Bandera was reduced to being a garbage collector. The story goes that one day in Old Havana, he approached the first U.S.-approved president of Cuba, Don Tomás Estrada Palma, who liked to walk down Obispo Street greeting the populace, his car behind him. When Quintín Bandera said he was without a job, Estrada Palma threw him a five-peso gold coin. Quintín Bandera set about him with his stick. Not long after, Quintín Bandera was found slashed with a machete on the corner of Vies and Figuras streets. The press headlines of the assassination ran, "Quintín Bandera dead in Ñañigo brawl." People said it was Estrada Palma who had him killed.

But to get back to Malcolm X, instead of me interviewing him, he wound up interviewing me. I'll never forget him telling me that Fidel had to watch out for white Cubans, because they would be out to get him, that they were white "devils." I told him about that incident in Santa Clara when the private recreation centers were taken over and Fidel said publicly that in Cuba anyone could dance with whoever they wanted, but they should dance with the revolution. That was the end of the honeymoon and the true start of the exodus.

I remember I talked with one of Fidel's secretaries about him meeting Malcolm. Fidel said he wanted to meet him and the meeting took place. The photos taken on that occasion, of the two of them looking as if they're old friends, had never been published either in the United States or in Cuba until recently. The only photographer was known to Malcolm X and had been invited into Fidel's room where the two leaders met. It seems there was a lot of conspiring against the publication of those photos. Today, after all these years have passed, I think it's precisely in these difficult times for Cuba, for the Cuban people, and especially black Cubans, that we need black business and black products. For example, here in Cuba, there are no cosmetics for black women, blacks are not part of the equation. It's now that we most need a closer understanding with African Americans.

2

The Only Black Family on the Block

Elpidio de la Trinidad Molina, Jorge Molina, and Egipcia Pérez

My relationship with the Molina-Pérez family grew in stages. I first met Egipcia Pérez in the home of my old friend and colleague, Reynaldo Peñalver Moral, whose wife, Caridad Molina, is the sister of Egipcia's husband Elpidio de la Trinidad Molina. It was some years back, when the couple was preparing to take one of several vacations, all expenses paid, in the former socialist countries—Elpidio's reward for millions of dollars his inventions and innovations had saved the state-operated Cuban economy. In 1975, on the way to visit my own family in Santa Clara, I stopped by to see them at Varadero's veteran Oasis Hotel. The first time I ever visited the fabulous Varadero beach resort was en route to Havana in July 1959, when I took part in a marathon run from the east to west of the island. The marathon was to celebrate the 26 July 1953 attack led by Fidel Castro on the Moncada Garrison in Santiago de Cuba, which, although a failure in itself, has since been heralded as the start of the Cuban Revolution. Varadero Peninsula, north of Matanzas province, with its long, white, sandy beachline and lush tropical foliage, was a coveted Caribbean vacation spot and, until 1959, had been the exclusive, favorite leisure resort for Cuba's upper classes, who were of course white. The historical irony is that decades later Varadero was to become yet again exclusive, when Cuba's opening to international tourism made the modern hotels of this former enclave of Cuban-style segregation out of bounds to cash-stricken Cuban nationals. The Molina-Pérez family was an exception. On that occasion, when I asked for them at the reception desk I was told the hotel didn't have among its guests anyone of that description—this was after I had described them in great detail, especially Egipcia, whose intensely black, portly figure would be extremely hard to miss. When I did eventually find them on the beach, she gave me one

of her characteristic comments: "They haven't seen us? You do realize we're the only black family around!" In January 1998, Jorge Molina was elected deputy to the National Assembly of People's Power. (PPS)

