

Upon the commemoration of the centennial of the massacre the Independent Party of Color's (PIC) members, in 1912 (after its creation, in 1908), as a result of the armed uprising they began in an attempt to obtain the citizens' rights they were denied, has emerged publicly with uncontrollable force. The mass killing carried out by the Constitutional Army of what was then the recently established Republic of Cuba has left incredibly painful scars on the island's Afro-descendant population. The current independent movement against racism and on behalf of civil rights played a particularly active role in this commemoration.

*ISLAS* agrees that this sort of commemoration is essential for continuing the debate about particularly hurtful, historical processes in Cuba, and to promote integration in our nation. This is precisely what groups caught up in the struggle against the kind of racism and other forms of exclusion that still exist in our society are advocating for intently.



It is absolutely necessary for us to continue delving into the conditions that led to the creation of the PIC to be able to totally understand the demands they were making. A century later, the currency and importance of these demands reveal that many of the inequalities against which the PIC at-

tempted to struggle still exist in Cuba. These facts can shed light on the way in which the urgent and unpostponeable demands of Afro-Cubans, and how the current state of affairs bodes poorly for the future of the Cuban nation. As Eleanor Calvo states in her article "A Commitment to Equality and Justice," we must reaffirm "exchanges about issues of supreme interest to the current social scene, especially concerning the need to extend to everyone the debate...and historical knowledge, as well as information about the dangers for interracial relations implicit in a foreseeable and complicated transition..., so we can move forward positioned to be successful in creating the prosperous, just and integrated Cuba for which the heroes struggled and (today's) racist hegemony refuses to acknowledge."

The PIC was created barely 10 years after the end of the War of Independence (1895-98), a war in which Afro-Cubans, played an essential role. They were filled with the hope that the integrationist and egalitarian ideals that had served as the underpinnings for the struggle in which all Cubans participated—without distinction of race—would come to fruition. Yet, once the republic was established, in 1902, politically manipulative, elite whites completely turned their backs on what had been proclaimed by José Martí and other independist leaders before and after the definitive war for independence.

From the very beginning, Afro-Cubans—who political parties only remembered during election periods, in order to get their support—saw themselves rel-

egated from enjoying all the economic, political, social and cultural advantages for which they had fought, side by side, with whites. Despite their prominent role in the war, their absence from public and governmental positions in peacetime was glaring. This was the case even with the police force and army, where they were relegated to a secondary or tertiary level of importance. These limitations and inequalities were always well supported by a racist ideology that appeared to have no intention of giving up ground, as later events would reveal.

It became more than clear to Afro-Cubans leaders who had distinguished themselves in the anti-colonial struggle that participation in electoral battles, supporting one or another party, academic and political education rendered no results for Afro-Cubans. Their frustration and unhappiness began to express itself through political concerns, and these African descendants sought ways in which to gain access to a space that should have been theirs in the new republic. The Cuba “with all, and for the good of all” that Martí had called on patriots to create—regardless their skin color or social position—and his notion that “being Cuban was more than being black, white or mulatto,” had become empty promises for those politicians who wielded power. The contradiction between political rhetoric and real exclusion created growing disquiet—just like today.

These are the conditions under which the PIC emerged, as a movement not only concerned with the innumerable ills affecting the country, but also as the only one that was proposing a program truly committed to eradicating racial discrimination. From the very start, it was the victim of an enormous campaign to discredit it. This climaxed with the promulgation of the Morúa Amendment (1910), which banned the party. Its leaders and sympathizers were then forced to resort to arms to demand what already should have been theirs according to the Constitution.

This is the context in which the press began its attacks and slander against those who were involved in the PIC’s creation and their subsequent uprising. This paved the way for the monstrous events of 1912, in the midst of a national passivity that could see the PIC militants only as enemies, as rebellious and racist agitators who were threatening the nation’s stability, as if this had been the first time Cubans had ever resorted to force to obtain their lawful or denied rights.

The essays “*Independent Party of Color: A Debt with Truth and History*,” by Leonardo Calvo; “*Skirting 1912*,” by Manuel Cuesta Morúa; “*From Silence to Scream*,” by Juan Antonio Madrazo; “*Commitment to Equality and Justice*,” by Eleanor Calvo; “*Real Unity*,” by Hildebrando Chaviano; “*The Rebellion of the Independents of Color: Things that Need Clarification*,” by José Antonio Fornaris; and “*Keeping Alive the Spirit of the Independents of Color*,” by Moisés Leonardo Rodríguez, all deal broadly and diversely with the consequences of the massacre of approximately 3000 black Cubans in 1912. We are also including a piece titled “*Anatomy of Silence*,” by Roberto Castell, which offers an analysis based on the perspective of the whites who were at the top of the economic, social and political pyramid at that time—a reality that seems to be the case even today, with some slight changes. Yet, its importance resides in the fact it contributes to motivating yet more essays on the topic, and promotes our unfinished conversation about the events of 1912, from differing points of view.

Upon analyzing the PIC's hundred year-old political platform and demands, one cannot help but think of the current reality facing Afro-descendants, and the currency of that program. Many of the articles published herein highlight the alarming conditions in Cuba today, a situation that is provoking the very same kind of economic, political, and social demands, even in areas like labor, educational, judicial and military. There is also a demand for equal participation in public spaces and a need to pay attention to the vital context in which Afro-Cubans develop.

Even though in many ways Afro-Cubans have many of the same needs and wants as the poorest Cubans, the need that Afro-Cubans have to elect their own government representatives, so they can face their problems from their own perspective, presents many challenges.

