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Caribbean Studies, Volume 36, Number 1, January-June 2008, pp.
207-210 (Review)

Published by Institute of Caribbean Studies

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/crb.0.0014>

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short, we get no real sense that the Foster family has made any headway in terms of colonizing their space within their host country.

Finally, though the film certainly throws some light on the Foster family genealogy, one is not sure that for the young narrator Pablo Elliott Foster Carrión, it would have resolved the issue of helping him to embrace his multiple identities. In the end, the film made a more powerful case for assimilation to the American cultural mainstream, than it made for the articulation of cultural differences. The real contribution of the film however might be better located in the telling of the story of migration from an Afro-Cuban perspective, which is clearly at variance with the story of exile and nostalgia of white Cubans—an angle, which never manages to claim a place of prominence in the film.

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Las raíces de mi corazón (Roots of My Heart). Directed by Gloria Rolando. English subtitles. Images of the Caribbean, 2001. VHS. 51 minutes.

Most Cubans still know very little about the Partido Independiente de Color (PIC), a racially-defined national political party that was created in Cuba in 1908, was declared illegal in 1910, and staged an armed revolt in 1912. Most do not know that the revolt of the PIC in the mountains of Oriente was met with swift military repression, which resulted in the killings of the main leaders of the Party, Evaristo Estenoz and Pedro Ivonet, as well as many of their followers. The precise

number of dead is not known: some sources speak of several thousand people killed. Few Cubans know that the repression quickly degenerated into a racist backlash that at the very least threatened the lives and the personal integrity of many black Cubans, most of whom were not related to the Party. They do not know about the goals of the *Independientes*, who they were, or why they were protesting. Neither Estenoz nor Ivonet are remembered as national heroes, despite the fact that they both fought in the war of independence of 1895 and participated in the struggles for the civil rights of black Cubans during the early years of the Republic.

The Party's existence and revolt is noted in some history textbooks, but typically as a minor political event with limited effects. It is frequently referred to as *la guerrita de los negros*, the blacks' little war. This designation tends to minimize the importance of these events, a particularly clear example of how, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1995) would put it, power produces histories that silence the past. It was not until the belated publication of Tomás Fernández Robaina's *El negro en Cuba*, in 1990, that the first serious discussion of the Party's activities was attempted in Cuba's post-revolutionary historiography.

Las raíces de mi corazón is, above all, filmmaker Gloria Rolando's attempt to break the historiographic silence that has surrounded the existence of the Party, the lives and purposes of its main leaders, and the massacre of 1912. "After repression and slaughter, came silence," the film argues, and "from silence comes oblivion." This brief feature film is an assault on nationalist complacency and oblivion, an invitation to dig for hidden truths. The film also challenges the characterization of these events as a "racial war"—a characterization offered by the press of the period—and emphasizes instead the persistence of racism under the Republic and the repression of innocent black people in response to the PIC's revolt. Last, but certainly not least, the documentary makes subtle connections between past and present. To begin with, it shows that the black professionals of today have their own history—a history that is itself poorly known, but that the documentary recovers through a quick visual tour of family photographs and images of properly dressed, middle-class looking, dignified black men and women. Furthermore, the past was silenced not only in the past. Such silence is reproduced in the present, as exemplified by the refusal of (white) cultural authorities to investigate topics that concern the history of black Cubans, topics that are described as "inconvenient" or ill-timed.

The process of recovering the hidden, silenced past of the PIC is articulated as an almost casual encounter between Mercedes, a black journalist who is asked to research fashions at the turn of the century, and her own family history. This history is itself hidden within the family, jealously guarded by her grandmother, who seldom talks about her own

life or about the family photographs and newspaper clippings that she is known to treasure. According to Mercedes's mother, "old people" kept many things to themselves in order "to forget" and "to lessen the pain." The pain, however, is hardly forgotten: it is safely archived and documented in family mementos, photographs, newspaper clippings, and letters kept by the grandmother. This history of pain was not really forgotten. It was carefully guarded, away from the gaze of official histories, disrupting its silences.

Rolando effectively complicates official nationalist narratives that portrayed early twentieth-century Cuba as an egalitarian nation for whites and blacks, showing newspaper headlines that called for all "whites" to arm themselves in defense against "*los negros*." The revolt as such gets little attention, despite the emphasis placed on this by the contemporary press, which frequently exaggerated the actions of the *Independientes* and depicted them as savages. Instead, evidence about the killings of Estenoz, Ivonet, and countless others is juxtaposed with news about banquets celebrating "victory"—banquets that, to add injury to insult, took place in front of José Martí's statue. "Time passed and it seemed as if nothing had happened. But many events took place. Nothing is what it seems."

Indeed. Nothing is what it seems. But this also applies to the documentary's main arguments. Like any other effort at reconstructing the past, *Las raíces de mi corazón* creates its own silences, its own blind alleys. Mercedes's great grandfather, José Julian, had worked as a cigar maker in Tampa, Florida, and returned to Cuba after independence, hoping that things would improve, "particularly for blacks." When they did not, he "entered politics." What the documentary does not say is that Cuba was one of the few countries in the Americas where people of African descent could "enter politics" at the time, if by that we mean participating more or less freely in competitive electoral politics. Since Cuba's electoral regime was based on universal male suffrage, people like José Julian could vote and get elected in the regional and national elections. The very existence of the PIC is linked to the realities of the republican electoral system. Nothing is what it seems. The same year the PIC was created, the percentage of people considered either black or mulatto in the national congress was about fourteen percent of the total; they were quite underrepresented compared to their percentage in the total population, but this proportion was certainly not negligible. Mercedes was somewhat surprised to learn that not all blacks supported the efforts of the PIC, but this line of inquiry is not pursued. The reasons, motivations, and dreams of those who opposed the activities of the Party—at the very least a significant portion of the black electorate and without doubt the overwhelming majority of black elected officials—do

not get a hearing in the film. They escape Mercedes's curiosity. Nothing is what it seems. The author of the law declaring illegal any racially-defined political party, including the PIC, was a prominent Afro-Cuban politician: Martín Morúa Delgado.

Las raíces de mi corazón offers one narrative of the events that culminated in the repression of 1912, a narrative that highlights the salience of racism in republican Cuba and its role in justifying the massacre of the Independientes and of innocent civilians. This is an interpretation that owes much to Aline Helg's *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (1995), who is one of the advisors to the movie. There is enough evidence to support somewhat different narratives and interpretations of the same events. But the important thing is that the documentary (as well as Helg's book) contributes to inscribe the Party, its leaders, ideals, and actions, into the history of the Cuban nation. By doing this, it also contributes to destroy any facile interpretation of Cuban history as a linear march toward racial equality and integration.

Finally, Rolando's timely, beautifully-executed film must be read in a context of renewed interest on race and more precisely on the intersections between race and *cubanidad*. This context is very much related to the uncertainties of the Special Period, as the economic and social crisis of the 1990s was officially labeled, and to the deterioration of race relations in the island. Struggles over the place of blacks in the Cuban nation have historically increased during periods of transition and change. Cuba is in the midst of one of those periods. To envision the future, it is now urgent to look into the roots of the nation's heart, as Rolando invites us to do.

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