Elpidio de la Trinidad Molina

I was born on 27 May 1923 in Havana. I am married and have five children. My father was a barber and my mother a seamstress. We went through hell during the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado.[1] To survive, we boys had to clean porches, sometimes a whole house, and we'd carry buckets of water for just a few cents a day to help out the family. Things were very cheap, but it was real hard even to put together a few cents. There were six of us, three boys and three girls. I was the second oldest. During that whole period we lived in slums, in a tiny room where the family could barely fit. Only my mother really knew what we were going through, trying to make ends meet to pay for the room at two pesos a month. We lived in fear of being evicted—that they'd throw our furniture out on the street and we'd have to find someplace else to live. Those days a haircut cost five cents for children, eight or ten cents for grown men, when they had it cut, because there wasn't the money for it, not even five or ten cents . . . it was a luxury. You'd get a haircut for your birthday, or May 20, Independence Day, or October 10, another patriotic day, or for *Noche Buena* [Christmas Eve], but our Christmas Eve was pretty sparse.[2] We couldn't celebrate with pork, only pig's offal. After the Day of the Kings,[3] a long time after January 6, maybe two or three months passed before my mother would have the money to buy each of us a spinning top or yo-yo, or a rag doll for the girls. But my mother did manage to find a way to send us to school and all six of us, first the boys and then the girls, finished primary school through sixth grade. I was able to go on through seventh and eighth grades, passed the entrance exam for the Havana Higher School for the Trades, and there I graduated as a chemical analyst and an industrial chemist. When I was eighteen, back in 1941–42, I was fortunate to start work where I still am today. I worked days and studied nights, to teach industrial chemistry, which is what I wanted.

We knew that because of the color of our skin we had to study hard, because through studying we would have more of a chance of getting a job. It wasn't easy. The worst jobs were for us blacks—a bricklayer's mate, because it wasn't even easy to become a bricklayer.

Way back, when I started primary school, I'd roller-skate all the way from Mantilla to Diez de Octubre, in Lawton,[4] and back. I started to study for my baccalaureate, but that wasn't going to give me a trade. At the university, for example, the technical courses were for civil engineering and architecture. I wanted to do chemistry, and there wasn't chemical engineering, only agricultural engineering. I knew that I'd never find a job as an agricultural engineer. They were needed for the two or three soap factories there were at the time and they didn't employ blacks. I couldn't have worked in agriculture either, because the large estates were also for whites. In applied chemical engineering in the sugar industry, I wouldn't have found a job in a sugarmill. So I decided to go to trade school and graduated as an industrial chemist.

In the midst of all that, the Second World War started and some German Jews opened an emery stone factory. They moved into a house that belonged to the Alfonso family, who knew my mother, and the Germans asked if they knew of a young man who could help them. The family recommended me and I had the great luck to learn the trade. Now I'm an emery stone expert. I had the great luck of being helped at a certain stage in my life by whites who had quite a lot of power. I owe it to them for part of my education and well-being. In that sense, I can say I've been a privileged black.

The knowledge I had I gave to the revolution. When the owners went to the United States, I was left in charge of the factory with one of the sons who didn't know much about production. The son stayed and I was the technical person, because I had already graduated from trade school. When the revolution opened up the universities, I did a year's training and then studied what I'd always wanted to study and hadn't been able to, chemical engineering. But then after two years I switched to a degree in chemistry. I didn't graduate in either, but I did acquire the knowledge I could later apply in emery stone production. It also stood me in my stead when Comandante Che [Guevara] visited our factory. By then he'd already said, "Worker, build your own machinery," and we were building ours. Putting together the information and with his inspiration, we developed a whole emery stone technology for the many varieties that are used in a country's development. That helped us hold out against the imperialist blockade that started after 1 January 1959.[5] I remember when Fidel arrived here on 8 January 1959, he said in his first speech that blacks had been given the coral rock, because we couldn't visit the sandy beaches, only a bit at Guanabo. For us blacks there was Santa Fe Beach, and Biriato, which closed under capitalism; we were

left with only Jaimanitas and Santa Fe beaches, which were full of sea urchins and coral rock. Today we can go to all the beaches the magnates would go to, from one end of the island to the other, without discrimination.[6]

For all that I've done for the revolution I've received numerous awards, right from the start. In 1962, I was National Vanguard of the Silicate Enterprise, which covered cement, tile, and brick for furnaces and house construction. In 1963 I was also National Vanguard. Between 1959 and 1963 I made some twenty or thirty innovations. In 1962 I was chosen as a founding member of the Socialist Revolution United Party (PURS). In 1965 it was named the Communist Party of Cuba. Up until today, I've been a member. For the merits I've been given, from 1976 to 1994 I have been National Vanguard of the Construction Workers Union. I've also been Provincial and National Vanguard of ANIR (the National Association of Innovators and Rationalizers). I have many medals and diplomas, and the highest recognition that can be given to any worker, which is that of Hero of Labor of the Republic of Cuba, since 1990. This recognition has only been given since 1985–86. There are fewer than one hundred workers in the whole of Cuba who have it. In our Construction Workers Union, there are only twelve Heroes of Labor. The rest of the unions, about eighteen of them, some have six, four . . . we're the ones who have the most.

