as the joy I felt playing card games with the children, and of introducing my family to theirs, has very little necessarily, to do with challenging power relations within the research site. Part of true self-location is to not cover up race and other markers of difference with high theory and flowery rhetoric. When a white North American researcher with $1000 cash in his hotel room and a return ticket, is sitting in a downtown one room apartment which houses four generations who live on a few dollars a day, no methodological approach can span the bridge between the research site and the researcher’s own living room a thousand miles away. It is disingenuous to argue that a research method or methodology can explain away (or even explain) privilege and academic power.

Further, a firm footing in anti-colonial and anti-racist theory guarantees nothing about whether or not the project is good, or will do good. So while I come at this research with anti-colonial intentions around supporting the evolution of race relations in Cuba, and of contributing uniquely to the fields of anti-colonialism and anti-racism, I have yet to be convinced that these intentions matter in and of themselves. While I hope to contribute to the fight against racism in Cuba, I proceed knowing full well that I may not accomplish that goal. I am confident I will hurt no one, but less sure that the intention of service which guides much of my thinking will play out in a way which effects change. The research undertaken here is made possible by my privileges, and will neither feed nor clothe people. It is my discursive impotence, enabled by where I am positioned (and not positioned) which locates me and dislocates me as much as anything else.

While self-identification involves an analysis of one’s embodied offerings to the project, it must also involve a look at what one does not bring to the table. I do not understand being victimised by
racism. I do not understand living without white privilege. Specific to the Cuban context, I do not understand living through the poverty of the US Blockade. A self-identified socialist, I live like a capitalist. I do not know what socialism feels like — I do not know what it feels like to pay the cost of socialism in Cuba. I am by no means the first to find Cuba romantic, sexy, righteous, infinitely excusable and splendid, just as imagined memories are often splendid. The rich, however, have always been the only class to fully understand and attest to the nobility of poverty.\textsuperscript{39} Similarly, to point to Cuba’s racism and then argue that Cuba is still a force for good on the whole, will require some heavy analysis. I cannot say with certainty whether or not my race prevents me from casting a more or less critical gaze on the island. Nor do I know if my race allows for a higher tolerance of Cuba’s racist past, present and future in the service of socialism. Conversely, it is through a heavily Euro-American anti-racist discursive lens that I have come to see the world. The vast majority of Cubans with whom I have spoken, downplay race. Statistically, Cuba is one of the most racially advanced nations in the world. Can Cubans be ignored in an effort to understand Cuba on its own terms? Can a race-salient analysis do justice to understanding power relations in Cuba? If there is an analytical conscience to which I am accountable, it lies in these questions — in the balance between my unembodied understanding of what it means to be victimised by racism, and a largely imposed insistence on the centring of the race question.

6i.3 Methodological rationale: Assessing qualitative and quantitative approaches and the mixed method approach

6i.31 The qualitative approach

Following feminist and anti-racist scholar Erica Lawson’s (2005, p. 85) argument that “all knowledge is partial and contested” we have, instead of final or total truths, a continuum of layers, arguments, degrees, nuances, experiences, histories and reflections that make up knowledge. Indeed Haraway (1988) and others have made these points the mainstay of a long and leading engagement with

\textsuperscript{39} This raises the question about different sorts of wealth of course, as cultural and social wealth can and often do exist in the face of economic poverty, and similarly, money is no guarantee of community or a rich emotional life.
questions of knowledge production. The research undertaken here uses a qualitative interview format, chosen to allow knowledge production, rather than collection, to take place. I was not asking teachers to recount stories of racial pain, or experiences of racism; I was instead talking about professional practice and philosophy as it relates to these topics. This was a conscious decision. My first idea was to attempt my investigation through the collection and analysis of oral histories. While this allows for a depth and nuance perhaps impossible through other formats, it also meant assuming a different place as the ‘collector’ of these stories, as well as asking a different thing of those with whom I would speak. I wanted to speak to teachers, as teachers, and wherever possible to make this process dialogical and productive. I cannot say with confidence that I would have been comfortable in the role of custodian of deep personal stories. This of course is not to say that it cannot be done. Yvette Louis (2009) has done excellent work with race and oral histories in Cuba. Her work reveals a depth of lived reality and understanding which mine does not. I wanted however, to be seen as a teacher colleague, rather than collector or authority, by the people with whom I spoke, as part of my engagement with social location and research.

The survey allows for the sketching of a context in which to read narratives like those which might emerge from oral histories (as well as from interviews like mine). Race and its understandings are contested and I wanted the opportunity to ask questions, be asked questions, be corrected and arrive at conclusions as part of a process of collective knowledge production, treating each session as a problem posing moment (see Freire 1997). Interviews, I feel, allowed for just this. As Stepan (1991) argues, researching race poses unique challenges, as it is a social construct both ideological and discursive. It has a material life however, and schools and schooling provide an institutional backdrop against which the terrain of race takes on a material form; educational contexts are important sites through which to understand difference and power (see Anderson, 1989; Dei, 2004; Gormley, 2005; Burgess, 1991; and
others). Teachers, while part and parcel of these institutions, make meaning of race and racism in ways related and unrelated to these institutions.

In-depth interviews allow a revelation of the contours of racial common sense to emerge. The qualitative approach allows for a pursuit of individual explanations of why particular attitudes are held and certain practices undertaken. To get at the layers, arguments, degrees, nuances, experiences, histories and reflections mentioned above, a reflective conversation is needed. Elaboration and immediate follow up are available in the interview context, and through this emerges the pursuit of thick description as outlined by Geertz (1973).\textsuperscript{40} Further, such a format was necessary for my self-implication, described in the previous section. The qualitative interview format was needed in the pursuit of dialogue, and to achieve to whatever degree possible, the space of mutuality described by McIntyre, 1997; Smith-Maddox and Solorzano, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2005; Daniel, 2005; and others. While the interviews stopped short of creating what one might term participatory action research, the dialogical format allowed for a centring of the agentive, meaning-making role of participants within the conversation. Although the interviews were thus highly subjective, this allowed for subversion to a certain degree, of discursive structures, allowing for a more culturally attuned picture of race and racism to emerge. Ultimately, this amounts (as much as possible) to an anti-colonial approach to the research process. As Sawyer (2004, pp. 104–105) argues: “Because race itself is an ideological construct, a true measure of its impact on attitudes and behavior is more likely to be found in subjective discussions than in a review of available data.” We can go a step further: an understanding and/or measure of race and its impacts on attitudes and behaviours is impossible without subjective information stemming from personal reflection and lived experience.

\textsuperscript{40} Geertz describes ethnography (which included interviewing) as well as extensive engagement in and around people’s lives. Although there is no way to compare 30-60 minute interviews with this approach, Geertz remains relevant to this work.
Despite the many strengths of the qualitative approach, it carries with it liabilities as well. I wanted to do the interviews myself, to allow for a dialogue reflective of (and on) the questions at hand, and to guarantee the approach described above. It is difficult however, to escape the white western gaze with me asking the questions. The degree to which my own subject location affects the response of participants can be neither fully understood nor dismissed. As a white researcher from North America, what defences did I inspire in participants quick to explain the merits of the revolution to someone from a discursive and geographic place traditionally critical of Cuba? Would a scholar of colour have had different conversations in both the way she would be perceived and indeed the way she might perceive? What would have been the effect had I been a woman, gay, or visibly disabled? Specific to the Cuban context, I would expect that responses to a Russian academic versus a Columbian academic would vary as well. The task then is not to speculate on whether or not social location matters but to acknowledge that it does and work with that challenge.

I wanted a more anonymous pathway of information and this was impossible in a personal, face to face interview context. The qualitative interviews are strengthened when anchored by a contextual backdrop. Such a backdrop simply doesn’t exist for race in Cuba, and this is where other data sources come in. The Cuban state and its academics, as well as foreign researchers working in/on Cuba, provide insufficient information with which to best situate, contextualize and juxtapose the conversations described above. This informed the decision to develop a corollary survey designed to support the qualitative component.

6i.32 The quantitative approach

The survey comes with a dangerous past. As the mainsail of the positivist research ship, surveys stand for objectivity, measurement, impartiality, determination, definition of the subject by the researcher, and for a hands-off approach to knowing and doing. Surveys rarely ask follow up questions,

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41 See Appendix A (for the Spanish) and Appendix B (for the English) versions of the survey.
rarely account for power or disempowerment, rarely ask for elaboration, rarely allow dialogue, and cannot be adaptively reflective. Surveys make researcher accountability to the participant all but impossible. Most importantly, as far as the challenges of the survey approach, surveys are particularly limited in their ability to tell us why people know, understand, act or feel certain ways. It follows that surveys should be used carefully and only for certain tasks. In conjunction with a more qualitative component, the survey can form part of a statistical picture in which to better understand a given research context, question, population or idea. The Cuban context is uniquely void of formal numerical data on race. Sawyer explains part of the rationale for his groundbreaking survey research on race in Cuba:

There has only been one other sample of public opinion on race conducted in Cuba in the past forty years by US based researchers (de la Fuente 2001). That sample, gathered by Alejandro de la Fuente, did not include standard measures of racial attitudes used by social scientists... In addition to de la Fuente’s work, several Cuban research units have conducted survey research in Cuba. We do not know how many people were sampled by these researchers, however, or to what degree the samples are representative. Also, the raw data have not been made publicly available. (Sawyer 2006, pp. 135–136)

Although Sawyer restricts his statement on the paucity of statistical research on race in Cuba to the US and Cuba, I have found no other relevant work by scholars anywhere outside of the US and Cuba. To my knowledge, it simply has not been conducted. The data collected herein will be a relatively large contribution to a small but growing field of study.

6i.33 The mixed method approach

The survey component assists in making the data collection a more holistic endeavour by adding another layer of potential understanding to the interviews, and as well by creating potential moments of interrogation with regard to the other data. The mixed research approach, described above, comes out of the recognition of the strengths and weaknesses of both the qualitative and quantitative approaches in light of the nature and topic of the project, as well as in consideration of my social location in relation to the topic and research context. The mixed approach, while by no means perfect, attempts ameliorate
the shortcomings of each method, and provide as deep and wide a picture as possible within larger strictures of time, space and money. The mixed approach attempts to strike a balance between the statistical and dialogical approaches, in the pursuit of a stronger and more transformative understanding. As the next three chapters demonstrate, the findings from the qualitative and quantitative approaches tended to support each other, and while the survey revealed a broad trend not found in the interviews, the interviews revealed the rich readings of racial meaning as understood and conceived by teachers. Indeed the use of multiple approaches to understanding the research and learning objectives of this study reveals the ways various data sources complement and contradict each other, overlap and diverge. The interview and survey findings themselves are contextualized by the historical analysis presented in Chapter Five, and by the literature discussed in Chapter Four. This triangulation allows for the racial understandings of teachers to be juxtaposed against (or alongside) the narratives which emerge in the existing literature and the historical analysis.

I close Part one of this chapter by acknowledging the essential work of Mark Sawyer. Specifically, his book *Racial Politics in Post Revolutionary Cuba* must be mentioned and credited, as the research model undertaken here is a similar yet less ambitious version of his incredible undertaking to understand race and racism in Cuba. Sawyer’s work, as well as his meticulous and generous explication of his methods and findings, is an invaluable tool for any understanding and analysis of race in Cuba.
Chapter Six Part Two. Interview data analysis part one: Cuban teachers and general understandings of race

*What is the role of racism in Cuban society?* (Interviewer)

*Since racism does not exist in Cuba, it does not have a role to play.* (Respondent)

6ii.01 Introduction

This chapter investigates my conversations with 41 Cuban teachers over the course of four, one month research trips to Havana in 2007 and 2008. While the next chapter focuses on teacher understandings of race and education, this chapter looks more generally at teacher reflections on race and Cuban society. The interviews reveal a complex web of assertions, questions, normative discourse, and contradictions. While teachers frequently deny the presence of racism on the island, their stories and indeed in many cases their pedagogies, demonstrate that teachers are front line workers of Cuba’s racial project, effecting and affected by racial logic on the island. Teachers generally identify as anti-racist practitioners and see this as part of both their professional and patriotic duty. The interviews sketch a tapestry of race which is an expression of government party line, but which simultaneously draws on personal experience and reflection with regard to race and life in Cuba. A variety of theoretical articulations of race and racism emerge, largely embedded in an obfuscating discourse which centres Cuba as racially fair, good and indeed better than elsewhere. In most cases, as the survey data reveal as well, teachers tended to disagree with the findings of many researchers (Blue 2007, Sawyer 2006, de la Fuente 2001, Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs 2000, and others) that economic reform has disproportionately advantaged whites.

Teacher readings of the race landscape certainly cast light on the degree to which race is far from salient in the minds of those interviewed. As mentioned, many of the teachers interviewed were the under-housed, underpaid and over criminalized Afro-Cubans whose neighbourhoods are held up as proof of the government’s failure to create a racially equitable and integrated Cuba. If there exist economically and racially marginalized communities, the teachers here speak for and from those
communities. The cramped apartments where three generations share two rooms are indeed the places where these interviews took place on hot afternoons with children and grandparents not far off. These conversations reveal people who believe in the racial project and gains of the state, and who work toward an ideal of racial equality in their everyday practice. Indeed the complex contradictions further reveal the necessity of understanding Cuba on its own terms, rather than via any imposed lens or framework. Official discourse has never been translated unscathed into the quotidian lives of Cubans. Indeed Cubans make meaning and articulate counter discourses, resisting complete closure and saturation of government understandings. This resistance is not rejection however, but rather negotiation (conscious sometimes and unconscious others) with dominant ideas in pursuit of personalized and contextually valid understandings.

Section one of Part Two of this chapter, *Official Stories*, looks at the dominant racial narrative that teachers expressed and invoked to explain the role of race in contemporary and historical Cuba. The historical place of race as central and yet unspeakable is re-affirmed in these reflections, wherein contradictions are marginalized to support the Cuban success story with regard to race. Section two, *Instances of Racism*, looks at numerous examples of racism, cited by teachers, following powerful denials of not simply the ubiquity of racism but the very existence of racism in Cuban society. While never reconciled, this contradiction is partially explained by a reading of these denials as normative statements, an idea expanded upon below. Section three, *Conceptions and Constructions of Race*, investigates teacher’s theoretical and practical understandings of race and racism, as both concepts and systems. Teacher responses reveal a reliance on notions of formal, personal equality to define racism, as well as a belief in the profoundly equitable nature of the Cuban state and its leaders currently and historically.
6ii.1 Official stories

*I think there is no racism here and that we have always taught the kids that it should never again exist.*

(Fernando, Mestizo-Cuban male)

While the quote above is an example of an extreme denial of racism in Cuba, the assertion that racism is not a problem is part of the dominant and widely held perspective of race on the island. For the most part, participants either downplayed or denied the existence of racism on the island. The following dialogue between Ofelia (a Mestizo Cuban female) and Georgina (an Afro-Cuban female) provides an example of both.42

Racism is very rare. Here, you can find a white man with a black woman; a black man with a white woman; etc. We love and accept each other equally. We Cubans are very united. You were mentioning before that when you passed by a Miramar school [referring to Havana’s elite and highly white suburb] you saw many white people; if we go there to socialize, they will accept us because they look at us as the same as them. They give us the same treatment. We are very united. It does not matter if you are black and I am white and I do not know you but you need a glass of water, you are welcome to my home and I will give a glass of water. Race is not an important factor for us to gather together. (Georgina)

I agree it is negative; it has no positive effect in Cuba at all. There is always going to be someone with these ideas, but at least in the professional field, I do not think there is a big problem. This is because the companies here are not privatized; they are part of the state and since the ideologies of the state are not racist, it does not happen. Maybe if the companies were private, and for example, the owner/principal of a school was white and he did not want black people working at the school it could happen. This does not happen in this country; not here. (Ofelia)

The notion of racial unity is key to the Cuban story as both a rhetorical and corrective notion. Indeed the division by race of people (even within a demographic analysis) was problematic for some teachers.

When asked about the racial breakdown of their classrooms, teachers were reluctant to count bodies by race, and the question often required further explanation, despite various attempts at re-phrasing between interview sessions. The following exchange between Raul (an Afro-Cuban male), Paula (a white female) and me (a white male) highlights this reluctance.

Can you describe the racial distribution of the class? For example, if there are 50 students, 15 are Afro-Cuban, 30 are white, or...? (Interviewer)

42 Pseudonyms were used for all respondents.
When you say Afro-Cuban for us, do you mean black? (Raul)

Yes. (Interviewer)

Because since the moment you say “Afro-Cuban”, that marks itself the idea of racism, I don’t know if you understand me... For us, there is a 50–50... Because Cubans measure racism very little... In Cuba, practically, there is no racism. This is the product of our ancestors, of our own ideologies, of our books... The problem of racism belongs to grown people, to adults. The children don’t see that. The social system has emphasized that. You are white. I’m black, but we are the same, we are equal; were two human beings. Do you understand me? (Raul)

Yes, I do. What about you Paula? (Interviewer)

The same. For me, in the classroom, there’s no black, no white. (Paula)

Read from a Euro-North American anti-racist perspective, this exchange points to a silencing discourse whereby teachers purport to not see the race of their students, and could thus never do, or need to do, anti-racist work to challenge the status quo or to teach to the differentiated lived experiences of their students. This presumes however, that teachers always do see race; that teachers count up students of colour in relation to students of no colour; and that teachers necessarily assess schools, districts and student populations by race and other social statuses. While each of these is the case with me, and with most of the North American teachers I know, assumptions about these readings cannot be made for the Cuban context. For Raul, the child (particularly in her role as student) is understood as pre-racial, and as being in a state of pre-race consciousness when entering formal education. Children will of course have information on race ahead of and apart from formal schooling education, but that information is commonly much different in Cuba than it is in many Euro-North American contexts. The Cuban ontological diet is distinct from that in Euro/North American contexts, particularly with regard to understandings of socio-material oppression and power. On one hand Cuban children grow up surrounded by a greater degree of racial equality than children elsewhere, and on the other, notions of unity and supporting one’s neighbours are at the heart of normative patriotic behaviour.

The assertion that ‘we are all the same’ is perhaps easier to believe in direct proportion to the amount of equality one observes, as well as in relation to what one has been taught to consider as moral
and just behaviour. Bearing in mind the powerful relationship between class and race, the relative economic equality between and among different races in Cuba goes a long way toward diminishing recognition of racial difference. Nonetheless, it is crucial to consider the degree to which dialogue is possible on race, and to keep an eye on the tools which silence potentially transformative discussion.

Education, for Raul, is a pre-race and pre-racist space. Others shared this perspective, as the following dialogue demonstrates.

In general, you will find more racism in the higher classes in our society, such as tourism, and in business. In the educational system however racism doesn’t exist, but there is a lot of racism in those other places. (Maritza, a Mestizo female)

Why is there not racism in the education but there is in other areas? (Interviewer)

Look, from what I understand, in the school while educating him or her, the student is taught not to be racist. He is already taught and inculcated and he doesn’t understand why when he goes to other places, like tourism, like when he goes to work in the tourism industry, why these things occur. I don’t know why or what are they doing there. They are doing nothing because from an early age he is taught not to be racist from an early age not to be racist. I don’t know how to explain it! (Maritza)

A gap emerges here where the lived truth of race runs counter to a denial of racism on the island. A counter discourse of sorts which although unresolved and contradictory, nonetheless ruptures the assertion that there is no racism on the island, negating the official truth as described by other teachers above and below. Other teachers shared this perspective. When asked about the role of racism in Cuban society, Lola (an Afro-Cuban female) agrees:

Well, there is no racism here. What I understand, at the personal level, is that there is no racism because each child starts off with a good education before the child begins school, so there is equality in the classroom. This is why we teach children the situation that other countries experience and the problems they face because of racism. So we teach them about equality, that we are all the same, and that it is not necessary to look at skin colour to become friends [among themselves], to be strong, to unite, to bring this society along the right path.

The pursuits of social equality generally, and racial equality specifically, as described by Lola should be distinguished from the paradigms of difference and tolerance; as well as from multiculturalism (Canada) and melting pot (US) approaches. Lucia, (a white-Cuban female) argues, “It is in our constitution to fight
racism, to fight inequality. It is part of how we are one.” For Lucia and others, this is part and parcel of the socialist project. She continues:

With capitalism there was racial inequality due to social class inequality and it seems to me that this has an impact because... after the Revolution, we had land distribution [programmes] and all the land was divided and distributed equally and this helped abolish racism... not only for the white or black person, or like you said, for the Cuban, but also for the urban and rural person... and socialism abolished it [racism]. I believe socialism has abolished it. We continue to work in fighting racism as we continue the path of socialism.

The social hardwiring to fight racism notwithstanding, teacher perceptions of race and racism follow a narrative similar to that on offer from the dominant race story on the island, relying on disconnection (finding race and racism elsewhere in time and space) and formal equality as a measure of racism.

6ii.11 Disconnection

Very much in keeping with Castro’s treatment of race, particularly pre 1986, many of the teachers interviewed, described race and racism as issues relevant (and thus confineable) to the past. Racism, for many, was a problem of the early and pre-revolutionary periods, which is either solved or near solved by virtue of the efforts of the Revolution and the Cuban people over the course of the last 50 years. Teachers also distanced contemporary Cuban society from the dirty business of racism by locating it in other countries whose comparative failures demonstrate Cuba’s success. This follows Carlos Moore’s 1988 hypothesis. The following exchange between Ofelia (a Mestizo-Cuban female), Georgina (an Afro-Cuban female) and me, fleshes out this disconnection on both fronts.

Well, it is shown how we have progressed positively, specifically in the matter of race; this issue has evolved within the society through the years. Before, issues related to racism were harder to deal and live with. When the Revolution took place, there were efforts made trying to get rid of these problems. For example, back in time someone black was not employed anywhere, or it was really difficult to get a job. Nowadays that is not a problem, you could be white, black; as long as you have the capacity to accomplish the tasks of the position you can take it. This subject is discussed with regard to history, but not so deeply. It is not a topic immersed in all subjects taught. This is because it is not a crucial topic in our culture anymore; it does not have the same impact or importance as it does in other countries. (Ofelia)

Specifically, what countries come to your mind when you say this? (Interviewer)

United States, where the black has less value than the white. (Georgina)
And Germany. (Ofelia)

Yes, Germany where Hitler existed. In his time he would just accept white people with blonde hair and blue eyes... (Georgina)

Besides this, there are still many racist groups in those countries. (Ofelia)

Although the process of fighting racism is understood as unfolding over time by many teachers, it is rooted in the past (and/or elsewhere) and is therefore not salient or pressing (and deniable) for many — even those who acknowledge its existence. The following remarks speak to this perception:

Racism is something that still exists today. I am not saying that there is racism in Cuba and not in other countries. But generally, there is racism in the world still but it is getting better here — much better. (Erica, an Afro-Cuban woman)

It is a slow [process], like all other processes, in all systems. This takes time and people first see an idea in a very abrupt manner, and some may not agree, while others may and begin to adapt themselves [to this view] slowly. We have to recognize the successes and move on though. The change is evident from ’59 to ’89, because after ’89 we had many economic problems [during the Special Period] but it is true that Cuba’s socialist government has accomplished much and has promoted various policies on equality and things, like the role of women and of racism [in society]. And government has, of course, had a great deal of influence in all of these [changes]. We have come out of our own great depression [referring to the Special Period] and racism is not the problem there. (Xiomara, a Mestizo-Cuban woman)

They are not making it up. The changes, as noted in Chapter Five, were sweeping with regard to racial equality in Cuba. Although few rightly can fault the early revolutionary government for not moving fast enough, it is fair to say the government since has not moved far enough in its efforts to combat the way people think about (or fail to think about) racism. In many ways, the reliance on formal equality as the only measure for assessing racial prejudice and discrimination is one marker of that failure. This fifty year old mistake lives on in the thinking of today’s teachers. As the custodian of Cuba’s official race story, it follows that education itself not only uses disconnection as tool for understanding race, but indeed teaches disconnection as part of the epistemic framework of student understanding.
6ii.12 Formal equality

Racism as a thing of the past — as a struggle of the past — relies on incomplete understandings of what racism is and how and why it might be constituted. Sandra, a Chinese-Cuban female, offers the early formal-equality racial gains of the Revolution as evidence of contemporary racial harmony. She argues:

Look, socialism comes from the word social, from society. Therefore, if we look back, when we wanted everyone to be equal and for all, to have the same rights — although we all have different skin colour — we did something about those wants and now we all have the right to free education and to free medicine.

Luis (Mestizo-Cuban male), follows this same logic of formal equality through access to health care:

[Anti-racism is] a principle that exists in Cuba; racism doesn’t happen in Cuba. For example if you go to the doctor, the doctor treats a black person or a white person the same. In our case the same, we teach a black or a white person equally.

For many teachers, formal equality is the measuring stick for contemporary relations as well. Discussing the advancement of Afro-Cuban teachers into administrative positions within schools and government, the following dialogue with Marco (an Afro-Cuban male) is instructive:

Are Afro-Cubans well represented within upper echelon of jobs in the educational field? (Interviewer)

It’s not that a black person represents black people or a white person represents white people — no that does not happen. Anybody represents everybody and anybody can achieve any position. The individual character of the Cuban is to not be racist. There are schools where perhaps racism may exist, but generally it does not exist. You can find a school principal who is black, or the president of a firm can be black, white or Mulatto… (Marco)

How about at the Ministry of Education, are Afro-Cubans well represented there? (Interviewer)

Blacks can get any job, there is no rule that says ‘this many blacks and this many whites for this job and that job.’ (Marco)

For many of the teachers, analyses really hit a brick wall beyond the notion of the feasible, and few moved their comments or thinking to the level of the probable or the proportional. While educational and professional opportunities may be theoretically accessible to Cubans from all backgrounds, this fact mitigates but does not eliminate the need for questions of what bodies end up in what schools, jobs and
neighbourhoods and at what rates. This dialectic was entirely absent in the reflections of most teachers. The dominant truth is thus reliant on the limitations of popular analysis.

Although numerous researchers have pointed to the racialized economic results of Cuba's free market reforms during the 1990s, teachers for the most part insisted on a lens of formal equality to deny the degree to which private businesses and remittances have disproportionately privileged whites, white households and in turn white students. The following responses from Ximena (an Afro-Cuban female) and Hector (a Mestizo-Cuban male) are a reflective sample of the way these issues were understood.

Do you think the introduction of small private businesses, like guest houses and restaurants — or in general more businesses operating relatively independent of government control has led to an increase in racial inequality? (Interviewer)

No. I don’t think so. Because a person like myself, of colour, can start a business and he or she can do well. And they can improve and they can also look at everyone as equals. I don’t think that has anything to do with racism. (Hector)

What worries me most is the black market, because they are private businesses not regulated by government. But there should not be any more racism [with capitalism] because all businesses, like hotels, allow blacks and whites alike. If a white or black person wants to rent a room, or eat in the diners they can do it. No. A black person and a white person can both go into the diners and the houses for rent. There are no problems. In fact, that diminishes racism because people can mix. (Ximena)

The reference to the black market points to the stigma of the illegal and ever-growing informal economy in which Afro-Cubans are over-represented for reasons discussed in Chapter Five. When pushed further, Hector and Ximena disagreed that Afro-Cubans had fewer opportunities to start these private ventures.

No, because it is the same for a black person as a white person to own a guest house. In any of those situations, they benefit equally. What this means is that it is not only white people who set up their guest house [business] because it can be a black or white person, and it does not make any difference. This means that basically, it does not help a particular racial class because it can be either, and both can do it. (Hector)
Ximena echoed this statement during her interview, arguing “whites and blacks can have their business. They can both go anywhere... and I don’t think that [racism] is a problem. This business does not have greater impact on one particular racial class.” We thus see a powerful application of a dominant and limited race discourse which fails to recognize the degree to which race plays a role in the chances of people benefiting from and accessing equally the gains of the Revolution — racialized inaccessibility. Further, this incomplete picture prevents an empirical reading of the true effects, as far as race, of government policy related to private business. Racial logic, or racial common sense, is informed and misinformed by more than statistics or a lack of statistics. There also emerged in the interviews, in tandem with the reliance on formal equality, an invocation of meritocracy as the governing factor for advancement in both education and employment in Cuba. Numerous teachers, some of whom pointed to instances of racism within the schooling process, deferred to the notion that Cuban schooling and work life are fair and accessible for those willing to work for it, as the following dialogues demonstrate:

**Do all Cubans have the same opportunities to succeed? (Interviewer)**

The youth for example, illustrate how when you reach the end of secondary school or ninth grade, they have many options or careers to choose from: tourism, education, public health. What happens? [Their career choices] depend on the grades each student gets. Therefore, if you choose tourism, and you have the grades and all other prerequisites, then you can get a scholarship for this. (Lola, an Afro-Cuban woman)

**What are the qualifications they need? (Interviewer)**

They need to study and pay attention in class and get good grades. For example, if I have good marks and if she has them as well, then I will choose a career path that I want, but if she has better marks than myself, she will get chosen, because this means I did not study or pay attention in class, but she did. (Fernando, a Mestizo-Cuban man)

Besides these aspects, this country offers what we call ‘bolsitas’, which means that you can get a scholarship to study tourism. The students are assisted in many ways. (Lola)

The following dialogue with Ivelisse and Antonio supports this ‘by your own bootstraps’ theory:

**In the upper tiers of various government ministries, are Afro-Cubans well represented? (Interviewer)**
Yes, and this is quite normal too. There are all kinds of people. (Ivelisse, a Mestizo-Cuban woman)

You will find everything from the darkest black person to a blonde white person. About the quantities, they are even as well. (Antonio, an Afro-Cuban man)

There goes who has the capability to be there. It is not an issue of colour, but of capability. There is also an enrolment exam. (Ivelisse)

About the school headships, is there also an even representation of the different races? (Interviewer)

The same. There are black people, white people, and Mulattos. (Ivelisse)

Ivan (an Afro-Cuban man quoted above) describes the way the structure of education produces equal access for all students, and relies on the notion of academic merit as the only factor in student advancement:

For example, here we have a pre-university centre. In that centre only the best students with the biggest efforts and the consistency are admitted. This centre takes the students with the best marks. Everybody wants to go to this institution because it offers some of the best careers, like systems engineer or electric engineer. So, in order to have the opportunity to be part of this centre, it is necessary to have good marks that would back up the request. Once that you can see the kind of people that go to this centre, you would find that there is an even distribution of people from different races; you cannot say that there are more black people than white people. There are all kinds. We are talking exclusively about the confines of education. There are certain sectors that show this type of multiculturalism. For example, these situations exist within the education and health sectors. There is no differentiation based on race. The same applies for higher positions. The principal of a school can either be white or black. A head office position within the Ministry is the same situation. These positions have been earned based on capability and effort, not based on skin colour.

If Ivan were correct, and indeed the nation’s top schools were racially reflective of the nation’s racial breakdown, the merit argument would hold water. As Gasperini (2000) notes, however, whites are indeed over-represented in some of Cuba’s top schools. Confusing equity with equality is by no means characteristic of the Cuban project as a whole.

As mentioned in chapter two, gender inequality and sexism in particular were understood by the revolutionary government as phenomena existing and treatable beyond the reach of economic equality. The recognition that equity-oriented approaches, as opposed to equality-based approaches led to the creation of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) in 1960. When in conversation with one
teacher, I contrasted the creation of the FMC with the government’s opposition to a race-based version of such an organization, she did not see the connection, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

So there is a special arm of the government devoted to the advancement of women, due to persistent and historical inequality, but nothing addressing the same inequality as far as Afro-Cubans? (Interviewer)

No, it is different. Because in the end, a person will occupy a seat or a position not because of their race or gender... you can be white or black or a woman... and you will take a position based on your achievements, based on what you do, your abilities and not just because you are white or black. (Xiomara, Mestizo-Cuban woman)

The discourse of merit thus veils concerns about educational and employment access and outcomes; in a sense, providing an internal form of disconnection whereby the dominant is again disconnected from any culpability with regard to racism — leaving racialized bodies responsible for not choosing to work harder, more consistently, or more ambitiously.

Formal equality and disconnection serve, in tandem, to powerfully re-enforce the denial of racism, while at the same time represent the limits of much of the analysis of race on the island. The success of the Revolution comes through in the empirical proof offered by formal equality on the one hand and through an analysis of race as something unCuban, historical and foreign on the other. As is the case with disconnection, the idea as well as an investment in formal equality is no doubt both the medium and message for teaching students about race. As the measure used by teachers it is also the measure taught by teachers. The development of critical understandings of race is thus confined by these mechanisms which limit the potential for any rupture of dominant discourse within the epistemic boundaries of race conversations in schools.

