

In 2005, when we published our first issue of *ISLAS*, the journal was simply a project whose success, in great measure, rested upon its acceptance by our readers, and authors who were willing to write for it—quite aside from the importance and urgency of its proposed focus.

After five years, we have now published our sixteenth issue, which closes our fifth anniversary year of publication, and we can say, with satisfaction, that we have fulfilled our initial objectives. More over, the goals that originally inspired us to take on this project have not only been met, but also enriched notably.



The most satisfying achievement may be having gotten a large number of principal leaders and activists from the thriving Cuban anti-racist movement, and members of other groups representing Cuban civil society, to contribute articles to the journal and collaborate with us on other projects. We are extremely grateful to all of them, and the rest of the *ISLAS* team—the editors, translators, designers and printers.

As always, the current issue contains new reflections on the race problem in Cuba. Yesenia Selier's piece, "A Black Cuban Woman's 'Room of her Own,'" deals with the multiple challenges that black Cuban women face on the island and elsewhere in the world, focusing on the need for a black, female intelligentsia to speak, write and publish on these issues and their causes, and to discuss the negative stereotypes that stigmatize women of African descent.

José Hugo Fernández's "The Paradigm's Color," also in this section, discusses the recent releases of Cuban political prisoners, and the reasons, facts, and events that forced the Cuban government to make this unexpected move—a step that caught many of its followers and adversaries by surprise.

In addition, our readers will encounter "José Martí and the Future of Blacks," by Miguel Cabrera. It is a critique of a series of publications, essays, and analyses that misrepresent the true substance of Martí's thinking about Cuba's black population.

A number of authors have written from diverse perspectives on the troublesome issue of Cuban national identity. They are responding to an increasing concern regarding national and other alternative or complementary forms of identity in Cuba, a place whose political culture tends to ignore or hide them.

Manuel Cuesta Morúa's article "Black Intellectuals and a Recovered Identity" is one of the pieces that address this concern. He considers it extremely important to focus attention on "using critical thinking as a process by which to both define and recover identities in a racial and cultural context." Cuesta Morúa enumerates the problems and obstacles that make this process difficult, and uses what he calls the 'Morales *affaire*' (involving Esteban Morales Domínguez), and what ensued after Morales published an article in which he attacked the corruption present in Cuba's power structure, to once

again reveal the absolutely unchanging intransigence of Cuba's leaders when facing anyone's attempt to go beyond the limits of what is officially permitted.

Some of these ideas are echoed in the article by Víctor Domínguez, "Bridges to Memory," about the censorship to which publishing concern *Ediciones El Puente*, and its contributing writers was subjected, during the early years of the Revolution. The fact that a large number of these writers who dared to break with established 'political correctness'—many of them black and members of other subaltern groups—remain forgotten and buried in historical oblivion, ostracized, and marginalized to this day, sometimes facing intolerable circumstances, attests to the severity of the government's reaction to this group and its work.

Lourdes Chacón Núñez, too, writes about the issue of national identity in "Is Cuban National Identity Weakening? Are There Cultural Identities?" In this article, she undertakes a unique analysis of this weakening process as it relates to Cuba's national symbols and attributes.

For its part, the piece titled "Queloides/Keloids: Race and Racism" focuses on this collection's last exhibit, which took place on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2010, at the Wilfredo Lam Center for Contemporary Art, in Havana. The works contained in this exhibit represent a noteworthy effort by Cuban artists and creators to use their art to try to delve deeply into a very necessary, critical dialog regarding the persistence of racism in Cuba, and its economic and sociocultural consequences.

Since its earliest iteration, the term chosen to name this exhibit is extremely suggestive. Keloids are scars almost always caused by wounds, thus the forcefulness with which this continuing social and cultural scourge is presented, and its diverse effects on people in all walks of life, can be seen as keloids on Cuba's social fabric. If they are not openly treated, with surgical precision, they can continue to affect the whole body politic—the whole nation.

In our effort to acknowledge the work of black Cuban artists who have contributed so much to Cuban culture, we include in this issue a piece titled "Alexis Cardona: Rescuing History and Identity." In fact, one of Cardona's installations, representative of his creative search for our roots and traditions, graces this issue's cover. Another article, "Beyond a Feeling," is dedicated to José Antonio Méndez—known as 'el Rey del *Feeling*' [the King of *Feeling*]*—*and his impact on Cuban music.

In *ISLAS'* section "Parallel Views," our readers will find short but suggestive pieces like "Cuba: From Civil Society to Open Society," by Armando Añel, and "Racism and Injustices in Cuban Prisons," by Darsi Ferrer. Many of their ideas and criticism are corroborated in the "Prisoners of Color" section. Dinizulu Gene Tinnie's piece, on the other hand, discusses Key West's commemoration, on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2010, of the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition, and events related to the "Middle Passage."

In our effort to continue expanding our offerings in the realm of diverse perspectives on Cuban political and social life, this issue inaugurates a new section titled "Profiles." Its purpose is to share information about life, work, and ideas regarding Cuba's present and future as expressed by prominent black figures involved in politics, culture, civic activism, or religion. This issue's profile is on Manuel Cuesta Morúa.

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