Close to the factory, we had the Lawton Bus Terminal. The buses running at that time were GM (General Motors). The mechanics there, who were the ones who changed the brake blocks, came to ask me if I could make such a block. I said I could. I was familiar with the raw material, which was a base of amianthus and other components. I found out what they were, began to make them and try them out. The results were very good. Finally, our enterprise, which made emery stone, ceded the technology to the Ministry of Transport.

In the early days, as innovators we didn't receive any economic remuneration, only moral incentives. That changed later. After 1980, some workers received between 500 and 1,500 pesos for an invention. That was one incentive Fidel wanted to give us, because we'd received other incentives over the years; we'd been given beach houses to stay in, at Varadero and Guanabo. I've also had the honor of being on the 26 July Tribune, with Fidel. I've taken part in congresses of the party, the CTC (Confederation of Cuban Trade Unions), ANIR, and all that. Today, aged seventy-two, I calculate I must have made more than 150 innovations. Those that have contributed most to the economy of the country are those related to emery stone production. That technology isn't well known. It's saved the country several million pesos a year over the last three decades. Just calculate that before the revolution, between 150,000 and 200,000 square meters of flooring were produced, but in the 1970s and 1980s production soared to 3 million square meters. All those floors were polished with emery stone invented by me—whether tiled, granite-block, marble, or cement flooring. All the technology was mine—from street flagstones to tiled flooring in workplaces. We've been producing all that.

The factory bears the name of Juan Domínguez Díaz, one of the martyrs of the attack on the Moncada Garrison on 26 July 1953, in Santiago de Cuba. I knew him. The carpentry shop where he worked was also called that after the revolution. Now we have the factory in La Ceiba, where we're turning out all kinds of imported stone with new technologies. We've one technology left to develop, the tile grip for the machine industry—that's to say, perfect the technology. We still need it to respond to harder kinds of steel and some metals, like copper, bronze, aluminum, and different kinds of soldering. Steel is one of the most difficult metals in alloy form. There are some that have a high percentage of chromium, over 12 percent, and since chrome is an anti-abrasive, a higher percentage of chrome is added so the stone doesn't lose quality.

I encouraged my son Jorge to study refractory chemical engineering, to specialize in abrasives. He studied in the former U.S.S.R. and has been working in the factory since 1982. If it hadn't been for the Special Period, he would have completed postgraduate study specializing in abrasive emery stone production. But the Special Period and the dismembering of the socialist camp have prevented him. He could have done postgraduate study in the U.S.S.R. or in Czechoslovakia. He has some inventions, he's well trained, but this is kept quiet. Not much is divulged about this and other fields of production, because it's a strategic question. When Jorge and I went to what was then the German Democratic Republic, we visited an emery stone factory in Dresden, which the Germans told us had been bombed by the Allies. The Germans had it well camouflaged, but in 1985 it was still semi-destroyed. The bombing showed how strategic it was.

Today I'm happy to see there are as many blacks in science and engineering as there are in medicine. This is undeniably due to the revolution. There

is no discrimination, either by gender or race; 52 percent of professionals are black. Among the women, there are black and white women, as there are black and white men. There is no discrimination. That problem's behind us. The revolution fought it. This is a real revolution.

Jorge Molina

There are times when I sit and meditate on all the possibilities we blacks had at the start of the revolution to study at the university and even abroad. I studied chemical engineering, specializing in tiles and refractory materials, at the leading Moscow Mendiev Institute. There was a whole explosion of students who were able to choose their study. Of the five of us in my family, four boys and one girl, there was no push that we all be engineers. The opportunity was there. I'm the second of the family. The oldest, my sister, chose another subject at the university, because she wanted to earn a qualification, not because she was interested in the subject. She dropped out and started work but then combined work and study to get an economics degree. The brother after me studied electronics to work as a middle-level electrician. He has always found work. The next youngest, right from primary school, wanted to go into the military. He was sure of what he wanted, though he isn't someone who expressed himself easily. We're a respectful and united family, a product of how we were brought up in the home. Though black, we grew up in a neighborhood where practically the only black family was ours. From the start, we had to adjust to that life; we were able to live in a comfortable house because my mother was also a professional, in pharmaceuticals. That placed us in the Havana black middle class.

