

LA MULATA: CUBA'S NATIONAL SYMBOL

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The mulata is Cuba's national symbol. She began as a product of Spanish imperialism and slavery on Cuba's tobacco and sugar plantations. She is the product of socioeconomic inequality and the sometimes violent exploitation of black women by white men. The mulata was sexualized by white men in the nineteenth century, vilified as a "loose woman," and then used as a tourist attraction for European and North American men in the twentieth century. During the Special Period, she has been returned to her roots as a symbol of sexuality, once again a draw for white tourists. The mulata is treated similarly throughout the Caribbean and Latin America, including in Brazil. In Cuba, as in Brazil, she is a national icon. She is the symbol of Cuba's racial, economic, and gender hierarchies. I will argue that the mulata is the personification of Cuba: when Cuba is controlled by white imperialists, the mulata's body is used by Cuba's exploiters, as both country and woman are seen as familiar yet exotic. *La Mulata* remains a symbol of Cuba's diversity and beauty, as well as its internal and external racial, economic, and gender inequalities.

Cuba is ambivalent in its portrayal of the mulata. On one hand, she is the emblem of its national identity: the living, breathing, symbol of Cuba, since the fate of the mulata often resembles Cuba's own destiny. On the other hand, she is Cuba's biggest fear. Cubans fear that her exploitation by white foreigners mirrors Cuba's own exploitation by imperial powers. Machismo, or a strong or exaggerated sense of mas-

culinity stressing attributes such as physical courage, virility, domination of women, and aggressiveness, is a part of Cuban culture. Under this system, Cuban men can penetrate and control Cuban women, but to have foreigners penetrate them instead threatens Cuban masculinity. If the mulata is penetrated by foreign men, she is seen as being vulnerable and Cuba loses an aspect of its power and its potency, something very important to such a machismo-driven society. If the mulata is used, Cuba is perceived as being weak.

Many Cubans have come to recognize the importance of the mulata in terms of their national identity. For better or worse, she is a symbol of Cuba's plight or triumph as a country. Nicolas Guillén, a mulatto Cuban poet, has said: "Cuba's soul is a half-breed. And it is from the soul not the skin that we derive our definitive color. Someday it will be called 'Cuban color'" (Kutzinski 1993:1). Because Cuba is a combination of many ethnicities and races, the mulata embodies that diversity. This racial diversity is common in the Caribbean and in other places in the world, but *mestizaje* has had a particular currency in Cuba: "Since the 1890s, when Jose Martí began to popularize the idea of 'our half-breed America,' *mestizaje* has been perhaps the principal signifier of Cuba's national cultural identity" (Kutzinski 1993:5). The mulata—as a blend of black and white, slave and master, exploited and exploiter—is a blend of all aspects of Cuba, thus a symbol of its identity.

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SUGAR, SEX, AND MARRIAGE

Cuba's beginnings are a tale of imperialism and slavery, and the mulata reflects both the external and internal inequalities that existed in the 18th and 19th centuries. Sugar and tobacco were the main sources of Cuba's economy and both heavily depended on slavery ("Cuba," Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2004). The 19th century depictions of mulatto women on cigar and sugar packages link the mulata with Cuba's economic identity. Mulatas were seen as a source of income, as a way to sell products. Depictions of their bodies and allusions to their sexuality were enough to sell sugar to white men. The foreign white male was especially intrigued by mulatas' perceived sensuality. A white man who purchased Cuban cigars or sugar would most likely be faced with a drawn depiction of a mulata. Foreigners came to view the mulata as a symbol of Cuba's sexuality. They also saw the mixed-race women as being exotic as compared to the women they associated with. This was an ingenious marketing strategy for the tobacco and sugar industries, as sex really does sell.

Although mulatas' bodies were being exploited to sell products, they also served as an apt symbol for Cuban culture at the time. The social, racial, sexual, and economic inequalities of the day were all addressed using the mulata's body as a means to represent these issues. "The classification of nonwhite women in terms of different grains of refined sugar is most striking in the *marquilla* series entitled '*Muestras de azúcar de mi ingenio*' (sugar samples from my plantation)" (Kutzinski 1993:48). "First-rate" sugar and "second-rate white" sugar refer to light mulatas. Second-rate sugar "features a brown-skinned woman with 'negroid' features" (Kutzinski 1993:48). Lighter mulatas were prized amongst white men and within black society as well. They had the ability to "pass" for white, but were surrounded by a mystery as to their heritage. The fact that darker, less expensive sugar was linked to darker mulatas demonstrates that darker women were not as highly prized as lighter ones. White women did not stand in for the sugar comparison, however, as sensuality and sugar were both attached to the mulata. Directly linking different grains of sugar with mulatas' bodies made the product sensuous and appealing to buyers. Certainly,

this also degraded mulata women. And the sugar companies profited off of racism and sexism, representing Cuba's internal gender and racial inequalities and reflecting foreigners' desires to sexualize the mulata and Cuba.

