

## Q&A with Carlos Moore

### Author of *Pichón*

#### **What inspired you to write *Pichón*?**

Nothing was further from my mind than a book like *Pichón*, until, in 1982, my friend Alex Haley sat me down in a Harlem restaurant and literally convinced me that I *had* to write my life story. At first I resisted, but soon I got to see his point—the story of the Cuban Revolution told from the perspective of a Black Cuban would indeed break from the traditional way in which Cuba, Castro and the Revolution were viewed and explained.

#### **Why is this memoir so relevant to current politics in Cuba?**

Cuba has now entered a new phase of its evolution into the future, and race is at the center of it all. From whichever standpoint you may view it, even in terms of the future of Cuba-U.S. relations, race has become central. Why? Cuba is at least 62 percent Black and the Cuban American community that wants to play a dominant role in Cuba again is 90 percent White. How will the post-Fidel leadership in Cuba, the Cuban-American elite in the U.S., and, ultimately, the U.S. government handle this potentially explosive demographic reality? In very personal terms, *Pichón* delineates the broad issues that constitute the core of the Cuban racial dilemma. In that way, it provides a missing element that is necessary to arrive at an understanding of what may be ahead for Cuba.

#### **How did your experiences with racism shape who you are today?**

Racism compelled me to think about my place in society and the world; it made me realize that I was born *different* and that that difference was not accepted. So I had to understand what *difference* meant. Had it not been for racism, I would never have understood that “otherness” is a basic problem for human beings. I now realize that identity is linked to *difference*. Today, I regard “otherness”—that is, *difference*—as a necessary, positive and enriching quality of existence.

#### **What was the most startling form of racism you encountered when living in America?**

When I arrived in America, I sincerely believed I was in a free country. Therefore, I was shocked beyond measure to hear about the conditions prevailing in the U.S. South. I was absolutely devastated by the discovery of the reality of Jim Crow. Something similar happened when I discovered the existence of apartheid in South Africa. Discovering apartheid in America destroyed all of the confidence I had in American democracy. That shock was what pushed me into a social radicalism of the Marxist type.

#### **How did racism in America compare to what you experienced in Cuba?**

The overt and crude segregation I encountered in America in the late 1950s and early 1960s was unlike anything I had experienced in Cuba. In Cuba I had confronted segregation all of

my life, but it was always denied and clothed in an equalitarian and inclusive rhetoric. In the U.S. at that time, racial segregation was blatant and backed up by physical violence. When the segregationist wore the uniform of a policeman and carried a licensed gun, you knew you were facing the imminent possibility of a legal lynching.

**Who were your mentors in the 1960s and how did they influence your career in activism?**

My mentors in the 1960s were the Americans Maya Angelou, Harold Cruse and Malcolm X; the Cuban ethnologist Walterio Carbonell; the Haitian historian Marc Balin; the Martiniquan philosopher Aimé Césaire; and the Senegalese anthropologist Cheikh Anta Diop. Those were, without a doubt, the people who most influenced my life as a young man.

**When you returned to Cuba and discovered the racist rhetoric of Castro's revolution, how did you confront the state?**

When I discovered the extensive and profound racism that persisted covertly under the Revolution, but that the Cuban leadership systematically denied, I attempted to mobilize Blacks around the idea of drafting a petition to present to the regime. I thought that what was needed was an open debate of the racial issue nationwide. Therefore, I attempted to bring that question to the attention of the revolutionary leadership. When that failed, I attempted to reach the top of the top—Fidel Castro.

**How should our leaders be addressing racism in Cuba (and abroad) in the 21st century?**

The U.S. needs to have a better understanding of what the majority of the Black Cuban population wants, rather than being stuck with the old policy of reacting solely to what the predominantly white Cuban-American community wants. Cuba's future will be determined by Cubans *inside* Cuba, and these are predominantly Black citizens; like it or not, that's the essence of the problem. The sooner the U.S. understands this, the quicker a sane solution to the "Cuba problem" will be found.

**If Barack Obama wins the presidential election in November 2008, how do you think his intended initiatives to ease the Cuba embargo will affect U.S.-Cuban relations?**

Senator Barack Obama has a clearer and saner vision of what is wrong with U.S.-Cuban relations than any other major American politician on the scene. He understands that the embargo has achieved basically nothing, except building up hostility inside of Cuba against the U.S. Engaging Cuba in a principled political dialogue, and increasing the economic exchange between Cuba and the U.S., is the best way to force the Cuban regime to respect the civil rights and human rights of the Cuban citizenry.

**What message do you want readers to take away from your memoir?**

If there is one thing that I want readers to be convinced of after reading my memoir, it is that the denial of someone else's humanity is the ultimate statement of our own incapacity to be fully human.

**Carlos Moore is available for interview.**

Please contact: Laura Di Giovine, Publicist, 814 N. Franklin St., Chicago, IL 60610,  
312-337-0747 ext. 282, [laura@ipgbook.com](mailto:laura@ipgbook.com)