Reflections on Race In Cuba

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Background
Race in Cuba is very similar to the U.S. Both countries thrived from a plantation economy in which Africans were enslaved. Once emancipated, many Africans had to contend with racial stereotypes and discrimination; this still continues today. However, life-course outcomes for Black and Mestizo Cubans differ from POC in the U.S. as healthcare, education, and housing are provided under Socialism. Despite these provisions, Black and Mestizo Cubans are underrepresented in higher education and the tourism sector. Additionally, they are disproportionately incarcerated.

“Racial Silence”
• Unlike America, the term “Race” does not have a scientific or social basis in Cuba.
• Race is not measured by the Cuban government. Last recorded in 1919 (Ex. Health & Education).
• “Cuban First” - Cuban’s typically identify by their nationality before their “race”.
• Racial discrimination is a crime punishable with jail time for up to two-years. However, this is hardly pursued as racism is difficult to prove.
• Conversations on race are often “silenced” as it undermines equality achieved after the 1959 revolution.

Variou Facts
• Like the U.S., there are no explicit racist laws within the Cuban constitution. However, implicit color bias exists, this creates discrimination based on colorism.
• Research suggests that 72% of population is non-white. However, many Cubans identify as White.
• In 2005, 68.5% of Black Cubans were unemployed while 70% of White Cubans were employed.

Race & Economics
• Cuba lost 3/4 of its GDP when the Soviet Union divided; The “Special Period”
• Private businesses were permitted (ex. tourism) to stimulate the economy
• Black and Mestizo Cubans benefited the least from this change
• The average monthly salary: Government Job = $20; Tourism (Private) = $60 +
• White Cubans receive greater remittances than Black Cubans thus exacerbating income disparities in Cuba.

References
3. Art: By children of the community project El Niño y La El Niña
4. Personal Communication with Dr. Lourdes Serrano March 11th, 2015

Implications for Social Work
• Understanding colorism vs. racism and how it impacts your population
• Identifying the systematic operation of race and color based discrimination
• Identifying steps to reject color-blind practices
• Assess how colorblind practices create undetected vulnerable populations in schools, health care, employment and child welfare