6ii.2 Instances of racism: Tourism and police

Any prison you go to is filled with black people. (Rolando, Afro-Cuban male)

There is now, and has for sometime been extensive debate around just how racist, non-racist or anti-racist Cuba is and was — from independence to the present. Teachers were almost unanimous however, in their denial of racism in contemporary Cuba, with varying degrees of racism assigned to
different periods of the past. Remarkably, some of the same teachers who denied the existence of racism were also happy to provide examples of it. Even among those who provided examples of racism in contemporary Cuba, many were quick to point out that race is no longer an important issue, invoking the historical location of race as an obfuscation of current relations. One of the most senior teachers with whom I spoke, Ivan (an Afro-Cuban) told me one of his favourite stories about race in Cuba.

One time there was a black man trying to court a white woman. When she tried to explain to her parents that she was in love with him, they were completely opposed to the idea of accepting the guy just because of his skin colour. When she mentioned he was doctor, the parents said “well, if he is a doctor, he is not that black...” She added that he owned a car, “oh! He owns a car!? How can you say that he is black!?” they exclaimed.

Given the degree to which Afro-Cubans have been well represented in professional sectors, tropes of race and professional status in Cuba have been extremely persistent and pervasive to have survived both pre and post-revolutionary struggles and the accompanying gains of Afro-Cubans. After telling the joke, Ivan framed the relevance of the story for my inquiry on the relevance of race in today’s Cuba:

The point is, based on old ideologies, it was the whites only who were allowed to achieve all these things in life. Regarding discrimination, these are the kind of manifestations that nowadays take place but less so, and they are not as relevant within the society; they still exist due to poor education and bad habits transmitted generation after generation. They do not have the importance necessary to be prosecuted. It is not as crucial as economic inequality and perhaps even homophobia — but it exists.

In addition to teaching, Ivan is an anti-racist activist in Havana. The final words of his comment are perhaps even more remarkable given his commitment to issues of race. Ivan’s personal entry point on social inequality is indeed race but he checks this against his contention that it is not the most pressing issue facing Cubans today, as well as against the notion of racism as an unfortunate but evaporating heritage. Ivan understands race as operating along a historical trajectory within Cuban social policy that has been largely successful at continually combating racism. Of those who did cite instances of racial discrimination and prejudice (those I quote below) they generally shared Ivan’s contention about the (ir)relevance and non-salience of race. Although I pressed a little harder for examples of racism in education than I did for examples from wider society (examples from the educational context are...
discussed in the next chapter) numerous teachers pointed to both the tourism sector and law enforcement/incarceration as areas in which race and racism were relevant.

6ii.21 Tourism

The centre piece of Cuba’s economic recovery over the past 20 has been the expansion of its tourism industry to virtually all areas of the island. As mentioned in Chapter Five, many of the highest paying jobs are now in tourism, and many frontline tourism workers have access to Cuban Convertible Pesos (CUC), which is valued at almost ten times that of the main currency (the Peso). Racial barriers to working in the sector are well documented by Blue (2007) de la Fuente (2001) and others, who point to both local and international preferences for white front of house staff. Even among the teachers who agreed with these assessments, there were frequently caveats added to essentially imply that ‘a few bad apples’ were to blame here and there for what were largely isolated incidents. The following dialogue between Raul (an Afro-Cuban male), Paula (a white-Cuban female) and me demonstrates:

Talking about tourism, some people have told me that it is easier to get a job in a hotel if you are white or Mulatto than if you are black. Is it true? (Interviewer)

It is easier. I can say now that at least talking about tourism too, I have seen either black or white people. In theory it is based on the capabilities that you have; if you are a hard worker or you were a good student, the skin colour doesn’t matter. But it doesn’t always work that way. (Paula)

All this is true but we need to remember that these are isolated cases. (Raul)

The following exchange, with Manuela, a 40 year veteran Afro-Cuban teacher, begins with the customary denial but changes with the mention of the tourism industry:

I do not discard the idea that there may be someone among us with racist ideas, but generally this is not a noticeable problem. The situation in Cuba is that we are trying to progress, otherwise we are in the wrong path. I can imagine that there is a group with racist ideologies, as in any part of the world there are minorities and majorities, but on the whole it does not represent a problem here today. (Manuela)

Is it difficult for Afro-Cubans to enter to enter the tourism sector? (Interviewer)

Yes, that is true, it is not easy for us to get into the touristic industry. We cannot really have access to tourism simply because we are not in the condition [we are the wrong race] to do that... (Manuela)
What is that condition about? (Interviewer)

Tourists want what they want — that is it! (Manuela)

And what they want, we can gather, is to deal with whites. Conspicuously absent from the analysis is the notion of responsibility or culpability as far as the Cuban government who works in partnership with foreign companies, and who is uniquely positioned to challenge the racist (formal and/or informal) policies of foreign firms. Also absent is the question of local responsibility for Cuban officials deciding to market Cuba in a certain light to tourists, with attractive white-Cuban women at the counter and strapping male Afro-Cuban dancers in resort entertainment shows.

In the following excerpt, participants Ivan (an Afro-Cuban male) and Ivelisse (a Mestizo-Cuban female) provide a frank description of the issue, and point to the steps recently taken to address employment equity in the sector:

The problem of racism can still be present in certain industries. This is the case in the tourism industry, where there is a big differentiation issue. The problem does not start at the education stage. There are the same amounts of graduates who are black or white. The problem comes at the stage of applying and getting a job. There is a certain preference for white people. This has been a real issue that concerns the Cuban State, as well as to the Central de Trabajadores de Cuba (Cuban Workers Board). This organization is formed by the workers of this country and they are very concerned about this issue. There is no balance of the ethnic distribution of workers that are part of this industry. (Ivan)

In some cases measured steps have been taken. (Ivelisse)

These measured steps that have been taken are imposed in some cases. For example, if there is a project to work in a hotel where a certain amount of workers are necessary, 50% per cent have to be black people, and the rest white people... Do you understand how it works?

It has to be imposed, otherwise there are preferences. The selections are based on things like choosing white women because they are more beautiful or they have better bearing... So, these are the kinds of situations that can exist, where black people are left out. Or in cases where they are hired, when assigning positions, you can still notice a differentiation, like black people working for the bar or something similar but not having managerial positions. Those are some of the difficult problems to be solved, the ones that we inherited from capitalism. (Ivan)

At first reading, the conclusion reached above that the institutional racism described comes as part of the capitalist hangover is dubious: race based patronage is by no means necessarily capitalist
phenomena. For Ivan however, the hangover is a moral one, in as much as to enact such racism is contrary to the philosophy, goals and proper practice of Cuban socialism. The moral project of socialism (as opposed to simply the economic program) emerges here as part of a normative embrace of anti-racism, rather than as simply a scape-goating of a system of the past. The fact that affirmative action programs were set up, speaks to the size of the problem as well as to how public and widespread knowledge about the problem is. The fact that most teachers denied or made no mention of this problem is reflective of limited analysis, limited information, and/or an unwillingness to acknowledge racism on the island.

6ii.22 Law enforcement

Where discussions about race and tourism were tempered, the few teachers who addressed issues of race and policing were clear, critical or outspoken with their comments. For the teachers quoted below, as well as for many Cubans that I met on the island, the police are powerful but highly disrespected agents of control rather than protection — frequently looked down upon. Rolando, an Afro-Cuban explains:

In Cuba you just need to be corrupt [in order to be a police officer]. You can apply to be a police officer and have a long dark history hidden that police do not know about. If you are applying for this position, at least you should be asked why you want to become a police officer, whereas here you just receive a uniform and that is it. This leads to them having low culture and being more racist.

The following dialogue between Raul (an Afro-Cuban male), Paula (a white-Cuban female) and me highlights and fleshes out some of these criticisms. In a discussion about sanctions for teachers who commit race-based offences, Raul raised the issue of police racism.

If teachers get out of line, there are reprimands, which are like sanctions. They are very few related to race though — in fact never that I have heard of. Some of [the reprimands] are fines. (Raul)

Are they very common? (Interviewer)

No, they are not. But, surprisingly, the ones that should be paying those fines are the ones that created them: the police. They need to be fined. I was raised in here among black people and I consider myself as black as them. Why? Because I was raised with that mentality. But police, the
repressive body, sees us in a different way. I am of the idea that in order to be a policeman, it should be necessary to go to school. Like it is everywhere in the world — but not here! There is a formal process; there is a punishment, usually a fine, depending on the damage caused. Now, the ones that really commit those problems are ok because nothing happens to them, because they are the repressive body, they belong to the public in this country. (Raul)

I agree with him. (Paula)

With the police, do black people have more problems than whites? (Interviewer)

Yes... (Raul)

Why? (Interviewer)

Yes. They have more problems than the white people. If a white person gets in trouble with the police, they may have more possibilities to solve things. If it is a black person, a worker like him and he has a problem with the police, they... here we do not have a police department that is well educated, they may just get there and become a police man...so, there is some racism. (Paula)

The police departments here and anywhere in the world, have to be repressive entities, and in order for you to be repressive, it is necessary to have a certain cultural level. That is it. To be cultured. The Cuban police, in quantity we are very good but in quality we are the worst. In the same way that Paula was saying, if there is any racism in any sphere of this strong society, it exists on the repressive body, on the police. (Raul)

I can come here with a kilogram of cocaine in my hand and the policeman can think that is only powdered milk. He can come here with 4 books of History and the people think that he’s money laundering... (Paula)

Paula effortlessly points to her own white privilege, while speaking to the criminalization of Afro-Cubans by the police. Sebastian, an Afro-Cuban male, echoes this argument.

The problem is that in many places where there are problems of racism, it is the blacks that get blamed. Nowadays in this country, when there are problems that could have been caused by whites, the immediate thought is that a black was the guilty one. If a black is seen close to a white, it is judged as he/she wants to harm the foreign white; whereas if it is the opposite, nothing is judged, no thoughts about it. So, what happens is that if something was done by a black, the case is prosecuted, but not if it was a white person, and they do bad things too. Any prison you go to is filled with black people.

Although very few of the teachers addressed these issues, these comments resonate with the external findings discussed earlier, and point to widespread denial, ignorance or unwillingness to acknowledge issues of racism on the part of the majority of teachers. Further, the comment about Afro-Cubans and foreign whites refers again to the terrain of the informal sectors of prostitution, ‘black’ market sales, and
petty crime, in which Afro-Cubans are over-represented. We can assume that the pedagogy of those teachers who are silent on the issue does little to provide a social corrective, or to prepare and inform students about racism in either tourism or policing.

Finally, one teacher, who argued that race was by no means a major issue in contemporary Cuba, nonetheless identified the presence of a subtle racism, stemming from old prejudices (from the grandparents). Xiomara (Mestizo-Cuban female) explains:

Let’s see… what roles does racism play? On one hand, we do not really see racism in Cuban society. It could very well exist, but it is not something that we see clearly or that a person mistreats another person for being black, indigenous, or white. It is not something that you see like that… (Xiomara)

In what form does it exist then? (Interviewer)

In a very… covert and subtle form. These are residues from the grandparents… from past generations in Cuba. We were governed by the Spanish until 1898, therefore slavery in Cuba really marked… an important moment in history. Given that in Cuba families have always lived close by, there are many generations living under the same roof. Therefore, there are many grandparents that lived through this period of racism against blacks, and there is so much that their parents taught them [about racism/race]. But Cuban society has moved forward and since the Revolution. But as much as the Cuban government tries [to change] this, there are always remnants from our grandparents that affect, but it is not something you will [overtly] see in Cuban society. It is not what you call a pressing issue. (Xiomara)

So although she identifies the nuanced level on which race operates in Cuban society as a product of transgenerational living arrangements, the notion of saliency arises again, and while racism is acknowledged, it is not terribly significant for Xiomara, this is due in part, to her faith that racism is essentially on the wane, at least on the basis of generational attrition, and that there exists a momentum to Cuba’s racial story which is ultimately moving at a good pace in the right direction.

Something perhaps of limited comfort for those spending time in unwelcome conversation with Havana’s finest.

6i.3 Conceptions and constructions of race, racism and equality

In response to what I understood as an over reliance on formal equality as a measure of racism (or the absence thereof), I asked teachers to explain what racism was, and to provide examples of
racism. In addition to extending the discussion on formal equality, this also revealed numerous associations and definitions common to many of the teachers’ thinking on race. From this also sprang numerous explanations of the existence of racism on the island and elsewhere. I also sought to investigate what provided the scaffolding for common understandings of racial equality in Cuban society. This revealed a reliance on not just formal equality but also a persistent invocation of the notion of meritocracy, with hard work and skill responsible for advancement in both schooling and employment. Equality was in many cases understood as well, as naturally and inevitably springing from socialism, although teachers were far from unanimous on this point. On the whole, this section reveals a variety of understandings and misunderstandings of race and equality stemming from interpretations of the past, personal experience and normative ideas on what sort of country Cuba should be.

6ii.31 Racism defined

*I don’t know how to define it but I can tell you that by looking at the rest of the questions like sexism, homophobia and all that — racism goes last.* (Mariela, Mestizo woman)

Most teachers had no problem defining racism, but did not do so outside of the boundaries of racism as either a historical phenomenon or an individual behaviour. Of the 41 teachers with whom I spoke, only three described racism beyond the confines of the historical and/or personal. Santi (an Afro-Cuban woman) defined racism as “part of a system of exploiting a people based on their race.” Erica (an Afro-Cuban woman) argued, “to me, it is the inequality that some people see, where they see that to have power or assets they must reject other people because of the colour of their skin or because they are poor.” Santi was a veteran teacher and former director of a large Havana teacher’s college, and Erica was one of the only classroom teachers to address the notion of power in relation to race when defining racism. Lucia (a Mestizo-Cuban woman), took a general approach, invoking the notion of belief, as it applied to racial inferiority and superiority. She explains “well the idea I have of racism is, I don’t know, it means seeing different races as unequal. Believing that one race is inferior and another is superior.”
Even this response however, is easily disconnected from analyses of structural and institutional forms of
racism. In this regard, she was far from alone in her views as the following dialogue demonstrates.

To me, racism is rejecting someone because of their particular skin colour, or someone from
another race and that one does not see him or her as equal because of the fact that their skin is a
bit lighter or darker. (Sara, a white-Cuban woman)

Can you give me an example? (Interviewer)

Look, all of my friends are of colour. Now, it could be if I did not want to hang out with them just
because I am a bit lighter skinned, but we are all the same. Some of us are lighter and others
darker, but we are all the same. (Sara)

My conversation with Irene (an Afro-Cuban woman) followed a similar path. She argues “racism is when
a person rejects another person because of their skin colour.” When I asked for further clarification, she
explained:

Right now, you are white and I am black. When I get close to you, if you reject me and tell me that
you don’t want to hang out with me, this is an example, if I want to hang out with you and you tell
me you don’t want to hang out with blacks. So for me, this is a classic example. Or, if I want to
borrow something or help you, you reject me, but, if a white person comes and you immediately
accept that person and you still reject me because I am black.

Two teachers, Paula (a Chinese-Cuban woman) and Ximena (an Afro-Cuban woman) in interviews almost
one year apart answered word for word the same response as Irene: “racism is when a person rejects
another person because of their skin colour.”

Fernando (a Mestizo-Cuban man) concurs, arguing: “for me, racism is worrying about difference
in races, in colour. An example would be if I cannot talk to people that are different than myself.”

Ezequiel (a Mestizo-Cuban man), alludes to state wide racial oppression, but returns to the sphere of the
personal to conclude his explanation. He explains:

I see racial prejudice as something someone has against another, whether they are black or white
because generally, that is the only prejudice that gets talked about, but it can happen in the
opposite direction: from a black person to a white person. Racism can be a form of rejection
towards the other just because one has a different colour than the other. It doesn’t have to be a
rejection, or something like what happened in Germany with the Nazis and fascism; it does not
have to reach that magnitude. It suffices that I treat you in a particular way and then I treat someone else in a different way because of your different skin colour. What I mean is that I will call you ‘usted’ [respectful or formal form of ‘you’] and someone else ‘tu’ [familiar or casual form of ‘you’]. What I mean is that I have no reason to call you ‘usted’ and the other person ‘tu’ unless there is a higher degree of familiarity, but if I don’t know either of the two people, I should treat them the same.

Thus, the sphere of the personal is, alongside the historical, a crucial boundary limiting teacher’s analysis of what constitutes racism. This relates as well to the widespread reliance by teachers on formal equality as a measure of societal inequality. If the absence of racist remarks and the presence of a law preventing black people from doing certain jobs were all that were required to mark success in the battle against racism, then the widespread denial of racism would be, at least in part, substantiated. The significance of the personal, as a terrain of racism should not be underestimated however, and indeed teachers refer again and again to time spent (in school, in the street playing, in the home etc) in mixed race settings as a key source of their own anti-racism learning, and indeed point to race mixing as a pedagogical strategy for countering racism. The personal thus forms a distinctive dimension of anti-racism structuration to borrow Giddens’ (1986) term. Everyday interaction and social intercourse are powerful. This by no means excludes the fact that racism can function within the course of daily social interaction however, and we should not reify the informal as either inherently positive or negative.

As mentioned in previous sections, history is a favourite hiding place in teacher analyses of racism on the island. As the following excerpts demonstrate, this holds true in the way teachers define racism as well. Erieta (an Afro-Cuban woman) argues, “Like she says, racism is when a person of a particular skin colour tries to exploit a person of colour. And an example I can give you is from the past, how light skinned people exploited people of colour.” Hector (a white-Cuban man) explains, “I think that racism is discrimination against the black race... that is what I think racism is. An example of this [racism] is when the Spaniards fought against the indigenous people. Mariela (a Mestizo-Cuban woman) is even more direct:
To me, racism is something that happened a long time ago, when they used to take blacks to make them into slaves. And this is how racism began. For example, we tend to think of racism as the time when there were slaves, but for example, Germany was racist towards the Jews. And many other places are racist toward the Chinese just because they are another race. And this is what they call racism; it is to discriminate against a race other than your own, or that is not the same... I believe this is the concept.

Ximena (an Afro-Cuban woman) speaks to the race-based opposition of racial intermarriage as a phenomenon entirely of the past, arguing: “For example, in the old times, whites only married those from their race. A white woman who married a black man committed a great insult against her family. Not now. There are blacks that marry whites, Mulattos with blondes...” She is right as far as the frequency with which racial mixing happens now, as opposed to even two years ago, but as Robaina (2008), Fernández (2006, 2009) and others have pointed out, there remain people and communities for whom race mixing is undesirable. Sawyer’s study during the late 1990s provides the most powerful recent statistical data with more whites (28%) than blacks (12%) frowning on interracial marriage, although Fernández’s (2009) more recent qualitative work argues that such disapproval may be ebbing in the 21st century (2006, p. 47). In any case, race has a contemporary life often denied by the teachers.

Although definitions of racism were generally limited to personal and historical confines, when pushed to provide examples, four teachers provided examples outside of these, and each gave hypothetical examples involving employment. Lucia (a Mestizo-Cuban woman) gave the example of “When you deny someone a job based on the colour of their skin. Or when you have to live apart from people of another race.” Lola (an Afro-Cuban woman) explained: “I think [an example is] if I cannot work in a store because only white people can work there.... Or if I cannot work as a teacher or in a public institution. I have not experienced this myself.” Paula (a Chinese-Cuban woman) suggests: “it could be that because of the difference in colour between a black and a white person, one is not accepted in a workplace for example. One could not work in a particular place because you are black.” Finally Ofelia (a Mestizo-Cuban woman) argues:

Racism can also be the opposite way. It could be that the black does not accept the white; it is
not always coming from whites. Racism means to reject a race, either black or white or any other. For example, based on my skin colour, whether I am black or white, you would not let me work for your company — that is racism.

Ofelia was one of the few teachers who pointed out that racism refers not only to anti-black sentiment. Generally speaking, teachers used anti-black racism to explain their answers. As discussed in the next chapter, this is in-keeping with the race breakdown of racial incidents in the classroom described by teachers. Further, it demonstrates the limited degree to which Cubans invoke the notion of race as ubiquitous, a common argument in the North America context. In the previous section, Ivan and Ivelisse described the racial barriers to employment in the tourism sector (the nation’s most lucrative). The fact that employment was raised by four different teachers as a possible example, and that no other examples outside of personal and historical spheres were given, makes these excerpts remarkable. We can infer that employment is a primary potential site of race-based discrimination and as well that the work place comes under some critical scrutiny by Cubans as a potential site of racism.

6ii.32 Racism (un)explained

In addition to the numerous definitions and examples of racism offered by teachers, a few of those interviewed provided explanations of racism. Among these explanations, history again played a key role in the why of racism (as opposed to the what described earlier), as the following excerpt from Ivan (an Afro-Cuban man) demonstrates:

I think we should analyze [racism] from a historical angle since it is a legacy that emerged during capitalism. Fidel Castro made it possible: nowadays blacks and whites walk side by side. Still, there are some people like me who do not think the same way, and this is because the whites were ahead long ago, and that gives them some advantage. The black is still left behind. Regarding manifestations of racism, the problem of racism is not reduced to the idea that whites place themselves over blacks, but it also involves the idea of the blacks understanding themselves as inferior to whites. Using an example, if someone comes with a really good idea, someone else exclaims: “He’s thinking like a white...” Why? Do you not have a brain as well? Skin colour does not matter. This is a very good example of an inferiority complex. At least me, as a human being, I do not consider myself inferior to anybody else. Talking about women, if one woman has very dark skin, I do not care about it.
In addition to his colour-blind (and patriarchal) approach to dating, Ivan points to the role of historical racial oppression as informing current notions of race, in the form of inferiority complexes and by extension, superiority complexes. As an individual, Ivan has overcome this hurdle but understands its prevalence in contemporary Cuba. Another teacher addressed the notion of the Afro-Cuban racial inferiority complex as a way of explaining the presence of racism in Cuban society. Marco, (an Afro-Cuban man) argues:

There are complex people living complex lives even though Christopher Columbus came over 500 years ago. Still some people are living with that complex, I cannot do that because I am black and he can do it because he is white. That is a lie, and we cannot accept it. That is somebody living with that complex and it is their problem. In the tourism sector, the manager can be Mulatto or Mestizo or white.

While certainly Marco is correct in arguing that all people, including people of colour, have to do the mental work of fighting racism and assuming an equitable place in an inequitable society, he seems to not recognize the degree to which racism itself inhibits just such behaviour, and by extension ignores the role of dominant accountability and responsibility in the processes of fighting racism. This parallels the dominant silence on the issue of accountability on a governmental (or program wide) level. His final statement, arguing that anyone can become a manager in the tourism industry, relies on a blind notion of formal equality. While it may be useful for all people to believe they can do any job, it is also dangerous to deny the fact that white Cubans have an easier time getting these jobs. We can assume as well that whites face expectations of success within these jobs, rather than being set up to fail, and that the racism which prevents so many from entering this sector continues to affect even those who manage to find employment within it.

Sebastien (an Afro-Cuban man) perhaps embodying the complex described above, disconnects the Afro-Cuban from the African, arguing that Africans (and specifically the media’s portrayal of Africans) has given Cuban blacks a bad name. He argues:

Now, we have to be aware that this is a matter of heritage that has stayed among societies generation after generation. Let us not forget that all this comes from a long time ago. Cuba’s racism
is a result of the past: from the history of peoples before they may even have come here. There was a time when black people from Uganda for example, killed many people, there is even a movie about this. Since that moment, there are incorrect ideas about black people. I have had the fortune to travel abroad and in many places where I go, the first perception of me is as an African. As soon as you present yourself as Cuban, the perception changes, because we have our own culture different from Africans. We both, Africans and Cubans, have our own culture. We are freer; we are more open to interact with other people; we express ourselves more.

With the help of a problematic generalization of Africans as a reducible cultural entity, Sebastien participates in the strategy of disconnection discussed above, by locating the issue of racism outside of the Cuban socio-cultural and political paradigms. Ricardo (a Mestizo-Cuban man) traces the development of the racial inferiority complex, and in an odd turn of logic, credits the Revolution for opening up the world to Afro-Cubans who otherwise would not have seen the world. The Trojan horse in this revolutionary offering is that Afro-Cubans have, through this new perspective, found negative perceptions of their race in the world beyond Cuba’s borders, which have in turn affected their sense of self on the island. This also speaks to the dangers and limitations of unilateral fragmentation around difference. In staking out Cuban racial identity Ricardo rejects his African heritage, invoking the very Eurocentric politics that he hopes to avoid in those judging him. When asked where racism comes from, he argues:

"After the triumph of the Revolution, the black has seen the image of the world; at least the government has given them a chance to see the image of the world and we see that blacks see themselves as very low in comparison to everyone else [in other parts of the world], and that has always been a concern for the Cubans. That is the reason for the development of the blacks. As a result you will see them well-represented at the elementary, board, and ministry levels - people of all skin colours and races."

For Ricardo then, the Cuban project has responded to foreign threats against the Afro-Cuban sense of self. While he is likely correct on some level, his offering of this as an explanation for racism on the island serves to separate racism from the Cuban project — another example of reification, fragmentation and dislocation. Further, Ricardo expresses the idea of blacks being developed (mentally) by the government and the Revolution. This paternalistic approach — one that invests agency in particular places and ways — has an uneasy history in race relations in the Americas and elsewhere. The
notion of a largely white government ‘developing’ the black population is troubling at best — frightening and indicative of racial colonialism at worst.

One teacher, Rolando (an Afro-Cuban man quoted numerous times above), was highly critical in his explications of race, explaining racism not as abstract or disconnected but as something quotidian and material in Cuban life. The following dialogue fleshes out this analysis:

So, if poor education explains the racism in the police department, what explains the racism in the tourism sector? What explains the fact that white people have better chances to get a job in the industry? (Interviewer)

Well, it is said that whites study harder than blacks, which is not true. In this country the opportunities of study are equal for everybody. Actually, the majority of whites have less education; or in case they have education, their achievements do not overcome those of blacks. When there are positions available and a person shows up for an interview, exceptions are made and sometimes even expressed verbally, arguing that what they are looking for is someone white. This is done in some places, and also when it is for management or trust positions. Look, we are a marginal culture, sometimes here, and in many places around the world, you know that. So, my perspective is that the attitude we have to adopt is to make use of what we have and get the best out of it through our lives. Our culture is distinctive due to our personality; we are fresh and proud of ourselves, and not everybody likes that. (Rolando)

Rolando’s closing declaration that Afro-Cubans are fresh, and proud, resonates with the work of Fernandes (2003, 2006) and de la Fuente (2008) who argue that a new racialized identity and sense of pride is emerging among some Afro-Cubans. Rolando is also a spoken word artist, and considers himself a member of Havana’s hip hop community — the cultural sphere and formation out of which these new understandings are emerging for Afro-Cubans, according to Fernandes and de la Fuente. Rolando is almost alone among his peers, however, in both his vehemence of critique, as well as in his racial identification outside of the boundaries of socialism, nation, and traditional ‘new Cuban man’ identity. This breach of the collective identity, a racialized formation in which black and not white Cubans are included, is not only rare among teachers, but flies in the face of national identity projects which although often inclusive of different racial formations, never hold race as salient and indeed discourage autonomous organizing around specific issues such as race, gender or sexual orientation. Only Rachel
and Zorita, two Afro-Cuban teachers who perform together as spoken slam poets and MCs, approached race with same critical lens, as the following dialogue demonstrates.

People need to wake up about this and no one can be doing that for them. (Rachel)

Wake up about what, specifically? (Interviewer)

About blacks and the Revolution. (Zorita)

Not just blacks but people who are pushed to the side by whites and foreigners and even the government. At some time people will say — and we do now say [in our music] what black Cuba is. (Rachel)

What is it? (Interviewer)

It is us, it is people who are trying to finish what the Revolution started — what we all started. (Rachel)

There is no black Cuba, but there is racism and many people do not know or do not agree that this is, but we know. (Zorita)

Rachel’s notion of a black Cuba, although contested quickly by Zorita, flies powerfully in the face of traditional revolutionary racelessness, and explodes the notion of national racial identity as traditionally defined by the government. The grouping of white Cubans along with foreigners, fuelled in part by the absurd and overt wealth gaps between most Cubans and most tourists on the island, speaks to, and likely extends, a significant perception of the chasm between whites and blacks on the island more broadly.

This counter discourse, one perhaps increasingly easy to find as it becomes more acceptable and more widely held, resists the silence imposed by dominant discourse and serves to pull the racial axis of dominant discourse in a more progressive direction. This comes, we should remember, in an era of increasingly vocal expressions of racism. The increased vehemence and poignancy of the country’s anti-racism is indicative of the dialogical, on the ground, construction of race which has always impacted dominant discourse on the island. Hip-hop has in some ways replaced the black free press of the early 1900s and is a public, popular and powerful site of counter discourse production. Zorita and Rachel are
doing political work and understand their art as the free expression of agency. These three teachers (all of whom were involved in the hip hop community) were by far the most critical of all participants.

Among the other teachers who did point to issues of racism, none went so far as to invoke a sense of the personal, and none identified an agentive space (apart from state development and the national project) for resistance, the very thing to which Rolando seems to allude at the end of the excerpt above. In aiming to finish what the Revolution started, Zorita and Rachel impressively criticize the failure of the Revolution to consolidate full racial equality on the island. In the same phrase however, the complexity of the Cuban case arises again as the young MCs identify the Revolution as having started an anti-racist project — they credit the Revolution as the seminal political project of racial transformation while simultaneously inverting many of the other teachers’ analyses: while many of their peers see racism as a thing of the past, Sara and Zorita identify anti-racism as a thing of the present and feel they are responsible for taking up the revolutionary racial project.

So while understandings of race varied, with the exceptions of Rolando, Zorita and Rachel, they did so only slightly. These understandings of race and racism are largely grounded, to various and limited degrees, in the lived experience of people and are the result of individual and societal reflections and constructions of these experiences. Teachers’ understandings of the more subjective elements of race and racism are informed as well however, by incorrect information about objective measures of inequality. As discussed in Chapter Five, the overhaul of the Cuban economy undertaken by the government during the Special Period increased racial inequality through the introduction of privately operated businesses, a racialized tourism industry, the private remittances structure, and government cutbacks. The causal understanding of the resulting inequality commonly shared by academics studying

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43 It would be logical to conclude that teachers are informed as well by their relative economic and social positions (as teachers) and indeed they are. These positions however, do not resemble their North American equivalents, and although teachers are living better than some of the country’s poorest, economic disparity is relatively minimal in Cuba and teachers are not highly paid state employees. Many are keen to receive remittances, many reside in multigenerational homes, and most live typical economic lives.
race in Cuba, was not widely held by teachers. Further, many teachers tended to assume that elite political positions were equally enjoyed by Afro-Cubans. The following series of questions and answers exemplifies these (mis)understandings:

Has there been an increase in racial inequality due to the introduction of market liberalization policies during the Special Period? (Interviewer)

No, because, those are not private either since they have to pay the government a licensing fee. It is not like in other countries where your business is yours alone. Not here. Here, you have to pay the state and then we can start talking about these other things. No one benefits more than others — not different races. There are more opportunities in general now though, but not for different races. (Irene, an Afro-Cuban woman)

We see again the substitution of formal equality, in this case through a particularly modest form of state regulation of businesses through licensing, for an anti-racist or anti-colonial analysis. The following back-and-forth between Ofelia (a Mestizo-Cuban woman), Georgina (an Afro-Cuban woman) and me speaks to teacher perceptions of the role that remittances play in the production of racial inequality:

What about the remittances? Because the majority of the Cubans that left the country to work abroad are white, is it not the case that the majority of families that usually receive that money are white? (Interviewer)

No! (Ofelia)

Some of them are also Mestizos. (Georgina)

OK, but the majority are white, right? (Interviewer)

No, no. You are wrong. They are Mestizos and white people. (Georgina)

What about Afro-Cubans? (Interviewer)

People receive remittances equally. (Ofelia)

As with private businesses and remittances, Afro-Cuban representation in government was understood by teachers as equitable, as the following conversation between Xavier (an Afro-Cuban male), Ricardo (a Mestizo-Cuban male) and me demonstrates:

It is seen practically everywhere. It is not that one race dominates more than the other, you can see that it is similar or the same. (Xavier)
Are there many Afro-Cubans in the highest ranks of the Communist Party? (Interviewer)

Yes, there are. (Xavier)

Yes. It is not only the Cubans, there are many blacks. (Ricardo)

For example, is it the same number at the highest levels of the party? (Interviewer)

Yes. (Ricardo and Xavier simultaneously)

In addition to this misconception about racial representation in government, Ricardo invokes the common distinction between Cubans and blacks — implying ‘Cuban’ refers to white. This same distinction was made by a leading Cuban anti-racist at a recent (2009) conference in Kingston, Ontario, with reference to ‘Chinese’ and ‘Cubans.’ In response to a question about the contributions of different cultural groups to the Cuban Revolution, the well-known Cuban scholar answered that Cubans were “proud of our Chinese, who have fought at our side for our Revolution” (italics added). The inside/outside paradigm becomes clear by virtue of these semantic distinctions, and indeed evokes the long history of white leaders and racialized sidekicks in the various anti-colonial struggles discussed Chapter Five. Although ‘Cuban’ is meant to be sufficiently inclusive as to negate the need for autonomous racial organizations, ‘black’ and ‘Chinese’ are is still often identified as separate from Cuban.

