

The struggle against racism, and achieving the demands of the black population, has been a long one; there is a long list of men and women who have dedicated their lives to it. Their personal experiences are as varied as the positions from which they have dealt with the issue. As such, the actions they undertook so that black people could attain their proper place in societies historically governed by whites—the descendants of those who engaged in the very slave trade that brought millions of Africans to the Americas—are also quite numerous and distinct. Moreover, the repercussions of their actions have been quite diverse as well.



Some of these men and women are almost entirely unknown to history, and the ideas of others have not transcended the national boundaries of their birthplaces. Yet others have become internationally famous and/or symbols of a seemingly endless epic endeavor. Distinguished among the members of this last group is Marcus Mosiah Garvey, a black Jamaican born in 1880 to a humble family, who eventually

led one of the most powerful and historic black improvement movements.

Garvey, who is considered a precursor to the ideas of Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X and many others, founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), an impressively large and effective organization intended to raise consciousness about unity and shared interests among his black brethren. New York's Harlem would end up being the place where his ideas achieved their greatest relevance. The activities in which he engaged, publishing a newspaper and participating in strikes, etc., were meant to confront the disadvantaged and shameful situation of blacks. Garvey is extremely well known for his Back to Africa struggle, a program that encouraged the descendants of Africans who were brought to the Americas as slaves to return to Mother Africa. His lifelong struggles caused him a great many problems. He was persecuted and imprisoned in the United States for being considered a subversive element that had a negative effect on the established white order. Ultimately, his life and legacy were acknowledged when the Jamaican government declared him a national hero. This issue of *ISLAS* offers homage to this tireless Caribbean warrior.

Another person who receives special attention in this issue is Lino D'Ou, a Cuban mulatto born in 1871, who reached the rank of lieutenant colonel in the Mambi Army during Cuba's last war for independence from Spanish colonialism. D'Ou had an active and prolific political life after the Cuban Republic was established in 1902, which would lead him to the Cuban House of Representatives.

As a friend and disciple of Juan Gualberto Gómez, he very early on embraced the idea of the struggle against racial discrimination. He had already taken this

stance against expressions of racism, unfortunately common in a force that was called upon to realize the ideas of Martí and Maceo about an integrated Cuba and for the good of all, while in the Liberating Army. As a politician and journalist, he used the most varied ways available to him to confront racism and achieve recognition for the rights that were denied the black population, as well as equal participation of said population in the new republic.

It is, however, true that his ideals, and those of other black Cubans, differed tremendously from those that Marcus Garvey expounded and defended. But there was at least one point on which they all agreed: the defense of the rights of black people. D'Ou always advocated for the integration of black Cubans in the economic, political and social life of the island, under new conditions created after Cuba's independence.

D'Ou was not only opposed to concrete expressions of racism; with his sharp prose he also challenged the psychosocial phenomena present in the society—stereotypes, for example—that served to justify those expressions. He never used the light color of his skin to gain the advantages that racial passing could offer, as was often the case. To the contrary, he openly confronted those who emphasized the supposed ugliness of blacks according to the aesthetic principles that are still in vogue (a topic that has been discussed in various issues of *ISLAS*). D'Ou published a number of articles on this subject.

As the son of a black woman, D'Ou was always very mindful of his racial origin. He made this broadly and definitively obvious in the material cited by Miguel Cabrera Peña, in his notable essay, *Barbara's Son*, which we herein publish:

“Of all my aspirations, my greatest, most heartfelt one is the greatness and freedom of my country. But I confess that above even that, beyond all my passions, is, and always will be, my devotion to the black woman Barbara. Wouldn't I have had to ignore and even deny her to make my place in the white storm? Never. I am always, always Barbara's son.”

Given how important it is to read analyses and evaluations of real life experiences, we are also inaugurating a “Testimony” section in this issue. The piece that initiates it is *Color and Uncertainty*, by Jorge Olivera Castillo. In it the author discusses, in an extremely direct and impactful way, what he, himself, calls the “tragedy of blackness.” The second piece, *Race, Caste and Untouchability: Lessons from India*, by Laurence A. Glasco, offers a vivid personal testimony to the rigid social stratification that governs all spheres of life in that South Asian country, and of the conditions upon which this system was built and continues to be practiced. This testimony focuses on the discriminatory conditions that the so-called untouchables (broadly known as *dalits*, meaning “oppressed or on the ground”) endure, and the somewhat fruitless efforts there are to improve their living conditions and propel the economic, political and social integration of, what by some calculations is, 15 to 20 percent of the Indian population.

In fact, page 80 of this issue is dedicated to another testimony, that of the black Brazilian woman Carolina Maria de Jesus (1914-1977). Born in a rural community of Minas Gerais, she learned to read and write in the most abject poverty. Despite the fact she never went beyond the second grade, Maria de Jesus managed to become famous in 1960 for publishing her diary as a book. *Quarto de Despejo*, republished in the United States as *Child of the Dark*, was the result of a systematic accumulation of her life experiences over a few years. In it she wrote about her everyday life and the desperate challenges that poor people like her, who live in Brazil's *favelas*, had and have to confront. That is the origin of our acknowledgement of this woman who, despite her limited education, lived her entire life proud of her race's attributes. The strength and sensibility with which she ensued her testimonies managed to impress a broad reading public both inside and outside Brazil.

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