In reality, not just in advertisements, mulatto women were subjected to the sexual advances of white men. Many mulata women were "the prey of white men in sexual liaisons that were very rarely legitimated through marriage" (Martínez-Alier 1989: xiv). The reason for the prevalence of concubinage is complex. First, it is a question of numbers. There were fewer white women than white men in Cuba throughout the 19th century, but more black women than black men (Martínez-Alier 1989: 57). Poorer white men could not afford to marry white women, who were usually of the upper classes. Therefore, they turned to mulatto women, who were not fully black and substantially below them in the racial hierarchy, but also not white and therefore more easily convinced to have sexual relations because of their desire to "advance" racially. There were legal restrictions on marriage between the races, but it was not impossible to get approval from the government. In fact, two-thirds of those who applied for marriage licenses were granted the right to marry between races (Martínez-Alier 1989:62). "Thus it would not be accurate to attribute interracial concubinage solely to the official prohibition of marriage" (Martínez-Alier 1989: 63).

If marriage was possible for at least some couples, then why did white men refuse to marry their mistresses? The answer may lie in Cuba's racial consciousness that stemmed from economic concerns. The mulata was the product of slavery and exploitation. For a white man to marry a mulata and acknowledge his children with her would be to lessen his status. Under hypodescent, his children would be assigned to the mother's race and would be given a lesser status in society. It did not matter if a woman was light enough to "pass" for white, if she was legally black, then she was labeled as such and her children were given the same label:

[I]n nineteenth-century Cuba it was not physical appearance as such that caused prejudice and discrimination, but what physical appearance stood for, i.e.,

an individual's occupational role in an economic system based on the exploitation of one group by another (Martínez-Alier 1989: 5).

Mulatto women, despite their possible Caucasian appearances, were "tainted" by their relationship to the economic institution of slavery. If a man had a child with such a woman, then the child was linked to slavery and was not given the status of a white person (Martínez-Alier 1989: 25). If a man claimed a mulatto child as his legitimate offspring, then the father himself would be linked to slavery. Most of the time, white plantation owners did not acknowledge their illegitimate children with darker women. This set a trend for other white men who had dark mistresses. I believe that this fear of slavery stems from more than racism and also comes from class biases, as well as from seeing slavery as a reminder of Cuba's repression and economic exploitation by Spanish rule. Thus, the mulata was later viewed as a symbol of oppression during Cuba's battle for independence from Spanish rule: "As a product of violence, the mulata is indeed the 'supreme flower of injustice'" (Kutzinski 1993:196). The mulata was formed by the economic exploitation and physical rape of black women and was therefore representative of the injustice of the colonial system.

The mulata could not be treated in such a way if she were an innocent victim; consequently, white men labeled her as a social deviant in order to justify their actions. Cigarette lithographs, intended for largely white foreign or local male audiences, depict mulatas receiving money from white men in exchange for sex (Kutzinski 1993:71). In showing the women taking money, "[s]ex, stripped of all affective associations, is a commodity exchanged not for social status, but for hard currency" (Kutzinski 1993:76). The artists of the cigarette lithographs are denying the mulatas' social incentives for engaging in sexual behaviors with white men and make them literally into prostitutes. A cigarette lithograph is entitled "*El palomo y la gabilana*" or "Male dove and female hawk" (Kutzinski 1993:76). She is not presented as a victim and is seen as the sexually out-of-control woman who tempts good white men into committing sinful acts. A popular saying in the nineteenth century was that "there

is no sweet tamarind fruit; nor a virgin mulatto girl" (Martínez-Alier 1989:115). The opinion of foreign white men that mulatto women were inherently sexually depraved was furthered by these depictions, as well as by the evolutionary theories at that time which claimed that the African races were inherently depraved.