The lack of understanding within teacher perceptions of political representation, market liberalization and remittances is confirmed in Chapter Eight, where in the broader survey, the pattern of teachers denying the racialized implications of these phenomena, held true. These misconceptions help to make some limited sense of the widespread claim that racism is not a major issue in Cuba. The final piece of the race puzzle as far as teacher understandings was the notion of socialism as an anti-racist force.

44 As Adams (2004) demonstrates, for over forty years scholars on and off the island have pointed to the paucity Afro-Cuban representation in the highest level of government (see Moore 1964, Sutherland 1969; Clytus 1970; Montaner 1981; Domínguez 1982; McGarrity and Cárdenas 1995; de la Fuente 2001 and Adams 2004).
Socialism opposes racism. That is the existing correlation. Socialism includes all types of people, no matter race or economic status. We fight for equity. (Ofelia, Mestizo Cuban woman)

Socialism aims for equity among all humans, based either on race or economy. Here in Cuba we are socialists and socialism is equity. (Georgina, Afro-Cuban female)

For many of the teachers interviewed, the socialist project is an anti-racist project. When asked about the connections between socialism and race on the island, a number of teachers argued that socialism brought an inherent anti-racism to social relations, and again they raised the notion of formal equality to point to the success of the Cuban racial project, as the following exchange demonstrates:

What is the relationship between Cuban socialism and race, in Cuba, in the struggle against racism since the Revolution? (Interviewer)

Basically, socialism deals with equality... of the sexes, races, level of economic acquisition. It is equality. Socialism tries to forge a path where all people must walk the same road, the same in as many aspects as possible. This is one aspect and it is one of the most difficult systems to organize in a society. Why? Because the problems are not akin to the social system in which one lives, but rather, it is the person who tries to increasingly get more benefits. [Therefore] it is not a social problem as such, but it has to do with the human egotism that we all carry inside. This means that today, you have this much and tomorrow you want something bigger and more beautiful and you will always try your best to get it. What this means is that one tries harder and harder and socialism does not try to prevent one from having better things, but rather, it tries to divide the existing things equally with the entire world. You are white, but because of the laws in Cuba, you will get ten pounds of rice. I am not, and I will also get ten pounds of rice. There are no differences and so no one will get more or less than the others. A teacher can be black or white and, as long as they have the same level of knowledge, they will get the same salary. If you are in the same level, you will get the same benefits. (Ezequiel, a Mestizo-Cuban man)

Although Ezequiel uses as his measure the notion of formal equality, he also provides a normative rationale, a social imperative which holds up mutual collective support as a political, social and moral act. Within this imperative is an agenda of racial equality — assumed and enforced simultaneously as part of the central notion of struggling together, as one people. Socialism, in its Cuban evolutionary form, is held up by Ezequiel as a corrective against ego and greed, which he assigns to human nature. He thus sketches a social contract with collective support and betterment at its heart (as opposed to individual freedom as sketched in the conceptions of Rousseau, Bentham and Mill). Indeed numerous
teachers agreed and understood the government as a progressive, civilizing force. Many teachers felt the government was generally more progressive than the people, as the following excerpt explains:

I think it is easier to guide a government into a certain direction than it is to guide a whole population. The government can take as its internal policies to be a good revolutionary, and act against racism. It is difficult is to set these ideas into the mind of every single Cuban. The government is a smaller circle, which makes it easier to approach. I think the government has progressed more revolutionarily than the population. (Mariu, Mestizo-Cuban woman)

Although socialism and the government were commonly seen as a guiding force — a higher power — in the spirit of true social contract, it was also understood as a higher power of their own making — as an expression of the people. Ezequiel, from above, continues:

People here have an idea, and what the government does is make it happen and make laws. This is not because the government follows Fidel, for instance. It is the fact that the government collects the ideas of the people because they are the people’s ideas. Fidel approves them as a law or a resolution. Then, we all follow that directive.

Irene, an Afro-Cuban woman, describes this process similarly:

Everyone’s opinions are gathered and the government sees that they are in agreement with their [positions], because that is how it is: The people are with the government and they are with us. That is to say that it is not just what Fidel says. It is not like he says one thing and we have to follow. They [government] do research first and it is not like they just made the laws today. No. That takes time because they need time to research and they go and listen to the people. They interview us, like you are doing right now. And they do surveys and after that they sit down and say and do this and that. And after, they do what we say.

Although Irene and Ezequiel use language which implies an ultimate discursive power resting with the government (‘Fidel approves’, ‘the government collects’ and thus potentially defines ‘the ideas of the people’) their descriptions fly in the face of popular misconceptions about governance and freedom in Cuba. For most teachers, alongside the linking of socialism to anti-racism, came a corollary linking of capitalism and racism, as the following dialogue demonstrates:

With socialism there is no racism. With socialism, we are all equal, we all walk the same road, we all have the same principles, the same morals. Socialism, in the transformation to communism, will never involve racism. Racism is when you do not have socialism, when you have differences, when you have [private] businesses, when people want to gain profit and exploit. (Lola, an Afro-Cuban woman)
She is right. Socialism has helped blacks a lot and capitalism discriminates against blacks more. Capitalism always reserves the best jobs for whites and the worst jobs for blacks. With socialism, jobs are the same for whites as for blacks. This is because socialism is equality for all, and to be a part of socialism, you have to know what it is you have with socialism. At the same time, it seems to me socialism should be based on mutual support: if you do not have something, I will bring it to you. But I cannot have a day in which no one helped me out... no, because after you get something, you cannot forget what I brought you. For me, this is equality in all senses. (Ximena, an Afro-Cuban woman)

Although the theme of formal equality emerges again, as well as the popular blind eye to the employment-based racial discrimination, the moral imperative re-emerges here as strongly as ever, as distinct from their highly accurate perceptions of the absence of collectivity within capitalist societies.

The common path, of progress, of struggle and ultimately of morality, is a voluntary directive which for most teachers is both fluid and structured — something that grows in response to the will of the people.

When understood this way, the persistent denials of racism in Cuba may be understood as informed by a defensiveness uncommon among North American anti-racists, few of whom take pride in Canada or the US the same way that Cubans might in Cuba.

As we will see later on, as the survey data demonstrate this as well, a small number of teachers argue against the automatic connection between socialism and anti-racism, as well as between capitalism and racism.

What is the relationship between socialism and the role of race and racism on the island? (Interviewer)

They have nothing to do with each other. One can be a capitalist, or socialist, you can be whatever you want to be... or from a particular political party. But in the end a government will give you results due to mounting pressure or demands from certain sectors of the population. But government can be socialist or capitalist. In the end, the people are the ones that decide if racism exists or not amongst them. Government can admit or deny that racism exists because we are all equal, but if the people do not believe it is true, and they do not feel or see it, and complain that a certain sector of society must be eliminated, then you can have government policies whether from a socialist or capitalist nature and the problem will not be resolved. [To resolve the issue] government must have political will in order to exert pressure and the people must support this political will because it could be that many laws exist, that are already in place, but that are not enforced or followed up on. (Xiomara, a Mestizo-Cuban woman)
Yes, of course, I think there are people who are living in capitalist countries who are not racist.
(Hector, a white-Cuban man)

And has this been the case here? Has there been an anti-racist political will from the people which
the government has heard and answered to? (Interviewer)

You have been talking to black people all day about racism what do you think? (Xiomara)

Xiaomara confirms the gap between official thinking and public, private and popular
understandings of race. On the whole, Cuban teacher understandings of race and racism are neither
imposed nor unanimous. They diverge in some areas and are informed by personal experience. As
demonstrated above, many Cuban teachers rely heavily on traditional refutations (there is no racism)
and definitions (formal equality and individual acts) to deny the relevance of racism on the island.
Further, false information about racialized economic inequality supports these denials and essentially
marginalizes the contradictions inherent in a raceless society characterized by racism. By focussing on
the past and relying on narrow definitions of racism, many teachers create the circumstances for
reconciliation between racism on the island and their denial thereof. Of those who do point to the
contemporary presence of racism on the island, most explain this as a pre-revolutionary hangover that
with time and continued effort, go away.

As a group, teachers tend to identify themselves as anti-racist and as resistance-oriented members
of a collective struggle: the Cuban Revolution, which is a living breathing thing for most Cubans. The
revolutionary project is one of which they feel a part, and in which they feel they play a role — as
discursive soldiers. They quickly and entirely reject any insinuation that they are told what to think and
say by their government, citing ongoing government consultation processes. They indeed understand
themselves as meaning makers in their own lives and in that of the country. Most understand
themselves not only as active agents of the revolutionary project, but as ready and willing servants of a
communal political project. Although it is tempting to see this as sophisticated racism on a common
sense level, as nothing more than perfect hegemony in action, such an interpretation ignores the fact
that the Cuban utopia described by these teachers is far closer at hand and thus much more imaginable in the Cuban context than in Canada, Europe or the US. Although many teachers are certainly misinformed about some key details, racially speaking, that which is obvious to Cubans is different from that which is obvious to Americans or Canadians. Cubans have lived in a society vastly more equitable than anything most North Americans have ever experienced. This necessarily impacts the sense of 1) the possible 2) considerations of saliency and 3) considerations of what is demandable of fellow citizens and the government. So while North American anti-racists might immediately bristle at the oft repeated and often empty promise of change to come in race relations, Afro-Cubans who lived through 30 years (1959–1989) of steady, marked and profound reductions in racial inequality might for good reason remain attached to the idea that the Revolution will indeed see to the end of racism. To a certain degree, we can read many denials of racism on the island as meaning instead that racism is unCuban and counter-revolutionary. Some, on the other hand, like Zorita, Rachel and Rolando, who see racism as a thing of the present and who identify its resolution (as well their own identities) as projects beyond the grasp of the Revolution, provide counter discourses which locate both their identity and their agency outside of anything provided or commanded by the state. They do not, however, reject the Revolution or the state in its entirety, but instead are assuming a key role in the construction of race discourse on the island. Although new in form, the highly critical voice of informed agentive Afro-Cubans has always played a role in this process.
Chapter Seven. Constructions of race and racial logic in Cuban schools

Since there is no racism in my classroom, it is not necessary to have a strategy.
(Sara, a white-Cuban woman)

7.0 Introduction

While the previous chapter looked at teacher understandings of the significance of race and racism in Cuba in general, this chapter narrows the focus substantially and takes an in-depth look at race and the educational context, as understood through the same 41 interviews described in Chapter Six Part Two. Education plays a unique role in the Cuban project, much as it does in Canada and the US. As Elvy (2009), Bronfman (2004), Pérez (1982), Gillette (1972) and others have noted, education played an important role in prerevolutionary Cuba and was key to the albeit limited gains toward equality made by Afro-Cubans between 1902 and 1959. As noted in Chapter Five, through much of the republican period (1902–1959), despite waves of brutal violence and repression against people of colour, a substantial Afro-Cuban professional class developed, and as Saney (2004) and others note, many Afro-Cubans came to attach a unique cultural significance to formal education, viewing it as a crucial and fundamentally meritocratic step in the journey from the socio-political margins toward the middle class centre.

Inequity persisted however, and as de la Fuente (2001) and others have argued, Afro-Cubans were under-represented in public and private educational institutions at all levels during the years immediately preceding the Revolution. In the post-revolutionary period, education became a pillar of the new Cuba. Cuba’s many private schools were closed (a key mechanism of pre-revolutionary segregation) and free and universal access to pre-K through university education was quickly available to all, throughout the country. Whatever the contemporary limits of the Cuban discourse of racelessness, and the corollary strictures of colour blind politics and policy, in the early 1960s these approaches were radical markers of progressive equality — relative to both local and international contexts.

These early tropes persist as pillars of Cuban race discourse both in and out of educational contexts. Although public and private race conversations are changing in Cuba (see Fernandez 2009, de
la Fuente 2008 and Fernandes 2006) my conversations with teachers on the island reveal a sustained investment in formal equality as a key measure of racism in both schools and society in general, embedded in the resilient and now century old discourse of racelessness and colour blind politics. Teachers are a step or two removed from the anti-racist vanguard found in certain Cuban cultural and academic circles, and support the dominant racial discourse of the state.

Teachers are not simply vessels, however, receiving and transmitting official versions of the race narrative. They instead understand themselves as forming and being formed by the official story, as trained professionals who voluntarily and analytically teach according to principles in which they believe, and which generally support dominant understandings of race. Although most teachers are far from the cutting edge of socio-cultural discursive change, such as that found for example in the Havana hip hop community, they nonetheless are the on the ground voice of Cuba’s race conversation with its citizens: they are the custodians of the quotidian life of Cuban race discourse.45 Conversations with teachers reveal a paradoxical formation in which teachers are indeed doing race work — much of the heavy lifting of the Cuban race project — in and out of the classroom, following an anti-racism derived from the larger Cuban race narrative as well as from their own experiences. Most of the teachers with whom I spoke are Afro-Cubans whose professional reflections on race and pedagogy are informed by their understandings of race and racism in Cuban society as whole, as well as by formal education and training. The epistemic foundations of teachers are thus informed by both their formal learning and by the hidden curriculum of (their own) everyday life on the island — various public pedagogies of informal learning.

Loosely following the format of the previous chapter, this chapter sheds light on the causal appeal of racelessness for Cubans in the Cuban context, explaining partially perhaps, the particular logic of the colour-blind approach. This chapter also reveals a wide range of formal and informal anti-racist

45 As noted in the previous chapter, three of those interviewed were indeed members of the hip hop community and had more radical views than their peers.
practices, despite widespread denials of the presence and relevance of race in Cuban education. Section one, *Official Stories: Racism and Denial*, begins by outlining the mechanisms and spaces by and to which, the significance of race is marginalized by Cuban teachers. By sketching the various denials, dislocations and obfuscations used by teachers, the outline of the official race discourse discussed in Chapters Four, Five and Six emerges. This section discusses teacher reflections and descriptions of racial representations within both formal and informal curricula. The section then looks at formal processes for addressing racist behaviour by teachers. This reveals a general lack of teacher knowledge of codified processes relating to race, and also points to a focus on individual versus group, institutional or structural behaviour. The section concludes with a look at teacher reflections on the role of Cuban education in the national struggle against racism, revealing the degree to which teachers understand education as a holistic concept, and also their own sense of agency within the process of discourse production and maintenance.

Section two, *Racism and Anti-Racism in the Classroom*, outlines the strategies teachers use to counter racism in the classroom. Despite the numerous denials of the relevance and even presence of racism in education as this section demonstrates teachers commonly see, deal with, and think about race. Further, in their descriptions of professional practice, teachers inadvertently depict numerous racist incidents revealing a contoured pattern of white on black discrimination.

Section three, *Pedagogical Responses and Opportunities*, looks at the unique relationship of Cuban teachers with the parents of their students as far as racial logic and discourse. Racist behaviour by students is often addressed with parents, where the social corrective of public education reaches into the private sphere. This is a key site of discourse transmission, a key terrain of Cuba’s anti-racist project. The section then moves on to look at teacher understandings of their own training with regard to equity and teaching. The section concludes with a discussion of teacher understandings of their own curricular freedom, revealing both autonomy and stricture as far as race and the classroom.
7.1 Official stories

7.11 The story of racism, denials of racism

What is the message or the official information that should be transmitted to students concerning racism? (Interviewer)

This is a question to be analyzed before answering it. Actually, in this country, we are not used to offences of that type; no matter the social circle, there are no problems related to the races. Here the problems could be more related to materialism, or even to sexism. Here, either as fortune or as a disgrace, from the very lower social levels, we do not see skin colour, and we accept each other no matter the racial background. (Oswaldo, an Afro-Cuban man)

When asked about how teachers were professionally expected to address issues of race and racism, and whether or not there was a party line of sorts which they were expected to follow, teachers pointed to the ideal of racelessness in the classroom within the broader pursuit of a raceless society. When sketching the story of race, which they both believe and feel charged with imparting, teachers invoke the notion of history as well as the notion of a progressive, near Hegelian, Cuban evolution from past to present — from racist to anti-racist. The following dialogue demonstrates:

I teach that in the old Cuba, and later on during the pre-colonial and colonial times, and after the triumph of the Revolution, we can see the different stages through which we have gone and the consequences that these have brought to white and black people. The child can then see that there is a difference and thus can notice that there is an evolution, that there is positive change regarding this aspect and that each day, there is less difference. We discuss how the government has made changes, to eliminate racial difference until it is reduced to zero. (Ezequiel, a Mestizo-Cuban man)

It is not just now that we are talking about what is black, white, etc. but rather we say that it is a historical issue. We approach it from a historical perspective so the children can see how it was before and how it is today. But we do not touch racism in today’s society. (Irene, an Afro-Cuban woman)

How do they learn about race over the course of their studies? (Interviewer)

As in Cuba’s history? As soon as [the students] start “The world in which we live” [an early social studies module] they get a bit of a summary... this is because I only work [with students] up until the fourth grade. Then, we start going deeper into Cuba’s history with the fifth and sixth grades, and we start to teach about Christopher Columbus and his arrival in Cuba, and then about the Indians, and then about the blood-mixing between blacks and whites; they know all of that. And then, in the fifth and sixth grade, when they go deeper into this, they already know about the colour [of their skin],
do you understand me? And they know what happened from this time until today, that we are all the same and that we now have an equality that we never had before. (Irene)46

History thus plays a key role, particularly alongside the notion of evolution, in the Cuban race narrative as imparted to students. Government action is credited with this change, and there is no appeal to time as a continuous force for anti-racism in and of itself. Although racism is something against which great struggle has been necessary, it is ultimately something that Cuba has, through deliberate anti-racist work, overcome and moved past. This anti-racist perspective is linked to and is part of the expected (and manufactured) moral stance on preparing Cuban students as future citizens. The dislocation of racism (to history or to specific and isolated locations) is part of the building blocks of racial commonsense in Cuba. Students learn that racelessness is linked to the fight against racism, which is part of being a good person and a patriot. In addition to its identification as an abstract and fluid location in which intentional social evolution has taken place, history is used to demonstrate the absence of racism in contemporary Cuba, as the following demonstrates:

Look at least in my class, I teach about Cuban history when.... the slaves were let free. I teach about racism... How to explain it? You see how slaves work, how they are punished, tied to a pole and whipped. I bring this to the attention of my students. That way I take it to the present and compare that period of time to the present. I ask them if that actually exists in our country and everybody will answer no, because racism doesn’t exist here. (Lucia, an Afro-Cuban woman)

Her final assertion could be inverted. She argues that we do not see people tied to poles (being whipped) because there is no racism. Another meaning is that there is no racism in Cuba because we do not see people tied to poles being whipped. The implication that the end of slavery equals the end of racism is of course preposterous but Lucia’s take on racism differed from that of other teachers only as far as her over-simplified evidentiary test. Other teachers concurred with her general meaning that it was key to teach racism as a thing of the past which was no longer an issue, by virtue of the absence of certain formal markers. Although the image of a bound and beaten enslaved person is uniquely terrible,

46 Note that Columbus comes before a discussion of Indigenous peoples, following the common colonial chronology of the Americas. I was unable to determine if the curriculum prescribed this chronology, or whether this was the teacher’s choice.
referring to its absence as evidence that racism is over, is simply another version of the formal equality discourse attuned to the same logic which insists that because doctors treat Afro-Cubans and white-
Cubans (unlike in the past) racism is long gone.

This is a thing of the past. Blacks and whites can do whatever they like — be whatever they like given positive material conditions. We do not see these issues, or our history, as Afro-Cubans or as mixed-blood, or as white. We see each other the same because in our country we do not see that African or mixed-blood difference. No. Everything is equal. There is an equality that says one can go home and say that there are specific things about blacks, or whites or Mestizos in the books... no, no no... We have equality in all aspects. We teach all kids. Do you understand? We teach everyone the same. (Lola, an Afro-Cuban woman)

For Cuban teachers in general, there is nothing automatic or accidental however, about the state of Cuban race—relations. As the following dialogue demonstrates, the evolution out of racism is seen as having been a social and political one, designed by the people and the government, implemented strictly at times, but successfully overall.

What is the official information about racism that you are responsible for transmitting to the students? (Interviewer)

Referring to history. We need to go back in history, base it on history. Because racism is focused on the position of a superior race over another. That is racism: the difference of races. So, because our history is so heterogeneous and we have all kinds of races, that is how we address the theme with the students. Why are you white? Because your parents are white, but for you to be able to study in here for free, many black people died. In that way, at least there will be respect for the memory of that black people. (Raul, an Afro-Cuban man)

But, why do you say that? Is that your opinion or is it the official history or official way to teach the subject? (Interviewer)

It is the official history. And talking about education, here before 1959, there were racial clubs. Clubs of whites, where no black was permitted; this happened inclusive of sporting as well. Learning from that, after 1959, studies were made to find a way to eliminate those problems — at least in this country. There was enforcement to spread that idea to the rest of the teachers, that way of thinking. This is what I’m telling you is coming from us, our generation, but it has been transmitted from generation to generation. So, on the subject of racism, the government of Cuba has been always very strict, very sharp. (Raul)

This comes from generation after generation. We were taught, and we as teachers will transmit the idea that there’s no racism in this country. Children learn from the moment they are at home because their parents are teaching them that there’s no racism, then they come outside and just play with the black, the white; they interact with everybody around them. At school, when we were students we were taught that there’s no racism in this country. It is the same if I share with him, or
him sharing with a black; I am Mulatto and he is white; we share with you, do you understand me? There’s neither any racism nor interest of any kind; we don’t think that if you are white you will have more possibilities than me, or that you will have more chance to get in to a club because I’m black. This is something that comes from previous generations, from many years ago. (Paula, a Chinese-Cuban woman)

Teachers, as Raul describes, were discursively re-tooled to support the anti-racist agenda of the Revolution. In the early 1960s, the time during which education was re-configured under and for the revolutionary socialist project, formal equality and the colour blind standpoint were progressive approaches to race relations at the local and national levels. Raul and Paula argue that those seeds planted by the Revolution have come to fruition in the form of an evolving, regenerative public discourse against racism.

Using Fernandes’ (2006) notion that Cuban hegemony is created by structure, resistance and co-optation, the official story of race in Cuba education is the product of a largely accepted give and take between the government and teachers who make race meaning and together confer legitimacy on the national narrative of racelessness. As the following excerpt demonstrates, denials of the relevance of racism are also frequently expressions of a personal politics — indeed perhaps as an act:

Now and here, we do not have a racial division between people. The same chances to go to university exist for a white, a black, a Chinese, an African or whoever else. Surely we as teachers, as well as this government, do not accept a separation of classes or people based on cultural characteristics. Inclusively here, you can see how we are all mixed no matter the race we belong to... I do not exactly know how to explain this to you. Here you can find all kinds of students: Chinese, Christians, Cubans; anybody. (Manuela, an Afro-Cuban woman)

Teachers thus do not understand the official story as one that is imposed on them, or as dominating. If anything, they see themselves as imposing it. In this excerpt Manuela implies that some students have private thoughts and/or feelings of racism, and that within school such feelings and thoughts are unacceptable. She argues that they are, as teachers, responsible for imposing the morality of the Cuban race story on their students. As evidenced above, as with their reflections on the relevance of race and

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47 The re-education of Cuba’s teaching force is taken up as well in Chapter Two.
racism in Cuban society generally, teachers tended to deny the presence (and/or insist on the absence) in their classrooms as well as in Cuban schools.

Beyond indicating to their students that all Cubans are equal, few teachers approached the notion of an ‘official position’ from a practice-oriented standpoint. Marco (an Afro-Cuban man) was one of the few, as the following dialogue demonstrates:

According to the Ministry of Education, how should teachers present or approach the themes of racism, sexism, homophobia etc, or other topics? (Interviewer)

We teach everyone equally, it’s not that because I am a black person, I am better, or because a person is white is better or because they have different genders. We attend to everybody the same, they have to help one another, if a student has a lack of knowledge about something and there is a person with a different skin colour or different sexuality, it doesn’t matter, That’s what I can explain to you. (Marco, an Afro-Cuban man)

7.12 Representation

There is much literature about Martí that talks about slavery, African peoples, etc. And these textbooks help us in the classroom because they talk about races and things like that. In our school at least we address those issues a lot. For example, we address issues of slavery, poverty and racism at the high school level in Cuba. (Erica, an Afro-Cuban woman)

From both an anti-colonial and anti-racist reading of race and education, representation of diverse bodies within the formal curricula (textbooks, lesson plans, teaching and learning expectations) and hidden curricula (school culture, teacher priorities, teacher focus, visual and cultural representation in and around schools) is imperative. When asked whether or not Afro-Cubans were recognized in both the formal and informal elements of Cuban education, teachers unanimously argued they were; in many cases citing General Antonio Maceo as a key historical figure (taught to students from an early age) as proof that Cuban history was taught as the history of Cubans of all races. However, as Robaina (2009) and Morales (2009) have pointed out, the study of both Cuban history and Cuban culture in Cuban schools is overly focused on the achievements and histories of white-Cubans. Esteban Morales, of the University of Havana’s Centre for the Study of the Hemisphere and the United States (CEHSEU), argues: “Cuban history as we teach it is a disgrace, because it is predominantly white history, and explaining the
role of black people and Mulattos in building this society and its culture is not given its due importance” (Quoted in Grogg 2009). The following teacher reflections (on whether or not Afro-Cubans are well represented in curricula) indicates that teachers tend to disagree.

Yes, for example, October the 10th, is the day that Carlos Manuel de Céspedes offered freedom to the slaves. That is printed on a 5th grade book where children can read and learn that historical fact. Also, on the 5th grade History books there is information about the Cuban Natives. (Georgina, an Afro-Cuban woman)

This means that the Cuban history... (Ofelia, a Mestizo-Cuba woman)

Is formed by black people; belongs to black people. (Georgina)

Cuban history has Afro-Cubans as an essential part. This is due to the combination existing in this country since the conquest. Besides, important black characters in Cuban history fought for the Revolution. This subject is not discussed with the purpose to denote the skin colour of these characters, but fortunately Afro-Cubans are well represented in the national history. (Ofelia)

Considered against the long-standing ban on black organizations in Cuba, and indeed against the assertion that Cubans are above race, Afro-Cubanness is thus confined to a role as an historical phenomenon. Georgina’s reference to black history as represented through the tale of the white slave owner cum activist and abolitionist, omits the actions of Africans themselves who thought and fought for their freedom, and ignores the highly political motives of the white hero de Céspedes. Although she then asserts that Cuban history ‘belongs’ to black people, this may say little about Afro-Cuban claims to the present. Afro-Cubans are by no means totally absent from Cuba’s story however, and a few teachers spoke directly to an intentional inclusion of Afro-Cubans in their programs:

In the curriculum, in your lesson planning are Afro-Cubans well-represented? In the teaching materials, and in photos or murals in and outside of the school? Posters on the wall? (Interviewer)

Yes, there are some lessons that speak of our Afro-Cubans. The subject is addressed in Spanish class. (Sara, a white-Cuban woman)

Yes, for example, in Spanish and history class, there is much talk about Afro-Cubans. (Erieta, an Afro-Cuban woman)

In what sense? About their achievements, their successes, their struggles against racism? (Interviewer)
We talk about that in history class. We provide many examples to the students about successful Afro-Cuban men in history. (Sara)

Do you discuss challenges that blacks have faced due to their race — due to the racism of whites? (Interviewer)

No. (Sara and Erieta)

We do not talk about it in those terms. We talk about it in terms of great people, martyrs and many of those are black so we celebrate those people not because of race. (Sara)

Judged not by the colour of their skin, but by the content of their character, Afro-Cubans are thus celebrated for their accomplishments rather than their race. Sara appears particularly proud of her Afro-Cubans. The degree to which race may play into those accomplishments is left uninvestigated by this approach, and indeed the agentive role that Afro-Cubans have played in their own march to equality is thus over-looked. This allows for notions of government benevolence (or even generosity) to ascend over notions of black (and even progressive white) struggle as well as government political strategy.

Before continuing, the relative degree to which Cuban education does value the contribution of Afro-Cubans should be discussed a little further. Cuba is an anti-colonial state, and the critique which Cuba’s official discourse brings to European mental and physical colonialism, slavery and domination is unique. Teachers generally bring a much more radical and unequivocal analysis of these phenomena than we might find in Canadian schools for example. Further, while many students in Jamaica, for example, still wait for exams to be graded and returned by British ‘experts’ to determine their academic futures, Cubans reject the Western European educational project, favouring a revolutionary home-grown model which is perhaps the most successful in the history of education within developing countries. When I asked about representation, most teachers immediately saw what I was getting at and some, such as Paula, perhaps in response, jumped right to defences and denials about racism.

Are Afro-Cubans well-represented in the texts and materials you use? And as well, in the general context of the school? (Interviewer)

In Cuba, from an early age, we teach children so they may know their country’s history. And one of the basic facts he or she has to know about Cuban history is that since the first war of 1868, one of
the ideals for which Cubans fought was about racism. As we can see, 1885 and 1886, was when Cuba abolished slavery. And, I repeat, although it is redundant, that this is one of the ideals for which Cubans fought. We had many examples of racism. For example, we had black immigrants from Haiti that we also look at in Cuban history because we cannot leave them out, even if they are immigrants, of colour... and many of them participated in the war and we cannot let that go unnoticed because they are international heroes and the child must know who they were, maybe not in primary school but in other levels. (Paula, a Chinese-Cuban woman)

This same resistance emerged when I asked about the demographics in teachers’ individual schools and classrooms. Although I had initially only hoped to get a sense of which students the participant group as a whole was involved in teaching, when I asked teachers to describe the racial breakdown of their schools and classes, reactions varied and the line of questioning seemed to breach the way in which they understood their students. Although teachers were happy to talk about difference by academic need, as well as by gender, they were reluctant to break things down by race, as the following dialogue demonstrates:

Could you briefly describe the racial distribution of your class, or classes? Meaning what is an approximate racial breakdown of the students you are teaching now? (Interviewer)

No... that is a difficult question; it is actually something not to be asked. I teach physical education. My students are from 4 to 8 years old. They are all different. Their performance also varies due to various reasons. Often the black students are stronger; another group could be weaker, but it is not necessarily because of their racial background, but because their participation in activities is not enough to develop the adequate physical condition. Nonetheless, we do not do racial breakdowns of our students. (Rolando, an Afro-Cuban man)

While perhaps engaging in essentializing generalization, Rolando is reluctant to conduct a racial headcount. Although the former demonstrates that he does indeed see racial difference, the latter speaks to the acceptable limits of that field of view. He is not alone, and this reluctance ties into the colour-blind mantra of Cuban race discourse, as the following excerpts reveal:

Can you describe the racial breakdown of the classes you taught this year? (Interviewer)

That is not how we see students — or tally them. I teach my class to everyone, there is no distinction of classes in any way, they are being taught equally. I distribute materials for all, there is no racial discrimination. (Lucia, a Mestizo-Cuban woman)
In my class I teach 9th grade. I have about 200 or more students. There are more white students than black students, but everyone is united, in class there are no racial differences... it does not get noticed and everyone gets along well. (Maritza, an Afro-Cuban woman)

Maritza explicitly links the failure to notice race with social harmony — colour-blindness as social cohesion and in a sense, social corrective. To notice race, as Martí suggested so long ago, is to create the problem one is noticing. Her assertion that “it doesn’t get noticed and everyone gets along well” not only speaks to the notion that no one should notice it, and in this sense she is correcting me, but also to the idea that there are different kinds of noticing. Like Rolando above, she makes an observation about race which implies she does indeed see racial difference, but then points to a divisiveness which she seems to feel underlies the question. Indeed this is a cultural butting of heads: my Euro/North American anti-racist and anti-colonial lens is trained on seeing racial breakdowns, while Maritza’s perspective is informed by a different approach — a colour-blind Cuban anti-racist approach. It bears repeating that in the Cuban context, the colour-blind approach has developed in support of a much more successful anti-racist project than that in Euro-North American contexts. As mentioned earlier, Africans living in Cuba have the highest literacy rates, life expectancy, home ownership rates, and educational achievement rates of any national African population in the Diaspora and the continent. This must be remembered when considering Maritza’s (an Afro-Cuban) investment in the colour-blind discourse. While she is indeed expressing views which are in keeping with the national race discourse, she also likely holds deep personal beliefs about the Appropriateness of that approach, developed from her own experiences, analyses and reflections as a black woman.

