

# YESCuba

YesCuba, the official newsletter of Jamaican Youth and Elders in Solidarity with Cuba, No. 16, July 2010



## Professor Keith Ellis

One of the most outstanding Jamaican intellectuals now alive

- ◆ First Jamaican to receive the Doctor Honoris Causa from the University of Havana
- ◆ First black person to be elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, a group of the top professors in the country, elected by their peers
- ◆ Recipient of The Award for Excellence in Academia bestowed upon him in 2004 by the Association of Black Students and Alumni of the University of Toronto
- ◆ Recipient of the Dulce María Loynaz International Prize for contribution to literary studies and understanding of and support for Cuba, given by UNEAC (The Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba)

*Professor Ellis seen here in conversation with YESCuba's Russell Bell*

**YESCuba:** *Is the Cuban revolution important for Caribbean and Latin American countries?*

**Ellis:** The Cuban Revolution is important in multiple ways to Caribbean and Latin American countries. First of all, it has given new meaning to independence and sovereignty to people in many of these countries and provides a model for a more inclusive application of the idea of democracy.

This inclusiveness means education and cultural development for all, health care for all, and political responsibility for all. It is based on a well-educated public that can understand and articulate real issues and select candidates



## Cuban Clinic Provides Free Eye Care for All Cubans

Doctors help a patient after he had eye surgery performed by doctors participating in 'Operacion Milagro' (Operation Miracle) September 12, 2006 at Pando Ferrer hospital in Havana, Cuba.

beginning with people in their neighbourhood that they know very well to be ones who would serve conscientiously and, failing that, could be recalled.

### Education for All

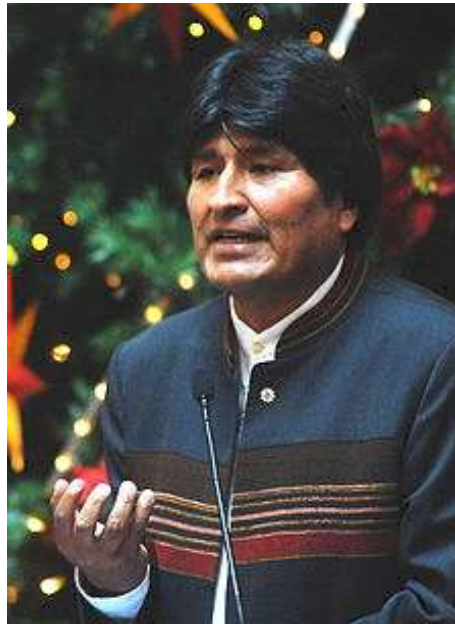
Education for all means that children are ensured of provisions of food, clothing, books, shelter and the peaceful environment that allows them to go safely to school. Even though these remain goals for many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, the trend for those countries to use their resources for the benefit of their people—the factor that is basic in making these things possible in Cuba—is growing. Bolivia, for example, has always been called the poorest country in South America. Now, with the increasing application of these measures, the country is coming to life and had economic growth

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that was among the strongest in Latin America and the Caribbean in the past year. The benefits are going to its people, including, of course, the majority indigenous population.

### Free of Illiteracy

In other ways, because of Cuba’s internationalist and humanitarian policies, peoples of the whole region have seen great benefits. Several countries are now free of illiteracy, thanks to the Cuban



*President of Bolivia, Evo Morales is leading the transformation of Bolivia on behalf of the poor*

method, the most effective in the world, for teaching literacy. The method known as “Yo sí puedo” (Of Course I Can), was developed from the Cuban experience in Haiti and is



*Fidel*

now usable to teach reading in any language. Cubans are using it to help indigenous people in New Zealand and Canada, for instance.

### A Healthier Region

People are also healthier in the region thanks to Cuba’s humanitarian imagination and to its refusal to bow to obstacles that may come in the way of its helping other peoples. During the campaign to free people from illiteracy in Venezuela, Cuban teachers found that a percentage of people were not benefiting from the method. The teachers consulted with Cuban doctors on this matter, and on examination of some of the students, it was found that they couldn’t see well because of cataracts. When President Fidel Castro became aware of this obstacle, he consulted ophthalmologists in Havana’s ophthalmology hospital, the Hospital Pando Ferrer, and asked them in 2004 if they could double to more than 200 the number of operations for cataract removal that they do in a day.

They said yes, and patients started to arrive from Venezuela immediately for operations for cataract removal.



*The first set of Jamaicans to graduate from the Cuban literacy programme Yo Si Puedo seen here at their graduation ceremony in St. Mary.*

A couple of months later, for Fidel's birthday, they did 365 operations in one day. This was quickly followed by the training of more ophthalmologists and the building and equipping of more than twenty ophthalmology hospitals in Cuba.

Thus became established the humanitarian phenomenon known as "Operación Milagro" (Operation Miracle) that has to this point, with the assistance of Venezuela, helped some 1.7 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean. The programme is now being decentralized and broadened, with hospitals and clinics being set up in several different countries, including Jamaica.