Conflicting images make it necessary to define what white men's incentives were for using the mulata this way. Political and commercial affairs were dominated by white men in Colonial Cuba, but the images that dominated literature and popular culture were of non-white women (Kutzinski 1993: 21). In Cuba's white-dominated, patriarchal system, it is the mulata that stands out as the national symbol, even at the time that she was most mistreated. Her perverse sexuality was an obvious artificial construction. While she engaged in sexual liaisons with white men because of the social demand to "whiten," "honour was evaluated highly by the coloured people" (Martínez-Alier 1989: 112). Many young mulatto women were misled by the lies of their white lovers. In *Cecilia Valdés*, a novel by Cirilo Villaverde, a *parda* is courted by a white man, dishonored, and abandoned for a white woman. She has a mulatto suitor, but she casts him off because she wrongly believes that her white lover will honor her with marriage (Martínez-Alier 1989: 115-116). Cecilia Valdés knows that if she has children with the mulatto man, her offspring will not be able to rise in society. It would also benefit her own social standing if she were able to marry a white man, no matter his economic condition. The novel is a social commentary and shows that white men were not unaware of the mulata's many hardships. The author presents the various class and race issues of the day and makes his protagonist a sympathetic character.

If that is the case, why did so many white men allow themselves to believe the depictions of cigarette and sugar packages? The construction of the mulatto woman as a sexually perverse creature dehumanized her in much the same way that depictions of blacks allowed whites to justify slavery and racial inequality. Sexuality was seen as base and animal-like. If black and mulatto women were sexualized, then they were

also likened to animals. This excused the rape of black women on plantations and the unfair treatment of dark mistresses by white males.

Also, white women were not available as objects of desire. As Vera Kutzinski (1993:30) astutely points out:

To speak of black female sexuality here is somewhat redundant since the body of the dark complexioned woman appears to be the only available site of female sexuality in nineteenth century Cuban literature. White women, that is, those of known 'purity of blood' and hence of social standing were almost by definition, exempt from such sexualization.

If white men needed an outlet for their sexual desires, then demeaning mulatto women served this purpose. White women were considered to be cold, uninviting, and asexual. Black women were too obviously linked to slavery; were made for work, not for sex (Kutzinski 1993:30). The black woman was the mother of the mulata, but she was dehumanized within the framework of slavery to the point where even her sexual allure was gone. She was seen as a breeding mare and as a worker. The mulatto woman, however, as a product of the sexuality of black women and white men, had a lower social status than white women and could therefore be objectified. She was seen as exotic, being neither black nor white (Kutzinski 1993:30). The mulata represented Cuba being "tainted" with "primitive" African blood.

The choice to make her into a sexual and social deviant comes from the conflict of a mulata's appearance and legal social status. The mulata looked white, but she was not "truly" white.

The difference between being "held to white" and being "truly white" was not one of physical colour. In 19th century Cuba physical appearance had become equally misleading with regard to a person's racial origin. Only too often it was difficult if not impossible to detect any actual physical difference between a person of Spanish and one of partial African origin (Martínez-Alier 1989: 71).

There are different levels of "whiteness" in the facial features and color of the mulata. A light-skinned mulata is called an "evolved mulatto" and she has mostly

Caucasian features. A "very white mulatto" is a mulatto who can actually pass for white (Moore 1997:14). In instituting the importance of legal color, it was easier for white men to sexually exploit mulatas, even if they were also using her body as a national symbol in poetry, short stories, and cigarette lithographs. Because she fit into neither racial category completely, she was dangerous. She was not for marriage, like white women were, and could not be depicted as a happy motherly slave, like black women could be. Where was her place? The mulata, then, "is a symbolic container for all the tricky questions about how race, gender, and sexuality inflect the power relations that obtain in colonial and postcolonial Cuba" (Kutzinski 1993:7). She is a representation of Cuba's internal and external power structures, a physical example of outside imperial influence and of racial, economic, and gender hierarchies within Cuba.

U.S. TOURISM, PART I

In 1898, the Spanish American war ended, transferring Cuba's sovereignty to the United States from Spain, instead of transferring power to Cuba itself ("Cuba," Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2004). Cuba had fought for its independence from an imperial power, but instead traded one oppressor for another. The United States swiftly took control of much of Cuba's economy, including its sugar industry, which under U.S. control remained the island's largest export. Once the United States and Cuba were linked almost as much as Spain and Cuba had been in the last century, Cuba became a major tourist destination for North Americans. A tourist postcard claimed that Cuba was "So near and yet so foreign" (Perez 1999:173). It had exotic people and music, a tropical climate, and was a place where Americans could engage in otherwise forbidden behaviors. Later, after America had established Cuba as its favorite vacation spot, many aspects of American life infiltrated Cuban culture. American businesses and chains moved to Cuba in the hopes of cashing in on the Cuban tourist experience. The names of streets, restaurants, the clothing, and infrastructure became familiarly American to suit the tourists (Perez 1999:173).

