

The year 2012 is well on its way and it seems that new pathways are opening up for African descendants all over the world. The United Nation's proclaimed "Decade of African Descendants" would seem to be strong evidence of this, yet it is also likely that no dearth of obstacles will be erected by those in power. Cubans are witness to this, despite the fact that the African descendant movement put forth its best efforts to remain committed to the same goals, garnering the best results by the end of 2011. The articles published herein reveal the persistence of Cuban officialdom's intransigency, the consequent effects, and how this cadre does everything within its power to prevent a real discussion and treatment of our problems from taking place.

In his contribution, José Hugo Fernández touches upon unacceptable statements made by a United Nations representative in Havana who seems to have ignored the disadvantageous situation of black Cubans and describes the independent Cuban movement's timely, public response to what it saw as an 'offensive mockery.' He delves into some of the specifics and asks himself why those in official power "cannot just objectively and scientifically focus on the problems of Cuba's African descendants without being political about it." Moreover, despite the fact he lauds the recent appearance of publications on the subject in book stores, Fernández warns that their pages lack meaningful, deep analyses, because they have been written by authors who are caught "between a rock and a hard place"—having to critically confront reality and still endure their political trappings. In order to accomplish this, they use the so-called Special Period as their point of departure, considering it the source of all evil, but never really examining the three decades of revolutionary Cuba prior to that moment.



"Current Details, Dangers and Challenges in the Race Debate in Cuba" delves into a series of factors that reveals what interest there is in keeping the current situation from changing, or free of significant changes, at the very least. Once again, we see concern about official pressure to generally keep government intellectuals who are interested in the topic from straying from established canons when they deal with one of our nation's most nagging problems. Its author concludes: "Those in power use sovereignty and unity to manipulate and divide—far beyond just their inclusionary rhetoric. Supposedly committed intellectuals serve the system and its specific interests. Independent activists openly and clearly deal with the problem, and its grave, social and political implications. Then there is the great mass of society, which suffers silently and voicelessly, and needs to see a light on its horizon."

The variety of topics in this issue of *ISLAS* are further enriched by the article “Cuba: Indigency and Race,” by Gloria Llopis, which elaborates on a phenomenon that the Cuban authorities have pushed to the invisibilizing margins for over three decades—an indigency that has plagued society since the crisis of the 1990s, which the government euphemistically called the *Special Period in Times of Peace*. Men and women, many of them quite elderly, are part of a Dantesque army that prowls around anywhere there is trash with which to satisfy its hunger, and endures its almost perennial life on the streets. Black people are quite over-represented in this sector, an almost entirely marginalized population: they are invisible. Since 1959, the difficulties faced by the black population in its attempt to take its rightful place in the Cuban nation have been alarming. These are examined in the article “Racial Hatred: An Inescapable Legacy?” by Aramis del Valle, who also warns of the potential social explosivity of this problem.

Hildebrando Chaviano shares with us new experiences about the police force’s racist practices. His article focuses on black youth and the daily harassment inflicted upon them by the police, as a result of the extremely racialized training these agents receive at their professional schools. At these programs, they are convinced of the alleged, innate, criminal tendencies of darker-skinned citizens. Once they are recruited, police cadets are “inculcated with the idea that most criminals are black.”

Fernando Palacios Mogár’s “Cuba: May 20th’s Other Color” recalls the protest launched by the Independent Party of Color to demand their constitutional rights, on May 1912, after the organization was declared illegal. The article highlights the symbolic importance of remembering this moment in history, and points to the realities that black Cuban are still facing a hundred years after those events, and what has been done to remedy this, while still facing governmental obstinance on the matter.

In the cultural realm, Jorge Olivera’s article “A Forgotten Poet” stands out because it is a tribute to the hundredth anniversary of Marcelino Arozarena’s birth. This poet was inspired by cultural traditions very deeply rooted in Cuba’s black population, and devoted his life’s work to poetically visualizing its contingencies, customs and vicissitudes. As Olivera himself writes: “Blacks situated at the margins have in Arozarena a voice that defines a committed poetics... one that has made its mark on the nation’s poetic production.”

Another creative talent to which space is dedicated in this issue is Eugenio Hernández Espinosa, a playwright who employs the best of Cuban theatrical tradition to reflect upon the life, creativity and difficulties of black Cubans. Juan Antonio Madrazo believes that in Hernández Espinosa’s artistic oeuvre “Cuban and the black subject are always present. His stories afford dignity and humanity to the world of the marginalized... we can today find in any corner of Cuba along the island’s poverty belts.”

The *Profiles* section this time around includes an exclusive interview Leonardo Calvo conducted with Yoslainy Pérez Derrick, a highly talented soprano whose laurels include a prize for best opera singer at the 2009 Mariana de Gonich competition. Her efforts, devotion and success are a positive example for all.

Cuban rap returns to our pages with “*Las Krudas: Those Quasi-Paradigmatic Black Cuban Rappers*,” by María Ileana Faguaga. Her article affords us an intimate view into the life

and work of two black women—both relevant artists—who confront their fate and challenges with pride and dignity. With their unusual lyrics, which are both precise and challenging, and the force with which they express their ideas about the contradictions concerning burning issues such as sexual diversity, *machismo*, the role of women, and racial discrimination, these rappers have become among the best known and acknowledged hip-hop duos in Cuba, the island of their birth. Now, they are blazing trails elsewhere, outside of Cuba.

Jorge Camacho critiques the historical accuracy of the events narrated in the film “The Last Supper” (1975), by Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, a film he considers to represent a manipulation that responded to the political and ideological interests of the moment: “a continuation more than a rupture in the way those in power can use black culture and history to support class interests against their enemies, imperialism and the bourgeoisie.”

In “Feast, Race and Power,” Manuel Cuesta Morúa undertakes a sociological analysis of feasts, starting with why they are celebrated, what the motivation behind them is, and what are the social and economic contexts in which they occur. He reveals their function in the complex world of power relations, and uses for an example feasts in slave barracks, and the transformations they have undergone.

The section titled *Parallel Views* offers our readers “NTICs, the Digital Divide and Citizen Empowerment,” by Rafel Campoamor. In it he examines the importance of new technologies in the struggle against poverty and for the creation of multiple manifestations of democracy in our society: freedom of expression, a flow of information, and the defense of human rights. Citizen empowerment is the author’s central concern, and this issue is crucial for Cuba, one of the countries offering its citizens the least amount of access to new technologies. The reason for this is as much due to the lack of telecommunications infrastructure in Cuba, as to the government’s desire to keep the population at bay.

In “A Strategy for an Independent Civil Society,” Moisés Leonardo Rodríguez introduces the readers to the *Martí Current*, a patriotic, humanitarian and culture institution whose goal it is to serve society. Its principal objectives and goals regarding civil action seek “a reverence for the full dignity of each person via a State of Law, social justice, etc.”

For some years now, the pages of our section titled “Prisoners of Color” have been bringing us stories about many African descendants who have had to endure the disdain for their dignity, human integrity, and justice they have encountered in Cuban prisons. With the present issue, we will begin to offer our readers personal testimonies written by victims of that penitentiary system.

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