### A Vision of All People as Equal

Cuba's vision of democracy at the national level and its unprecedented

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and generous internationalism are based on a vision of all people as equal, irrespective of their race. Cuba is working hard to overcome the effects of the centuries of slavery and its concomitants of racism and discrimination that were brought to the island by Christian Spaniards. I have long been concerned about this link between Christianity and discrimination. From my early readings of the Bible, I was uncomfortable about the emphasis in the Old Testament on the idea of a privileged, special race of people.

I have seen later how that idea has encouraged racism. The Bible having been written from the perspective of one race that exalts itself, then other races might in their representations of themselves follow that lead and think that they are

special and that others are less special than they are.

### A Special Race

This problem of a special race posed by the Bible and that pervades the Old Testament, fomenting genocidal wars in which God is represented as cooperating in a partisan way, spills over into the New Testament as well. Jesus himself, in an incident narrated by Matthew (15:22-28) and by Mark (7:25-30) seems to be snagged by this problem.

If one wonders, for example, how it is that the Catholic church in Cuba, like other Christian churches elsewhere, actively supported slavery, and when it had the authority to do so was content to marginalize blacks in the well-equipped secondary schools it

controlled in Cuba, one might justifiably trace such propensities back to religious influence. Indeed, one might discern a difference between a Christian Cuban and a revolutionary Cuban in this regard, even though we must always acknowledge the fact that there are Christian revolutionaries or revolutionary Christians. Revolutionary Cubans absolutely hate slavery. They associate with it anything that infringes on their sovereignty. The writings of even the



*Minister of Health, Hon Rudyard Spencer, speaking at the opening of the Ophthalmology Centre in Kingston, Jamaica. The Centre is a gift from the government of Cuba. Looking on is the Cuban Ambassador to Jamaica, H.E. Yuri Gala.*



most enlightened Cuban cardinals, such as Céspedes, reveal a position of ambivalence and surely no outright condemnation or apology regarding slavery. Revolutionary Cubans are for inclusiveness: schools for everyone, or health care for everyone. That is why they willingly treated in Bolivia one of the men responsible for murdering Che. In this they set a better example than Jesus did in his initial reluctance to help the gentile woman in the incident I



aims, that of justifying the maintenance of the embargo. However, the Cuban emphasis on education, and on scientific education, and the steadfastness of its people, are saving Cuba from the worst effects of the campaign. Its scientific development is enabling it both to defend itself almost daily against different kinds of terrorist attacks and to provide economic benefits from the export of

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have mentioned.

### **José Martí’s Perception**

We might see in the Christian substratum in Cuba a main reason for the surviving remnants of racism, and understand why the government must continue to frustrate the church in its passionate desire to recapture a substantial role in the education system. Revolutionary Cuba is truly living José Martí’s perception that “Patria es humanidad” (Homeland is humanity, all of humankind).

*YESCuba: Why, in your opinion, does the US still have an embargo against Cuba, although the UN General Assembly in 2009 voted 187 - 3 against the embargo?*

**Ellis:** Unfortunately, all this social progress is seen by the United States, and some of its close allies, as a threat to their interests; and the embargo, reliably supported by Israel and which has genocidal intent, is being used as punishment and a brake on Cuba’s development and capacity to extend its beneficial solidarity to other countries.

### **Campaign against Cuba**

The present campaign against Cuba, conducted by the media and bourgeois people who distance themselves emotionally from the poor on whom Cuba focuses its effort, has as one of its principal

*Professor Ellis speaking about the Five Cuban Heroes at a function hosted by the Canada Cuba Friendship Association in Toronto*

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its inventions. Nevertheless, the embargo is a heavy burden on the Cuban people, depriving them of some essential goods, including medicines, or making them outrageously expensive.

*YESCuba: What do you think of the 11-year imprisonment of the Five Cuban Heroes?*

**Ellis:** Nothing exposes more the cynical exploitation of the idea of terrorism by the United States than this case. The United States had been professing an absolute intolerance of terrorism by saying anyone who shelters a terrorist is a terrorist. These men were doing nothing more than reporting to the U.S. itself on terrorists.

### **Self-confessed Terrorists Walk Freely in Miami**

It is downright disgraceful that after they reported illegal terrorist behaviour on American soil, they should some time later be accused, imprisoned and later condemned to impossibly long prison terms of up to two life terms in one case, in harsh conditions, for spying. Meanwhile self-confessed terrorists, like those who blew up the Cubana flight off Barbados in 1976, killing all 73 people aboard, walk freely in Miami. It was thought that Obama would do something about this, but the same shamelessness continues.

*YESCuba: Are there any lessons from Cuba for Jamaicans,*

**“...that alienating tutelage that surreptitiously continues to guide our institutional and social life—these are all barriers in the way of our youth...”**

**“...it is of crucial importance that information such as that provided about Cuba by YESCuba be extended to other areas of world life by organizations similar to YESCuba.”**

*especially young Jamaicans?*

**Ellis:** I think many lessons have been implied from what I have been saying. But the information we get from sources such as CNN and the BBC, which influence our own apparent

overcoming of obstacles. And it is of crucial importance that information such as that provided about Cuba by YESCuba be extended to other areas of world life by organizations similar to YESCuba. ♦



*Friends and relatives of the victims of the Cubana airline which was blown up minutes after taking off from Barbados on October 6, 1976*

local media such as the *Gleaner*, plus the greater respect we seem to have for our old slave and colonial masters than for the majority of our people—that alienating tutelage that surreptitiously continues to guide our institutional and social life—these are all barriers in the way of our youth.

