

According to the limited amount of news about the race problem one can read in Cuban news sources, the government has redoubled its efforts to somehow show that it is concerned about the issue. Much has contributed to the constant pressure the independent, anti-racist movement has been able to exert on it and, naturally, the continued deterioration of the black Cubans' standard of living has also had an impact. With this in mind, and within the context of the U.N.'s "International Year for African Descendants," the government has attempted to make its intentions and efforts regarding this issue even more visible, particularly the image



of itself it wants to project to the outside world and international organizations, because they have already shown concern over what is really happening.

A few months ago, the Cuban authorities organized a colloquium titled "Cuba and African Descendants in América" at the Juan Marinello Institute for Cuban Cultural Research. Participation in the event was controlled, thus avoiding the possibility of any expression of discord. In addition, diverse representatives of international organizations, activists, and scholars of race in the Americas, known for their struggle against the disadvantages faced by Africans and African descendants all over, were also cautiously and selectively invited to participate. Yet, in the Cuban context, some of them seem to be somewhat complicit with what is happening on the island, and seem to be offering support to a government that has done little to support this struggle—a struggle that has had to endure decades of political rhetoric about it.

Cuban participation in this event was restricted. Only a small group of specialists—many of them enjoying close relations with the government—took part in it. With them, Ministers and leaders of pro-government organizations and commissions took it upon themselves to set a tone appropriate to the government's interests. As one might expect, the closing statements were careful to make explicit the government's political will to confront and initiate measures aimed at addressing the disadvantages faced by black Cubans.

How can one possibly take seriously those and so many other statements of good will? For example, the possibility of taking this topic to the public for open and diverse debate was mentioned, but most of the participants just kept repeating themselves, without allowing into the discussion leaders and activists in the independent, black movement, many of whom have been labeled as enemies of the state for their participation in it. More than opening up, these actions are much more indicative of a new level of willful and open disregard for these groups, and of the depth and breadth of the real problem.

Is there a political will to face this evil? Are their believable official efforts to get beyond the pernicious politicization of the problem? Certainly not in light of these sorts of events, because they are completely manipulated and only contribute to preventing a very necessary citizen debate to confront a problem that affects the whole nation. On the contrary, there are still accusations launched against agents of imperialism, and counterrevolutionaries who try to publicize the problems of African descendants, and hint at the reasons for the continuation and reproduction of racism and its effects in Cuba.

Nothing of what has been published about the event via the official media says anything about the police operation that took place shortly after it to prevent the *Citizens' Committee for Racial Integration's* celebration of its third anniversary. Details about this can be found in the article titled "Happy Anniversary" right in this issue of *ISLAS*.

A politically, socially and culturally segregated colloquium in which any word of discord was avoided at all cost cannot lead to any action all on the proposals that were therein shared. Either they expect Cuban blacks to keep their arms crossed and wait for those in power, and its carefully chosen representatives to decide how to deal with a problem that affects millions of them, or perhaps they need to keep accepting the official story and believe these fake leaders, who one way or another repeat and attempt to justify what people should officially think and want, for which purpose they sometimes acknowledge things that will obviously lead on to justifying the unjustifiable.

It is also lamentable that the foreign participants gathered there didn't ask themselves where the representatives of the independent anti-racist movement were. They do not seem to know that individuals in the anti-racist movement exist. Some prefer to look the other way regarding the already lengthy, alternative struggle of those groups to reempower citizens, so that those who have suffered the scourge of a racism that is far from deconstructed—as the Ministry of Culture and the principal organizer of the event declared—can be the agents of changes that can no longer wait.

How can one continue believing that Cuba is one of the world's primary centers for the anti-racist movement, when distinguished Cubans with alternative ideas, projects and solutions are considered traitors and counterrevolutionaries, and they are prevented from exercising their "constitutional" right to publicly express, present and debate them democratically?

At some moment, it would be quite useful for these visitors to break away from itineraries carefully planned so as to prevent them from coming into contact with "Deep Cuba," because then they would encounter daily realities with which they are unfamiliar, or prefer to ignore: poor neighborhoods where there is abundant evidence of a marginal and marginalized existence for African descendants and other subaltern groups, where they face inhuman living conditions with no opportunity to get out of there in the immediate future, as is the case with the "El Hueco" neighborhood, which is described in an article by the same name in this very issue of *ISLAS*.

ISLAS once again contests this officialist tendency. In her pages, readers can find analyses and reflections unfettered by the aberrations, restrictions and euphemisms that characterize government representatives, many of whom live far from the actual, daily grind of so many black Cubans.

Many of the articles in this current issue make clear the terrible need there is for the issue to be dealt with democratically, so that not only blacks, but also subaltern groups can express themselves freely. This would allow the topic of discrimination and segregation, or at least the fact that people's most urgent needs and interests are ignored, to be seen from different angles and appreciated via different arguments.

In "A Dialogue within the Race Debate in Cuba," Manuel Cuesta Morúa examines affirmative action, its origins, advantages and limitations, particularly for societies like Cuba's, where the black and *mestizo* population is far from being a minority. This political and social analysis concludes that "what Cuba needs [is] to reconsider two related things, its State model...and its nation-building project, which is culturally exclusionary..." He defends the idea of using "homegrown formulas" in dealing with the race problem" and affirms that "reempowerment is... a combination of policies that promote the autonomy of social actors by acknowledging their constitutive ability to construct their identities, and their right to define and participate in the State's political will from those constitutive identities."

Thus, we might want to ask if these and many other ideas sustained by independent groups within the anti-racist movement are truly unknown by those who participated in the meeting at the Juan Marinello institute. It would seem so. This is how they contribute to reinforcing the silence and aberrations that María I. Faguaga talks about in her "Profile." This is how they justify the pleasant image of black life in Cuba that is presented to the world. We cannot say that the same image is presented in Cuba and to Cubans because except for a few short pieces that were published praising the event, Cubans—not even scholars from official institutions who research these issues—were able to find out what was really discussed there. Some outside of Havana did not even know the event had taken place.

Finally, although no less important, the *ISLAS* team and all of the journal's contributors are pleased to dedicate this issue to three paradigmatic figures of Cuba's musical and artistic world who were born in 1911.

Dr. Juan Antonio Alvarado Ramos
Editor-in-Chief