In addition to the idea that race was something ‘not to be noticed,’ when asked about the demographics of their classes, teachers frequently alluded to school as performing the cultural function of serving as a melting pot, as the following demonstrates:

Can you describe the racial breakdown of the students in your class? Is there much variation from one school to the next, or one region to the next? (Interviewer)
Of course, there are mixes; even in the same city... there are schools that are more heterogeneous than others, this depends on the area where they are located. For example, in the countryside (rural areas), we can say that the population of black students is less compared to whites or mixed-bloods. I worked in a school where each classroom had about 15 black students and ten mixed-bloods and five or six white students. Meanwhile, I had another classroom where there were 15 white students and the rest were black or mixed-blood, while I also worked in classrooms with all black students or all white students. Just like you said, schools are generally very heterogeneous and when children go to school, they are placed so that they are all mixed up and therefore, more heterogeneous. In this way they learn to become one people — sometimes literally [through their offspring] — Cuba is a mixed country and this should only increase. (Xiomara, a Mestizo-Cuban female)

Xiomara’s enthusiasm for the increasingly multiracial future (part of the official discourse) stands in stark contrast with what we may imagine a randomly selected US, Dutch, French or Canadian educator would say on the same topic. Indeed to my knowledge while official multiculturalism in Canada for example champions interracial food nights, it rarely does the same in terms of marriages as the social foundation of the future. The mixing project also informed the colour-blind approach in as far as some teachers explained it was hard to identify a racial breakdown, given the degree to which Cubans are racially mixed already, as the following excerpts demonstrates:

What happens is that Cuba has always had that and the varieties of skin colour are very wide. Here we have many races and colours. Russians have come, also Czechs, Chinese, Arab, African and the Cubans are mixed among all those different races and it is very difficult to define the amount of students who come, black, white etc. Do you understand? (Ricardo, a Mestizo-Cuban man)

(Ivelisse, a Mestizo-Cuban woman), agrees:

Here we have all kinds of students. There is no racial difference. There are Chinese, because as you know here in Cuba we have many Chinese people; there are white, black, Mulatto, Indian...there are all kinds of people. The racial composition in Cuba is not reduced to Cubans, and it is hard to tell sometimes who is what and what is who.

My overall impression was that teachers had a very clear understanding of the intricate and varied racial categories used in Cuba, but were reluctant to describe their classes in these terms for two reasons: first, they felt uncomfortable with the implied politics of the question, resistant to the counter colour-blindness implied on my part; and second, teachers were not used to thinking of their students in this...
way, and the question was in a sense, illogical — a breach of their racial logic. Ivelisse did go on however, to describe the racial drama of the integration of the prestigious national ballet school (a process which started in 1999 and continues today). In response to the over-representation of whites in the school, an informal quota system was implemented in 2000, which has since increased the number of Afro-Cubans in attendance. Ivelisse, a Mestizo-Cuban woman, explains:

Like ballet schools, for example, the responsibility of the state is to make a selection among black people to choose those to be incorporated in these schools. Before, you could go to different ballet schools and notice that there were no black people in any of them. All students were white. A balance was needed so they included more blacks. This is why the state took the task of selecting children, black preferentially, who wanted to be part of these ballet schools. Nowadays we can go to these ballet schools and they are mixed and not only for white people like a while ago.

After this interview, Ivelisse’s daughter took me aside to explain that her mother was wrong about these schools being fully integrated. Although Afro-Cubans were in the schools, she explained, the best parts/roles still went to white dancers and that her daughter (Ivelisse’s grand-daughter — an Afro-Cuban) had been told by an instructor at the school that she was too dark to ever really succeed in dance on the island. She added that things were getting better though, and that racism was not a big problem in Cuba. Ivelisse and her daughter speak to and for the basic counters and contours of the conflicted, changing and contradictory life of race in Cuba. Ivelisse is likely wrong about the extent to which the state has succeeded, and according to Gasperini (2000) this holds true of other elite institutions as well. Her daughter, however, did not disagree with her mother’s over all explanation that race played an unimportant role in Cuba, and indeed shared her mother’s sense that the government was generally succeeding in its efforts. She closed our conversation by musing that she should have had her daughter a decade later. This implies of course, her faith in the evolution of Cuban race relations, and by extension, a quasi adoption of the official discourse, despite her critique of the very institutional racism which so powerfully affected her daughter.

Critical whiteness studies has pointed to the privilege whites enjoy of not seeing race (usually their own race) in the Euro-North American context. It is useful to remember that these are mostly non-white teachers, for whom a decision or claim to not see race would not in this sense constitute an act of privilege.
As a group, Cuban teachers understood education as playing a central and unique role in the Revolution generally, and with regard to race and racism specifically. Before moving to discuss this role, it is relevant to turn briefly to teacher reflections on their sense of how speaking race is regulated, as part of the official story of race within education.

7.13 Formal processes for addressing racism

During the third round of interviews, I asked teachers whether or not there were formal processes for addressing racist behaviour by teachers or school administrators who might have been accused or had been found to have said or done something racist during the performance of their professional duties. Of the 15 teachers with whom I spoke on this topic specifically, most said there was no such process. When I broadened the question include sexist and/or homophobic teacher behaviour, most still said there was no such thing, as the following dialogue demonstrates:

Do you know if there is a formal process for addressing such behaviours? (Interviewer)

No, there is not. (Ricardo, a Mestizo-Cuban man)

What we try is not allow the problem to escalate and reach that level, we deal with it... there is no process like this. (Xavier, an Afro-Cuban man)

With the exception of one teacher, among those who did know of a process, all assumed it took place through the Cuban Teachers Union (an affiliated arm of the Cuban Worker’s Federation), but were not sure of any specifics, as the following dialogue demonstrates:

Do you know if there is any legal or formal process for the resolution of complaints made by teachers or students related to racist offences? (Interviewer)

In case this happens, which is very rare, we go to the union council. We are teachers from way back, so we have a different mentality wherein there is no place for these circumstances. If they occur, the Council is where we go to present the situation and where we get the adequate solution. (Oswaldo, an Afro-Cuban man)

Like Rolando, many teachers were quick to answer this question with an explanation as to why such sanctions or procedures are scarcely necessary to begin with.
There are reprimands through the union, which are like sanctions. They are very few related to that subject. Some of them are fines. (Raul, an Afro-Cuban man)

For teachers? (Interviewer)

Yes, for teachers. (Raul)

Are they common? (Interviewer)

No, they are not. In fact I do not know a lot about them. We really do not have a great use for them. (Raul)

While many teachers failed to identify any formal processes, those that did tended be unspecific, and also to minimize both its relevance and significance. Lucia, in the dialogue below, provides the most specific descriptions, by far, of any teacher.

There are formal processes for dealing with racist behaviour among teachers? (Interviewer)

No, it does not exist. Just in case it does happen we would call the school union. We talk with the school union and the union gathers the members involved, the union, the principal of the school, the party, the youth, the comrades, and present this problem and take the appropriate measures with this comrade. (Maritza, an Afro-Cuban woman)

The union plays an important role in that process, the union undertakes the measure to punish that person who did that manifestation. (Lucia, an Afro-Cuban woman)

What is the process that the union follows? (Interviewer)

After talking to all the parties, the union files a written report, which will or will not contain recommendations for sanctions for the teacher. The schools are then expected to report compliance to the union. [The school] completes the process by submitting a letter back to the union no longer than three months later. (Lucia)

Are schools ever asked to change, if there is a pattern, or repeated instances at one school or with one teacher? (Interviewer)

I was an investigator for two years with the federation and there was never a need for that. (Lucia)

Does anyone at the union or the ministry look for patterns? (Interviewer)

You should understand me, it is not necessary. (Lucia)

While Maritza acknowledges the process, she downplays it, similar to the teachers mentioned above. Lucia, a former union representative on the other hand, takes nothing away from the importance or
even the prevalence of the sanctions. She stops short however, of identifying school-wide patterns; she
refuses the jump from individual to system-wide (or structure-wide) analyses. Presuming her account of
the process is accurate as far as the lack of union scrutiny of school-wide (let alone neighbourhood or
region-wide) patterns, the union (the very body charged with dealing with and presumably
understanding such phenomena) likely shares her limited analysis. Both Lucia and the union seem to
work with notions of formal equality, rooted in analyses of individual behaviour; this follows the
narrative discourse established at the dawn of the Revolution. Indeed with this set of tools only certain
houses can be built. Like an invisible safety on the discursive trigger, the Cuban racial toolbox can only
produce institutional narratives reflective of its core tools: an axiology of fairness and formal equality, an
epistemology of individual accountability to a collective ideal.

7.14 The role of education in the fight against racism

As discussed in Chapter Two, education has been central to the revolutionary project, as both
the primary site of discourse dissemination and along with healthcare, an essential success story of
socialist Cuba to which most on the island lay claim and take advantage. As part of the official story on
race and schooling, teachers often mentioned the degree to which racial equality was a central aim of
the revolutionary government (and had been since the early 1960s) and argued that in service of this
revolutionary ideal, education had played a unique role in the fight against racism. This led me to ask
directly about the relationship between schooling and the battle against racism (schooling’s role in this
part of the national narrative), and also about the roots of Cuba’s national anti-racist project. The
following excerpts reveal the degree to which schooling is understood not simply as colour-blind, but as
colour-blinding, as part of the nation building project. When I asked what role education played in the
battle against racism over the past half century Ximena (an Afro-Cuban woman) and Hector (a white-
Cuban man) explained:

49 I could find no documentation of union policy on this issue.
It plays a big role because it teaches children there is no racism in Cuba, and that blacks and whites are as one. And on top of that, there should not be any racism within the Cuban people. We can live with blacks, whites, Mulattos and everyone. In fact there really is no such thing anymore. (Ximena)

Not now. At least not here. I also do not believe there is an authentic white person because we are all a mix of blacks and whites, a blond person with a black person, etc. Schooling teaches we should be and are past this. (Hector)

Out of Cuban diversity springs Cuban racelessness, like an imagined stage of racial development. Given teachers’ frequent associations of capitalism with racism, this progression seems to metaphorically parallel the economic path from capitalism to socialism. For Ximena, schooling is the contextual engine for the evolution of race. Asked roughly the same question as that posed above, Irene and Ezequiel explain:

The child has to know it from an early age because in the first grade we teach about what racism is, and from the very start they all play together: it is the same to be white or black or mixed-blood. Therefore, there is equality and when the child reaches first grade we talk to them through the books so they all understand we are all the same. It is the same to be white or black. A white person knows as much as a black person. (Irene, an Afro-Cuban woman)

Luckily, in Cuba, we have the advantage that our education system is really broad, that is to say, it is not limited to school; it encompasses many spheres. On the radio, there are information spots, brochures, and there television programs that teach us how to deal with sexual and racial diversity issues and others. Movies and shows from other countries, you can only see white actors, and those are things that do not favour and do not allow us to see diversity as something normal. Not here in Cuba. In Cuba, if there is an ad advertising an event or something, you see whites, blacks or mixed-bloods. That is, in a show there are people of all races and from an early age, one can see that all the colours are represented and that there is no difference; we all work together. Therefore, the child sees this from an early age and when they grow up, these issues are easier to talk about. Therefore, besides the subjects that are taboo, that is if a child has never seen a white or black person, then the child sees the two races in television and this favours everyone. (Ezequiel, Mestizo-Cuban man)

As a centralized state, Cuban education as far as the Cuban message goes, is everywhere. Ezequiel mentions the media as part of a broader curriculum in Cuban life. His arguments about diversity and representation raise the important point about foreign versus local media. Of the limited foreign media available in Cuba, Brazilian and US television programs often over-represent whites while under-representing blacks. Cuban media, despite critiques about the racial representation from some Cuban artists and scholars (see Rolanda, 2009) tends to include more actors of colour in a variety of roles than
those piped in from other countries. Further, as Sujatha Fernandes (2006) and others have pointed out, Cuban cinema has increasingly challenged the racial status quo and has raised important questions around racial inequality (see in particular Eric Corvolán’s *Raza*, 2009). Ezequiel and others read the notion of education more widely than simply formal schooling. Since indeed TV is a part of the educational equation, foreign programs must be understood as part of the Cuban curriculum, despite their origin. To follow this line of thought further, we would also need to challenge Ezequiel’s portrait of Cuban media in light of various criticisms citing poor representation of Afro-Cubans (see for example Robaina 2009). In one failed interview opportunity, I should have asked him to what ‘taboo’ subjects he was referring when he described the role of the media — and indeed had him reflect on the implications of ‘off-limits’ topics for race and representation.

Teachers also tended to see education beyond the chronological boundaries of formal schooling, and located learning in the home, and among parents as part of a larger notion of education. Paula (a Chinese-Cuban woman) argues:

> All education takes place from an early age and it could be that parents have taught their child a particular way of being, of their way of disciplining, moral values or whatever it is, because of their colour: [they can say to the child] “you cannot be friends with a black child“, or “you cannot go with so and so because he or she is black”. But, while this can happen with the parents, it is something which I have not seen at schools. This is just an example so you can understand what I am trying to say: all children are equal no matter what their cognitive level is, or their skin colour. They are all the same and we teach them in the same manner, even if they do not all learn in the same way.

For Paula, within the total picture of education there may well be conflict and contradiction. Formal schooling — revolutionary schooling — often conflicts with ideas in the home. Schooling, and teachers in particular, thus work on the front line of the public discursive spaces of Cuban people — doing battle at times with racist ideas from the home. Despite the many denials about the role of race and racism in Cuba, teachers often referred to the role of schooling in the fight against racism emanating from history, parents and grandparents. The following dialogue demonstrates:

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50 Educational television, produced by the Ministry of Education, is part of the formal national schooling program and is integrated into the formal curricula throughout the country.
And parents also have an important role to play in all of this. Because before, parents lived in a time where other situations prevailed; there was racism and other issues... and so the education we have received after the Revolution has taught children these principles, this ethic. We have taught children and then parents and teachers that we all have to help one another to learn this. I am not saying that all children are instructed in the same way or that they all have the same ability to learn or same ethics, but this has been a policy in Cuba. Do you understand? Sometimes a child lives with a grandmother who has the wrong ideas about these things. (Lola, an Afro-Cuban woman)

Yes, education has this role to play and thanks to the education provided to the parents, teachers and students, we have completely eliminated racism. We have taught the kids that are starting to analyze situations, what racism is in other countries that are different from this one, and its consequences. (Fernando, Mestizo-Cuban male)

Working with the classic tropes of Cuban race discourse, Fernando uses the dual dislocation of time and space to deny the contemporary relevance of race and racism in Cuba: in the past (the past as embodied in an older generation) and elsewhere (different countries) but not here and not now. Lola was one of many teachers to mention parents when describing the role of education in Cuba. Although she describes them as potentially negative influences as far as the race consciousness of their children, other teachers recognized this fact but extended their analyses of education to include the transformation of the parents themselves, as the following excerpts demonstrate:

There are Schools for Parents in the regular schools, and this is where they talk to parents about these issues in such a way that they may be able to speak to the children about racism so that there is no racism with the children. And it seems that we have accomplished a lot in this country to battle racism. (Sara, a white-Cuban female)

You are in the classroom, there are parents from generations to generations who tell or teach their children not to be with a black person. “Do not play with him because he is black.” That happens at home but then the child comes to the classroom and has the idea that teachers know everything and sometimes the child gets along with the teacher. This is the work of the teacher: getting out the bad idea in the child’s mind, and instead convincing them that a black person is the same and should be treated equally. This is one of the main aims of the Revolution and of schools in the revolutionary society. Parents change sometimes because of the work with their children. (Luis, a Mestizo-Cuban man)

This socializing of the family, societal outreach of a form, is a clear part of the national project undertaken by formal schooling. Teachers appeared both aware of, and comfortable with, the overt political project of education, as the following dialogue reveals:
What is the role of education in the fight against racism? (Interviewer)

That we all have the same rights and that we all have the same place. All whites, blacks, Indigenous, mixed-bloods... whatever colour we are, we all have the same rights and obligations. That government has to propose an end to discrimination, like in a campaign... but it is not like a campaign that says that we are going to do this like this, and we will therefore move forward. It is a campaign that will be built throughout the years and therefore, [racism] will be eliminated slowly. This is a long process that takes years. In Cuba, we have many years and since the Revolution, the government has made efforts so we are all equal and that we have the same rights. And schools respond to the interests of the government, whether this or that one. In this case, the Cuban school system responds to the interests of a socialist government. (Xiomara, a Mestizo-Cuban female)

So schools respond to the government? (Interviewer)

Yes, it is the same everywhere. And in Cuba, since schools are part of the state, unless it is a private school, which there are none of in Cuba, the school system responds to the government’s interests in all senses. Therefore, if the government is fighting so we can all be equal and have the same rights, then the school follows this line of work. The government’s interests are our interests though, so we are doing work for them but they are working for us. To be clear though, schools respond to the government, like the government more or less responds to the people. (Xiomara)

So in addition to a basic buy-in for Xiomara, and a faith in the success of the national approach to racial equality, she also raises the issue of representation, and points to a circle of responses wherein people direct the nation and the nation directs its schools, who in turn direct the people, who in turn direct the nation, and so on. Xiomara provides yet another conception of schooling as part of a broader project that extends beyond formal schooling.

Although I generally asked about the role of education in the fight against racism with regard to the post-revolutionary period, a handful of teachers provided somewhat corrective answers, linking Cuba’s education/race paradigm to the early and pre-republican periods, and to the ideas of Martí and others. The following explanation from Rolando (an Afro-Cuban man) is informative:

You have to go back further than fifty years however. You have to look to Martí and the fights against slavery, colonialism and imperialism. Teachers, well those with more education, will teach that both have been the army in the fight for social changes — against all forms of inequality. Rolando correctly points to the broader historical development of Cuba’s current race paradigm as expressed and produced through education. As noted in Chapters Two and Five, Cuba’s educational project radically changed under the revolutionary socialist government. Rolando’s and Paula’s
explanations fit tightly however with the revolutionary discourse used by the rebels cum government to link the Revolution of the late 1950s to a broader historical pattern and truth in Cuban history. As mentioned in Chapter Five, Castro, Che and others articulated the revolutionary project as the logical extension of the revolutionary struggle of Martí, seventy years earlier. This had particular relevance for race discourse given the relatively progressive racial politics of the Cuban struggle for independence.

Creating/invoking historical laurels upon which to construct a contemporary race discourse in the image of Cuba’s early anti-racism afforded a certain legitimacy to the Revolution. It also allowed for the implicit argument that Castro and others were returning Cuba to a more Cuban state — re-establishing a pre-existing or true Cuban identity — one largely eroded under successive regimes from 1902 onward — all in keeping with the organic teleology of the nation.

While the strategic of invocation of Martí and of his race politics in particular may have softened the blow of the Revolution’s anti-racist agenda and staved off certain resistance from privileged Cubans, it also established strictures beyond which the revolutionary approach to race relations could not go. The racelessness prescribed by Martí and officialised by the revolutionary government placed limits on the agentive capacity of anti-racists to effect change, and following its reliance on formal equality, prevented a deeper epistemological discursive shift around race thinking. By driving race underground — into the shadows and whispers and private spaces — official racelessness provided the hiding places necessary for a quiet but persistent reproduction of racism. This was of course strategic politicking by the revolutionary government however, which has always balanced radical change with maintenance of its own legitimacy.

The potential role of education in fighting racism, as well as the limitations of this role, mirror the paradox which characterizes Cuban race politics more broadly: along with tremendous strengths and opportunities come disastrous pitfalls and hazards. As demonstrated above, as well as in preceding chapters, education has historically been the vanguard of Cuba’s war of ideas and as such has been
largely responsive to and responsible for the tremendous discursive change in race politics. In keeping
with this allegiance to dominant discourse, education has failed to evolve in its approach to race and
racism. Working with the tools offered 50 years ago by the Revolution (tools which themselves had been
partially recycled from the turn of the century 60 years before that) contemporary schooling is
dramatically restricted in its ability to think or teach past the strictures of revolutionary racelessness as it
confronts the post-Special Period era.

7.2 Racism and anti-racism in the classroom

As the previous chapter demonstrates, within teacher reflections of race in Cuba, a discourse of
racelessness is accompanied by seemingly contradictory insights into the relevance of race: denials of
racism are accompanied by examples of racism. This holds true as far as teacher reflections on
education as well. Despite the denials mentioned above, in addition to the discourse of racelessness
invoked through dislocation and a reliance of formal equality and individual acts as the litmus for
whether or not racism exists, teachers also provided examples of racism in the classroom, sketching a
rich and varied life of race and racism in Cuban schools. Indeed descriptions of racialized and racist
behaviour sometimes directly followed outright denials of the existence of racism. As the excerpts in this
section suggest, race and racism are fluid but they follow particular paths and observe particular
patterns. For example, despite numerous claims that racism can be black on white just as easily as white
on black, every concrete example given was of anti-black racism from white students. Teachers also
tended to identify causal factors when describing in-class incidents, often citing the family and the
passing down of racism from parents to students.\footnote{This inversely follows the common racist pathologization of racialized families in Canada and the US, which questions their ‘cultural’ commitments and dispositions with regard to education.} Indeed, beyond the broader examples of racism
many agreed upon (e.g. in employment, in relation to police services), in the context of education it was
only in asking teachers to reflect on concrete descriptions of pedagogy and practice that instances of
racism were revealed. Teachers then discussed racism as part of a fairly quotidian aspect of their work;
one for which there were many articulated strategies at hand. When asked about the relevance and role of race and racism in Cuban education, teachers, as the previous section demonstrates, generally appealed to a discourse of racelessness scaffolded by denials of the presence of racism. When asked about what strategies they used to counter racism in the class, teachers were quick to describe their methods. In so doing, they revealed snippets of the very life of race and racism many previously denied.

While a few teachers argued that strategies to counter racism were unnecessary owing to the absence of racism in schools, most quickly and easily provided descriptions of their practice as it related to racist behaviour in the classroom. Teachers tended to approach racism with an appeal to formal equality, and many understood the social corrective of anti-racism as part of teaching the solidarity, unity, humanity and compassion needed to continue the Cuban revolutionary project. The colour-blind approach was alive and well within these strategies, and a program of integration (forced mix-race groups) was commonly cited as a good tool for countering racism in the classroom. Teachers were engaged in anti-racist pedagogies on an ongoing basis as situations arose, with a variety of specific techniques as educators. Given the systemic nature of the equality discourse which begins very early, we can expect that this pedagogy builds somewhat grade after grade and may tend to reduce the need (or at least the perception of the need) for it. This can be understood as an active, race-sighted, pedagogy even if the discourse is framed around the goal of racelessness. While some teachers chalked up in-class racism to being the product of parents who themselves needed to be taught, others focused on the children themselves, and used one-on-one conversations to make the change they felt was necessary. Others, relying on Cuba’s historical narrative and self-definition as a racial democracy used a critical reading of history as a weapon against student ignorance and racism. As the following excerpts and dialogues demonstrate, teachers on the whole reveal a complex and somewhat varied set of pedagogical strategies for dealing with racism in the classroom. As mentioned, a number of examples of
racism, as well as strategies for countering racism came directly after outright denials of the very existence of racism in Cuban schools. The following two dialogues demonstrate:

In your class, is there much discussion of racism? Do you address it when it comes up, or when it happens? (Interviewer)

No. (Mariela, a Mestizo-Cuban woman and Lucia, a Mestizo-Cuban woman simultaneously):

It does not exist? (Interviewer)

No. racism does not exist. (Lucia, a Mestizo-Cuban woman)

Has there ever been a racist incident at your school or in your class? (Interviewer)

No, Never. Never. (Lucia)

It has happened in mine… (Mariela)

Can you describe what happened? (Interviewer)

Well, there are some people that talk to you and then they start arguing and they start saying how this belongs to whites and that to blacks… and that is how they argue. Therefore, it [incidence of racism] has happened, but what happens is that we are teachers and so we have to talk to them about how things are… (Mariela)

And what did you do, or say? (Interviewer)

Well, I sit down with the student and explain that we are all the same. And that is not reason to fight… that he is white or black… And I decide if I need to call the child’s parent. (Mariela)

Despite her denial a moment earlier, Mariela is able to provide an example of racism, as well as of her strategy for dealing with it. The following dialogue follows this same pattern:

In general, what is the role of racism in the Cuban educational process and in your classroom? (Interviewer)

No, it doesn’t exist (Ricardo, a Mestizo-Cuban man)

In general it doesn’t exist. (Xavier, an Afro-Cuban man)

You have never had a racist incident in your class? (Interviewer)

It has happened but it is an exception and human beings are not perfect, that goes with your parents, the parents are the root, the base of what a child can be. There is a Cuban saying “Parents are the mirror of the child, the child is a reflection of the parents.” For example the parent might say “I feel that you are not suitable for my daughter because you are black.” I would consider myself a
racist as an example, a hypocrite and I would influence my daughter so in the future she will have my thoughts. Yeah it sometimes happens, but in general, it does not exist. We take the students to have a conversation, sometimes with superiors and sometimes just one on one. (Ricardo)

I think the same, in general it does not exist, but you have cases where there is a racist student in your classroom, but they themselves struggle with racism in general. When they have that idea they change that idea in class, because they interact with that person, that person who is racially different. Do you understand? You have to counsel and instruct them. For example a rejecting way or look, or saying “you are wrong! This is not right!” And in that way, they change their thoughts. As an example, a racist person comes to class, who always has been like that because of his/her parents, and he shows signs of racism, who deals with that? The same students whites, blacks, Mestizo, Chinese, do you understand? And they make him change and do not let him go with that kind of thinking. That is a key function of education. These things are unacceptable — even among families — we are all one people and this is something on which we [Cuba/Cubans] are based. (Xavier)

Citing the parents as the cause, Ricardo and Xavier quickly articulate the way race sometimes plays out. Between the two of them, they trace race from the home to the classroom. Ricardo and Xavier point to racial equality in the minds of teachers and students as part of, and as motivated by, the Cuban project — what many call the betterment of the nation and the road forward. A number of other teachers shared this perspective and invoked unity as a corrective norm, to be lived and created by all, and to be taught in support of the Revolution and in support of a better Cuba. The following excerpt explains:

What techniques do you use to minimize situations related to racism within the classroom? For example, in case there is a student whose parents are... (Interviewer)

We approach that student to talk to him/her and let him/her see that on this we are all together fighting to succeed, to progress. He/she may come with those ideas already, but at the end, communication is how people understand each other. The outcome of this Revolution was not the idea of separation or division; that is not what we learn from it. At the time of going to university, you can see a black or a white person; everybody can go there. That is something beautiful you can see in the schools of this country. There may be always and everywhere at least someone with racist ideas, “I cannot hang out with this girl because she is black and I do not want her close to me”; but we always keep trying to live together and get along. Living out the effects of this economic Blockade may have us a little tight and frustrated, but we keep it up, looking for a breath and trying to get the best out of it. Everyone has to react and be responsible. (Manuela, an Afro-Cuban woman)

Manuela powerfully connects the economic struggle resulting from the US Blockade to the lived understandings of race. She explains that unity requires work (far from a glossed over assertion about that work being finished) and refers to the beauty of integrated Cuban schools. She appeals to the social
project of nation building, and in her final sentence, implicates everyone in the pursuit of unity through both action and accountability. This is one of the few conversations with teachers which made the connection between economic struggle and race. Unity, for many Cuban teachers, is something which helps in the struggle for dignity in hard times, and provides a sense of pride for those on board with the official discursive project. This social corrective function is evidenced in the following conversation as well:

There should be collectivity in the class, the unity in the classroom is important, always be combative (active), always be in the vanguard, give ideas, share ideas. (Maritza, an Afro-Cuban woman)

From the first year of a child’s life, at least in this country, the child is educated so there should not exist any racial discrimination of any kind. From an early age, as early as preschool they are being taught when they are in primary, secondary, the child knows how to behave in school and how to interact with his classmate’s regardless of race or skin colour, also regardless of any disabilities. Racially, the student behaves properly, the student behaves like a brother. Racism in general is excluded completely in the educational process. In our interactions racism should not exist because if there is racism, we take the necessary steps. We talk with the students and we take radical measures because in an educational centre, racism must not exist.

In disciplinary matters, for example one white student hates another black student, I make them play together, because if they are together they will have to work together as a team. I have a lot of success with that. As the time passes they will achieve unity and teamwork. This is what we need to do as a nation — work together in humanity, in solidarity, in socialism for the collective future and present, in light of the capitalist and more recent socialist past. Cuba is unique in this way. (Lucia, an Afro-Cuban woman)

What about you? (Interviewer)

We always reach that goal. The student is obligated to depend on that student and recognize the importance of one another. Regardless of a person’s skin colour, there is no difference. (Maritza)

The powerful normative function of combating inequality is revealed in these explanations alongside specific strategies for countering the near heretical acts of racism. Notions of interdependency, from sit-ups, to economic survival are a key material mechanism for countering racism in Cuba. This fits well into the raceless and colour-blind national discourses which teachers so powerfully enact, reinforce and believe. When dealing with the racist actions or comments of students, another teacher associates racism with foreign capitalist behaviour, pathologizing the racist behaviour with the tools provided by
the official revolutionary discourse, which is of course anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist. The following dialogue explains:

What techniques do you use to confront and challenge racism in your classroom? (Interviewer)

I talk and give opinions. It is important to talk, engage in conversations and teach [that way]. (Lola, an Afro-Cuban woman)

Are there other strategies for challenging racist behaviour when it arises? (Interviewer)

We have to talk to them, about difference and let them know that it is not something that is acceptable in Cuba — it is for other countries, for example the capitalist nations — they have different politics and information. This is some of what I say when it happens. (Lola)

As mentioned above, a number of teachers described placing students in mixed race groups in response to racist behaviour and racial tension in the classroom: this ties into the notion of interdependency discussed above, and it was the most commonly mentioned strategy. The following dialogues explicate this approach:

What strategies do you use to confront racism in your class? (Interviewer)

There are groups, to do practical work, of about six people. I mix everyone and they all have to get along if they want to accomplish their goals and what I expect them to hand in. This is how they relate to one another. If there is a problem I am sure to mix the groups — the white child who has been racist with a black one. (Hector, a white-Cuban man)

Has there ever been a racist incident at your school or in your class Ximena? (Interviewer)

I had a white child in my classroom and he sat beside a black student. He then started to tell him that he did not want to sit beside him because he was black. Therefore, we spoke about the times when whites and blacks fought beside one another, and that we are all equal and that we are all the same although some are lighter skinned than others. And from that point on, he has been learning and now he is fine with the other children. (Ximena, an Afro-Cuban woman)

Marco, an Afro-Cuban man, agrees:

When I see that a white girl or boy rejects a black colleague, I call him or her and talk about it privately, converse that he or she should not be that way, and make them work together, share, sit together and the child gets familiar with the matter and the situation disappears.

As is the case with the instances described above, the examples are always white on black, and generally have to do with interpersonal situations and one-on-one behaviour. This is in keeping with the analysis
described in section one of this chapter, wherein teachers limit their descriptions of racism to incidents between small groups and individuals, while avoiding structural and institutional analyses. Even among those who deny the presence of racism, the hypothetical examples follow this same pattern, Lucia, a Mestizo-Cuban woman, explains:

In my class, you do not see racism but if in case it does happen, what would I do? I would sit the boy who feels that way towards the coloured person and I would team them up to work together so they can build a relationship, do you understand? If there is homework I would pair them up in order for them to work together... At break time I would let them play a game of chess and make them play together so they can establish a relationship with each other.

Descriptions of both real and imagined race-mixing in the class thus come in response to a particular pattern of racialized behaviour, wherein Afro-Cubans are victimized by white-Cubans. In Chapter Six Part Two, I noted that many teachers argue racism can occur between any two (or more) groups, however the practical instances described support a specific anti-Afro-Cuban trope, lived in individual instances and treated through in-class integration techniques which mirror the formal approach to equality taken by the Revolution initially: create equal access and material conditions, mix everyone together, and equality will result in both traditional social markers and in the epistemic life of Cubans.