I remember a story my father once told me when I was little. He was studying and already had a good salary. One day a white told him to his face, "I may be a shoemaker, but I'm better than you, even though you've studied, simply because you're black." That still holds. Recently there's been a resurgence [of racism] because not only can certain businessmen in the new joint ventures choose their personnel for their skills, they can eliminate persons of the black race. The tourism which is coming in may have certain requirements and you simply find they don't accept blacks, even when the black may be educated, speak several languages, and have training in accountancy. You can't help see it. It's there. Cubans confuse ethnicity and nationality. You see that a lot when you go abroad. I studied in the former Soviet Union. There, we would be asked our racial origin, and we didn't know what to reply, whether Bantú, Yoruba, or Carabalí. They didn't know why we didn't know, because the white Cubans, of a different racial origin, said they were Cuban.

Today those managers simply don't want blacks among their workers. They identify with you as Cuban, which is what we are, but, whether a joint or Cuban venture, management doesn't want blacks. I know of an experience of a friend of mine. One day he heard he had been promoted to a company where he would be in charge of a tourist taxi firm which had some stringent requirements. The drivers had to speak at least three languages, be 1 m, 85 cm tall . . . I added, "and preferably white." He said, "Not preferably—they had to be white." And that's happening in many areas. It's the reverse of what was applied some years back with blacks, youth, and women. In part, I'm the product of that policy in the second half of the 1980s. It became a campaign to include blacks. I was called on to administer my workplace when I was a technician because the administrator had been promoted, not only because I knew languages and the technology of the factory, but also because I was young and black. But all that was ephemeral and came to an end, and as blacks we were left to head the unions and work in construction. There are very few of us who are enterprise managers. But I was also elected to a provincial government organization—as an innovator, which was something passed on to me by my father—where the provincial administrative posts are not exactly in black hands. Yet I'm indignant when I come across a person of the black race speaking against the revolution, because I'm convinced that blacks never lived better before the revolution. My parents taught me that.

For example, during the so-called rafters crisis in August 1994, we blacks asked on the street who were the ones throwing stones and all those things—because those who were in the front line, like cannon fodder, were black. People were asking and telling us that. Were they white or were they black? People I asked would say, "What gets me most is that there were a lot of blacks who should be shot." The response comes from the observation that blacks, with all the possibilities they have had with the revolution, had no right to be giving voice to ideas that were out to destroy the revolution, and that they served as cannon fodder. Those who were out on the streets were not the ringleaders; they remained well protected. The blacks were manipulated, because they needed a body of people.

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former Soviet Union. There, we would be asked our racial origin, and we didn't know what to reply, whether Bantú, Yoruba, or Carabalí. They didn't know why we didn't know, because the white Cubans, of a different racial origin, said they were Cuban.

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As blacks, we set out to observe how the whites live to imitate them. If whites celebrate their daughter's fifteenth birthday,[7] we want to do the same. Many black families have done that. It's hard to be black in this country. We know because we're the most marginalized, there are more and more criminals, and that's how you're seen, even if you're not.

Egipcia Perez

I was born in Surgidero de Batabanó, in the south of Havana province. My childhood was pretty hard because I lost my mother when I was very little and was brought up by my grandmother on my mother's side. My two aunts looked after me and my sister, respectively. Though I didn't know much about life, I thought everything was fine, at seven I had already had to work. My father was a fisherman and, after being at sea for two or three months, there'd be times when he'd try to make seven to ten pesos after selling the owner's catch. Sometimes he'd only make three. The fishermen had to deduct their costs—fuel, food, and other supplies. What was left was divided among them. The fishermen were poor whites and blacks of the region, while the boat owners and dealers were always white.

My aunt was a home dressmaker and when I was nine she sat me at a sewing machine to make my first dress. It was to celebrate Fisherman's Day. My aunt said I could make myself a dress if I wanted. The whites had their Lyceum Sports Club and the Spanish Casino, but no black or mulatto, or anyone with any black in them at all, could go into either of them. We blacks had the Progress Society, an old, run-down place where the sponges were cut and kept, that would be fixed up for our festivities. That's when I made my first dress.

