

The wonder of all the diverse activities was still with us as we prepared the present issue of *ISLAS*. Three Cuban, anti-racist activists and scholars from the island—Juan Antonio Madrazo (National Coordinator, *Citizens' Committee for Racial Integration* [CIR]), Leonardo Calvo Cárdenas (Vice-Coordinator, *CIR*) and Manuel Cuesta Morúa (spokesperson, *Progressive Arc Party* and CIR member), and activist Rafel Campoamor (President, *NGO EmpoderaCuba*) spent the months of May and June participating in events in a number of U.S. cities.



Our journey began in Pittsburgh on May 6, with *AFRICAMÉRICAS* week, which kicked off with a panel on deliberative democracy, its challenges and perspectives in Cuba and the world. The invitation came from Professor Robert Cavalier, of Carnegie Mellon University, who is a specialist on the subject. We explored the value of this kind of democracy for solving multiple social problems, particularly those caused by discrimination, as well as the need for racial integration in multi-racial and multicultural countries like Cuba. That afternoon, the *Crossing Havana* photo exhibit opened at the *Young Men and Women's African Heritage Association*. Its many different image groupings, taken between 2012 and early 2013, in Havana and its surroundings, revealed to the many visitors a panorama of the complexities and problems

the city's Afro-descendants must face on an island where the scourge of racism and discrimination continue to affect the daily life and even future of a segment of the Cuban population that is estimated to be more than 50% of the total population. The exhibit remained open till Saturday, May 11, to give ample opportunity to interested academics, civil rights activists and residents to visit it. Five different Cuban films were also shown throughout the week at this location. There was non-stop activity: presentations, press interviews for the print media and radio, workshops about Afro-Latin American culture, two Afro-Latin poetry, percussion, dance and song concerts, and constant attention to those who visited the activities throughout the week.

Having served as a bridge to another great challenge that awaited us in Washington, D.C., the Cuban activists traveled to Miami, where an extremely busy political and sociocultural agenda awaited them, which occupied them for nearly three weeks. These were days filled with intense work at panels at venues like *CubaOcho* and Miami Dade College, as well as numerous encounters with political and social leaders, and cultural celebrities who are very interested in the current situation of Cuba's Afro-descendants on the island.

The last challenge came in late May: a panel presentation about the current situation of Cuba's Afro-descendants at the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) conference in Washington, D.C. This was the first time that representatives of civil society in Cuba were admitted to a space that for too many years had been controlled by Cuban *aparatchiks* or those who take their orders directly "from above." The success of the panel, with all its audience participation, rich discussion and analyses, which went over the allotted time, was more than apparent. All this

served to strengthened our resolve to continue the struggle in which we have found ourselves for so long, to broaden and deepen the debate about the race problem in Cuba—something the Cuban government, with its stubbornness and desire to control everything concerning it, sometimes violently or legally, has put off for too long. It punishes anyone who tries to objectively and independently join the debate. For a more detailed description of the very successful visit of these CIR activists from Cuba to the United States, please read Juan Antonio Madrazo's piece "*Crossing Havana: Something More Than Just Beyond the Razor Wire.*"

The present issue begins precisely with the papers that were presented at the LASA conference. In "Traditional Sociocultural References and Interracial Relations in Today's Cuba," Leonardo Calvo Cárdenas offers a revealing summary of the participation of Africans and the descendants in all areas of Cuba's economic, political and social life. He emphasizes the disdain with which that participation has historically been considered, which resulted in the creation of deeply rooted psychological perspectives and cultural references that situate Afro-descendants in an inferior position, and denies them their well-deserved place in Cuba. This culturally ensconced attitude has survived powerfully to the present day, despite the just and egalitarian rhetoric that was adopted after the triumph of the revolution in 1959. According to Calvo Cárdenas, it is now up to our authorities not only to admit the existence of this scourge, which makes Afro-descendants "victims, guilty, suspicious or beneficiaries of hegemonic paternalism," but also to acknowledge their responsibility for these shortcomings in a society that proclaims itself to be integrated, cease its old practice of controlling and manipulating

everything that is said about the subject, and support an open and unprejudiced debate in which the principals affected have a voice and vote.

Manuel Cuesta Morúa presented "Political Integration of Afro-Descendant Communities in South America—Deliberative Democracy: Towards Strong Democracies," in which he focused on Cuba in a Latin American context, and found commonalities whose examination helps us understand the phenomenon in general terms. His analysis begins by explaining that the nations that emerged after the hemisphere's independence "are not sufficiently integrated because they are not democratic enough." This is exacerbated by the fact that they do not know or acknowledge the cultural pluralism within them. These factors are exceptionally present in the Cuban case, and are reflected even in its Constitution. Article 5 legally consecrates the cultural superiority of a hegemonic group in shaping the State's political will.