Group mixing was not the only strategy described and many teachers do more than rely on organic development of a commonsense of interdependence. As the following conversation demonstrates, some teachers have very direct and constructive conversations with their students.

How can I tell you this... an example is that now, at school, whenever there is an incident, we talk to students and explain to them the problems that racism brings. (Erica, an Afro-Cuban woman)

Do you do this with reference to the past or the present? (Interviewer)

The conversation is about the present, now. (Erica)

And what are the most important ideas for confronting racism with students? (Interviewer)

The most important ideas, like I was saying just now, is to talk to the students; read a text that can lead us into that discussion. (Erica)

Is that common among teachers, to take that time to have those discussions based on texts that you bring out? (Interviewer)
Sure, that is the norm. You have to take the time or else they do not really learn or change. (Erica)

Erica’s final comment was echoed by other teachers whose approaches tended to be more dialogical than top down. In the following lengthy excerpt, one teacher outlines the way in which teachers use a critical reading of history to address racism between and among students:

There are methods and strategies that teach children, in a healthy way and without pressure, that there is equality, although I have not seen the need to resort to their use, but I do know that there are forms to deal with that. Supposing there is a racist situation: the teacher can sit the children beside each other, and the children, without noticing, start to recognize and respect one another from the moment they are seated. The teacher talks to both students and explains to them the historical problems. In order to do this, we resort to history classes because they teach the child the cycle of racism from the start until today, and we teach them how it goes through stages, how things develop. And, for example, if a white person discriminates against a black person, then we guide them to see how racial discrimination is not simply due to skin colour [difference] but simply because a child thinks or has heard or seen that a race is inferior to his. Therefore, what we as teachers do, is to provide them with opposite examples because they can say things like “black people are worthless”, and so we provide an example like Maceo, who is a leader in this country who has fought and has accomplished many things. Nelson Mandela is another example, or we provide an example of other great historical figures, trying to show, like Maceo, who was black, that we can show them that there are people of colour that can be accomplished...

What happens is that from the time one is in elementary school, teachers already teach the children what colour is: that is, what is red, white, green and blue. And we begin to notice that “I am not the same colour as you.” What this means is that we learn not to differentiate, not to make distinctions [based on colour] and one simply notices that, for example, you have different traits that I do not have and that I have certain characteristics that you do not have. And this is how we create that difference that does not affect [negatively] because it is not something inherent in society or anything like that. And in the classroom, when we notice that there is a child that shows the slightest sign that he has doubts [about his equality], we clarify the issue, without pouncing on him but through games, so the children can sit together and they feel they are classmates. So these are the themes we get training on, and they are not difficult to deal with because the children already have this knowledge from home because the parents take care of this. (Ezequiel, a Mestizo-Cuban man)

Ezequiel challenges what Robaina (2009) asserts is a white only curriculum. If it is the case that he does this only when racism arises (and he happens to notices it, which he says he has not) his approach could obviously be more sophisticated and consistent in his critical reading and teaching of history. His detailed response is, however, a far cry from the silence and denial that appear to generally characterize other teacher understandings of race. Indeed Ezequiel does not consider himself to be working outside
of the box or thinking above and beyond the call of duty with regard to race. This is the call of duty for Ezequiel, and as he explained for all teachers who “understand that we must walk the same road together toward a better future as one people united.”

The dialogical pedagogical approach was deemed necessary by many teachers, who explained that students require convincing, rather than authoritarian indoctrination on issues like racism. The following excerpts explain:

What techniques do you use to confront racism in your classroom? (Interviewer)

I explain that we are all the same; she and I both have two hands; not for being black you cannot sit down next to a white. Humanity. (Georgina, an Afro-Cuban woman)

Humanity? (Interviewer)

Yes, because the teacher should form human values in the children. You need to love him because it could happen that in a future if you get sick and he is there, he can help you out; if you fall today, he would help you; if they need a pencil, lend it to them. (Georgina)

Solidarity... We need to persuade them to do this. We cannot force them to believe in something. Instead, we should explain to them the reason to act a certain way, so they would understand and analyze the situation. It does not work if we just ask them to sit down and work together. No. They have their own personality and we shall respect them. We will try to convince them, to persuade them rather than forcing them. (Ofelia, a Mestizo-Cuban woman)

This respect for the student, as well as this Freirean rejection of a banking model approach to learning as far as moral education is concerned, is echoed in the following dialogue:

In those situations we resort to persuasion through dialogue. We look to convince them but not to force them. Nobody is forced to think anything here. As my co-worker said before, there are many phrases from Marti, from Maceo, and from Che Guevara and Fidel... all those phrases are shared with the student so they can learn them and come to the conclusion that racism should not exist. We give them the causes and their consequences, hoping for them to realize their importance. All this in a passive form without forcing them to believe in anything specific. If they were forced to believe in certain ideologies, it would be a complete failure. Eventually students are approached and we discuss with them certain examples and situations where it is shown how unfair it could be to put a person over another based on skin colour. We ask them what they think about one person abusing someone of another race because of the skin colour; or if that could be a reason to determine who is going to be able to succeed. So, we hope they will get to the conclusion. (Ivelisse, a Mestizo-Cuban woman)

We are prepared and educated people. Race issues have been always present. The education starts at home, and is it necessary to be prepared in order to successfully confront those situations. That is
the reason why whenever these situations emerge we have a dialogue where information is provided so they can be prepared. Many times, the reason why these situations take place is due to ignorance. The way we find it helpful to avoid or eliminate these problems is through learning. (Ivan, an Afro-Cuban man)

Dialogue plays a very important role in education. Interrelations between students and teachers, otherwise we will not achieve anything. (Ivelisse)

Ivan and Ivelisse provide a poetic explanation of a transformative approach to learning and unlearning. This approach mirrors the perceptions of many teachers about their own learning and knowing with regard to race and racism. As mentioned above, teachers do not see themselves as passive recipients and transmitters of state discourse, but instead as contributors to the national conversation (no doubt legitimized by the government) which is in a sense a macro dialogue. As the next excerpt reveals however, Ivan’s race pedagogy is embedded in a colour-blind approach to anti-racism, which relies upon a final discursive destination of racelessness:

What is the official idea of racism? Can you talk about racism with students? (Interviewer)

What happens here is that we are recommended to not give an importance to racism. This is because in the same measure you pay attention to this problem, the tendency is transmitted to those around you. So, we approach those students who are concerned about it rather than involving all the others.

Jose Martí is, for us, one of the best thinkers, one of the best in this country. There is one of his verses that is well known for many here: “Man is more than white, more than black, more than Mulatto. Man, said by itself expresses everything.” This verse can be difficult to understand for students who do not know about it. It is important to talk about the African descent the country possesses. We make use of all these tools and information to handle the problem of racism, so they will not think they are pure white but they also realize that they have these roots. Back to what Martí expressed, the canary can be completely yellow but the eyes are black. At the end, the purpose is with delicacy to show equality where the skin colour does not matter. If after all this there is still someone with questions about the subject, we explain the facts and our mentality about the topic. Talking about racism is not prohibited, we can discuss it with the students. (Ivan, an Afro-Cuban man)

While talking about racism is allowed and Ivan does this voluntarily (as an educational activist) the prevalence of these discussions, as well as the saliency assigned to those discussions is limited. For Ivan and others, there is an underlying ascription to the notion that to speak race is to create racial tension (Martí’s precise assertion) and this supports the idea of a racially mixed Cuban racial identity, within
which speaking race is both unnecessary and controversial. This approach cannot be confused with a simple denial or ignorance on the part of teachers. It is instead an approach which at once creates and observes official discourse, and which is grounded in the lived experiences of Cubans. Ivan has spent all of his 60 years as a black man in Cuba. His understanding of race is far more than a parroting of the party line on Cuba’s social narrative.

As mentioned above, teachers often identified parents and grandparents as the source of racism among students. As the following dialogue demonstrates, this may shed light on teacher investment in the racelessness paradigm:

Has there been any incident related to racism in your classroom or school? (Interviewer)

Yes… (Georgina, an Afro-Cuban woman)

Could you describe what happened? (Interviewer)

Between children. As we have said before, there are parents that influence their kids either in a positive or a negative way. So, when this happens, it is time for the teacher to interfere and explain to them that we are all equal; that all children are equal and they were born to be happy, as Marti said. This is when the teacher makes peace between the two sides and convinces them to treat each other equally. Racism exists. It is very rare but still there are some cases. (Georgina)

For example, if the parents of one of my white students do not want their child to play with another of my students who is black, I just come and tell them that for me, they are my students and they are equal, at least in my class. So, when they are with me, there is no white or black, they are just my students. All this happens at least in my class, because I cannot be there 24 hours a day, I cannot follow them everywhere... In this way, little by little; drop by drop, I think the idea will start to get into their minds and one day, maybe not be tomorrow, it could be in one year, but at the end, the children will realize that their teacher was right, that the two of them are equal, are the same. (Paula, a Mestizo-Cuban woman)

And what about your techniques? How do you do it? (Interviewer)

When a parent whose child is white does not want him or her to sit down next to a black child, or to play or just share; if that would happen, I would know it right away considering that children tell everything to their teachers. Almost all the problems that they have with their parents, they tell everything to their teachers. If that would happen, the first ones that I would talk to would be the parents. In my classroom, in the whole school...at least in my classroom, there is no tolerance for racism. It cannot be. If that situation happened at their own home, I would give them advice because that is the way we were taught. (Paula)
Given the common teacher perception that they are working against the prejudices of parents and grandparents sometimes nascent in students, the colour-blind discourse is generally understood as not a fait-accompli, but rather as a strategic anti-racist stance, which as far as many can see, works well in service of the national project of racial equality. This requires recognition of the distinctiveness of the Cuban racial context in which equity is so much more common, and equality so much more easily conceivable than in North American. As mentioned before, the colour-blind approach has a different application on the island and cannot be dismissed out of hand as is the case in Canada or the US. As the following section discusses, the relationship between teachers and parents involves a complex set of interactions which bridge public and private space and discourse. Teachers are uniquely posed as border crossers from one to the other.

7.3 Pedagogical responses and opportunities

The role of teacher as an agent of social change is paradoxical. Measured by Euro-North American anti-racist principles, the 41 teachers I interviewed would on the whole not be called anti-racist educators. The interviews reveal an over reliance of notions of formal equality, a colour blind pedagogy, a widespread denial of the relevance of race, and a passive acceptance of a Eurocentric curriculum. Teachers would come up short within certain analyses from within the Cuban context as well: much of Havana’s and Santiago’s hip hop communities (including musicians, poets, painters, graffiti artists and others) would likely find little deviation from the official discourse, which has to a limited degree been rejected by many from within those groups. Further, certain Cuban scholars doing work on race on the island (e.g. Robaina and Morales) may find the general acquiescence of these to the status quo, intolerable.

Teachers however, as frontline race workers, perform the tightrope act of translating the state for the public, at the same time as teaching with the consciousness and dignity required to have a pedagogy which reflects their own lived experience. Despite their crucial analytic shortcomings when
measured by the North American anti-racist measuring stick, teachers are agents of social change doing public anti-racist work to eliminate prejudice and racism in the private spaces of Cuban society. Despite the many powerful denials, teachers tend to agree that racism germinates and emanates from the home and that it is their job to convince students and parents of the principles of racial equality. This particular labour is by far the most common and widespread race work being done in Cuba right now. It is the dominant mode of transmission of racial discourse. Teachers are, as in Canada and the US, paid agents of the state charged with advancing the social, political, cultural and economic aims of the government. They also have to teach. So while select hip hop MCs and academics may indeed provide a counter-discourse — a new vanguard of ideas — the core learning which takes place uniformly for all Cubans, in all areas of the island, happens in through formal educational processes. It is easy to understand why teachers understand themselves as progressive willing servants and architects of a progressive discourse and state. They frequently confront racism and other forms of social inequality. The pervasive and persistent nature of racism within the private spaces of Cuban life can on one hand be attributed to a shortcoming of the educational system over the past fifty years, but can be understood on the other, as an indication that given the firm belief in equality expressed by these teachers, they have a huge and important task ahead of them to which they are quite committed. Further, if we are to blame education for Cuba’s shortcomings as far as race-relations over the past half century, then we should as well credit the educational system equally for the tremendous gains during that same time — even on the epistemological level. Cuban teachers are a key piece of the race puzzle.

As a largely white and capitalist community of expats returns to the island under easing US-Cuba relations, teachers will be increasingly needed in the battle for Cuban race equality — so too however, will a broader conversation on race and difference which accounts for the racialized inequality which has been on the increase since the early 1990s and shows few signs of slowing. The tools at the disposal of teachers for equity work, as both self-guided practitioners and as representatives of the state, are thus
highly relevant for understanding the role of teachers in the life of race and race discourse in Cuba.

Principal among them are their relationship to the private sphere via parents, the formal training they receive with regard to race issues and the degree to which they are able to determine the content of their teaching. The dialogues and excerpts in the remainder of this section demonstrate both the possibilities and limitations of the teacher’s role for effecting change as teachers as they see fit.

7.3.1 Teachers and parents

I agree with my colleague, race is not a problem; the house is the problem, when they do not exercise, they do not practice what we are teaching them. (Paula)

A very simple example: Now that we are in final tests, it does not make any sense to bring the children to a house on the beach for the weekend (for holidays). It is nonsense. (Raul)

But it happens. (Paula)

It happens but then you have to ask them not to. It is really best for their children. (Raul)

Do they have to listen to you? (Interviewer)

No but the majority of the time they do. (Paula)

Most of the teachers with whom I spoke expressed a profound sense of entitlement to comment directly on parent behaviour with regard to a host of issues, including race and racism, stemming from a belief in Cubanidad and the Cuban project as a whole. Entitled by both professional power and the moral weight of the Cuban racial project as whole, teachers are empowered in their discursive relationship with parents as far as issues of racism are concerned. The Revolution has long valued education and the educational achievements if post 1960 Cuba. Teachers are at the heart of the educational system and have since the earliest literacy campaigns been framed as intellectual frontline workers, epistemological missionaries in the socialist project — the primary aims of which include the creation of a society where race does not matter. Positioned as knowers, this first form of entitlement relates to the second: the national moral imperative. Teachers tended to be on board with the national project, and did anti-racism work not simply as part of their job, but out of a commitment to their
understanding of the ideals of the revolution. Patriotism, informed by the teleological narratives described in Chapter Five fuel the race work of these teachers. Teachers feel compelled to enter and affect the private space of home life as part of their responsibility to their students. According to many of the teachers interviewed, the role of parents is a key primary ingredient of student success, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

Parental involvement is important. We have to communicate with parents because without that, students can be at a disadvantage. For example, in the situation where a child is marginalized, by means of being very poor, perhaps he/she is very smart. The parents of this child did not receive any education. Therefore these parents wish for their children to be able to obtain good results, to build a career. This preoccupation and dedication from the parents is what motivates the good performance of the children. This is reflected at the time of helping them with their homework when sharing with their children their own knowledge. Here is where the participation and guidance from parents is necessary and not only at home but also in the education process. All these actions make children feel happy and therefore their commitment to school improves. In this case, I am talking about the people less fortunate economically. To be fair, there are cases where the financial situation is better and the parents do not show any interest either. (Ivan, an Afro-Cuban man)

The flipside of Ivan’s argument is the implication that parents might be to blame for student failure (since they are to be credited with success). Unlike similar arguments in the US and Canada however, Ivan’s analysis takes a priori account of the degree to which learning is embedded in social context, and contingent on personal/familial drive and volition, yet simultaneously mediated by particular circumstances. Where attacks on the educational ethics of poor and black families in the US and Canada tend to place blame (for failures) on parents while giving credit (for successes) to schools, Ivan’s approach begins with the credit owing a family that takes the time, and mentions that the same neglect occurs in wealthy families. While he does not appear to address material circumstances such as free time, he does look at educational opportunity among the parents — without the pathologizing gaze so often found in such readings of the family/education relationship in the US and Canada.

Other teachers describe a more harsh relationship between the parent and his child’s learning, as the following dialogue demonstrates:

Teachers are the students’ parents so they learn what we are teaching them, and this knowledge is taken home and they sometimes reject their parents’ comments on this matter, and they discuss
this matter; “this is my friend; he is my classmate” — they reject the values the parents may place on their friend’s colour. (Marco, an Afro-Cuban man)

Is this a problem with parents? (Interviewer)

No, of course not, school is where everything begins; we make parents feel that they cannot teach their children not to be with blacks, because if a student tells their parents that the teacher told them to be with the black student, the parents do not have the courage to come to school and say that their children cannot be with a black person because the teacher will not allow that. (Marco)

For Marco, the dialogical approach of convincing, rather than just silencing or demanding agreement is out the window when it comes to parents and race. The moral imperative implied here is a remarkable exercise of discursive authority which is common to the practice and understanding of many teachers. Marco’s comments on the parental lack of courage can be taken two ways: read one way, parents know they are wrong — know their racist ideas and their practice of inculcating their children are wrong. Understood this way, there may be a reflexive and transformative result to this use of power. The second reading (and it is deeply related to the first) would be to see the lack of courage as a fear of public and political sanction — a reluctance to publically speak against the dominant race discourse of equality. Read this way, Marco’s approach does little more than re-enforce the very public silence which has served to preserve racism in Cuba’s private spheres for so long. Although most teachers took a more nuanced approach to the parent-teacher relationships, Irene (an Afro-Cuban woman) describes her strategy for addressing persistent tardiness using an approach which echoes the bluntness of Marco:

At the beginning of class, we line the children up and tell them only 19 children came, that so and so is missing and that it is ok... but then the child arrives, and... poor child... he says he is late because his mother woke up late. Then the other children say they are going to speak to the mother and they go to this child’s house to speak to her. And from then on, the child arrives to school on time. And from that point on, we talk to the parents as to why children should get to school on time. (Irene, an Afro-Cuban woman)

Seeing nothing remarkable about his colleague’s tactic, Ezequiel (a Mestizo-Cuban man) adds happily “[I]t is a way to educate the parents.” Due to simple practicality, we might assume that such mass visits are rare, but what stands out instead is the implication by both Irene and Ezequiel that such powerful
crossover between school and home (public and private) is a quotidien — and non-remarkable — occurrence. As mentioned above however, the preceding excerpts stood out among the rest of teacher responses. Although most teachers saw themselves as educating and as effecting change in their relationship with parents, they generally described a more dialogical approach to conversation. The following excerpt explains:

This is why it is important that education reaches the child but also the parent. You cannot accomplish much with the child if the education he or she receives in school is good and then the parents don't know: [You have to include] the parent, the student and the teacher, along with society. (Irene, an Afro-Cuban woman)

This approach presumed an openness among parents (and among Cubans generally) to new ideas, and to political change. Mariela and Lucia explore this further in the following dialogue:

As a teacher, do you have the right and/or the responsibility to change the opinions — to teach within the private sphere of the family? In Canada, there is often a fairly severe divide between the public school context and the private home — between teachers and parents. Is that the same here? (Interviewer)

I understand... there is the professional sphere, work and school... But not here [because] here, the teacher can come and take the liberty to talk to the parents about personal issues even if the teacher is new at the school. And you can tell them or advise them since there are no restrictions and parents never take offense... (Mariela, a Mestizo-Cuban woman)

Never, why not? (Interviewer)

Because Cubans... we are an open society and therefore we say what we think and that is that. It is not like I have to keep something to avoid hurting you. No. I can tell you “look, it is not right for your son to fight with my son only because you may have better economic conditions and he has better toys as a result.” And the teacher can even take the liberty to punish the students or to scold them without the parent’s consent because the parent does not get upset: parents accept the fact that teachers are an authority. (Mariela)

And Lucia, what has been your experience? (Interviewer)

In my situation, some parents do get mad. This is because sometimes you scold the children and they run to their parents and tell them the teacher punished them and when you see that, then the parents turn against you. But then you can explain to them so they understand but children do not explain the reason why the teacher punished them. But, when we tell them, they understand; but we do have to treat parents in a nice way. (Lucia, a Mestizo-Cuban woman)
Even in the case of parents who resist this imposition, Lucia argues that although they often need handling, they eventually come around to the position of the teacher. If we accept the Cuban anti-racist position of the teacher as the custodian of the official position — or discourse — we can assume that bringing parents around is eased by the substantial legitimacy offered not by their professional position, but by their discursive position. The relationship with parents is envisioned by teachers as a partnership within the broader project of the child’s education, but it is a somewhat uneven partnership, as the following demonstrates:

In general, what do you think is the roll that racism plays in the educational processes? For example, if there is a child that comes from a family where there are racist ideas and she expresses this toward another student, what do you do? How far does this situation go? Who is responsible for solving this situation? (Interviewer)

We just have a meeting with the parents at first, so they can act and help us with changes in the child’s attitude. We are not the only ones involved in their education, so we need them too, considering they spend long times with them at home. We let them know that we care about them because we see the potential their students have to be an important and recognized part of this country. (Sebastien, an Afro-Cuban man)

Do they listen to you? (Interviewer)

Yes, always. (Sebastien)

Sebastien’s colleague, Oswaldo (an Afro-Cuban man) is quick to contextualize Sebastien’s description, explaining:

Now, these situations do not happen very often in this country. We are telling you this to answer your question, but it is rare it happens. It is part of the culture to educate them with the ideology of equality. It is an ideology passed on by generations. Jose Martí is one of our idols, and we learned from him that racism is not accepted; it should not exist. So we bring this concept to our everyday life and into our education system.

Sebastien’s description reveals the conversation is dialogical only to a point. While the teacher is indeed convincing, rather than insisting, it is the teacher and not the parent who is doing something in this scenario — the teacher is the active knower, while the parent is the subject of the discourse, a subject
who as Sebastien explains, always listens. Xiomara, a Mestizo-Cuban woman, provides the following description of the process:

It is a given that if a student has an issue or creates a problem with his peers, or if he has an incorrect idea about skin colour, whether his or someone else’s, then I will speak to his parents: “Where does this problem come from? Why does this child think like this?” There are parents that resist and others that do not. But there are some that are more understanding. In the end, you are the teacher and have to explain to the parents what the problem is, the situation and how their children fare in all of it. If you do not inform them, then how will this problem get solved? We have to coordinate [efforts] between the school and home.

Do you learn from the parents as well? (Interviewer)

Of course, sometimes they know more than me about these issues and they can help me with didactic preparation. (Xiomara)

The influence parents have on schools, as well as the reverse, thus emerges out of dialogical processes, which albeit skewed to privilege the dominant knowledge of the teacher, is a negotiation all the same. The teacher parent relationship seems to thus perform a dual role of simultaneously challenging racism within the private sphere, while implanting what is likely uninvited official public discourse in the ‘free’ mental zones of Cuban life — an imposition of the purest form. A convergence of influences (including education itself) thus creates a conflicted space wherein teachers make sense of contradictory racial truths, or racial truth claims as Figure 5 demonstrates.

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52 A missing piece of my analysis is of course parent reflections on these meetings, which would no doubt round out the picture sketched here.
As the diagram above demonstrates, teachers produce discourse through the navigation of competing ideas, and thus make meaning of race and racism in the process.

Teacher meetings with parents are not all informal and conducted at the discretion of the teacher. When asked about strategies for addressing racism, a number of teachers described the monthly parent teacher nights (School for Parents) which happen at most K–12 schools. The School for Parents was formalized as part of the Teach Your Child program, founded in 1987, which focuses mainly on pre-K education but also makes recommendations for teaching and learning for older children. Although not hugely relevant for race discourse in elementary or secondary schooling, one teacher explained that it encourages a dialogue between parents and teachers about their students and gives
parents an early idea that they should, for the good of their children, be having these conversations on an ongoing basis. Speaking about the role of education in the fight against racism, Lucia and Maritza in conversation with me explain:

So schools are places where you can convert students from racist to anti-racist? (Interviewer)

Yes you educate them, you form them. (Maritza, an Afro-Cuban woman)

And here there is a program for parents called Teach Your Child. (Lucia, a Mestizo-Cuban woman)

About racism? (Interviewer)

No, it is not only about racism. If there is racist behaviour in a child, we bring this to his/her parents’ attention and ask the parents for help in the matter. Most parents know from Educate Your Child that it is important to speak and listen to their child’s teachers. (Lucia)

School for Parents was a key recommendation of the Teach Your Child program. Scheduled at a time convenient for parents, administration and faculty the meetings usually last 30–90 minutes and take place at the school. Parents often gather in the main classroom of the child, or children, and have short presentations from the teacher, followed by a discussion period. Xiomara (a Mestizo-Cuban woman) explains:

The school uses parent’s meetings for various purposes. For one, the school organizes them to provide parents with guidelines and information on the courses. If there are issues with a student then you, as a teacher, can call the parent to come into the school so the two of you may resolve the issue: the parent and the teacher. But, there are monthly meetings where teachers update the parents as to their child’s performance in school, how they are progressing or not, and whether you have had an issue or success with a student. This is all part of what you can tell the parents during these meetings. We use those meetings to address issues of inequality if they have arisen, and this way we are addressing the issue to all parents.

While meetings are supposed to be fairly structured and focused, teachers indicated they often become a catch all, check-in for parents, where assignments are discussed as well as specific behavioural issues. The following explains:

Well, if there is a problem that happens in the classroom, then we talk to the parents during these meetings and tell them they need to talk to their children and advise them that what has happened was not good and that they should not keep fighting because they are classmates. They have to continue loving each other and showing each other respect because we are all human beings and
we should show mutual respect, not only with their classmates but also with everyone. (Lucia, a Mestizo-Cuban woman)

Well, during my meetings I address students that did not do well in an assignment and talk to their parents and explain the situation to them so that they motivate them to study more, above and beyond their regular classes. Motivate them to study and to finish their assignments and homework. (Mariela, a Mestizo-Cuban woman)

Some teachers pointed to the adult education function of School for Parents, citing the historical inaccessibility of education for some parents. Ezequiel, a Mestizo-Cuban man, explains:

What happens is that we are in a society that keeps moving forward, and the people that have not gone to school or that are a bit older, they did not get the same benefits that the new generations are getting, which means that we are progressing. Today, we talk to children about sexuality, about different issues that a fifty-year old person never had the chance to hear because when he or she was a student, it was a different time in history and perhaps there were other issues that they discussed. Therefore, even though this person is part of a society, the changes are not necessarily transmitted to him or her and so we bring them to the classroom with the child and we talk about the changes that the society is going through, so that he or she becomes part of the classroom, even if they are 50, 60 or 70. And so this person adapts to the changes and is not left with the old prejudices because this is different than it was before. That [issue] happened in your time but it is no longer like that; things changed and this person keeps moving forward as well.

Anti-racist education for the parents can thus happen within these meetings, in a non-targeted way, addressing all parents (and students) and advancing the official position in an informal and no-accusatory manner. Some teachers report using highly creative strategies, involving student generated reflections of race and inequality, as explained in the following:

Can you describe the School for Parents? (Interviewer)

If a mother tells [a child] they cannot play with another child because she is white, or with him because he is black, or [with the other one] because he has nothing, then you would have to deal with it and speak to them in a subtle way. That is why we have the School for Parents, and this is the place where we talk about all of these issues. These schools are small gatherings for parents and we do small skits, or a small theatrical piece. One time, after one student would not play with another because he was black, we did a small theatrical skit about working and playing together, in which I had the two students write together, as part of a larger group. We also do it with the children and with the parents, according to the issues that need addressing. We also do it with the entire family if the grandparents, aunts and uncles want to come... With the older students it sometimes gets the children and parents to connect; they are all there. (Irene, an Afro-Cuban woman)
To refresh the reader’s memory, this is the same woman who sent her entire class to scold the sleepy mom. This is also the same teacher quoted above as saying about racism: “We approach it from a historical perspective so the children can see how it was before and how it is today. But we don’t touch racism in today’s society.” Irene’s rich description provides a wonderful picture of community building in and around the school context, and also of her own pro-active approach to race and racism in the class, despite her denials of the need to do so earlier. School for Parents is a key tool for communication between parents and teachers. As with the other meetings described by the teachers however, it is limited in the degree to which parents are equal partners in the discussion — above and beyond anything else, they are there to learn rather than be learned from. While this may suppress local knowledges, it also forms local knowledges and, as one teacher mentioned, is a learning opportunity for parents — particularly those who may need correction for what teachers consider old-fashioned thinking around race. On the flip side, we can only imagine the hard time a parent would have bringing up issues of racism she may feel her child is facing in the classroom if teachers did not agree with a parent’s perception.

7.32 Curricular freedom

Ahead of speaking with Cuban teachers I had no idea about the often close relationship between teachers and parent communities. Near the end of my interviews, spurred on by hearing about this relationship, I attempted to further explore the existent and potential role of teachers within dominant race discourse, as transformative agents, conduits of official discourse or as some hybrid of the two. As part of this exploration I asked teachers about their sense of curricular freedom — the degree to which they felt they could interpret the assigned curriculum independently — and as well about the training they received with regard to equity and pedagogy. Like most of their conceptions of professional practice, teachers had highly political understandings of both their relationship to the curriculum and their experiences with and without equity oriented teacher training.
In section one of this chapter I discussed teacher understandings of representation within both
the formal and informal curricula. When asked about their own freedom to interpret assigned formal
curriculum, teachers tended to see it not as a question of freedom, but of unity, as the following excerpt
explains:

For example, in my experience teaching a particular course while another teacher is teaching the
same course to a different class, it is likely that one teacher will interpret and deliver the course
differently, according to her values and politics. If there are two teachers teaching the same subject,
officially they are transmitting the same information, but the truth is that they show their personal
opinion and that influences the student. Do you feel you have the freedom to do that? (Interviewer)

OK, I understand. To follow the same example, if we have two teachers with different ideas, we try
to unite them so we would transmit the subject with consistency. If we do not share a perspective in
common, we will not get anywhere. We have to be united in order to succeed, in order to get
students to progress in the future. So it is not a question of freedom as much as of consistency
within the school for the students. (Rolando, an Afro-Cuban man)

Fernando, a Mestizo-Cuban man, shares Rolando’s pursuit of unity in the delivery of materials. He
explains:

I have the fortune to work with another two teachers more experienced than I am. So, whenever
there is a difference in perspective that will influence the way to give the class, we analyze our
differences and take a decision. Personally, I rely on and trust their opinions, simply because they
have more experience than I do.

There is a logic to both of these arguments, and although students should certainly be exposed to
different ideas and perspectives, formal public education is scarcely open to such infinite
epistemological approaches, and the schooling system is a federal program in which one can understand
the drive for equitable delivery throughout the island. What this approach allows however, is a
consolidation of official discourse and a potential silencing of ideas and practices which run counter to it,
as well as the benefit gained from the incorporation and valuing of local knowledges, representative of
organic epistemologies. When asked a similar question to the one I posed above to Rolando, some
teachers rejected the notion of the insertion or ascendency of personal opinion. As the following
dialogue illustrates, education is part of a national moral project for some teachers and best left not to
the personal interpretations of teachers:
I say this because in Canada, there are many teachers, and to a very limited degree, each can have different opinions and ideas. Most are somewhat conservative, but a few others are radicals...
(Interviewer)

Sure, I get what you are asking: here we have our own opinions each one of us, but I would like to explain this to you specifically on this subject. I have my own opinion, but there are also opinions that are national. For example, you will not find a teacher talking bad about the Cuban Revolution, is it clear what I am trying to say? This is because it is a more general subject rather than personal. We also have to let the students express their personal opinions; they need to think and analyze. We are here to help that thinking be positive, especially on certain things that are just socially correct, like not stealing. I think that is the same in Canada and Cuba, right? (Ofelia, a Mestizo-Cuba woman)

The idea is to form values in them. (Georgina, an Afro-Cuban woman)

Moral and positive values. I think everywhere in the world there are certain things that are accepted as good or as bad: we know that stealing is bad everywhere in the world; abuse and violence are bad as well. So, in the end the teacher improvises based on previous knowledge but also is responsible for transmitting positive things to the students. We have to pay attention all the time, because children absorb and can learn bad things at home and it is our chore to attack those habits right when they come out. (Ofelia)

Ofelia’s distinction between ‘national’ vs. ‘personal’ opinions can be read as official or dominant opinions vs. unofficial or non-dominant opinions. Ofelia identifies national truths as ‘general’ and not personal. She goes on to attach a moral significance to the general/national opinions/truths, and compares criticizing the Revolution to stealing (a crime). This provides a clear look at her sense of her own personal and professional relationship with the dominant discourse. Dominant discourse requires truths and unquestionable narratives, meant by decree to remain unpacked, and invoked to define the limits of discursive behaviour separating, as Ofelia says, the national from the individual. Education, for Ofelia and Georgina is responsible for shaping the finest features of citizen participation. Georgina (an Afro-Cuban woman) continuing Ofelia’s argument explains:

The Cuban future relies on children. Those children will go through stages. These children are growing up and living through those stages; we are part of the past. This is the reason why we need to inculcate values in our students, so they can have them present all the time; their revolution and their motherland, love them and respect them.