Cuba was both familiar and exotic, but it was mainly its dark-complexioned people that made Cuba so interesting for white tourists. In the United States at this time, blacks and whites were segregated in restaurants, restrooms, buses, and in all public spaces. The United States was emphatically racist and it was forbidden for blacks and whites to marry. In traveling to Cuba, white American men and women were able to interact with darker men and women. American men especially were interested in Cuba's darker female population. The mulata was exotic and foreign. She was not white, was not black, and sometimes her ancestry was a mystery, making her intriguing to tourists. Like Cuba, she contained both the foreign and the familiar. Cuba, like the mulata, was described in explicitly sexual terms. Bruce Blivenn said of Cuba "[i]t is hot, it is 'wet,' it is, in its easy tropical way" (Perez 1999:187). His statement contains some very obvious sexual imagery and in calling it "hot," "wet," and "easy," he is implying that it is femininely sexual and also available. This imagery directly links to images of the mulatto woman as being sexually available for tourist men. "Cuba was the site of sex with women of the 'Other,' exotic and mysterious, primitive and carnal, passionate and governed by libidinal impulses, and often articulated in explicitly racial terms" (Perez 1999: 189). Cuba was a romance tourism destination, but it was not white Cuban or purely black women who were sought after as much as mulatto women, who had come to be the international symbol of Cuba. Because of the mulata, Cuba became an international sex symbol, as well as a powerful tourist draw.

Cuba was a place of white men's fantasies and this is reflected in foreigners' discussions of Cuban beauty. The racial diversity and economic inequalities in Cuba made it possible for white tourists to exploit women of color. Waldo Frank says, "[a] woman passes. The hips and the high heels are jazz; the arms and breasts swathe her in Andalusian softness; under the blare of her rouge, Africa mumbled" (Perez 1999: 190). The woman is nameless, an object. He dissects her body as if talking about an animal. Her hips, arms, and breasts reflect her sensuality and the harsh "blare" of her rouge gives away her African heritage, pinning her as a mulatto jezebel. The diversity

present in this woman reflects Cuba's own racial diversity, and her African blood makes her into an object of lust. In a Cuban travel guide, the women are described: "Their complexions are like petals, of some unknown flower between pink and brown, their figures as dainty as a midsummer-night's dream" (Perez 1999:191). The aspect of the unknown makes these women appealing. They are "dainty" and flowerlike, not a threat to powerful American imperialist males. Cuba became America's playground, with mulatas serving as American men's playthings.

U.S. TOURISM, PART II: THE REVOLUTION AND THE SPECIAL PERIOD

This concept has not left international images of Cuba even today, and internal racial discrimination existed throughout the Revolution and during the Special Period:

While slavery produces discriminatory practices, the absence of such practices does not necessarily imply the absence of prejudice. Moreover, the persistence of some racial consciousness in Cuba not only after abolition of slavery but even after the 1959 revolution with its egalitarian doctrine throws doubt on such an interpretation (Martínez-Alier 1989:6).

In other words, even after the abolishment of slavery and the color-blind efforts of Fidel Castro, racial equality has not been achieved in Cuba. Castro attempted to make Cuba "color-blind" by ending the usage of racial terminology. Technically, there was no definition of "race." Castro attempted to get female sex workers other jobs. Because so many sex workers were mulatas, this benefited women of color. In ignoring the complex issues of race and sexuality, however, he also made racial tensions understated, but all the more present. If a problem cannot be addressed, it will be left to fester.

This festering problem especially came to light during the Special Period, or the period of economic crisis in Cuba caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union, its biggest backer. The problems of race and sexuality, however, had not disappeared even before the new economic crisis. Martínez-Alier wrote about the lingering inequalities long before the Special Period, when racial, economic, and gender inequalities

increased. Because mulatto and black women do not have access to American or European money, since it was mostly upper-class whites who left Cuba during the revolution, many women sell their bodies in order to get dollars: "Mulatas and Black Cubans are once again relegated to their historical trajectory of promiscuity and licentiousness while White Cubans are implicitly constructed as their opposite" (Cabezas 1998: 82-83). Once again, mulatas are being used as sexual objects by white men.