It is with these ideas in mind that Cuesta Morúa offers his own proposal: deliberative democracy, something he knows a great deal about, as he himself is well known, too, for his efforts to build a road to democracy in Cuba. He believes this particular kind of democracy represents a series of advantages that privilege "a orderly exchange of voices, because it presupposes an autonomous citizenry, cultural citizenship and an ability to exercise citizen sovereignty." All of this is absolutely necessary if we are to pave the road to the complete integration of Afro-descendants.

Rafel Campoamor's "The Africans in the Americas: Afro-Cubans as Part of the Afro-Latino Family" offers a summary description of the presence of Africans and their descendants in areas he has visited from Mexico to the Southern Cone. He also examines these

peoples' current problems and often refers to their particular histories.

José Hugo Fernández offers "The Dilemma of Anti-Racist Activism in Cuba," in which he elaborates on the official reaction to Cuban intellectual Roberto Zurbano when an article of his was published in the *New York Times*. Fernández discusses the controls that were created on the subject of race early on in the 1959 revolution. The risks Zurbano took and the measures employed against him for daring to suggest that there was racism in Cuba, government inaction in facing it, and decisions made that hurt instead of help Afro-descendants are part of continued and historical government policies. Not only did it prohibit any discussion of the problem from early on, but it also sanctioned in differing ways anyone who strayed from the canons predetermined by official rhetoric. The need to monopolize any treatment of the race problem has increased recently, in response to the explosive growth of the independent anti-racist, which is ever increasing its strength. Its potency has grown so much that the government has felt compelled to limitedly acknowledge the situation, although it still hasn't come up with any measures to resolve it.

This issue also contains an article by Hildebrando Chaviano, "Sonia Garro," which denounces the terrible violence committed against this civil rights activist and independent, community cultural promoter. Her adherence to democratic ideals and the need for the whole world to know what's going on in Cuba inspired her to want to demand citizens' freedoms for everyone and denounce the situation of political prisoners in Cuba before Pope Benedict XVI. This was all prevented by her rapid and violent arrest and imprisonment in 2012.

In "Racial Cuba: Where are We...Still?" Erois González discussed the lack of a solution to the problems faced daily by Afro-descendants, and the persistence of racist and discriminatory practices that efficiently prevent their egalitarian incorporation into the country's socioeconomic life and ruin their chances for personal fulfillment. James Weldon Hill offers us a piece about the ultimate reasons for this reality and the ways to confront the problems facing those who suffer discrimination in Cuba and around the world.

In our history section, we include "Céspedes Frees His Slaves: Two Hypotheses" and "'Compassion and Blacks in a Story by José Martí.'" In the former, Miguel Cabrera Peña uses philosophy of language to explain the reasons why Carlos Manuel de Céspedes freed his slaves to start an independence war against Spain, and the true importance and implications of his actions for the Cuban nation. He also analyzes the possible effects such an event may have had on the future attitude and actions of the freed slaves. As the author says, this is something that has generated a number of controversies. In the latter article, Jorge Camacho focuses on the story "La muñeca negra" [The Black Doll] and little Piedad's attitude towards her old and battered doll. Camacho explores some of José Martí's anti-racist tendencies or, what the author considers "...his 'charity,' 'duty' or 'compassion' for blacks or, in the end, his disposition for accepting what others reject."

In "Masks and tribulations..." Víctor Domínguez leads us in an exploration of Tomás González's artistic work. He has delved with singular brilliance in the art world as an actor, director, playwright, pedagogue, poet, screenwriter, painter and musician. A virtuoso who has known how to skillfully use the art of camouflage to present Cuban society's

problems, and denounce, behind masks, what is prohibited or imposed by power's impunity. González is yet one more person who has been denied his rightful place in the world of art and works among those who have dared to violate norms that place limits on creativity and individual freedom. His work reveals his persistence in rewarding Afro-descendants with their place in the Cuban nation and its culture. Jorge Olivera's article, "Zenaida Manfugás and her Other Milieus," pays hom-

age to this acclaimed Afro-Cuban pianist, who lived out her final years outside her homeland.

Finally, we offer a new chapter of "Grievous Abyss" in which Guillermo Ordóñez Lizama recounts the traumatic events Cuban society experienced during the massive exodus from the port of Mariel in 1980. In keeping with its tradition of imposing measures, the Cuban government forced many prisoners and ex-cons to emigrate to uncertain futures.

Dr. Juan Antonio Alvarado Ramos