There is nothing particularly Cuban about the intensive role of education in the shaping of individuals.

We need look no further than the playing of the sexist and racist national anthem in Canadian schools,
the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in US schools or the fury that erupts when teachers challenge
the legitimacy of either of these in our classrooms, to see that schools are often blatant mechanisms for
social production, correction and programming in the service and image of a dominant discourse,
following a prescribed national narrative.

To this end, teachers internalize the boundaries of their relationship with curriculum, as the
following dialogue describes:

You have a perspective but that is the way you focus your ideals, but there is a limit. The limit is a
plan — content — you follow the lesson plan, you cannot get out of the way you teach, that is your
way. You have to follow the plan though, a theme that is generated by the curriculum and your work
with it. You can get out of the theme if you want to speak in general about other small topics but
you cannot get out of that theme overall. You can express yourself freely in history (not only in
history there are other subjects but mostly history) but you cannot get out of it, you cannot add
something that is not there unless you have studied other books — other content and you have
elaborated your own tests and your own work with your lesson plan. But either way, you have to
follow your planning because just in case you have a visit, the boss will talk to you to see how you
are teaching, what is right or wrong, etc. (Xavier, an Afro-Cuban man)

Xavier describes the intermingling of content and perspective, wherein deviating from one may mean
deviating from the other, which in the case of getting away from one’s topic area (via the insertion of
too much personal opinion) could place the teacher in trouble with his or her principal. Underwriting the
legitimacy of tempered obedience to government dictates is a belief that the government does a good
job — indeed better than the people sometimes, at thinking through and providing strategies for
combating inequality. The following dialogue addresses this belief:

According to the ministry, how should teachers treat racism or other topics around inequality? What
is the process? What is the process to deal with these matters? (Interviewer)

With this, we work a lot and the ministry always looks for the integration of the human being —
encourages that human minds should be open and can mix in any group of society such as Chinese,
white or others: we apply this very well among students so there should not be any divisions among
races and everybody sees themselves equally, whites and blacks the same. It should not exist, the
difference between them, as it did a long time ago. At one time there was only one school for girls
and the other for males. We got together the two genders and we get black and white colours

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53 The scarcity of other "books" is relevant here. If further reading of a wide variety of sources grants discursive
agency, then the vast majority of Cubans who have very limited access to such variety are positionally
disempowered.
together. The Ministry of Education is handling this very well, that is why you will see the mixture of races everywhere, in schools, in the ministry, etc. (Ricardo, a Mestizo-Cuban man)

Do you ever deviate from the government’s approach to addressing these topics? (Interviewer)

No, there is no need to. (Ricardo)

Although most responses to questions about curricular freedom attest to substantial teacher buy-in as well as personal and professional investment in the official discourse, one conversation was completely different. While by no means representative of the group, Luis (a Mestizo-Cuban man), in conversation with Marco (an Afro-Cuban man) painted a very different picture, indicating that in discussing the key figures and moments in Cuba’s struggle for independence, students, and he personally, were entitled to different and legitimate opinions, as the following dialogue illustrates:

I am a teacher and a student in Canada. In a high school I once taught at, there were two history teachers and we had the same content to teach, but we had very different perspectives. About the content, for example treating say Maceo or Martí or the War for Independence. If you are teaching that content but you have a different opinion about it, can you give a different perspective about the content to your students if you want? Or do you have to follow a guide? Is there an official story to be followed? (Interviewer)

That’s History! Real history! A real history, you cannot change. (Marco, an Afro-Cuban man)

But every story can be explained from different perspectives, no? (Interviewer)

Every teacher has his own way, yes. (Marco)

But we have to train students as revolutionaries, teach them to respect the Cuban heroes. As an example, a student can say that Maceo in a particular battle did right or wrong, and convince other students about what they think. And I then convince my students about what I think, but I never lie to the students about what Maceo actually did. (Luis, a Mestizo-Cuban man)

While ‘what Maceo actually did,’ at least with regards to the historical record, is nearly as subjective as whether he was right or wrong, Luis describes a reflexive and dialogical approach to the discussion of history. While ‘real history’ as Marco says may be a synonym for ‘national’ or ‘general’ history as described above (official narratives). Luis seems to allow for competing perspectives and appears to work with a problem-posing approach to teaching history. Neither Luis nor Marco appear any less convinced by the official discourse than the other teachers, they just do not appear to enforce it as
discursive dictate, but rather teach it with respect for the opinions and knowledges of their students. As mentioned above however, this was the only such description. On the whole, teachers seem to work with a complex understanding of the inner and outer limits of discourse negotiation: consciously and unconsciously navigating their professional life as subjects and objects of the state in their role as frontline mediating custodians of official discourse. It can indeed sometimes feel quite empowering to find a way to embrace that which we cannot change; and it may very well be the case that as Bourdieu (1984) has remarked, human beings tend to make a virtue out of their necessary conditions. At the same time, there is enormous evidence that the project they so contentedly defend is indeed working and that, in comparison to the outside world, parents, teachers and the state are a force for progressive good in a fluid world where race is both tightly held and out of control.

Informed by the tension that arises between the fixed national truths and the more arguable or subjective truths raised above, there arises the question of whether or not participants were describing national or non-national truths when speaking with me. The answer, I believe, is both. As noted, there exists a conflicting distinction between the denials of racism and the description of the various instances and examples of it provided by the teachers. Denials, generally, precede these more detailed descriptions, and in the move from proscriptive statement to rich depiction, we see the move from national truth to local knowledge and narrative. Although this further explains the dramatic contradictions inherent in simultaneous denials and examples of racism, there is another element: the national story is in many cases the local story as far as local epistemological investment in the national narrative as a pedagogical corrective. A belief in racelessness, as well as the denial of racism, is for many teachers considered an anti-racist discursive act — and actors they are.

While teachers may not have, or alternatively not need, a great deal of curricular freedom with regard to race and teaching, a number of them may not mind. Teacher reflections on their training with regard to equity education reveal a general satisfaction with the status quo, and a widespread scarcity
of equity training. When I spoke with Nestor Bosla, Director of Secondary education at the Cuban Ministry of Education, about equity and teacher training, he explained that all teachers “are trained in the key principles of equality, diversity and social justice.” And that with regard to race and racism “teachers understand what Cubans understand, that in Cuba everyone is equal — as the constitution guarantees.” Dr. Fuentes, retired professor at the Facultad Pedagógica, Instituto Enrique José Barona, Havana’s largest teacher training facility, explained to me that while teachers do not take a specific course on diversity, themes of equality and anti-oppression are woven throughout teacher education programs and the Cuban educational system as whole. While I have no doubt she is correct, as Cuban culture is indeed anti-imperialist, race is often the first to fall off the oppression table when multiple ‘isms’ are taken up simultaneously. Further most of the teachers with whom I spoke would likely have disagreed with Bosla’s description and may have been at least a little surprised with that of Dr. Fuentes. While a great deal of race work seemed to be done by teachers with parents individually, in groups and school-wide, teachers generally reported receiving little or no formal training on equity issues in their preparation for teaching. While there exist additional qualification courses treating equity, only one teacher reported attending such a course, and such learning is optional. Most reported having no training at all, as in the following example:

In your preparation to become a teacher, what education did you have treating issues of inequality and social justice? How were you taught to deal with issues such as racism and sexism in your classroom and general professional practice? (Interviewer)

They do not really teach us.... They do not train us for that specifically. We are trained in everything but not that issue. (Fernando, a Mestizo-Cuban man)

The same for me. (Lola, an Afro-Cuban woman)

Some teachers, while answering that they had had no equity training, explained why no such training was necessary, as the following dialogue illustrates:

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54 A relevant extension of this analysis would investigate the impact of K–12 schooling of Cuban teachers, as far as their understandings of equity as adults.
In your preparation to become a teacher, how were you trained to address issues of inequality generally and issues of race and racism specifically? (Interviewer)

Look, I finished grade 12. This is a pre-university term that you finish and you go straight into university. From the time a child is in elementary school — and I will speak to you about this time to give you examples — children are taught about values and how we all have the same rights. And the teacher tries to transmit this to the child and in second grade continues... Inequality does not generally exist in Cuba. (Paula, a Chinese-Cuban woman)

Yes, I did not take courses on racism or inequality. In the end, it is not a subject you teach, about racism or inequality. It is not a class you give. On the subject of racism: we are all the same. We are all the same from the day you are born and raised and develop in this society: this goes for blacks, whites, Indigenous and Mulattos. All children are the same. (Xiomara, a Mestizo-Cuban woman)

Paula and Xiomara here embed the lack of equity training within the dominant discourse of a colour-blind, formal equality framework. What comes across is their sense of having dealt with these issues already, and needing no further work in this area. This was echoed in the following dialogue.

I was never talked to about those issues. And to me, that issue does not exist because I have never been in a place where there is racism because we are all the same here. Here no one.... No one... is completely white or black because we are all mixed .... All of us. (Lucia, a Mestizo-Cuban woman)

It is incredible because you see it and no one teaches this. This is what we live daily. As a child, I always played with... even though my skin colour is a bit lighter... I am mixed, but I played with white and black [children]... but it is the same thing because we all grew up together with that sense of equality, and no one taught this to me at school. I lived it and we all experience it as children. Therefore, this issue is never addressed [at teacher’s college]. (Mariela, a Mestizo-Cuban woman)

For Lucia and Mariela, formal equity education is unnecessary given the broader informal learning in which they and others participate. For Hector, (a white-Cuban man) such training is unnecessary for teachers at the secondary level because student understanding of race (and in his conception, racelessness) are already, and satisfactorily, formed:

I work at a high school and the students already come with all of that knowledge. They know how things are and we just make things clearer. The black student knows he is white and the white student knows he is black. This is what I was taught as well: that we are all the same.

Race is rendered impossible and thus irrelevant by Hector’s articulation. (I wonder if the police know Hector’s ‘black.’) Other teachers however, were far more reflective on the issue, as the following discussion of teacher training demonstrates:
It is a good preparation [teachers college], at least in my case back in Hungary. It does not matter if the child comes from a low-income family and he does not live in a nice house; he could live in a very small place, or just a room, and still be treated in the same way as all the others. (Georgina, an Afro-Cuban woman)

All these subjects have in common equity as a value. I think this should be important not only in Cuba, but also everywhere in the world. There should not be any difference between children based on their skin colour, or their social-financial situation. There should not be any differentiation in how they are treated; instead, subjects concerning and supporting equity as a value, should be approached with them; equity among human beings, no matter race or social class. I think inequity is common in the world, at different scales, whether it is because of racism, economic situations, etc.; there is always someone that is going to have more than another. It is difficult to have complete equity among humans. This subject represents a social and psychological challenge, but as teachers, it is our chore to encourage the idea and to not give up. At least this is a positive act that we can keep working on. (Ofelia, a Mestizo-Cuban woman)

Although their responses work within the confines of the Cuba’s race discourse as far as the notion of the inevitable elimination of racism under the Revolution, they are engaged in a practice which they feel is equity oriented. Their approach appears limited however, to an equality of treatment, rather than equality of outcome philosophy. They also provide no specific details on the content of the training. When pressed to do so, Georgina repeated “it was very good, very good.” The responses of the few teachers who answered that they had been trained to deal with equity issues tended to point to the dominant discursive tools of formal equality, and dislocation, as the following dialogue demonstrates:

We are trained in political issues, which is where we address some of the subjects you mention. (Erieta, an Afro-Cuban woman)

And can you describe the content of those classes? (Interviewer)

We talk about everything: about racism, the sexism problem, and all of those subjects and political issues that affect the country. We talk about everything. (Sara, a white-Cuban woman)

Do you talk about race in a historical sense or with regard to today’s Cuba? (Interviewer)

We talk about current times as well. We discuss how racism has been abolished in this era and we talk about that a lot. (Sara)

And what did those classes teach you? (Interviewer)

That we should all be equal. In this country, racism is not so present. We are all at the same level. We are all the same. (Erieta)
In addition to being limited and inconsistent, equity education within pre-service teacher training (what little there is) seems to re-enforce the dominant race discourse and narrative.

Despite this however, while pre-service equity-oriented teacher training is non-existent for many teachers, or appears that way through these highly varied descriptions, the little that exists may provide important new insights for those few who do receive it. Although curricula appear to do little more than support the dominant discourse, this may demand an epistemic shift from many teacher candidates. Given the amount of anti-racist work practicing teachers do with parents, it is reasonable to assume that many in-coming teacher candidates may hold the very beliefs they will soon be charged with changing. As mentioned above, additional qualification courses are available in a number of areas, including those treating issues of race and ethnicity.55 Ivan (an Afro-Cuban man) and Ivelisse (a Mestizo-Cuban woman) explain:

I facilitate a teacher training course on racism. There are certain manifestations of racism. An example would be: if there is a black guy on the street wearing an earring, he would be called “maricón” [faggot], whereas a white guy would be called “homosexual”. The term is what marks the difference. In this example, “homosexual” is used for the white for being a little more polite or respectful. Situations like this one are plentiful, where the word used to describe the same concept will vary depending if they are a white or a black person. (Ivan)

The course that you were previously talking about, did it have a professional development purpose? (Interviewer)

Yes, it was for professional purposes. (Ivan)

When did the course take place and how did you become involved with doing this sort of work? (Interviewer)

55 The latest (2009/2010) Additional Qualification course offered by the Ministry are: Integrated care and early childhood educators; Towards a pedagogy for the care to people with special educational needs; Model Primary School, major changes; Methodological strategy for implementing changes in the basic secondary Cubana; Major transformations in the Cuban Teacher’s performance; Polytechnic integration and employment in the professional training of the Technical Baccalaureate; Theoretical, methodological and didactic curriculum of the Youth and Adult Education in Cuba; Higher Education Teaching. Challenges for teacher training; and Globalization of Higher Education Teacher, model curriculum for training.
It is a night school or summer course. Going back to where we talked about the racial distribution of the classes, I mentioned that it depends on the location of the school. There are certain neighbourhoods where the racial distribution can be an issue, which means that it is necessary to reinforce the education given to those students in order to eliminate the problem. Being an issue I had an interest in, I enrolled myself in one of the Institutional programs [additional qualification courses], located down the street. There, I met a woman who gave me the informative material so I could educate myself and know more about the subject, which is actually pretty accessible and easy to understand, especially for us, Cubans. So, after some time, on more than one occasion I have had the opportunity to facilitate conferences and courses with this information, accompanied by other people that learned more about the subject as well. Nevertheless, it is necessary to mention that the reason why these courses take place is not because there is a problem of racism or discrimination, but simply is always better to improve and learn about it. (Ivan)

They are meant to improve knowledge and to prevent future problematic situations. These courses are given to younger teachers periodically so they can start to realize in early years, the consequences of racist acts and avoid being part of them. In the same way, there are other conferences given by some institutions, focused on educating youth on diverse subjects, like drugs or HIV issues: how to protect themselves, the consequences of being infected, etc. This is meant for them to realize the dimension of the problem so they can protect themselves from the “no face” infection, as we call it in here. (Ivelisse)

Despite the powerful analysis of the life of race in language and the lived reality of racialized bodies, Ivan ends his description with a denial of the relevance of race and racism. Ivan is an anti-racist activist on the island, and this contradiction appears startling. While the continuing education on race (which Ivan implies is necessary even in a post-race context) is surely a good idea for the preservation of the gains implied, racism in contemporary Cuba is a problem — the severity of which is of course up for discussion. As an instructor, we can assume that this denial of racism (this invocation of the dominant race discourse) colours the content and delivery of the additional qualification classes he teaches.

Because these courses are optional, relatively few teachers participate in equity oriented learning and those who do, obviously find themselves in a course that while critical, is embedded in and with dominant ideas about race and racism in Cuba. The limitations of what is perhaps Cuban teachers’ most radical equity-oriented training opportunity, combined with the general paucity of pre-service equity training, mean that Cuban teachers simply do not have access to very much equity education, and that the few options they do have are embedded within a dominant epistemic framework.
The tension which has characterized official discourse in Cuba for the past 150 years is present in the understandings of teachers who on one hand fight racism and on the other frequently deny its existence. Although the contradictions arising between the teacher denials of racism in education and their simultaneous provision of numerous examples of racism in their classrooms are ultimately irreconcilable, when the denials are read as normative rather than positive statements, (“this is the way it should be” versus “this is the way it is”) they make more sense. Given the clear ability and willingness to identify, address (professionally and personally) and discuss race and racism, the degree to which teachers’ denials silence the issue of racism is unclear. Charged with battling racism on the island, teachers invoke racelessness as a flawed but necessary anti-racism tool. While teachers represent the government, this process is dialogical as they understand their role as active rather than passive and as meaning makers and problem solvers rather than vessels of government propaganda. To return to figure one, originally presented in Chapter 4 and reproduced below, education is simultaneously an anti-colonial and colonial force:

Figure 1: Operations of Colonialism and Anti-Colonialism

---

**Concrete Implications of Oppression**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Material Implications</th>
<th>Colonial Moment</th>
<th>Sites of Difference</th>
<th>Colonial Moment</th>
<th>Non-Material Implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Overt</td>
<td>←</td>
<td>-Race</td>
<td>←</td>
<td>-Spiritual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Structural</td>
<td>←</td>
<td>-Class</td>
<td>←</td>
<td>-Emotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Institutional</td>
<td>←</td>
<td>-Gender</td>
<td>←</td>
<td>-Epistemological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Economic</td>
<td>←</td>
<td>-Ethnicity</td>
<td>←</td>
<td>-Psychological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Cultural</td>
<td>←</td>
<td>-Religion</td>
<td>←</td>
<td>-Ideological</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>←</td>
<td>-Citizenship/</td>
<td>←</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Political Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Ability/Disability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Sexuality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Linguistics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

↑ CONCRETE  ←  ↑ ABSTRACT  →  ↑ CONCRETE
While largely responsible for the tremendous racial progress on the island, education is culpable as well for the limitations of this progress. The formal equality produced by education, as well as the discursive work done by teachers to combat racism from students and their families, serve to de-operationalize race as a dominant site and force. Simultaneously, however, the silence produced and reproduced by education serves to preserve the operation of race as a site of oppression. Regardless of any conclusions we might draw about Cuba as a whole, it is clear that teachers resist racist imposition as they see it (fighting racism in the homes) and at the same time carry out discursive imposition upon others through the denial of racism. As with Cuban race discourse as whole, race discourse among teachers emerges as a perhaps unintentional half way point between the critical perspectives on race emerging from some artists and academics on one hand, and the racism in the private sphere on the other. If racism continues to increase on the island, and at the same time so too do public discussions of race, teachers (and the positions expressed here) will be at once increasingly both necessary and antiquated: the task of rupturing racism in the private spaces of the nation will be ever more urgent while a continued denial will be ever more alienating for young people who wish to speak race. The paradox of racism and anti-racism in Cuba, identified for the nation and its history in general, is alive and well in the racial logic of Cuban teachers.

As a closing thought, it is worth considering 1) the notion that some Cuban educators really do not see race in the way their North American counterparts do; 2) that many Afro-Cubans have critically arrived at the informed conclusion that Cuba is a racially progressive place and that they support the government; 3) that the official discourse of racelessness has an important role to play in the success of the Cuban project, and 4) that the Cuban racial project is ultimately good. Although these four points are not my precise contention, such heuristics are needed to even begin to consider Cuban race relations on terms set forth by Cubans. To deny this as a possibility is to presume a hegemony so thick that Cubans
themselves cannot see through it, but which is remarkably transparent from a Northern vantage point.

The following chapter reviews the survey data in relation to this and the preceding chapter.
Chapter Eight. Survey data analysis: Overview and analysis of survey responses

8.0 Introduction

The design, administration and analysis of the survey are part of an attempt to enrich the context in which the qualitative interviews can be understood. Although the sample of 150 respondents is by no means large enough to be representative of Cuban teachers as a group, and of course even further from providing a picture of Cuba as a whole, the numbers provide a much broader picture than that allowed through the 41 interviews. Although broader, the picture is as well much shallower than that offered through qualitative analyses. Despite my efforts to create clear questions, as well as the research team’s efforts to clarify questions when necessary, the individual surveys are in many ways one dimensional, and only minimally reflective of a generative conversation. With the two approaches taken together however, a picture emerges in which the data from the interviews can be better understood. A racial logic emerges from the surveys in which the roles of race and racism in Cuba and Cuban education are typically downplayed and often denied. In many ways, the survey is reflective of the same racial conversation that emerged in the interviews: on the surface we find denials of racism in Cuba and Cuban education specifically, overwhelming support for the racial status quo and also breaches in the script, through which dissenting opinions emerge.

As mentioned in the previous chapter however, these denials of racism can be read as normative statements and indeed as part of a Cuban anti-racism, which although imperfect is intentional, and indeed should not be confused with Euro/North American notions of racelessness. The first section of this chapter describes the basic demographics of the survey respondents, and describes the process of racial identification in the survey as well as the rationale for recruitment. The second section describes teacher reflections on race and racism in education. This section also looks at the degree to which responses on questions of race were differentiated by the race of the respondents. The third section looks at the teacher responses to questions addressing race and racism in Cuba generally,
as opposed to specifically within the area of education. This section also looks at the degree to which responses on questions of race were differentiated by the race of the respondents.

**8.1 Demographics, recruitment and clarification of terms**

**8.11 Age and teaching experience**

Of those surveyed 46.7 percent had 0–4 years of teaching experience, 27.3 percent had 5–9 years of teaching experience, 9.9 percent had 10–14 years of teaching experience, 6 percent had 15–19 years of teaching experience and 10 percent had been teaching for 20 years or more. This breakdown corresponded with the age of teacher respondents. Almost half of those surveyed (48.7 percent) were between 17–25 years of age. Respondents 26–39 old made up 27.3 percent of the respondents and 18 percent were 40–50 years old. Older teachers were under-represented with 4 percent between 51–59 years old and 1.3 percent 60 years and over. Although this is an over representation of younger respondents, it provides a good look at the perceptions of junior Cuban teachers: the young vanguard in the Battle of Ideas.

**8.12 Gender and race**

Women outnumber men among the survey respondents at 67.4 percent and 32.6 percent respectively. The over-representation of females was roughly designed to match anecdotal data on the breakdown of the teacher population as a whole. Although no such data has been released, this percentage breakdown loosely follows an informed estimation based on discussions with Cuban teachers. As far as race, selecting from four choices, 57.8 percent identified as Mestizo, 18.9 percent identified as Afro-Cuban, 22 percent identified as white, and 1.3 percent identified as Chinese. The issue of racial self-identification in both qualitative and quantitative race research is controversial (see Johnson, Jobe, O’Rourke, Sudman, Warnecke, Chavez, Chapa-Resendez, and Golden 1997; Bowman 1994; McKenney, Fernandez and Masamura 1985; and the National Research Council 2004). It is also germane to remember that a North American approach to a racial identification scale applied to
determine who is white, black and who is of mixed race ancestry does not work in Cuba. The North American one drop rule does not apply. In the Cuban context, not only is a much more nuanced scale used, often reflective of the seven point scale described in Chapter One, but someone likely considered black in North America may be considered Mestizo in Cuba. Similarly, a number of people who would be read as white in North America identify (and are identified) as Mestizo in Cuba. Sawyer (2004) explains: “Some have pointed out that someone like Jesse Jackson would be considered Mulatto while Tiger Woods and Colin Powell would be designated as Asiatic or white” (p. 71). Further, the racial terms black, white and Mestizo are invoked much less frequently in the Cuban context. As noted in Chapter One, ‘Mestizo’ is, for many Cubans, little more than a politically correct term, while ‘Mulatto’ is much more commonly used. Although among some activists and academics the term has begun to fall out of favour, the term carries little of the stigma that it does in North America, and indeed caries rich historical significance.

Relative to virtually every other nation, race mixing has for over a century enjoyed high levels of support within official discourse and policy. I used the term Mestizo however in recognition that some anti-racists in Cuba have begun arguing for the use of this term instead of Mulatto (Robaina 2009). Further, there is a distinction to be made between Mestizo and Mulatta identity, with Mulatta encapsulated by ‘Mestizo’ but not the reverse. ‘Mestizo’ thus includes all people who identify as mixed (black and white) race rather than Afro-Cuban or white Cuban. Additionally, the term Afro-Cuban, although common in much of the literature on race in Cuba, is by no means ubiquitous in quotidian descriptions of individual people or groups of people by Cuban people. The term Afro-Cuban instead most often describes cultural phenomena (e.g. music or religion) and historical phenomena (e.g. Afro-Cuban organizations). In recognition that there is a tradition among Cubans who bring a critical reading to race in Cuba of invoking the term Afro-Cuban (Moore, Pérez Sarduy, Robaina), I used the term Afro-

56 The seven point scale from darkest to lightest: negro azul, prieto, moreno, mulato, trigueño, jabao and blanconaso.
Cuban rather than black. Further, although much race scholarship on the island groups all non-white and non-Chinese Cubans as Afro-Cubans, I chose to include Mestizo and Afro-Cuban separately in order to better understand the racial identity of the participants.

Finally, as discussed in Chapter One, the precise racial breakdown of Cuba is unknown (Pérez Sarduy 2009). The most recent official available data (from the 2002 Cuban census) puts the percentage of black Cubans at 10.8 percent, white Cubans at 65.5 percent and Mestizos at 24.86 percent (CIA, Cuba, People, 2009). As I indicate in Chapter One, I take this to be inaccurate. A correct figure, I have no doubt, would be more reflective of a more recent report of the Institute for Cuban and Cuban American Studies which puts the percentage of Afro-Cubans and Mestizos, at 62 percent (Miami Herald, 2007, ¶ 30). In their discussion of the racial makeup of the 24 member Politburo in government, Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs (2000) write:

Proportional to the population as a whole, a one-quarter representation [that found in the Politburo] might be seen as not far off the mark. However that depends on whether minimalist estimates of 30 percent or maximalist estimates of 60–70 percent of the population are considered, broadly speaking, to be black. There is a growing current of opinion that the latter figure is more accurate (due in part to the greater exodus of whites from the island)... (p. 6)

In addition, de la Fuente 2009, Sawyer 2005 and others place the number of Afro-Cubans and Mestizo Cubans in the ‘maximalist’ range described above. The survey respondents were selected demographically to roughly reflect a higher rather than lower estimate of Afro0Cubans within the island’s racial breakdown.

8.2 Race and racism in Cuban education

If there is an anti-racist vanguard in Cuba, the vast majority of teachers interviewed and surveyed for this study are not members. The qualitative analysis of interview data reveals that notions of Cuban racelessness are alive and well among Cuban teachers and the same was largely true for those surveyed, with some exceptions noted below. Indeed, in response to the statement “Marti’s [raceless] philosophy of Cubanidad is important to my practice as a teacher” 98 percent of respondents agreed or
strongly agreed while only two percent disagreed. As mentioned in Chapter Five, it was Martí who most powerfully articulated the notion of the Cuban man as more than black or white; Cubans he argued needed to be above and beyond race. This silencing and colour-blind approach were applied to the classroom by most of those surveyed. However, in contrast to the teacher reflections in the interviews, 15.3 percent of respondents felt that Afro-Cuban students faced issues of racism in the class, while 84 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. Teachers interviewed for the study were asked directly about these issues and denied such a problem existed. When pushed however, and asked the questions differently, many cited numerous examples of racism and its role in schools. As Table 1 demonstrates, age played a role in survey responses to these questions, whereby the older the respondent, the more likely s/he was to agree that Afro-Cubans face racism in the classroom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>q2 Please select the age range that applies to you</th>
<th>2 agree</th>
<th>3 no opinion</th>
<th>4 disagree</th>
<th>5 strongly disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 17–25 years old</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 26–39 years old</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>56.1%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 40–50 years old</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>70.4%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 51–59 years old</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 60+ years old</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among teachers 17–25, 8 percent agreed; among teachers 26–39, 22 percent agreed; among teachers 40–50, 26 percent agreed; and among teachers 51–59, 33 percent agreed. This pattern also strongly corresponded to teaching experience, as Table 2 demonstrates.
Table 2: Afro-Cuban students face issues of racism in the classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>q1 How long have you been a teacher?</th>
<th>2 agree</th>
<th>3 no opinion</th>
<th>4 disagree</th>
<th>5 strongly disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 0–4 years</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 5–9 years</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 10–14 years</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 15–19 years</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 20+ years</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>73.3%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>.7%</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Roughly speaking, greater years of life and teaching experience correspond to a greater likelihood of agreement that Afro-Cubans face racism in the classroom. Although 22.7 percent disagreed strongly, none agreed strongly. At least two possible explanations emerge for this response variation by age and experience. First, younger teachers, as well as those newest to the profession may have simply witnessed less racism, and be thus less likely to report on it. This is potentially attributable to younger teachers actually being exposed to less racism than their senior colleagues and, given their limited time in the system, might point to a decrease in racism in schools. A second explanation, however, might involve their tools for recognizing racism owing to the lens through which they view equity issues in schooling in particular, and in more generally in Cuba and elsewhere. On one hand younger teachers may be increasingly free of their parents’ and grandparents’ biases, while on the other, these may be the blinders of the Special Period generation, a group raised just beyond the glow of the glory days of the Revolution. In any case, the total numbers are not insubstantial. It would be interesting to see data collected through a similar survey with Canadian or US educators. Across such a survey sample, would
three in 20 teachers in Vancouver or Denver agree that African Canadian/African-American students face issues of racism in the classroom? Although only 15.3 percent of the sample as a whole agreed that Afro-Cuban students faced issues of racism in the classroom, only 2.7 percent of respondents felt white students faced issues of racism in the classroom. This follows the contoured narrative of black racialization noted in the previous chapter. Fascinatingly, among the few teachers who agreed that white students faced racism in the class, none were white.

Gender played an interesting role in the responses as well. Men were more than twice as likely as women to agree that Afro-Cuban students face racism in the classroom, with 19.6 percent agreeing compared to 9.5 percent of women. Given the high number of young teachers, it is safe to assume that some respondents were reflecting on their own experiences in schooling as students, in addition to their experience as teachers. Gender plays an interesting role in affording saliency to issues of race and racism in the classroom as well. Teachers were asked to rank racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism and classism from one to five in terms of their respective effects in the classroom (one being most important and five being least important). Among male respondents, 30.3 percent ranked race as either number one or two in importance. Among females, the rate was 14.1 percent. In this female dominated survey these findings keep the overall numbers low, but the fact that almost one in three male teachers put race in the number one or number two spot is remarkable.

Almost one quarter of teachers (23.3 percent) agree with the statement “I am forced to respond to issues of racism in my class” while 71.4 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed. This again conflicts with the interview data where initial denials of the relevance of race were more unanimous — particularly when teachers discussed their own classrooms. It corresponds, however, to later explanations of anti-racist pedagogy, which offered an explanation for those denials and indeed added richness to their meaning. This also lay speak to a defensiveness invoked in response to the presence of a foreign researcher (me) during the interviews, which was absent during the survey research. Following
the responses about white and Afro-Cuban students facing racism in the classroom, we can assume that the racism to which teachers were responding was largely (if not entirely) against Afro-Cuban students.

Age, again, plays an interesting role here, as Table 3 demonstrates:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>q2 Please select the age range that applies to you</th>
<th>1 strongly agree</th>
<th>2 agree</th>
<th>4 disagree</th>
<th>5 strongly disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 17–25 years old</td>
<td>Count 2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 2.7%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>38.4%</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 26–39 years old</td>
<td>Count 3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 7.3%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 40–50 years old</td>
<td>Count 1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 3.7%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 51–59 years old</td>
<td>Count 1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 16.7%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 60+ years old</td>
<td>Count 0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% .0%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count 7</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% 4.7%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Roughly: the older the teacher, the greater the likelihood that she or he agrees or strongly agrees.

Among teachers 17–25, 12.5 percent agree or strongly agree; among teachers 25–39, 41.4 percent agree or strongly agree; among teachers 40–49, 41.7 percent agreed or strongly agreed; and among teachers 50–59, 50 percent strongly agree and 16.7 percent agree (66.7 percent total for the two).