There is no longer even any legislation or action taken that considers the specificities that have historically affected this group, nor how many other problems they have generated. It is as if the thinking were that Afro-descendants should be submissive and conform to the realities affecting them, if for no other reason than the fact that the white elite refuses to take accept them, or all their significance and valor as creators of the nation's wealth and values—although there are other reasons, too. This is why there is not only a need, but also demand for prompt, committed and responsible action regarding the nation's destiny.

Leonardo Calvo Cárdenas emphasizes: "The Cuban authorities and their academic and intellectual spokespersons have missed a wonderful opportunity to situate in its proper place this significant historical process, and once and for all acknowledge all its protagonists, heroes and martyrs of the struggle for a long awaited and dreamt social equality so often praised in song but not yet achieved in our country.

In this sense, the *Citizens' Committee for Racial Integration* (CIR) has been developing and carrying out a robust program of conversations and commemorations, despite the hostile conditions in which they have to do their work because they are faced with aberrant obstinance by government forces. Thanks to the CIR, the founding of the *Independent Party of Color* is recalled as the "Day for African Descendant Dignity" every August 7; every June 27 (date when PIC leader Evaristo Estenoz was assassinated) is commemorated as the "National Day to Pay Tribute to the Martyrs of the Struggle for Equality and Justice." Its leaders also say they are going to "pay tribute to those Africans who preferred dying at sea than arriving to a foreign land as slaves; those slaves who rebelled or fled captivity and created what in Cuba would be the very first, truly free spaces; those thousands of African descendants who gave their sweat and blood to the independence cause." They include so many others who have enacted memorable moments in Cuba's history with true patriotic courage; their creative and productive participation in the construction of the nation is celebrated, because none of this is reflected in the Afro-descendant's lack of access to spaces in which power and wellbeing are defined and constructed. Much less do they have a place in a persistent *criollo* and colonial thinking that always presents Afro-Cubans as inferior."

*ISLAS* pays tribute not only to the PIC's centennial commemoration, but also to José Antonio Aponte and all the participants in the first great conspiracy (1812) that desired to put an end to Spanish colonialism and eliminate slavery. Two hundred years after it was brutally squashed by colonial powers and Cuban slavers, one can only watch in pain the oblivion to which these precursors of Cuba's nationality have been relegated. In the United States, we can be proud of monuments to black civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., even in a leveled history where there are others besides George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. Yet, Aponte has no such appropriate monument in Cuba, nor is his extremely significant conspiracy seen for its truly national importance. It is not uncommon to graduate from college without having a fair notion of our independence struggle.

In contrast with all those absences, omissions and lack of information, the statue to General President José Miguel Gómez, who ordered the massacre against the Independents of Color, was reinstated on the Avenue of the Presidents, one of the busiest streets in the capital, Havana—despite the fact it had been dismantled. This ignominy could only have been approved by inveterate racists, and has garnered the condemnation of many Cubans, in particular by members of the independent movement truly committed to history, the present and the obligatorily integrating future of the Cuban nation. With this in mind, we publish the article “Historical Justice for an Unknown Hero,” by Rogelio Montesinos.

Upon closing this issue, Americans and the worldwide community, particularly the large number of people who struggle against any kind of discrimination and exclusion, got the news that the first African descendant president of the United States, Barack Obama, had obtained a resonant victory in the presidential elections. This was no longer evidence of what one of our contributors called “A Passing Rain” that some expected, but rather of an unprecedented “storm” that highlighted the struggle and possibilities of African descendants in our hemisphere's destiny. The fact that this is occurring with marked regularity in the world's greatest power, in the monster the Cuban government uses to exemplify racist practices, must be causing the island's leaders to start thinking about other ways with which to divert Cubans' attention from their internal problems and the discriminatory situation that still affects black Cubans. One can be sure that new ruses will be deployed to present the image of an egalitarian Cuba that the pages of *ISLAS* will completely destroy.

In this edition, our readers will find articles on numerous topics, such as the condition of being *mulata* in Cuba, and its concomitant, historical and current contradictions. “The Mulatto Woman: She Seems White, but is She...?” contains debates concerning how it is determined if a mulatto woman is white or not, and the endless prejudices and discrimination to which she has been subjected.

The articles “Georgina Herrera: A Genuine Cimarron,” by Jorge Olivera, and “Cimarrons in their own Right,” by Melquiades Montenegro, dedicated to poet Georgina Herrera, documentary filmmaker Gloria Rolando, and plastic artist María Magdalena Campo Pons, highlight that “legion of Afro-feminist women that has proposed to itself to dismantle their history of invisibilization, in which Afro-Cubans women have had to live the worst part of their lives.” This section on African descendant women is topped off by “Afro-Cubans in Search of their Own Imaginary,” by Lucas Garve.

With “Dreading Dreadlocks in Havana,” José Hugo Fernández reveals for us how the Rastafarian movement has taken off in Cuban society, and describes both particular aspects of it in the Cuban context, and the concern it has caused those in power. It’s deep African and Afro-Caribbean roots have not stopped the authorities from categorizing Cuban Rastafarians as dangerous to Cuban peace. The author explains: “It would seem that the recent growth of the Rastafarian movement in Cuba, and particularly in Havana, causes one of our society’s endemic ills to resurface: fear of blacks and black things, which, curiously enough, is more visible in the upper strata of power than among a common population, in which, nonetheless, there is a marked increase in blacks and *mestizos*.” Yet, they are still there, facing the hostility, increasing in numbers, and developing a genuine sociocultural and philosophical program.

Finally, not last or least among the many articles that fill this issue, and offer a panoramic view of the Cuban socio-racial problem, is María Ileana Faguaga’s ample review of *El miedo al negro* [Fear of Blacks], by renowned black author Juan F. Benemelis, whose current and educational, historical, anthropological work cannot circulate in Cuba because it is officially censured.

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