

JUU LON NYK BAS

MIS:SLAVERY

CUBA CELEBRATES CENTENARY OF ABOLITION OF SLAVERY:

BY LIONEL MARTIN

HAVANA, OCT 10, REUTER -- CUBA CELEBRATED THE HUNDRETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY IN THE THEN SPANISH COLONY BY DEDICATING THE DAY TO THE STRUGGLE OF THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH AFRICA AGAINST APRTHEID AND T THEIR JAILED LEADER, NELSON MANDELA.

NEWSPAPER ARTICLES AND RADIO AND TELEVISION PROGRAMS COMMEMORATED THE EVENT WHILE THE CUBAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES HELD A SYMPOSIUM AND A MAJOR MEETING WAS HELD IN MATANZAS, ONE OF THE MAIN CENTERS OF SLAVE REBELLIONS DURING SPANISH COLONIAL RULE.

ALTHOUGH THE SPANISH CROWN LEGALLY ENDED SLAVERY BY DECREE ON OCTOBER 7, 1886, THE CUBANS ARE CELEBRATING THE DATE ON OCTOBER TENTH, THE ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTEEN ANNIVEERSARY OF THE BEGINNING OF CUBA'S THIRTY YEAR INDEENDENCE WAR AGAINST SPAIN AND A YEARLY NATIONAL HOLIDAY.

THE LINK-UP BETWEEN THE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION AND THE STRUGGLE OF THE SOUTH AFRICANS AGAINST APARTHEID STEMS FROM THE FACT THAT CUBA HAS BEEN AN OUTSPOKEN OPPONENT OF THE WHITE SOUTH AFRICAN REGIME AND THAT IT HAS TROOPS IN ANGOLA:

LAST MONTH, WHEN IN AFRICA FOR THE NON-ALIGNED SUMMIT MEETING, CASTRO VISTED ANGOLA AND SPOKE TO CUBAN TROOPS AND MILITARY PERSONNEL THERE. HE DECLARED THAT CUBA WAS READY +TO MAKE ALL THE NECESSARY SACRIFICES UNTIL THE CANCER OF APRTHEID DISAPPEARS.+

WHEN CUBA SENT ITS TROOPS TO FIGHT BESIDE THE MPLA IN ANGOLA AGAINST SOUTH AFRICAN FORCES IN LATE 1975, FIDEL CASTRO DECLARED THAT CUBA WAS AN AFRO-LATIN NATION AND POINTED OUT THAT IT WAS POETIC JUSTICE THAT BLACK CUBAN TROOPS WERE FIGHTING IN AFRICA FROM WHICH THEIR FOREFATHERS HAD BEEN KIDNAPPED AND ENSLAVED.

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ACCORDING TO CUBAN SCHOLARS, WITH THE SPREAD OF SUGAR PLANTATIONS ON THE ISLAND, THREE QUARTERS OF A MILLION SLAVES WERE BROUGHT TO CUBA IN CHAINS BETWEEN 1790 AND 1880. IN 1880 CUBA'S TOTAL POPULATION WAS SOMEWHAT OVER 1.5 MILLION.

AN ARTICLE ENTITLED +WHO ABOLISHED SLAVERY IN CUBA?+ PUBLISHED LAST WEEK IN THE OFFICIAL PARTY NEWSPAPER GRANMA, SCOFFED AT THE IDEA +OF THE APOLOGISTS OF COLONIALISM WHO SPEAK OF THE GENEROSITY OF THE SPANISH METROPOLIS IN ABOLISHING SLAVERY.+ THE ARTICLE DECLARES THAT THE SPANISH ABOLISHED SLAVERY AS A RESULT OF THE PRESSURES STEMMING FROM CUBA'S TEN YEAR WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE BETWEEN 1868 AND 1878. THIS FIRST PHASE OF THE INDEPENDENCE WAR DID NOT ACHIEVE ITS AIM, THE ARTICLE DECLARES, ~~SPAIN~~ BUT SPAIN WAS FORCED TO MAKE CONCESSIONS IN AN ATTEMPT TO UNDERMINE THE GROWING INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT AND THE ROLE OF THE BLACKS WITHIN IT.