### **Confident Young Jamaicans**

On the other hand, there is a vibrant spirit among our young people, a curiosity about the world, a confidence that they are equal to everybody else and to every possible task, displayed both in their academic achievements and in their sporting achievements; these qualities augur well for the

**“...there is a vibrant spirit among our young people, a curiosity about the world, a confidence that they are equal to everybody else and to every possible task, displayed both in their academic achievements and in their sporting achievements; these qualities augur well for the overcoming of obstacles.”**

# Mr. Stone

When we were thirteen we were his height,  
but we didn't tease or nickname  
the frail gentle man who wandered the street  
speaking in soft politeness to everyone  
and receiving reciprocated gentleness  
in his shell-shocked hell-locked trances  
that drew us fearfully to him,  
like to the Apocalypse when Deacon Evans preached.

A tailor he had wanted to be,  
his hands made for passing  
gently over soft wools,  
smooth serges, and the tough khaki  
which he himself did not wear,  
his disposition ready to praise  
the expectant and sacrificing customer  
for his tasteful economy,  
his ears made for the whirr  
of his machine oiled for long life  
and, while it rested,  
for the singing of three little birds  
by his fresh open window.

What made him go  
to that first big war?  
"Me noh know, they come.  
--My friend Bertie was going,  
an him did hear say, the Gleaner say,  
we should go serve the King, an the Empire.  
Him didn' come back at all. Didn' make it."

Is not like him tek faas go there too,  
they came to fetch him from his Mile Gully,  
not the Mile Gully in Manchester with Post Office  
but the one later served by Dressikie Postal Agency  
when letters came for Mr. McFarlane or somebody else there,  
and they enticed the small nineteen-year-old  
with bugle and drum and show of tidiness.  
In the marches he strained  
with the rifle's weight to keep pace,  
as his little feet swam in oceanic boots  
and the green khaki absorbed the sun,  
needling him with Kingston heat he had never felt  
in his cool riverside Mile Gully.

Bugle and drum and left right left  
was all the preparation, and then the ship,

crossing in the other direction,  
pulling him up toward the cold, disgorged him  
among men reddened by the zeal for war.  
Young Stone, trembling, exposed among them,  
with no ancestral memory to steady and incite him,  
neither once more unto the breach  
nor the urging half a league onward.  
With cause too he was tropically clad:  
Bertie's were words of abstract airiness,  
they went well and away with blue skies.  
These reddened men in this sullen clime  
knew well the substantial cause.  
From school days with torpedo  
they liked to puncture the proud boast  
stamped on newly ubiquitous competing German  
goods:

D	R	G	M
Deutsches	Reich	Gebrauchsmuster	
(German	Reich	Registered Design)	

and convert it in smearing fury into  
Dirty Rotten German Make.  
Young Stone could not catch the fire.  
His less flammable skin marked him  
for indignities inflicted by those comrades-in-arms  
to which even his like-shaded illustrious compatriot,  
Chief Minister-to-be and hardened  
by Cecil Rhodes, was not immune.  
Without the musty garb of bellicose tradition,  
without the scissors of imperial trade,  
our essential tailor stood naked among his peers.  
Shieldless to shells, ears wide open to every  
explosion,  
the hellish sulphuric haze invading his nostrils,  
warning of more lethal stuff to be breathed,  
eyes scaled to witness too late but with luck  
the soaring trajectory, the searing landing,  
imagination wandering to the other side,  
feeling their anguish, multiplying his,  
immersed in nothing but war.

The Gleaner welcomed him back  
among "our stalwart victorious  
fighting men," lamenting "those  
who made the ultimate sacrifice."  
He took up his tailoring dream,  
but its soft whirr soon made  
of the well-oiled machine  
intolerable misfiring engines of brutal tanks.

Indoors became worse than the trench  
in which he had cowered in unwanted closeness:  
he couldn't see anything from there  
of the incoming shells, or hear in time  
the reports of the mortars and big guns.  
So Mr. Stone took to the hungry neighbourhood streets,  
available to all for conversation,  
his speech in short quiet spurts,  
like the start stop of a sewing machine,  
and with its trace of the accent of the trenches.  
He was missed during his monthly three-mile  
trip to Gayle Post Office, where the Royal Mail came,  
to collect his monthly veteran's two shillings and sixpence (\$3.50 U.S.).  
We would have walked with him,  
his erect walk, with military intimations, though slow,  
his shirt buttoned up to the neck for neatness,  
his bursting shoes,  
but we couldn't withstand along the way  
all the exploding shells, all the bombardments,  
all the projectiles whistling through the sky  
that in panic he would make us notice,  
his hands cupped over his ears,  
his eyes wide with terror.

Keith Ellis

