

Shirley A. Jackson, Ph.D.

I am constantly amazed by the resiliency of Cubans, but am even more impressed by the ability of the women to take in stride those things that they have been able to accomplish since the revolution. In particular, the presence of women in many aspects of Cuban life where they are in leadership roles and those where they continue to participate in important roles such as caretaker, mother, sister, and so on. Equal pay for equal work is something that has not yet been attained in the U.S., thus, when one finds that this is a normal state of affairs in Cuba, it lends itself to question the emerging roles of women in these two separate social spheres – the U.S. and Cuba. Namely, one observes that the roles of women can be dictated in large part, and thus become stagnant, based on gender disparities in social life.



Cooperative Farm Workers



Photo of Vilma Espin and Fidel Castro at Havana Offices of the Federation of Cuban Women

Yet, I speak as a non-Cuban (an American), sociologist, woman, and person of African descent. My perceptions are influenced by a global comparative analysis of race, skin color, class, and gender in the U.S. and Cuba. The result is that my views may be considered naïve at best and erroneous at worst by those who share a different point of view. Nonetheless, the reality of the situation is that the advances made by Cuban women and particularly those who are considered “non-white” could have only been accomplished as a result of the Cuban Revolution. This provides an opportunity to explore not only the impact of women’s advances in Cuba compared with their counterparts in the U.S. but also an analysis of the changes in social and class status of non-white Cubans with their African American/Black sisters and brothers in the U.S. in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution and Civil Rights Movement respectively. When I travel to Cuba, these thoughts of gender and race/skin color are always first and foremost on my mind.