As Cuba's economic situation worsened, so did the status of the mulatto female. It is not just foreign white men who degrade mulatas, but the internal members of Cuban society who view mulata women as inherently sexual beings. Because interracial couples are still uncommon in Cuba, mulatto and black women are the most obvious *jineteras*, therefore the ones who are most often caught by the authorities (Fusco 1998: 161). *Jineteras* are female hustlers. In the male form of the word, the term means a hustler, but it is not necessarily sexual in nature. Women hustlers, however, are associated with sex workers. Because those in financial trouble often turn to hustling or to sex work, it is often mulatas and women of color who fulfill this role. Mulatas are so much associated with the role of sex workers that to be a sex worker is to take on the mulata's race, regardless of genetic origin. To be a sex worker is to assume the identity of a mulata, so ingrained is the concept of the mulata's sexual interest to tourists (Fusco 1998: 155). Many mulata women who are seen with white men, tourist or Cuban, are at least subconsciously assumed by other Cubans to be mistresses or possible *jineteras*.

IMAGES OF THE MULATA IN BRAZIL AND IN CUBAN-AMERICAN CONSCIOUSNESS

The image of the alluring mulata has reappeared in American markets. On an American website I found images of current perceptions of Cuban beauty. There are illustrations of a scantily-clad Cuban mulata on various items of clothing and other collectibles, including thongs, boxers, t-shirts, mugs, and coasters, all stamped with the phrase "Made in the USA." This is an example of America's remaining fascination with Cuba, and especially with its mulatto wom-

en. The creator of the line, however, is a Cuban American living in Miami (www.cafepress.com). Now, American manufacturers are making profits by using the icon of the mulata's sensual body as a selling point to Cuban-Americans who long for home and to Americans in general. The images are degrading and overtly sexual, as the woman depicted has exaggeratedly large breasts and hips, with large eyes gazing directly at the buyer of the item, just as the mulata on cigarette lithographs started seductively at white male consumers in the 19th century. Cuban males, regardless of race, were able to use the image of the subjugated mulata female as a form of propaganda and as a marketing tool. The fact that these items even exist shows that America's perceptions of Cuba and the mulata have not changed and that the mulata is still representative of Cuba's exploitation by foreign powers, but it also seen as a source of Cuban-American pride, as a reminder of their homeland.

In Cuba, the mulata is a symbol of male domination, regardless of race. The objectification of the mulata is not unique to Cuba because the phenomenon of white males and black females procreating is not uniquely Cuban. It appears in many places in Latin America and the Caribbean and the image of the mulata manifests itself in countries other than Cuba as a national sex symbol. Brazil is similar in its treatment of the mulata:

Mulata subjectivity in Brazil is ensconced in the history of "conjugal union" in situations of patriarchal domination, the male usually being the dominant class and "race" and the female from a subaltern group and her body encoded as such (Gilliam and Gilliam 1999: 61).

White males are given a higher position than women in a patriarchal society, and black women are automatically given an even lower status. Angela Gilliam, an anthropologist, explains how Brazil and the United States have similar constructions of black women: "Similar to the Brazilian case, the mulata/Jezebel image justifies, in Mullings's words 'miscegenation and sexual assault,' while the Mammy/Mae Preta image validates slave conditions of labor" (Gilliam and Gilliam 1999:64). Therefore, mulatas are sexually objec-

tified when they are young and attractive and are then desexualized and “blackened” in old age, losing their mulatto status (Gilliam and Gilliam 1999:64). Part of the mulata’s appeal, then, is her youth and beauty, the ideals she represents and her ability to be objectified as a non-white, but not completely black, woman.

The mulata’s age is also a factor in Cuba, her youth a symbol of Cuba’s virility, much in the same way the mulata is viewed in Brazil. In lithographs from the 19th century, mulatas are always young and beautiful. But what happens to the mulata when she loses her youth and beauty, when she can no longer be an object of desire? In one lithograph, a mulata is portrayed in a sexually inviting manner, wearing clothing that accentuates her buttocks and breasts. She is with a darker, older woman who is standing behind her, looking serious and masculine (Kutzinski 1993:63). It is possible that the older woman was a mulatto in her youth and has become a black woman now that she is older and not an object of white men’s desires. The youth and beauty of the mulata is very literally a symbol of Cuba’s virility and therefore essential to the identity of the mulata. She was created through the perceived sexual prowess and power of white males, making Cuban men seem sexually potent and masculine.