I went to school, but since I was always ambitious and, it would seem, clever, when I was nine I was already in junior high. The director, who was white and comfortably off, and called Pelayo Suárez Orta, said in admiration one day, "Egipcia, you really study, you don't seem black." According to him, I didn't have the backward ideas of other blacks for whom it was all the same to sew or clean . . . he saw another spirit in me. He asked why I didn't go on to study. When I told my father, he said I was crazy, where was the money going to come from. I argued I would sew and with the money from my sewing I'd pay for my studies. When I told my aunt who was bringing me up and who I called Mima, she said she'd help. She was the

dressmaker, and I'd do the hemming. She'd pay me twelve to twenty cents a dress, and that way I put together the money to study at Doctor Pelayo Suárez Orta's academy.

Mima told me, "You're going to Dr. Pelayo's academy, but mark my words, it's going to be hard rubbing shoulders with people who all have money." I didn't see it that way, because I never went by the color of my skin. The teacher's daughter was there, as was Laura Palomera, the daughter of the owner of half of Surgidero de Batabanó, and the daughter of Dr. Pons and Dr. Cancio, and there was I paying my six pesos a month with my sewing. I was more or less OK with my ten-cent shoes, which hung from the ceiling in the Polish shops. They looked fine with my socks, and they accepted me. A doctor who was very famous in the town even told my father, "I like the *negrita* [little black girl]," as if he were trying to protect me. I don't know what kind of paternalist help he might have offered me because I never saw any of it. Perhaps because people looked at me askance when I said I visited the home of Dr. Pons.

During one of the exams at the academy, Dr. Pelayo himself said, "You're very intelligent, it's not good for me having you here." That was because he wanted me to be passing the answers in exams to his daughter Clara and his son Pelayo, who later became a minister. That's when they started to block me.

Time passed and I finished eighth grade and went to an academy here in Havana, in Cerro, because there was nothing in Batabanó to prepare me for going on to teacher training. I was around fourteen. I had no rest: from work to school, from school to the academy, from the academy to work, and on it went. Those who went to that academy stood a good chance of getting into the teacher training school or the home economics school, one or the other. I did the exam and didn't get in because I was black. There was nothing in writing. Though I had the qualifications, I wasn't the right skin color. Yet Dr. Pelayo's daughter, the one I was to have passed the answers to, did get in. So I went to the home economics school, which was much further away and which I didn't like at all. That's when my studies came to an end. I didn't continue and went to work as a maid.

My first job was in the home of the director of my school in Batabanó, who was living close by in my neighborhood. She was called Haydée. I think her husband was also a minister. We had by then moved to Havana. That town was too poor to live in, much less to get on. So I became the nanny of a lovely little boy we called Pituco. It seems Haydée and the others in the

house liked the fact that I was such a refined black woman. But the boy wanted to be carried always, and, since I was black, it was my duty to carry him so everyone would know I was the maid—in crisp white uniform. In those days, we would go on the weekend to Tarará beach, which was for whites, not blacks. I could go in because of what I was. But Haydée didn't want me always to be carrying the boy. I gradually got the boy used to the pram, or the playpen, or holding my hand, and gently taught him to speak. Haydée's husband would watch and say, "She doesn't seem black!" Always the same thing.

Haydée asked me why I had such long nails and beautiful hands. Her husband replied for me: "Because she's decent, because it looks good." Her response was, "Well, you must cut them." She didn't look after her own nails. I had to do everything for that boy, from washing his clothes to preparing his food. And people who visited the house would comment on my dress and my hands while I also looked after the boy. She hated this so much that she dismissed me one day.

I had many problems as a maid, seemingly because the master and mistress of the house wanted a vulgar black who wouldn't talk, or take part in conversation, or behave in a certain way, to justify having a maid, because when they did involve me in conversation or asked me something, deep down they didn't like the fact I conducted myself well.

With all these setbacks, I already knew my future wasn't in servitude. I decided to study, even if it was for a vocational skill. That's when I went to the trades school and met my husband of today. I was sixteen when we met, we married, and that was the end of my studies.