ON OCTOBER 10, 1868, + THE FATHER OF CUBAN INDEPENDENCE+, CARLOS MANUEL DE CESPEDES, PROCLAIMED THE BEGINNING OF THE INDEPENDENCE WAR AND FREED HIS SLAVES AS GEORGE WASHINGTON HAD DONE DURING THE AMERICAN WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE AGAINST GREAT BRITAIN OVER A HUNDRED YEARS EARLIER. CESPEDES GOVERNMENT-IN-ARMS PROCLAIMED THAT +A

FREE CUBA IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH A ~~SLAVE~~ ^{SLAVE} CUBA.+

CUBA'S BLACK POPULATION, BOTH FREE AND SLAVE, PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN CUBA'S WAR FOR INDEPENDENCE WHICH ENDED IN VICTORY OVER SPAIN IN 1898..

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ONE OF THE MAIN HEROS OF THE WAR FOR INDPEENCE WAS THE
BLACK GENERAL, ANTONIO MACEO. IN THE LAST STAGE OF THE
INDEPENDENCE WAR BEGINNING IN 1895, MACEO LED HIS CUBAN
FORCES WHICH INCLUDED ~~RUNAWAY~~ SLLAVES, SOME 650 MILES FROM EASTER
TO WESTERN CUBA THROUGH SPANISH LINES IN A MILITARY EXPLOIT THAT
WAS LONG STUDIED IN MAJOR MILITARY ACADEMIES. MACEO WAS
KILLED ON THE BATTLEFIELD NEAR HAVANA IN 1898 ⁹⁸

YOUTH, FIDEL CASTRO WAS A GREAT ADMIRER OF ANTONIO MACEO.
FOLLOWING THE ATTACK HE LED ON JULY 26, 1953 ON CUBA'S
SECOND BIGGEST ARMY GARRISON, THE MONCADA, IN AN ATTEMPT TO
BRING DOWN CUBAN DICTATOR FULGENCIO BATISTA, CASTRO MENTIONED
MACEO AT HIS TRIAL..

CASTRO WAS ASKED +ON WHAT POLITICAL PRESTIGE DID YOU BANK
THAT LED YOU TO BELIEVE THAT AN ENTIRE PEOPLE WOULD JOIN YOU? +
CASTRO ANSWERED, : +ON THE SAME PRESTIGE THAT THE BLACK MULETEER,
ANTONIO MACEO COUNTED ON WHEN HE REBELLED, + AND HE ADDED, +BUT
BECAUSE HE WAS BLACK THEY BELITTLE HIS LEGITMATE PLACE IN THE
HISTORY OF HIS COUNTRY. +

WHEN THE CUBAN REVOLUTION TRIUMPHED, RACIAL DISCRIMINTION
BECAME A PUNISHABLE OFFENSE IN CUBA. THREE AND A HALF MONTHS
AFTER THE VICTORY, ON MARCH 15, 1959, CASTRO MADE WHAT WAS TO
BE THE FIRST OF MANY SCATHING ATTACKS ON THE PRACTICE OF RACIAL
DISCRIMINATION.

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BLACKS HAVE MADE IMPORTANT STRIDES IN CUBA SINCE THE REVOLUTION, ACCORDING TO VIRTUALLY ALL CUBANS BUT SOME SAY THAT VESTIGES OF WHITE SUPREMECY STILL REMAIN, ESPECIALLY AMONG SOME OLDER WHITES.

ACCORDING TO THE CUBAN CENSUS OF 1981, ONE THIRD OF THE CUBAN PEOPLE ARE BLACKS OR MULATTOS.

IN JANUARY OF THIS YEAR, AT THE THIRD CONGRESS OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CUBA, FIDEL CASTRO TACITLY RECOGNIZED THAT BLACKS WERE ~~OVER~~ PASSED OVER WHEN CHOOSING LEADERS WITHIN THE PARTY. HE CALLED FOR MORE BLACKS AS WELL AS MORE WOMEN AND YOUTH IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS. AS A RESULT OF CASTRO'S CALL THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY WAS RENOVATED WITH A LARGER PERCENTAGE OF BLACKS ELECTED TO IT.

ALSO AS A RESULT OF CASTRO'S CALL FOR MORE BLACK LEADERSHIP, THE CONGRESS OF THE COMMITTEES FOR DEFENSE OF THE REVOLUTION ON SEPTEMBER 28 ELECTED FIFTY BLACKS TO ITS NATIONAL EXECUTIVE BOARD OUT OF A TOTAL OF ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTEEN MEMBERS. THE COMMITTEE FOR DEFENSE OF THE REVOLUTION, A MASS ORGANIZATION WHOSE MAIN PURPOSE IS REVOLUTIONARY VIGILANCE, CLAIMS A MEMBERSHIP OF 6.6 MILLION OUT OF CUBA'S TOTAL POPULATION OF 10.2 MILLION.

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