

This volume marks *Islas*' first anniversary. This has been a year of experiences that have been accumulated as a result of a primary objective: to touch on all subjects related to the issue of racism in the broadest possible way and from every angle and perspective. We hope to have contributed our own small portion towards the knowledge and disclosure of such subjects.

Towards that end, we have been able to count on a group of collaborators whose dedication has been unwavering throughout all of these months. The interaction has truly been enriching. It is also important to point out the effort of the group of editors and translators who offered consistency and unity to a publication of bilingual character, such as *Islas*. In addition, our magazine is proud of having the support of renowned professors, researchers, journalists and civil rights activists in several countries. I send my most sincere thanks to all of them.



The effects of the pieces published in the magazine have been evident in many ways. An example can be found in the Letters to the Editor section of this volume.

Another fundamental experience comes from the collective work of the *Islas* team with African-American researchers and intellectuals who have a racial identity which is very different to that of Cubans. They have demonstrated great sensitivity toward expressions of racial discrimination, regardless of how or in which socio-political context they are manifested. African-Americans and, particularly this magazine's directors, constitute a critical support in our work.

The need to broaden the set of themes to be published and their social, historical and geographic scope has been at the center of our team's discussions from the beginning. Until now the main objective has been Cuba, where, according to conservative estimates, the population of African origin reaches 60% and where there is no publication that will touch the subject in an open and non-prejudicial manner.

At the same time, however, it appeared to be essential to publish works about other geographic areas, thereby enriching the analytical perspectives of

a problem of international impact. In this sense, the United States has played an important role through its long historical struggle for civil rights. Other pieces of work have presented how this subject is manifested in Europe. We have begun to present how it is manifested in Africa through an article dedicated to socio-cultural, economic, political and traditional inequalities that the rural woman of the Republic of Cameroon faces. Future editions will include pieces about Brazil and the Caribbean islands.

The pages of *Islas* have not only included criticism or the chronicle of concrete expressions of racism; we have also found it necessary to present the life and work of important black personalities in their respective countries and their diverse realms. That should assist in clarifying the place occupied by African descendents in the development of the societies to which they belong.

Contents

This fourth *Islas* volume is dedicated to one of the glories of Cuban culture: Ignacio Villa. The unique **Bola de Nieve** (“Snowball”), whose very personal musical style turned him into a universally renowned artist and into an ambassador of our culture. As stated by the director of the documentary *Bola de Nieve: the sad man who sang happily*: “He is a genius who should be a vital and artistic reference for many people.” Included with this article is one about the famous Cuban percussionist who lives in Los Angeles, **Francisco Aguabella**, and another about the writer and poet **Gastón Baquero**.

There are several articles which in this edition address the issue of racism in the largest island of the Antilles, from different perspectives and in different historical moments. In fact, Leonardo Calvo Cárdena’s essay *In support of an investigation of the racial problem in Cuba*, offers a dynamic and realistic image. The author shows the way in which the endurance of prejudices and racial stereotypes is reflected in the country’s socio-economic, political and cultural structures. In this way, he emphasizes the government’s absence of a political will to give way to a necessary and profound debate about the subject. In any case, this fact seems to be the key for black and mixed professionals and intellectuals to assume the role that corresponds to them in this task. The lack of political representation of the non-white population is also addressed in Armando Añel’s brief investigation, *Cuba: the face of power*.

Jorge Núñez offers a historical vision of the racial problem since 1902 in his essay *The rise and fall of racial utopia in the 1st Cuban Republic*. Núñez

clearly states that the idea of “whitening” as a way of including Cuba in the set of civilized nations focused the attention of important intellectual and political sectors of that time period. The distorted image of Africa had survived the independence and became a strong factor for the maintenance and reproduction of racist images and practices that were typical of the colonial-slaving societies. Gustavo Urrutia’s piece *Points of view of the New Black*, closes the section dedicated to this black intellectual. It is precisely this piece that touches on the subject in the wake of the 2nd Cuban Republic .

In the section on religion, Osvaldo Navarro integrates one of the most renowned practitioners of the Cuban religions of African origin: **Emilio O’Farril**. In his synthetic but fundamental testimony, the Cuban Palero accumulates much of the knowledge treasured throughout his long life. Every one of his phrases is a carrier of the existential philosophy and the ethical and moral principals professed by the more authentic followers of the religious systems that arrived from Africa.

Finally, a reading of the chronicle *In Search of the Cuban slave ship Dos Amigos* will reveal an ample report on the work of reproducing this ship, which reveals the horrors that characterized human trafficking in the midst of one of the greatest tragedies humanity has witnessed: the Transatlantic Slave Trade. As we explore this sad chapter in history, we will have more exact knowledge of the price paid by the African continent in the process of the formation of contemporary American societies. At the same time, this article can help us come to a much better understanding of the problems suffered by African people and their descendants. This is an opportunity for the people of Cuba today to help retrieve and reconstruct the story of this important historic vessel. If the story of *Dos Amigos* sounds familiar to you, please contact us so that we can put you in touch with the project director.

Dr. Juan Antonio Alvarado
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