As far as contacting and engaging the family, a phenomenon discussed in Chapter Seven, 33.6 percent of those surveyed indicated that they addressed issues of racism with the parents of their students. It is remarkable that a slightly higher percentage say they address issues of racism in the home with parents, than say they are forced to deal with racism in the classroom. There may possibly be one set of teachers (28 percent) who see issues of racism in the classroom and respond to it there, and another additional set of teachers (33 percent) who see issues of racism in the classroom and respond to
it outside of the classroom by speaking with the parents. This interpretation suggests that as much as 61 percent see issues of racism and respond to it some way. As Table 4 indicates, younger teachers were generally more likely address racism in the home than their older colleagues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please select the age range that applies to you</th>
<th>1 strongly agree</th>
<th>2 agree</th>
<th>4 disagree</th>
<th>5 strongly disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 17–25 years old</td>
<td>Count 3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 26–39 years old</td>
<td>Count 3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 40–50 years old</td>
<td>Count 2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 51–59 years old</td>
<td>Count 1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 60+ years old</td>
<td>Count 0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>Count 9</strong></td>
<td><strong>40</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
<td><strong>49</strong></td>
<td><strong>148</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td><strong>6.1%</strong></td>
<td><strong>27.0%</strong></td>
<td><strong>33.8%</strong></td>
<td><strong>33.1%</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While only 33.3 percent of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they address issues of racism with students’ parents, 42.6 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it was a teacher’s responsibility to address racism in the home, Table 5 indicates these feelings of responsibility were more common among less experienced teachers.
Table 5: It is the responsibility of teachers to address racism in students’ homes with their families.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How long have you been a teacher?</th>
<th>1 strongly agree</th>
<th>2 agree</th>
<th>3 no opinion</th>
<th>4 disagree</th>
<th>5 strongly disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 0–4 years</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 5–9 years</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 10–14 years</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 15–19 years</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 20+ years</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>.01%</td>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

So while older teachers were more likely to agree that they are forced to address racism in their classrooms and are more likely to indicate they address issues of racism with parents, younger teachers were more likely to feel it their responsibility to address racism in the home with the parents of their students. The younger teachers were thus more likely then, to see it as their duty to reach into the private space traditionally left to its own devices by other components of the Revolution’s approach to race. The incidence of feelings of responsibility appears more common than incidence of addressing racism in the classroom. In other words, many of those surveyed would indeed address racism more often, if it came up, as a matter of duty.

This reveals a race politics that is more than simply reactive, but in addition, is perhaps even strongly understood as philosophical and potentially programmatic in nature. In addition to experience, age also plays a role in responses to the statement, “It is the responsibility of teachers to address racism in students’ homes with their families” with increased agreement roughly corresponding to increased
age. Among teachers 17–25, 29.2 percent agree or strongly agree; among teachers 26–39, 47.5 percent agree or strongly agree; among teachers 40–50, 66.6 percent agree or strongly agree and among teachers 51–59, 50 percent agree or strongly agree. The relatively high incidence of teacher-home interaction points to the role of teacher as public anti-racist, discussed earlier. If across all teachers, one in three talks to their students’ parents about racism when necessary, then not only is race a major issue as far as student behaviour, it is in all likelihood an issue in the classroom. While we have no way of knowing from this survey exactly how frequent the practice is on a monthly or yearly basis, if one in three teachers go so far as to speak with parents, we can imagine that many more might observe racism and not speak to parents about it i.e. other teachers however, may observe racism but simply respond to it in the classroom. It is unclear how much overlap exists between educators who respond in the class and those who respond in their communication with parents.

As a small point of comparison, it is difficult to imagine that any topic about which a third of all teachers speak to parents (grades, attendance, attire, behaviour etc) could be anything but a very important issue in any given educational system. We get a sense then, particularly given that 42.6 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it was a teacher’s responsibility to address racism in the home, of the discursive anti-racist struggle in which teachers are involved. Positioned as such (professionally and personally) the rhetoric of racelessness and colour-blind politics is for many teachers key to the betterment of the racial project in Cuba. This is to say that racelessness is perhaps better understood as a normative discursive tool, than as a mechanism for the denial and silencing of race and race conversations.

Another variation came in responses to normative versus positive treatment of race-based treatment of students. While 86.6 percent of teachers strongly agreed that students of all races should be treated equally, only 53.7 percent strongly agreed that students of all races actually were treated equally. On the whole however, teachers overwhelmingly agreed (or strongly agreed) with both
statements. Finally, in striking contrast to existent research on the topic (see Gasperini 2000) the vast majority of teachers (86.7 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that students of all races were equally represented in the nation’s top schools, while 6.7 percent disagreed and only 2.7 percent strongly disagreed. As mentioned in Chapter Six, such mistaken information can only bolster larger denials about the relevance of race.

The preceding data point to a sustained, considered and critical approach to anti-racist pedagogical practices by Cuban teachers. One in three Cuban teachers speaks to the families of his or her students about racism. Over 42 percent of teachers feel it is their responsibility to do so when necessary. Almost 40 percent more teachers strongly agree that students of all races should be treated equally, than strongly agree that students of all races are treated equally. Taken together, it is clear that teachers regularly address race with their students and that in the course of professional practice race is often an issue, as are responses to racism within that practice. Additionally, it may be the case that the total number of teachers addressing race and racism is even larger if we consider the notion of two distinct groups of teachers, one that deals with race in the classroom and one that addresses race in the home. While these are not likely entirely discrete groups, it is probable that at least some teachers who choose one method may not be comfortable or interested in the other, potentially bringing the number of teachers directly addressing race in their teaching to (at the low end) close to 50 percent. The gap between the perception of racially equal treatment and the normative expectation of racially equal treatment, points to teacher observation of, and reflection on, the subjects of race and racism in education. Teachers notice that an ideal is not being achieved in the educational process, and while the degree to which they might consider their own failures or successes as far as the equal treatment of students is unclear, it is safe to say many teachers notice and consider these issues as they play out with their peers, and as well perhaps as they play out with individuals known to them such as family and friends via their experiences with the educational system.
Teachers, it seems, do indeed see race and this further strengthens the argument for a deeper reading of the colour-blind, racelessness approach discussed in this and the previous two chapters. There is strong evidence of widespread and common anti-racist practice among teachers, alongside persistent assertions that racism is not an issue in Cuba. Short of reading teacher denials of racism as nothing more than the tools of a racist system in the hands of the racist teachers charged with doing its bidding (a difficult proposition given the preceding statistics and the pedagogical anti-racism work described in the previous chapter) it becomes clear that racelessness is a normative approach as much as a positive claim. The following short excerpt demonstrates this point. Georgina (an Afro-Cuban woman) explains:

The Cuban future relies on children. Those children will go through stages. These children are growing up and living through those stages; we are part of the past. This is the reason why we need to inculcate values in our students, so they can have them present all the time; their revolution and their motherland, love them and respect them. An important part of that is students need to learn and know that there is no difference between the races — that there is no racism here. (italics added)

We can infer a normative rather than positive meaning in these claims. In her final sentence Georgina argues that students need to learn (and therefore that they must be taught) that there is no difference between the races. This implies that racial learning is needed to maintain the success of Cuba’s racial project. The social corrective is clear, and although she was the only teacher to put it this way, this reading sheds some light on the seemingly irreconcilable contradiction prevalent throughout most of the data. This by no means entirely mitigates the damage caused by the silence on race issues that no doubt stems directly from denial, but it does add a potential layer of understanding to the teacher reflections and survey results. The colour-blind approach is then indeed a strategic view of society aimed to counter racism on the island. While by no means perfect, Cuban racelessness must thus be read in light of this deeper meaning in order to reconcile what might otherwise seem to be contradictory statements.
8.21 Overview of racialized responses/perceptions

As with those interviewed, many teachers surveyed seemed to support the complicated and strategic Cuban discourse of racelessness, and downplay both the relevance and the saliency of race in Cuban education. Cross tabulation of the response data by race reveals only small variations in responses to individual questions, and only in some areas. When taken as a whole however, a pattern emerges from the data wherein Afro-Cubans consistently point to both the relevance and existence of racism at a higher rate than white and Mestizo Cubans. The following results point to a racialized understanding of race in Cuban education: in other words, a racialized epistemic position.

In response to the statement “It is the responsibility of teachers to address racism in students’ homes with their families,” teachers’ answered varied as Table 6 demonstrates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>q4 How do you identify racially?</th>
<th>1 strongly agree</th>
<th>2 agree</th>
<th>3 no opinion</th>
<th>4 disagree</th>
<th>5 strongly disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mestizo</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>76.2%</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>57.7%</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afro-Cubano</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Afro-Cuban teachers agreed or strongly agreed at a rate of 59.2 percent, Mestizo teachers agreed or strongly agreed at a rate of 40.7 percent and white teachers agreed or strongly agreed at a rate of 30.3 percent (just less than half of the rate for Afro-Cubans). This pattern holds on many other
survey items as well. In response to the statement “I am forced to respond to issues of racism in my classroom” Afro-Cuban teachers agree or strongly agree at a rate of 32.9 percent, Mestizo teachers agree or strongly agree at a rate of 26.4 percent and white teachers agree or strongly agree at a rate of 21.2 percent. In response to the statement “I address issues of racism with the parents of my students” Afro-Cuban teachers agree or strongly agree at a rate of 39.2 percent, Mestizo teachers agree or strongly agree at a rate of 35.6 percent and white teachers agree or strongly agree at a rate of 18.8 percent (just less than half of the rate for Afro-Cuban teachers). These discrepancies suggest that race impacts perception and thus is of greater importance than most tend to think. It may as well, point to racially equitable school-family relations, with Afro-Cuban teachers feeling comfortable challenging the race politics of white families. In response to the statement “Students of all races are equally represented in the nation’s top schools” Afro-Cuban teachers agree or strongly agreed at a rate of 81.5 percent, Mestizo teachers agree and strongly agree at a rate of 88.6 percent and white teachers agree or strongly agree at a rate of 96.9 percent.

As mentioned above, the variations in response by race are small but highly consistent across key questions on race and education in Cuba. These same responses reveal as well, that perceptions of Mestizo Cubans differ from those of white teachers, and generally sit in the middle between those from Afro-Cuban and white teachers. A shade grade emerges, correlating colour to understandings of race. As the next section demonstrates, the pattern described here appears in teacher opinions of race in Cuban society generally, as well with regard to Cuban education. Before moving on, it is worth mentioning the degree to which further survey data would advance general understandings of race and racism on the island. Although the work here touches on age, gender and race, deeper analysis of these phenomena as they relate to the way individuals understand race and racism is greatly needed and would be possible with a larger sample. Further, questions of religion, sexuality and ability are missing which in addition to
race, gender and age, contribute to the link between identity and representation, as well as between identity and knowledge production.

Even without these additional data however, the survey produces a slightly raced landscape of perceptions and understandings with regard to race and education in Cuba. These variations point not only to social location as a contributor to perception (an unlikely phenomenon in a society where race is irrelevant) but also to the implausibility of any analysis which ascribes unanimity to Cuban understandings of race and racism, particularly as these play out in educational contexts. As mentioned, it is plausible that analyses by class, sexual orientation, gender and ability might reveal further complexities of understanding based on social location, and indeed as mentioned above we have preliminary evidence to that effect with regard to gender.

While the fact that sexuality, race, gender, class and ability matter in Cuba speaks to the failure of the Revolution to eliminate the significance of social location as far as power relations on the island, the relevance of social location also challenges the notion of the monolithic socialistic state and citizenry, and indeed the idea that individualism constructed through a host of channels (good and bad) persists within a non-capitalist economic structure. Further, as is the case with race and what emerges as a unique Cuban anti-racism, Cuban society under the Revolution has probably produced a host of local and instructive strategies for resistance to various forms of oppression often pegged to social location. This flies in the face of capitalist mythology about the life of identity under socialism. As mentioned above, the degree to which social location affects perception is minor as far as the data on race and education. The survey data reveal only a small fissure in an otherwise united front, and it is the consistency across different questions (rather than the variations in answers to any one question) that raises questions and points to faint but intriguing pattern.
8.3 Race and racism in Cuban society

8.31 Overview of general responses/perceptions

The general perceptions of Cuban teachers with regard to race and racism on the island largely follow the responses discussed in Chapter Six. Teachers were asked to rank sexism, racism, classism, ableism and homophobia from one to five, in terms of which are most pressing issues in Cuban society (one being most important and five being least important). Based on the total survey sample, 15.8 percent listed racism as the number one or number two factor. If, as de la Fuente (2009) asserts, there is a budding awareness among Cubans regarding the prevalence of race and racism on the island, it does not appear to be widely shared by teachers.\(^57\) De la Fuente writes:

This discussion about race and racism in Cuban society is a fairly recent development. Not too long ago, scholars and activists were denouncing the silence that surrounded this issue. Interestingly, there are elements in the current debate that resemble the first years of the Cuban Revolution, discussions of race, racism and discrimination came to the center of national attention. (2009, pp 697–698)

For the teachers interviewed as well as those surveyed, race is far from the centre of attention. The silence (surely for many a strategic silence) on race mentioned above, is for many teachers alive and well. While far from totally homogenous, the results are consistent with the notions that race is for many Cubans of all races, not a salient issue in Cuba, and that the Revolution has been successful with the general project of fighting racism and creating racial equality, and further, that this success has its limits. As in the interviews, teachers surveyed deny the racialized consequences of private businesses and the remittance structure, and downplay the relevance of race on the island. Once again this flies in the face of research on the topic which clearly points to disproportionately more benefits accruing to whites as a result of these phenomena (Blue 2007, de la Fuente 2001 and others). As with the survey results discussed above, as well as with the interviews discussed in the previous chapter, there are

\(^{57}\) A better test of this would of course require longitudinal data from teachers over time, through a comparative analysis of qualitative or quantitative research findings from different periods.
fissures in the discursive dam however, as well as variations by race and gender which point to a
diversity of epistemic readings of the meaning and relevance of race on the island.

Although most respondents indicated that the Revolution had indeed brought an end to racism, a conversation clearly exists on the degree to which this is the case. While most teachers (80.6 percent) agreed or strongly agreed that “The Revolution has put an end to racism in Cuba” age played a role in the responses: the younger the teacher the more likely he was to agree, as Table 7 demonstrates:

Table 7: The revolution has put an end to racism in Cuba

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>q2 Please select the age range that applies to you</th>
<th>1 strongly agree</th>
<th>2 agree</th>
<th>3 no opinion</th>
<th>4 disagree</th>
<th>5 strongly disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 17–25 years old</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>72.6%</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 26–39 years old</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>52.5%</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 40–50 years old</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>48.1%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>25.9%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 51–59 years old</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 60+ years old</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
<td>60.1%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among teachers 17–25, 94.5 percent agree or strongly agree; among teachers 25–39, 75 percent agree or strongly agree; among teachers 39–49, 66.6 percent agree or strongly agree and among teachers 50–59, 66.7 percent agree or strongly agree. Gender is also relevant here, as 88.3 percent of females, compared to 68.5 percent of males, agree or strongly agree with the statement.

A similar pattern emerged in response to the statement “There is no racism in Cuba.” While most teachers (71 percent) agreed or strongly agreed, age played a role in the responses with increased agreement roughly corresponding to decreased age. Among teachers 17–25, 90.4 percent agree or
strongly agree; among teachers 26–39, 53.6 percent agree or strongly agree; among teachers 40–49, 59.2 percent agree or strongly agree; and, among teachers 51–59, 49.7 percent agree or strongly agree. Gender is also relevant here as well, as 80 percent of females, compared to 56.5 percent of males, agree or strongly agree with the statement. Although these are by no means large discrepancies (particularly given the small sample size, it does offer some challenges to the notion of unanimous thinking on race and points to the existence of individualized meaning making on the part of teachers as far as race, a conclusion supported by the interview data.

Another interesting variation is revealed within and between the responses to these last two statements. Tables 8 and 9 demonstrate a small but relevant contradiction as far as the denial of the existence of racism on the island. The first lists responses to the statement “The Revolution has put an end to racism in Cuba.” The second lists responses to the statement “There is no racism in Cuba.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 8: The revolution has put an end to racism in Cuba.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opinion</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 strongly agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 no opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In theory, the two responses would garner the same responses across the board, as the Revolution’s elimination of racism in Cuba would certainly lead one to conclude that there was no racism in Cuba (as it had been eliminated). The role of the Revolution in the elimination of racism is partially contested within the survey results, demonstrating that the class essentialist approach to understanding race in Cuba is hardly pervasive. Teachers agree or strongly agree at a rate of 52 percent with the statement “In theory, economic equality leads to racial equality” indicative of a real debate around class essentialism, with 47 percent of the total disagreeing or disagreeing strongly. This, in combination with Castro’s admission that class essentialism had failed (see Chapter Five) demonstrates that Cubans and their government bring a more complex reading to race than that for which critics such as Moore (1988 and 2008b) and others might give them credit.

As mentioned above, respondents were unlikely to make correlations between either race and employment, or between race and remittances. Among respondents, 93.3 percent disagree or strongly disagree with the statement “race matters to the jobs people get.” In response to the statement “The tourism industry benefits Cubans of all races equally” 89 percent of respondents agree or strongly agree. With regard to money sent from abroad, 84 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “white Cubans receive more remittances than other Cubans.” Interestingly, 23.9 percent of male teachers agree or strongly agree with this statement, which is more than twice the rate of female
teachers (10.6 percent). Teaching experience also plays a small role in responses to this question, as Table 10 demonstrates.

Table 10: White Cubans receive more remittances than other Cubans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>q1 How long have you been a teacher?</th>
<th>1 strongly agree</th>
<th>2 agree</th>
<th>3 no opinion</th>
<th>4 disagree</th>
<th>5 strongly disagree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 0–4 years</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>45.7%</td>
<td>51.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 5–9 years</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 10–14 years</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 15–19 years</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 20+ years</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>.0%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>.7%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>.7%</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Among teachers with 0–4 years in the field, 2.9 percent agree or strongly agree; among teachers with 5–9 years in the field, 14.6 percent agree or strongly agree; among teachers with 10–14 years in the field 15–19, 53.3 percent agree or strongly agree; and among teachers with 20+ years in the field, 26.7 percent agree or strongly agree. These variations aside, the vast majority disagree. The same holds true for tourism, an area with a demonstrated history of privileging white Cubans that a range of interviewees addressed directly, as seen in the earlier chapters. In response to the statement “The tourism industry benefits Cubans of all races equally,” 89 percent of respondents agree or strongly
agree. Once again teachers appear to be going on bad information and we cannot help but assume that
this informs their teaching and thus, of course, their students. Although we cannot see the entire cycle
of the production and reproduction of this ignorance, we can make out at least a portion of it whereby
the nation’s primary custodians of information are misinformed about the basic building blocks of
racial/economic inequality in contemporary Cuba.

In sum, following a pattern mentioned above with regard to race and education, younger
teachers tended to minimize the significance of race and racism in Cuban society as a whole. As age and
experience increase, teachers were less likely to argue that the Revolution has put an end to racism in
Cuba, or that racism does not exist in Cuba (despite a small discrepancy between these responses
mentioned above). Again, neither the interviews nor the survey establish why age would play a factor in
teacher perceptions of race and racism. If, as de la Fuente (2008) and Fernandes (2009) have argued, a
new race paradigm has emerged in Cuba, it makes sense that the impressions and perceptions of young
people would be reflective of this new reality. In addition to arguing that a new freedom to speak race
has emerged, these authors (along with Sawyer 2006 and others) also posit that this follows an increase
in racism during the Special Period. The degree to which younger teachers downplay the significance of
race speaks to neither of these trends. Coming of age in a time of intensified (and possibly intensifying)
racism as well as increased discourse about racism would, it seems, lead one to speak about the
relevance of race and racism, and this is generally not the case with younger teachers. Teacher
pedagogy with regard to race follows this pattern as well, with younger teachers addressing race less
frequently, both in the classroom and with parents in the homes of students. This raises important
questions about the potential age cohort effects of teacher politics as far as race and other equity issues
on the island. An important extension, although beyond the scope of these data, would look more
closely at the socio-political education (formal and informal) of teachers during different periods from
1959 onward.
Short of this sort of explanation, accounting for variations in teacher responses by age is difficult, and the existing data offer only small and incomplete clarifications. As mentioned above, reading the responses by gender, demonstrates a significant gap between males and females, even among younger teachers. A full third more women than men agreed or strongly agreed that the Revolution has put an end to racism. As women far outnumber men among the respondents, a more gender balanced survey would obviously affect the results. This gender difference follows the trend described above with regard to race and education, and speaks to a potential gendered experience of race on the island among young people, as men tend to point racism in education and elsewhere, far more often than women. This was the case with regard to teacher perceptions of race and remittances as well. While the vast majority of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “white Cubans receive more remittances than other Cubans,” 23.9 percent of male teachers agreed or strongly agreed, which is more than twice the rate of female teachers (10.6 percent).

Despite this discrepancy, the overall numbers regarding teacher perceptions of race and remittances, employment and the effects of private business point to a general lack of information among most teachers. The failure of the government — one which has an activist history with regard to public education around inequality — to better educate its teachers about key productive elements of inequality in contemporary Cuba is remarkable. Apart from the Eurocentric formal and informal curriculum of omission, this widespread lack of information is the only clear governmental mechanism I found for silencing and/or obfuscating race and race discourse in contemporary Cuba. Realistic understandings on the significance and workings of race, certainly as related to the post-Special Period economy, are difficult without these data and yet this critical analysis of the government’s economic policy of the past 20 years seems to elude most teachers. This is an important public conversation which has yet to happen. With just under half of all teachers disagreeing or disagreeing strongly that economic equality puts an end to racial inequality, a diversity of opinions exists on the connection between race
and economy. It stands to reason that public data on race and remittances, as well as on the racialized effects of private enterprise would be well needed and indeed much sought after in a country that lives and breathes politics.

8.32 Overview of racialized responses/perceptions

As in the preceding section on race and education, there were small indications of racialized perceptions among teachers with regard to Cuban society as a whole. Although all of the teachers surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I am proud of the social and cultural gains of the Revolution” Table 11 demonstrates some variation in enthusiasm, with Mestizos agreeing strongly, more often than whites, and with whites agreeing strongly more often than Afro-Cubans.

Table 11: I am proud of the social and cultural gains of the revolution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 strongly agree</th>
<th>2 agree</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Mestizo</td>
<td>78.2%</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Afro-Cubano</td>
<td>53.6%</td>
<td>46.4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 white</td>
<td>69.7%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As mentioned above, teachers were asked to rank sexism, racism, classism, ableism and homophobia from one to five, in terms of which is a most pressing issue in Cuban society (one being most important and five being least important). While 33.3 percent of Afro-Cubans listed race as either the first or second most pressing, the rate for Mestizos and whites was 13.7 percent and 6.7 percent respectively. As mentioned above, the general rate was 15.8 percent. The same discrepancy held true for other general statements about race and Cuban society. In response to the statement “Race matters in terms of the jobs people are able to get,” 14.3 percent of Afro-Cuban teachers agree or strongly agree while among Mestizos and whites the rates are 5.8 percent and 3 percent respectively. As mentioned above, however, the general rate of disagreement and strong disagreement is 93.3 percent. In response to the statement “white Cubans receive more remittances than other Cubans,” 21.2 percent of Afro-Cuban
teachers agree or strongly agree while among Mestizos and whites the rates are 14.9 percent and 7.1 percent respectively. As mentioned above, the general rate of agreement and strong agreement is 84 percent. In response to the statement “The tourism industry benefits Cubans of all races equally,” 93.9 percent of white teachers agree or strongly agree while among Mestizos and Afro-Cubans the rates are 79.3 percent and 67.8 percent respectively. As mentioned above, the general rate of agreement and strong agreement is 89 percent. Finally, in response to the statement “The Revolution has put an end to racism in Cuba,” 94 percent of white teachers agree or strongly agree while among Mestizos and Afro-Cubans the rates are 79.1 percent and 75 percent respectively. As mentioned above, the general rate of agreement and strong agreement is 80.6 percent.

If we accept that people understand the world around them based, at least in part, on information gleaned from their experience therein, then Afro-Cubans may well be working with somewhat different information about race than whites. Further, the discrepancies between black and white respondents mentioned in both Section One and Section two of this chapter indicate that Afro-Cubans have better information, as their responses pointed more toward the demonstrable existence of inequality as produced through capitalist-oriented initiatives such as private businesses, foreign dominated tourism, and the remittances structure. To be clear, none of the individual findings of racialized difference in response stand alone as conclusive evidence of a colour line of perception. Taken as a whole however, a racialized contour of understanding emerges across and within responses on Cuba generally and Cuban education specifically, which points to a slightly more critical reading of race by Afro-Cubans. On the whole, the interviews and the survey point to the same general conclusion that teachers as a group are invested in the official discourse of racelessness. While the qualitative and quantitative data can hardly be said to conflict, the survey more clearly points to racialized readings of Cuban education and society, although further and larger studies would be needed to take this any further. The interviews meanwhile, do what the surveys cannot, and reveal deeper meanings of teacher
engagements with the colour-blind approach. These conversations reveal richer senses of agency and self-determination in teacher conceptions of race and nation, and allow us to better understand the epistemological applications of the racelessness approach for the formal anti-racism with which teachers are charged — in and out of the classroom. The qualitative and quantitative data converge again to demonstrate that Cubans of all races (but especially white Cubans) have the wrong information about racial equality/inequality as far as broader economic issues. It follows that they may thus have faulty information about racial inequality on the island — and thus the role of race in and out of the classroom. While teachers may be doing the vast majority of the anti-racism work on the island, there are clearly limitations to the success thereof, not the least of which stems from the blind spots which fuel the widespread denial discussed in the preceding chapters.
Chapter Nine. Conclusions

9.0 Introduction

Cuban race discourse is produced and maintained via an enigmatic blend of dominance and resistance — control and agency. For almost 300 years race has been at the centre of the political stage; in various forms integral to every change of power and government since Europeans first invaded the island. This is not simply because Indigenous, white and black people were all there at the same time. In the short history of humanity, the phenomenon of multiple peoples occupying the same place and time often results in the extinction or expulsion of one or more of them, and this was certainly the case with Cuba’s first peoples at the hands of the Europeans. The push and pull dialogue which characterizes the development and content of Cuba’s race discourse comes instead from the confluence of history, geography, economics and politics. It is tempting to assign a mystical quality of rebelliousness and revolutionary spirit to Cuba, and even to Cubans. I am confidant many who study Cuba (on and off the island) feel more than a passing affinity for this unproven but irresistible assumption. This is why Cuba is a sexy topic for many non-Cubans on the political left and even for many who know almost nothing about the island either currently or historically. Indeed, a leading North American scholar on Cuba asked at a recent conference that the audience take a minute to “Let us reflect upon the magical realism that the Revolution represents.” Let’s not. While not a bad idea, I believe this has been done too often in place of actual analysis by supporters of the Cuban project, while within the anti-Cuba ranks, totalizing reflections about what the Revolution represents abound, but are of a different sort entirely.

That Cuba and the Cuban Revolution reads in these ways, however, has little to do with the intrinsic character of Cuba or Cubans, and is instead attributable in greater part to the success of various Cuban resistance movements and the resulting presence of anti-capitalism and anti-racism in dominant discourse on the island. Indeed this has almost as much to do with the reader of the Cuban landscape as it does with the terrain itself: the vast majority of non-Cubans are unaccustomed to national scripts and
stories which do not privilege capitalist social relations, and in which anti-racism movements have been successful. The successes of the Cuban revolutionary movements of the late eighteenth and mid-twentieth centuries stand in sharp contrast to the histories of almost all minority-world countries. That the social and intellectual landscape of Cuba (at the official level) centres and privileges these anti-colonial narratives should come as no surprise to those similarly steeped in the colonial discourse of mainstream Euro/North American societies. To walk by giant portraits of Amílcar Cabral and Aimé Césaire at the National Gallery in Havana (the equivalent in London might be empiricists David Hume and John Locke) is surely a romantic moment for an anti-colonial scholar from the US or Canada, but is the product of a specific cultural history and is constituted by, and constituent of, Cuban discourse.

That for some observers the good guys and bad guys are, to oversimplify, reversed in the Cuban discursive context, is not an indication that dominance and oppression are a thing of the past. As discussed in Chapter Five, not only have the gains been hard fought, but progressives in the pre-socialist and socialist eras have engaged in practices of marginalization and silencing, and have indeed ensured the persistence (despite dramatic decline) of racial privilege and punishment on the island. The Cuban paradox of being currently and historically a simultaneously racist and anti-racist place has meant that people of colour have made tremendous gains, and have often at the same time suffered tremendously. These victories and sufferings are not only central to the history of African peoples on the island, but they are central to Cuba’s conception of itself at the dominant discursive level. Indeed anti-racism (a contested and fluid version thereof) is a founding formal and informal principle of Cuban statehood. Laurels are no match for the future however, and the Cuban government has, so far failed to fully consolidate its racial gains in a holistic way.

The role that race and racism play in Cuba currently and historically is the result of incomplete colonialism and its battle with incomplete anti-colonialism. Race discourse is produced, (as well as enforced or handed down) through contestation, resistance, and epistemic ingenuity on one hand; and
at various times by colonial understandings of race, white privilege, imperialism, class essentialism, and enforced silence on the other. The quotidian life of race, on all levels is ultimately shaped by this trans-epochal tension. Chapter Five uses three separate tables to depict this process at different times over the past century. I have assembled them in sequence below, in order to illustrate the pattern described above. Notice the centre boxes in each: the centre box (or produced dominant discourse) remains the same over the span of more than a century.

Figure 2
Race Discourse as a Product of Dialogical Tension: 1902–1959

| Racism and colonial notions of nation, culture and power | Dominant racial discourse: Contested notions of Cuba as a racially mixed and unified country, produced by the push and pull tension of the two poles | Anti-racism and anti-colonialism, radical attempts to rupture colonial epistemology and governance |

Figure 3
Race Discourse as a Product of Dialogical Tension: 1959–1989

| -Racism from landed white pre-revolutionary elite -Racism among some white revolutionary government elites | Dominant racial discourse: Contested notions of Cuba as a racially mixed and unified country, produced by the push and pull tension of the two poles | Anti-racism and anti-colonialism, radical attempts to rupture prerevolutionary colonial racial epistemologies and to speak race by Afro-Cubans and many whites – |
Dominant discourse has been produced dialogically in each of these three distinct epochs. Despite the vastly different political systems and structures which characterized these periods (as well as intra periods) the tension has remained between racism and anti-racism, colonialism and anti-colonialism; and dominant discourse remains the imperfect child of racist and anti-racists interests — a child of whom neither parent particularly approves, but whose nationality is unquestioned. What stands out as well is that the process through which racial discourse was produced, remained consistent during pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods, despite the massive social restructuring by the government. Although Afro-Cubans were of course better off under the Revolution, this is largely attributable to the political priorities of the government, rather than to any new Cuban racial discursive paradigm introduced by the Revolution. Afro-Cubans participated at a higher rate than their white counterparts in the anti-colonial struggles of the late 1800s and the late 1950s, and during the interim had actively resisted lingering and nascent racism.

As far back as the pre-republican period (pre 1902) Afro-Cubans produced the circumstances in which the exercise of agency was possible. Although these contributions have been reproduced to bolster the teleology of a raceless Cuban cultural discourse the struggle and contributions of Afro-Cubans are an undeniably central fabric in the Cuban social project as far as race, and countless other issues. The Revolution, rather than marking a new era of race relations and discourse was instead a
product of the trans-epochal social relations on the island: an anti-racist revolution overwhelmingly supported by Afro-Cubans who fought in higher numbers, died in higher numbers, and self-exiled to Miami in lower numbers after the success of the Revolution. It was imperfect of course: among other things, despite the tremendous contribution of Afro-Cubans, as in the prerevolutionary period they filled the higher political ranks in lower numbers than whites. Further, successive discursive re-toolings of blackness have limited the legitimacy of Afro-Cubans’ claims to full Cubanness, as well as stymied various avenues of resistance. Neither domination nor resistance has ever been totally successful and the role of race and racism in Cuba results from these negotiations.