Her desirability is also an asset to Cuba as a country, but that can only work when she is beautiful. Her body provides revenue from tourists who want to have sex with her, watch her dance, or merely have a conversation with her. She is also a temptation for tourists, a draw for them, giving Cuba some power. While her body is used by tourists, her ability to excite them is also a sign of Cuba’s seductiveness. She is a symbol of subversion at the same time she is an icon of Cuba’s exploitation. In his poem, *Plena del menéalo*, Luis Palés Matos addresses this concept (González Pérez 1987: 297):

Shake your behind, mulata,
Project into eternity
That movement of your hips
Like the hurricane’s wind,
And shake it, shake it,
From here to there, from there to here,

Shake, shake it,
To make Uncle Sam rage!

The mulata is sexualized in this poem, but she is also strangely empowered. She is able to make America “rage” with the movement of her hips, either because she drives American men into a sexual frenzy or because conservative Americans are outraged by her seductive movements. Either way, the mulata’s youth, beauty, and sensuality are important in making Cuba exciting enough to attract tourists’ money and in making Cuba appear virile and beautiful. The mulata’s youth and beauty also demonstrate the masculinity of Cuban men, as white Cuban men’s sexuality created the mulata.

This view of the mulata is similar to Brazil’s. In 1992, Angela Gilliam traveled with her daughter, Onik’a Gilliam, to Brazil and found that the youth and sexuality of the mulata are important to her identity as being separate from black, as well as to her use as a symbol of Brazil’s sexuality. One mulata in Brazil said,

If you walk like a mulata, everyone on the street is going to know that you are one. To dress like mulata is to have hair like mine...the long *appliqué* [hair weave]; it is to put on a long skirt, high-heeled shoes with platform soles...I adore walking around pretty, decorated, perfumed...This makes me feel good (Gilliam and Gilliam 1999:64).

This mulata takes pride in her sensuality and plays it up, knowing that it is a source of power for her. Because the construction of the mulata is similar in Brazil and Cuba, I will infer that some Cuban mulatto women also see their attractiveness to white men, foreign or otherwise, as a source of power, as well as a source of income if they choose to sell their bodies or become showgirls. Being seen as a mulata requires the “right” hair, straightened either through natural or chemical means, it requires a hiding of a woman’s African heritage, and a concentration on her being “almost” white, but containing enough black blood to be sexually exciting to white tourists (Gilliam and Gilliam 1999: 69). Being a mulata is a profession; it requires the proper uniform to represent Brazil’s, or Cuba’s, sexuality and require the mulata to fit her

identity to popular tastes (Gilliam and Gilliam 1999:64).

Gilliam and Gilliam attended mulata shows in Brazil in which they saw the draw of the mulata's youth and beauty for foreign tourists. Most of the audience was made up of white males from countries like Argentina or Germany (Gilliam and Gilliam 1999: 77). The women were very light-skinned, but the music and costumes were "African." The women's costumes revealed their nipples, this concentration on the breasts indicating that the show was designed for foreign men, as in Brazil the hips are the symbol of sexuality (Gilliam and Gilliam 1999: 77). The women dancers, while Brazilian, were also subjected to the foreign men's desires and allowed themselves to be fondled on stage (Gilliam and Gilliam 1999:78). While they symbolized Brazil's sensuality, they also had to cater to the desires of white foreign men, altering themselves to fit foreign conceptions of their identities.

CONCLUSIONS

In Cuba, the mulata follows this pattern: she was objectified by white men in the 19th century because they were not able to objectify white women, women of their own status. The mulata took on the role of the mistress not because she wanted to be sexually exploited, but because of the concept of "whitening."

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In the 20th century, the mulata and Cuba both passed from Spanish to American hands. As the United States came to dominate Cuban industry and forced Cuba to cater to American interests, the mulata's body continued to be a symbol of illicit sexuality, removed of her dignity and her individuality. During the Special Period, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, race relations returned to Cuba's forefront and gender, racial, and economic disparities came through in the existence and treatment of black and mulata *jineteras*, sex workers or female hustlers.

As in Brazil, the mulata must alter the presentation of her body to fit the fantasies of white male tourists, just like Cuba must appeal to these men in order to boost its tourist industry. Still, the mulata is an ambivalent symbol for a country that is seen in conflicting ways by the United States, as a former neo-colony and also as a threat, enticing and dangerous at the same time. The mulata remains a national symbol and is seen as an indication of Cuba's diversity, sexuality, beauty, and sway over tourists, as well as a symbol of Cuba's internal inequalities in terms of race, gender, and class. Now that Castro has determined that the Special Period has ended, it will be interesting to see if the status of the mulata changes or if she remains in her historical space.

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