At the time of the revolution, I had three children and took on two new zone organizations—the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution and the Federation of Cuban Women. Into my hands came forms to be filled out by persons wanting future work. I started work in the pharmacy that was next door to my house as a sector person: my job was to report to a doctor at Lawton Polyclinic. I would write out the prescriptions and she was surprised I had such good writing and spelling. Since it was close to home, I'd go and see to the children and then go back to work. Then a course came along which interested me a lot and I became a pharmaceutical technician, and that's what I did for twenty-nine years, until I retired.

In this second stage of my life I started work as an auxiliary at Julio Trigo Hospital. There I really came up against people because my ideas were not those "of blacks." When I didn't understand how things could be a certain way, I would say so, and the directors didn't like how I would stand out above the rest. But it was simply that I felt compelled to say what I didn't understand. I had a colleague there who would say, "Never protest, because when you do it'll cost you your job." But since I didn't work to eat but because I liked my work and wanted to be independent, I went on protesting if things were not right. I reasoned that if I were dismissed I would work somewhere else.

At the time of my first job at the hospital, the head of the pharmacy was called Mario. He'd been there for many years and wanted to have everything under his control. There was a room that was never opened. One day I asked him why not. His reply was always the same, that Dr. Frías, the hospital director, didn't want anyone going near there. My argument was that it was part of the pharmacy and stockroom. My curiosity was such that one night, when I was on duty, I opened the room. What I found was that, while in the hospital there was no medicine for the sick, or sutures for operations, that room was filled with all the hospital needed. That was around 1970, when the revolution was well consolidated, thanks to the labor movement around the famous 10-million-ton harvest. We found a way to get all that out, without me being the one to denounce it, and I became the defender of justice, the leader, because I was the one to file a report to my superiors. I wasn't liked by the director and others in charge because, according to them, I shouldn't have been looking into things that were nothing to do with me. But I went on like that, always speaking out when I saw things that weren't right.

Later on I went to work at the worst pharmacy in the Víbora, one with a large personnel. I was the only black woman in my department and right from the start I crossed paths with a woman doctor who was like a whip. Customers would ask for me, not her, saying I treated them differently. The other two in charge took her side and would comment on money and medicines that were missing, saying the employees were to blame. Coincidentally, the employees were black. One day I told one of them that it wasn't the employees who were taking things: "The ones who rob here are the intelligent ones, you whites!" I was taken to a work council on charges of lack of respect. But they had to hear me out, because there I spoke about how I saw them taking medicines for their friends.

The persecution was so frequent and hostile that, in one of those cases,

a lawyer told me that if I had so much as taken a single aspirin I'd go to jail. It wasn't against me as a person but as the *negra* (black woman), to say, "The black woman took such and such." But there were whites who robbed constantly and were never caught. The sad thing is that not all blacks confront these racist attitudes. That's why I finally decided to retire.

3

Issues of Black Health

Lliliam Cordiés Jackson and Nuria Pérez Sesma

Lliliam Cordiés Jackson belongs to the first generation of doctors graduating at the outset of the Cuban Revolution. She studied medicine at the University of Oriente, in Santiago de Cuba, eastern Cuba, where the population is predominantly black and where there has been much more of a racial mix. Dr. Lliliam Cordiés Jackson is currently professor of internal medicine at Hermanos Almejeiras Hospital in Havana, where she founded the first multidisciplinary group for the study of and attention to patients with hypertension. The project expanded from Havana to the whole country, and so we began our interview on a clinical note. (PPS)

LCJ: Those who have studied this [hypertension] very seriously in the Caribbean are the Jamaicans. Jamaica has a strong intellectual tradition and the University of the West Indies is one of the most prestigious in the region. There's a Jamaican researcher who has devoted himself to studying this and his work is obligatory reference throughout the area. Work has also been done in Barbados, and now in Martinique and Guadeloupe the French are undertaking long-term proactive study. It's a serious problem because blacks who are hypertensive are disadvantaged. Whites can develop hypertension but not with the fatal consequences it has for blacks. It has been scientifically demonstrated that blacks are more prone to develop lesions of the heart, kidney, and brain than whites. In 1994 we selected a group of blacks who had not known they were hypertensive. We arrived at a place and started taking people's blood pressure, telling them, "You're hypertensive, you're not hypertensive." We selected thirty blacks and thirty whites, from similar work and living conditions, and began to study the heart, which is one of the organs most attacked by hypertension,