9.1 Cuban teachers and racial discourse

Education has of course played a role in the processes described above. Although the development of discourse production has remained the same, the results in material terms for Afro-Cubans have drastically improved during the revolutionary period. As described in Chapters Two and Five, education has played a central role in the discursive project of the Revolution as a whole, and has been the mechanism which feeds back to Cubans the product of their diverging discursive struggles. Education is, in a sense, the most important component of the centre, two-way arrows (↔) in the diagrams above. While by no means a total equalizer, as evidenced by the data here as well as in the work of Gasperini (2000), education goes a long way toward levelling the playing field in so far as all levels of formal education are accessible (free) to all Cubans. In addition to being available to all, it is as well, compulsory for all. As revealed in previous chapters, education is overtly political in Cuba. Education is thus on the hook for the failure of the Cuban state to consolidate formal racial equality in the private spaces of the nation. It must answer for the silences and denials so prevalent in dominant discourse. It must account for a curriculum of omission which centres some and excludes others. Ultimately, it must answer for the existent racism in Cuban society. In a paradox that mirrors that of the nation’s race politics as a whole, it is also to be credited with the specific type of anti-racism so
prevalent in Cuban society. It has been at the forefront of the epistemic embedding of a culture of rights and responsibilities which has not only produced unprecedented gains for racialized bodies in real terms, but has also created widespread sense of collective responsibility to ensure the longevity of these gains. As I hope the previous three chapters have established, Cuban teachers occupy this tense and conflicted centre space, and both their professional and personal understandings of race and racism are reflective of the tension that defines and indeed produces it.

Whatever the contemporary limits of the Cuban discourse of racelessness, and the corollary strictures of colour blind politics and policy, in the early 1960s these approaches were radical markers of progressive equality, relative to both local and international contexts. These early tropes persist as pillars of Cuban race discourse both in and out of educational contexts. Although public and private race conversations are changing in Cuba (see Fernandez 2009, de la Fuente 2008 and Fernandes 2006) my conversations with teachers on the island reveal a sustained investment in formal equality as a key measure of racism (in both schools and society in general), embedded in the half century old discourse of racelessness and colour blind politics. The historical place of race as central and yet unspeakable is reaffirmed in these reflections, wherein contradictions are marginalized to support the Cuban success story with regard to race. Examples of racism provided by the teachers appear to conflict with the persistent denial that racism exists on the island. A gap thus appears to emerge here, where the lived truth of race runs counter to a denial of racism on the island. This contradiction was explained, or marginalized in a sense, through the over reliance of formal equality on one hand, and various processes of disconnection on the other.

Formal institutional equality was, of course, an early goal of the Revolution whereby all Cubans were to be treated equally by state institutions. Cuban teachers were quick to point to the equality of treatment available to all Cubans in areas of education and healthcare in particular. The objective conditions for equality exist, they argue, and the results of those conditions can be relied upon to have
eliminated racism. Teachers are not alone in their understanding. A recent letter, mentioned in Chapter One, by a group of well known Afro-Cuban artists and academics written in defence of US allegations of racism follows this very same logic:

Cuba’s policies against any form of discrimination and in favor of equality have constitutional backing, registered in the chapters of the Cuban Constitution that refer to the essential political, social, and economic foundations of the state, and the rights, obligations, and guarantees of its citizens. (Morejón et al 2009, ¶2)

Absent of course from these understandings are considerations of the myriad informal ways that institutional spaces are operated and are maintained, whereby even equality-driven policy and directives are easily subverted to and by the subjective whim of the people responsible for the institutions at the end of the day. The investment in formal equality was further undermined by widely held inaccurate information by teachers about racialized economic inequality, which if corrected would likely challenge common understandings of the extent and success of formal equality.

Various forms of discursive disconnection were also used by teachers to marginalize the contradictions between the presence of racism on one hand, and the denial thereof on the other. Most commonly teachers referred to racism as a thing of the past, a pre-revolutionary epiphenomenon and colonial hangover. Current racism, when acknowledged was thus often viewed as inevitably on the decline, well on the way to extinction. Racism was also viewed as symptomatic of capitalist relations, and was thus assigned in the Cuban context to the pre-revolutionary period, while invoked internationally in a comparative sense to define Cuba as anti-racist. Racism, many teachers explained, is a US, German, or capitalist problem (so far so good)... but not a Cuban problem (enter the hitch). This is of course not the invention of the teachers alone. As Chapter Five describes, Castro used the same logic to define the Cuban race project as a whole, on numerous occasions, and cemented the point by looking at Cuba’s efforts to support African liberation movements in various countries on the continent. This thinking persists into the 21st century. The letter, mentioned above, follows the same reasoning and
points to Cuban support for African wars of national liberation, as well as the tens of thousands of Africans saved or trained by Cuba, with the implicit question ‘would a racist country do this?’ The answer of course is, ‘why not?’ This is the often powerful simultaneity of racism and anti-racism and nowhere is this evidenced more powerfully than Cuba. This faulty logic is another facet of marginalized contradictions in teacher race discourse.

There also emerged in the interviews, in tandem with the reliance on formal equality and disconnections, an invocation of meritocracy as the governing factor for advancement in both education and employment in Cuba. Numerous teachers, some of whom pointed to instances of racism within the schooling process, deferred to the notion that Cuban schooling and work life are fair and accessible for those willing to work for it: class-blindness is thereby revealed among respondents. The discourse of merit thus veils issues to do with educational and employment access and outcomes. This provides an internal form of disconnection whereby the dominant is again disconnected from any culpability with regard to racism — leaving racialized bodies responsible for not choosing to work harder, more consistently, and/or more ambitiously. This final technique for marginalizing contradictions is the most recent of the phenomena and, as we might expect, emerged in conjunction with market liberalization.

Teachers are structurally positioned to not only support but to also produce, maintain and reproduce dominant notions of race. As producers, rather than simply conduits of dominant discourse, they construct their own meanings, and as described above these generally conform to and constitute dominant discourse. This is an imperfect chorus however and a few teachers, as noted above, bring different readings to the table. A counter discourse of sorts emerges in the voices of some teachers, and although unresolved and contradictory, these voices rupture the assertion that there is no racism on the island, and go further by rupturing even the hidden scripts of marginalizing contradictions through the channels mentioned above, by identifying racism in contemporary Cuba and making no excuse for it. This dissenting opinion came from only three of the 41 teachers interviewed, however, and their views
were inconsistent with those of their peers as expressed in both the interviews and the surveys. Most teachers were happy to do the discursive legwork (the fairly elaborate dance of marginalizing contradictions) to support the denial of racism on one hand and attest to the racelessness of Cuba and Cubans on the other. The relationship between teachers and dominant discourse is reflexive however, and in many ways mutually constituting. They indeed understand themselves as forming and formed by the official story; as trained professionals who voluntarily and analytically teach according to principles in which they believe, and which generally support dominant understandings of race. Although most teachers are far from the cutting edge of socio-cultural discursive change, as found for example in the Havana hip hop community, they nonetheless are the on the ground voice of Cuba’s race conversation with its citizens: they are the custodians of the quotidian life of Cuban race discourse. Conversations with teachers reveal a paradoxical formation in which teachers are indeed doing race work — much of the heavy lifting of the Cuban race project — in the classroom, following a specific type of anti-racism derived from the larger Cuban race narrative as well as from their own experiences. Most of the teachers with whom I spoke are Afro-Cubans whose professional reflections on race and pedagogy are informed by their understandings of race and racism in Cuban society as whole, as well as by formal education and training. As indicated in Figure 5 (reproduced below), the epistemic foundations of teachers are thus informed by both their formal learning, and by the hidden curriculum of (their own) everyday life on the island.
The degree to which teachers construct racial meaning is thus very high, and is by no means contingent upon rote learning of the colour blind discourse. Further, teacher understandings of race and racism are complicated by their reflections on the relevance of race in the classroom, as well as by the way teachers address race in and out of the classroom.

When asked about how teachers were professionally expected to address issues of race and racism, and whether or not there was a party line of sorts which they were expected to follow — or even quote — teachers pointed to the ideal of racelessness in the classroom within the broader pursuit of a raceless society — a normative statement of ideals. History plays a key role, particularly alongside the notion of evolution, in the Cuban race narrative as imparted to students. Although racism is something against which great struggle has been necessary, it is ultimately something that Cuba has,
through deliberate anti-racist work, overcome and moved past — or so the argument goes. This Cuban anti-racist perspective is linked to and is part of the expected (and manufactured) moral stance on preparing Cuban students as future citizens. The dislocation of racism (to history or elsewhere) is a part of the building blocks of racial commonsense in Cuba. Students learn that racelessness is linked to the fight against racism, which is part of being a good person and a patriot. Students are not taught that time heals all racial wounds, however, as it would be tempting to surmise from the pervasiveness of denial and dislocation. Instead racism is taught as unacceptable, counter-revolutionary and as a phenomenon to which they must be committed to fighting, in-keeping with the national anti-racist position.

As described in Chapter Two, teachers were discursively re-tooled to support the anti-racist agenda of the Revolution. In the early 1960s, the time during which education was re-configured under and for the revolutionary socialist project, formal equality and the colour blind standpoint were progressive approaches to race relations at the local and national levels. Many teachers felt the seeds planted by the Revolution had come to fruition in the form of an evolving, regenerative public discourse against racism. Again, using Fernandes’ (2006) notion that Cuban hegemony is created by structure, resistance and co-optation, the official story of race in Cuban education is the product of a largely accepted give and take between the government and teachers who make race meaning and together confer legitimacy on the national narrative of racelessness. Teachers thus do not understand the official story as one that is imposed on them, or as dominating.

At first glance, teacher denials of the relevance and even existence of racism on the island seem to conflict with their professional practice and their sense of duty as teachers. The data demonstrate that teachers use formal and informal strategies for combating racism both in the classroom with students and out of the classroom with parents and other school community members. The degree to which the strategies are effective (e.g. mixed race seating and group formation to teach
interdependence) is not as important here as the fact that teachers have developed strategies, implemented these strategies and at least as far as these interviews, are able to reflect on these strategies. Teachers are race workers, and this was most powerfully demonstrated in their descriptions of interactions with parents and school community members who, the data show, the teachers felt entitled to correct with regard to racism in the home. Indeed many felt not simply entitled but responsible for this education in the private space. Given the consistency with which teachers pointed to regularly implemented anti-racism practices in the classroom, their corollary denials about racism appear to make no sense. As I argue in the preceding chapter however, the persistent denial of racism on the island by Cuban teachers is for many, meant as a social corrective and comes as part of a Cuban anti-racist approach meant to state the way it should (or even perhaps, must) be.

Given the common teacher perception that they are working against the prejudices of parents and grandparents sometimes nascent in students, the colour-blind discourse is generally understood not as a fait accompli, but rather as a strategic anti-racist stance, which as far as many can see, works well in service of the national project of racial equality. This requires recognition of the distinctiveness of the Cuban racial context in which equity is so much more common, and equality so much more easily conceivable, than in North American contexts. The colour-blind approach has a different application on the island and cannot be dismissed out of hand as is the case in Canada or the US. The relationship between teachers and parents involves a complex set of interactions which bridge public and private space and discourse. Teachers are uniquely posed as border crossers from one to the other. This is precisely the discursive divide that Cuba has failed to cross over the past 50 years, and as the survey data point out, younger teachers are more likely to address racism with parents, and as well more likely to feel a responsibility to do so. This divide, if the data are correct, will be increasingly bridged in the coming years by Cuba’s teachers.
9.2 Additional implications for further study

There remain distinct limits to the Cuban race project as currently in practice within education: worse than its champions make it out to be, and much better than its detractors, specifically those organized in the US, would have us believe. Although this research attempts to unpack the middle ground in pursuit of a more complete and accurate understanding than that provided by existent literature, as many questions have been raised by this study as have been answered. Race and racism hinge and hang upon multiple subjectivities, and indeed both are produced through social interaction. As such, there is no total truth to be had when studying racial power and oppression. This is quite different, of course than saying there are no objective truths, or that truth claims by virtue of subjectivity are infinitely valid (and thus invalid). The unavailability of a complete picture is attributable instead to the fluid nature of race, the vastness of the topic, and the limitations of the format. A PhD thesis will never give anyone a total picture of anything. Instead we have a smaller undertaking, a new reading on race in Cuba: that of the island’s teachers; voices heretofore unaccounted for in academic work on this topic.

This project has begun to flesh out the complex landscape of racial discourse on the island, both historically (in broad strokes) and currently in more detail with the case of Cuba’s teachers. In addition to identifying the content of dominant discourse, this project has investigated the complex and contradictory ways teachers make racial meaning in and out of the classroom, as well as the ways they navigate contradictory and competing discursive pressures as spokespeople for the nation, to produce understandings that reflect and balance their politics, their experience and their sense of patriotic and professional responsibility. A number of follow up questions arise through the clarity of hindsight, some while one is leaving the building, some while one is leaving the country, some while processing one’s data, and some while writing one’s conclusion. I was fortunately able to analyse the interviews and surveys as I went along, adjusting protocol between visits, fine tuning with each chance to reflect.
Questions persist however, that can only be filled by further study. The survey whets the appetite for a much larger data set to better understand the existence of racialized epistemic readings of race and education in Cuba. This would be invaluable to further research on these topics. Additionally, two interesting avenues for further qualitative analysis are mentioned above: the first relates to a potential counter reading of teacher denials of racism as normative rather than positive statements. Further inquiry would reveal the degree to which this reading addresses the contradiction in so many teacher statements, and this would not necessarily extend only to teachers.

The second issue is that of the demographics of the teaching force itself, and the implications thereof for perceptions and pedagogies of social inequality. Based on my time in conversation with Cubans in and around Havana, I believe many young civil servants, including some teachers, embrace the Revolution without the cynicism of those who were adults during the worst days of the Special Period. In many cases they seemed to have bought it more completely than their parents and unlike the highly critical youth involved in the hip hop community, these young people believe in the project, and are happy to do their part. This is not to say that they have no complaints about a host of issues in their lives, their jobs and indeed their country, but rather that on the whole and despite the problems they identify, they are proud patriots who have concluded that they believe in the colour-blind goals of the state — and for the most part I am describing non-whites. Further study of the post Special Period generation with regard to race, specifically in tandem and in contrast with further study of the hip hop community would be of great interest and provide an important compliment to this work.

There are also two larger questions that have for some time been at the margins of this project but which have been challenging to investigate further due to length considerations: first, what is the relationship between state socialism and race in the Cuban context? And second, what insights emerge from the Cuban example that might be of use to anti-racism and class-oriented scholarship and activism? As far as the former, the data reveal a profound interweaving of anti-racism and socialism.
Class essentialism is for the most part, a thing of the past among most of the Cubans with whom I spoke, and in its place is a racial moral imperative which, although unfulfilled in its entirety, informs general opposition to racism which I believe goes far beyond political correctness and lip service, and to the core of people’s understanding of self and nation — and this was the case for all races. On a less subtle level, the economic agenda of the socialist Cuban government, (widespread economic redistribution to begin with and equitable wage distribution thereafter via socialized employment structures and the establishment of a wide social safety net have) have, alongside universal healthcare and education, been responsible for the tremendous formal gains in race relations on the island. Further, the fact that implementation of market liberalization during the 1990s correlates to an increase in racism on the island seems to support the longstanding Cuban claim that racism is generally a capitalist problem. The correlation between the economic reform and racism is imperfect however, as there surely could have been measures put in place to prevent the racialized inequality that resulted, and it was a socialist government that failed to do so.

Such precise relationships are difficult to establish but a broader look at the Cuban project offers the following: in a sense, Cuban racism offers proof that socialism does not, on principle, eliminate racism. Racism is not simply a vestige of the past; it is a feature of the present and by all indicators an issue of the future. At the same time, Cuban socialism offers proof that racism is profoundly linked to economic relations and that addressing the latter has a profound effect on the former. The critique, and it seems this is where even many critical US scholars get upset about Cuba, is that while racism is far less of an issue in Cuba than most other places, the channels for challenging are profoundly limited by the government, and indeed by a dominant discourse that silences critical discussion about race. To this end, Carlos Moore has identified US president Obama (and his election victory) as a tremendous threat to the legitimacy of Cuba’s racial project (2008b, ¶8). The implication being that Obama offers proof of the racial success of capitalism and that Castro’s (either Raul’s or Fidel’s) claim that Cuba is a better
place for people of African descent than the US, is thus no longer tenable. Racially speaking, however, Obama is of course still more exception than rule. The Cuban president is not black though, and it will likely be some time before that happens. Not quite as long I would imagine however, as it will take for wage, healthcare and education parity between African Americans and white Americans to become a reality. As to the notion of silencing race in contemporary Cuba, beyond a basic lack of information the only active silencing of teachers on race comes at their own hands, through their own claims and conclusions about the irrelevance of race, which as I explain, can be understood as normative claims in pursuit of an organic Cuban anti-racism. Beyond this, Eurocentric curricula deter anti-racist teaching as they do in most western powers and by no means point a uniquely Cuban suppression of the race conversation. Indeed there is neither a general inability nor unwillingness to respond to questions of race and racism.

As to the second of the two questions mentioned above — what insights emerge from the Cuban example that might be of use to anti-colonialism, anti-racism and class-oriented scholarship and activism — the first and most obvious are the limitations of essentialist politics and the need for integrated anti-oppression strategies. Castro (2007, 1986) has acknowledged this and it is commonly understood in Cuba that economic equality does not equal racial equality. The learning for anti-colonial and anti-racist scholarship and activism is more complicated. Is Cuba an anti-colonial state? Yes. Do colonial relations of power, as defined by Dei (1999) as anything imposed or dominating, persist on the island? Yes. This paradoxical simultaneity, while not confined to the Cuban context, emerges in its Cuban form from the unique social, economic, political and historical landscape of the island. Official racelessness in the face of racial inequality is an act of colonialism in so far as it imposes a silence on those affected by race. Official racelessness is also the product of a longstanding political anti-racist project impacted at every stage and in every epoch by Afro-Cubans. The Cuban racial paradigm is powerfully different, currently and historically from that in the Euro-North American colonial centres.
Anti-racists and anti-capitalists have for so long been telling ourselves and others that another world is possible, that it has perhaps become hard to accept that another world exists: imperfect by all means, but not capitalist and indeed actively anti-capitalist; racist, but indeed also actively anti-racist. Internationally, Cuba is one of few anti-racist states, unabashedly criticizing imperialist racism, vocally condemning US boycotts of international anti-racism conferences, and speaking out consistently against Israeli apartheid in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Despite this however, it does not follow as some insist, that racism would be magically non-existent within Cuba’s borders. It is significant however that Cubans have seen and learned the world through this lens for the past fifty years, particularly in conjunction with unparalleled material racial equality. This epistemological footing is unique in the 21st century. Cubans have a highly critical understanding of the relationship between colonialism and race, between capitalism and race, and between resistance and liberation — even if it is inconsistently applied to their own back yard. Most Cubans understand themselves as victorious soldiers in an ongoing revolutionary struggle against the forces of capitalism, racism and colonialism. I suggest that non-Cuban race scholarship about Cuba has to accept a degree of theoretical intransposability — and that a failure to recognize and accept this constitutes an imposition in and of itself. Indeed, in the Cuban context racelessness and colour-blindness, as just two examples, play out in ways unique to the historical trajectory of Cuba’s racial discourse and this produces distinct versions of these phenomena.

Despite the teachers’ widespread investment in a colour-blind approach, their teaching practice was often raced. Although strategies for racial harmony in the classroom were somewhat limited, teachers nonetheless felt it was their job and duty to teach racial unity, frequently to the entire family. If it fell within the scope of this work, a comparison with US or Canadian educational contexts would reveal a great deal about the inimitability of Cuban racial discourse. In place of that however, one quick example: not one teacher invoked racism as a human or natural phenomenon. As Bonilla-Silva (2003),
Dei (1996), and many others have argued, these lines of reasoning are mainstays of dominant racial discourse in North America. So, although the frequent denials of racism in Cuba come at a high cost to marginalized voices, they are nonetheless expressions of a near unanimous national rejection of racism that is for many North American anti-racists unimaginable. Most Cubans know race differently than most North Americans, and respecting the historical relevance of these knowings as embedded and genuine, is key to understanding race on the island. While being careful to avoid idealization, local understandings of race and racism must be afforded analytical value. This offers a larger corrective about Indigenous knowledge and the potential for resistance. Anti-Colonial change, as the Cuban Revolution demonstrates, comes about through rupturing domination, on terms set forth by the colonized. Following Audre Lorde’s (1984) warning about the vital limitations of the master’s tools, only knowledge that grows from and honours the lived experiences which constitute people’s lives (currently and historically) can bring the change needed to overcome oppression. The Cuban toolbox contains tools that might not be right for the Euro-North American context, and by extension we must consider that the reverse is true as well. Cuba invites us to dare to imagine solutions, and at the same time to dare to be critical of the solutions we imagine.

While we’re busy with all that, Cuban teachers will continue doing the heavy lifting of the island’s distinctive type of anti-racism work; using many of the very tools that have created the problems they’re proud to be charged with fixing. Teachers are the epistemological gatekeepers of the nation and its narratives, and as racism and critiques thereof become central to Cuba’s public conversations, teachers will undoubtedly have to answer to these new conversations. Their ‘answers’ will come in alterations of the dominant discourse which has always been fluid, responsive and limited. Although I’ll make no predictions about forthcoming Cuban transition, it is safe to say that Cuba’s future will reflect its past, and that the historical and contemporary patterns of racial discourse production will impact whatever’s next. Afro-Cuban resistance and agency, as well as participation in dominant politics
will continue to play a central role in any national identity construction, and indeed in any significant political change on the island.
References


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Datos demográficos
1) Por cuanto tiempo ha sido profesor?
   __ 0–4 años
   __ 5–9 años
   __ 10–14 años
   __ 15–19 años
   __ 20+ años

2) Por favor seleccione el rango de edad en el que se encuentra.
   __ 17–25 años
   __ 26–39 años
   __ 40–50 años
   __ 51–59 años
   __ 60+ años

3) Sexo: __ Masculino/ __ Femenino/ Transexual __

4) Como se identifica racialmente?
   Mestizo ___  Afro-Cubano ___  Blanco ___  Otro (Por favor especifique)
   __________________________

Primera sección:

5) Me siento orgulloso(a) de los logros sociales y culturales de la Revolución.
   __  absolutamente de acuerdo
   __  acuerdo
   __  sin opinión
   __  en desacuerdo
   __  absolutamente en desacuerdo

6) En teoría, la igualdad económica trae como consecuencia la igualdad racial.
   __  absolutamente de acuerdo
   __  acuerdo
   __  sin opinión
   __  en desacuerdo
   __  absolutamente en desacuerdo
7) La revolución puso fin al racismo en Cuba.
   ___ absolutamente de acuerdo
   ___ acuerdo
   ___ sin opinión
   ___ en desacuerdo
   ___ absolutamente en desacuerdo

8) No existe el racismo en Cuba.
   ___ absolutamente de acuerdo
   ___ acuerdo
   ___ sin opinión
   ___ en desacuerdo
   ___ absolutamente en desacuerdo

9) La raza influye en los tipos de trabajos que la gente puede obtener.
   ___ absolutamente de acuerdo
   ___ acuerdo
   ___ sin opinión
   ___ en desacuerdo
   ___ absolutamente en desacuerdo

10) Los Cubanos blancos reciben mayores remesas que cualquier otro cubano.
    ___ absolutamente de acuerdo
    ___ acuerdo
    ___ sin opinión
    ___ en desacuerdo
    ___ absolutamente en desacuerdo

11) La creciente apertura de negocios privados ha afectado de igual forma a los cubanos de todas las razas.
    ___ absolutamente de acuerdo
    ___ acuerdo
    ___ sin opinión
    ___ en desacuerdo
    ___ absolutamente en desacuerdo
12) La industria del turismo beneficia de igual forma a los cubanos de todas las razas.
___ absolutamente de acuerdo
___ acuerdo
___ sin opinión
___ en desacuerdo
___ absolutamente en desacuerdo

13) De los siguientes temas, cuales son los que predominan en la sociedad Cubana? Enuméralos del 1 al 5 (siendo 1 el más importante y 5 el menos importante)
___ Sexismo
___ Racismo
___ Clase económica
___ Inhabilidad / Discapacidad
___ Homofonía

Segunda sección:

14) La filosofía de la Cubanidad de Martí, es importante en mi practica como maestro.
___ absolutamente de acuerdo
___ acuerdo
___ sin opinión
___ en desacuerdo
___ absolutamente en desacuerdo

15) Los estudiantes Afro-Cubanos se enfrentan a problemas de racismo en el salón de clases.
___ absolutamente de acuerdo
___ acuerdo
___ sin opinión
___ en desacuerdo
___ absolutamente en desacuerdo

16) Los estudiantes blancos se enfrentan a problemas de racismo en el salón de clases.
___ absolutamente de acuerdo
___ acuerdo
___ sin opinión
___ en desacuerdo
___ absolutamente en desacuerdo
17) Soy obligado a responder a temas de racismo en el salón de clases.
   ___ absolutamente de acuerdo
   ___ acuerdo
   ___ sin opinión
   ___ en desacuerdo
   ___ absolutamente en desacuerdo

18) Abordo temas de racismo con los padres de mis alumnos.
   ___ absolutamente de acuerdo
   ___ acuerdo
   ___ sin opinión
   ___ en desacuerdo
   ___ absolutamente en desacuerdo

19) Existe una igualdad en la representación de los estudiantes de todas las razas en las mejores escuelas del País.
   ___ absolutamente de acuerdo
   ___ acuerdo
   ___ sin opinión
   ___ en desacuerdo
   ___ absolutamente en desacuerdo

20) Generalmente los estudiantes blancos se esfuerzan más en su desempeño.
   ___ absolutamente de acuerdo
   ___ acuerdo
   ___ sin opinión
   ___ en desacuerdo
   ___ absolutamente en desacuerdo

21) Generalmente los estudiantes Afro-Cubanos se esfuerzan más en su desempeño.
   ___ absolutamente de acuerdo
   ___ acuerdo
   ___ sin opinión
   ___ en desacuerdo
   ___ absolutamente en desacuerdo
22) Las familias Afro-Cubanas representan un gran apoyo en el éxito académico de sus niños.
   ___ absolutamente de acuerdo
   ___ acuerdo
   ___ sin opinión
   ___ en desacuerdo
   ___ absolutamente en desacuerdo

23) Las familias de cubanos blancos representan un gran apoyo en el éxito académico de sus niños.
   ___ absolutamente de acuerdo
   ___ acuerdo
   ___ sin opinión
   ___ en desacuerdo
   ___ absolutamente en desacuerdo

Tercera sección:

24) Los estudiantes de todas las razas deberían ser tratados con igualdad.
   ___ absolutamente de acuerdo
   ___ acuerdo
   ___ sin opinión
   ___ en desacuerdo
   ___ absolutamente en desacuerdo

25) Los estudiantes de todas las razas son tratados con igualdad.
   ___ absolutamente de acuerdo
   ___ acuerdo
   ___ sin opinión
   ___ en desacuerdo
   ___ absolutamente en desacuerdo

26) Tengo la habilidad de abordar con éxito el tema del racismo cuando salen comentarios al respecto
    en el salón de clases.
   ___ absolutamente de acuerdo
   ___ acuerdo
   ___ sin opinión
   ___ en desacuerdo
   ___ absolutamente en desacuerdo
27) He sido instruido para abordar apropiadamente el tema del racismo en el salón de clases.
___ Si
___ No

28) La capacitación que recibí respecto a como abordar el tema del racismo en el salón de clases fue efectivo.
___ absolutamente de acuerdo
___ de acuerdo
___ sin opinión
___ en desacuerdo
___ absolutamente en desacuerdo

29) Es responsabilidad de los maestros el que los estudiantes aborden el tema del racismo en su casa con sus familiares.
___ absolutamente de acuerdo
___ de acuerdo
___ sin opinión
___ en desacuerdo
___ absolutamente en desacuerdo

30) Ordena los siguientes temas en orden de importancia con base en su efecto en el salón de clases (siendo 1 el más importante y 5 el de menor importancia).
___ Sexismo
___ Racismo
___ Clase económica
___ Inhabilidad / Discapacidad
___ Homofonía

Muchas Gracias
Appendix B: Teacher Survey (English)
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Demographics
1) How long have you been a teacher?
   __ 0–4 years
   __ 5–9 years
   __ 10–14 years
   __ 15–19 years
   __ 20+ years

2) Please select the age range that applies to you.
   __ 17–25 years old
   __ 26–39 years old
   __ 40–50 years old
   __ 51–59 years old
   __ 60+ years old

5) Gender: __ Male / __ Female / Transgendered __

6) How do you identify racially?
   Mestizo ___ Afro-Cubano ___ White ___ Other (please specify) _____________

Section One: Racism in Cuban Society/The role of race in contemporary Cuba

5) I am proud of the social and cultural gains of the revolution.
   __ strongly agree
   __ agree
   __ no opinion
   __ disagree
   __ strongly disagree

6) In theory, economic equality leads to racial equality
   __ strongly agree
   __ agree
   __ no opinion
   __ disagree
   __ strongly disagree

7) The revolution has put an end to racism in Cuba
   __ strongly agree
   __ agree
   __ no opinion
   __ disagree
   __ strongly disagree
8) There is no racism in Cuba
   __ strongly agree
   __ agree
   __ no opinion
   __ disagree
   __ strongly disagree

9) Race matters in terms of the jobs people are able to get
   __ strongly agree
   __ agree
   __ no opinion
   __ disagree
   __ strongly disagree

10) White Cubans receive more remittances than other Cubans
    __ strongly agree
    __ agree
    __ no opinion
    __ disagree
    __ strongly disagree

11) The increase in allowance of private businesses has affected Cubans of all races equally
    __ strongly agree
    __ agree
    __ no opinion
    __ disagree
    __ strongly disagree

12) The tourism industry benefits Cubans of all races equally
    __ strongly agree
    __ agree
    __ no opinion
    __ disagree
    __ strongly disagree

13) Rank the following in terms of which is found most often in Cuban society. Rank 1 to 5 (1 being most important and 5 being least important)

   ___ Sexism
   ___ Racism
   ___ Economic class
   ___ Disability
   ___ Homophobia
Section Two: Racism in the classroom

14) Marti’s philosophy of Cubanidad is important to my practice as a teacher
   __ strongly agree
   __ agree
   __ no opinion
   __ disagree
   __ strongly disagree

15) Afro-Cuban students face issues of racism in the classroom
   __ strongly agree
   __ agree
   __ no opinion
   __ disagree
   __ strongly disagree

16) White students face issues of racism in the classroom
   __ strongly agree
   __ agree
   __ no opinion
   __ disagree
   __ strongly disagree

17) I am forced to respond to issues of racism in my classroom
   __ strongly agree
   __ agree
   __ no opinion
   __ disagree
   __ strongly disagree

18) I address issues of racism with the parents of my students
   __ strongly agree
   __ agree
   __ no opinion
   __ disagree
   __ strongly disagree

19) Students of all races are equally represented in the nation’s top schools
   __ strongly agree
   __ agree
   __ no opinion
   __ disagree
   __ strongly disagree
20) White students are generally hard-working
   _ strongly agree
   _ agree
   _ no opinion
   _ disagree
   _ strongly disagree

21) Afro-Cuban students are generally hard-working
   _ strongly agree
   _ agree
   _ no opinion
   _ disagree
   _ strongly disagree

22) Afro-Cuban families are highly supportive of their children's academic success
   _ strongly agree
   _ agree
   _ no opinion
   _ disagree
   _ strongly disagree

23) White Cuban families are highly supportive of their children's academic success
   _ strongly agree
   _ agree
   _ no opinion
   _ disagree
   _ strongly disagree

Section Three: Relevance of race in the classroom

24) Students of all races should be treated equally
   _ strongly agree
   _ agree
   _ no opinion
   _ disagree
   _ strongly disagree

25) Students of all races are treated equally
   _ strongly agree
   _ agree
   _ no opinion
   _ disagree
   _ strongly disagree
26) I am skilled at successfully addressing racism when it arises in my classroom
   ___ strongly agree
   ___ agree
   ___ no opinion
   ___ disagree
   ___ strongly disagree

27) I have been trained to address racism in the classroom
   ___ Yes
   ___ No

28) The training I received to address racism in the classroom was effective
   ___ strongly agree
   ___ agree
   ___ no opinion
   ___ disagree
   ___ strongly disagree

29) It is the responsibility of teachers to address racism in students’ homes with their families
   ___ strongly agree
   ___ agree
   ___ no opinion
   ___ disagree
   ___ strongly disagree

30) Rank the following in terms of their effects in the classroom (1 being most important and 5 being least important)
   ___ Sexism
   ___ Racism
   ___ Economic class
   ___ Disability
   ___ Homophobia

Thank you