

The group of personalities to whom tribute is paid in this issue is enhanced by the presence among them of Cuban historian Walterio Carbonell. His work is intimately linked to the central issues tackled by *ISLAS*. In this sense, his book *Cómo surgió la cultura nacional* [How the National Culture Emerged], published in 1961, stands out. It is a study dedicated to the process of the formation of Cuban identity; in it Carbonell offers a sharp, new perspective. The book, which is still inestimably relevant, constituted and constitutes a laudable attempt to open conduits conducive to an all-embracing understanding of Cubanness, in its broadest manifestations. The participation of blacks in this process is the essay's main point.



Throughout its pages, the author inveighs against century-old criteria and even myths. In *Cómo surgió la cultura nacional*, Carbonell smashes traditional paradigms and in great measure clears the way for a discussion based upon different assumptions, all of which conceptually revolutionized Cuban historiography.

It is true that in his desire to reevaluate, vindicate and emphasize the African presence in Cuba, as well as the role blacks have played in the national culture, certain sections of the book seem, at times, contradictory—even arguable. On occasion, its reading suggests to readers that Carbonell, who persistently called for debate on the matter, meant to cause just such a long needed but delayed conversation by deciding to introduce his ideas in an impulsive, provocative manner. His book was published in the early years of a revolutionary process that had proposed to bring about radical socioeconomic transformations. It seemed that the subject of blacks in Cuba was going to be of primary importance. For this reason *Cómo surgió la cultura nacional* was in no way extemporaneous, because it had the potential to stimulate an open debate on the matter. Yet, this did not happen. The author and his work resulted too polemical, thus the book was buried in libraries, where it might be found, and was ignored by centers of learning and researchers, who never cited it. Its author became almost academically invisible.

As a result, the José Martí National Library's reprinting of this essay, after nearly half a century of intentional oblivion, seems quite laudable. Notwithstanding, there are those who must be asking themselves if it is possible to bring out into the open Carbonell's judgements and criticisms today and, as such,

promote analyses that transcend a purely historical focus to delve into the current chaos that so interests the black population and in which it has so important a place. This remains to be seen. Meanwhile, in this issue *ISLAS* has published a brief excerpt from the book, which we have titled *Negros y criollos en la formación de la conciencia nacional* [Blacks and Criollos in the Formation of the National Consciousness]. This is not only a tribute to Walterio Carbonell but also an invitation to read his essay. For his part, José Hugo Fernández offers our readers an interesting, in-depth evaluation of the writer and his work in his article *Con más vidas que un gato* [With More Lives than a Cat].

Alejandro Aguilera and Radcliffe Bailey, who wholeheartedly agreed to illustrate this issue with a photographic essay containing representations of important moments in their artistic careers, deserve special mention. They are two artists, a Cuban and an African-American, who reside in the city of Atlanta (in the United States) and have developed a broad and symbolic collaborative project stemming from important ethical and aesthetic coincidences in their work. Numerous points of contact can be found in their works, although one should also consider the importance of one common denominator they share—a treatment of the African cultural presence and its transculturated manifestations in our countries. This serves to underscore how art, in any of its forms, is a unifying force for peoples and cultures.

Finally, we would like to highlight the fact that 2007 marks the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the parliamentary act that declared the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in territories under British imperial control. The eighth issue of *ISLAS* will publish works that deal with this event, and its significance and repercussions in Africa, the Americas and Europe. Our inclusion of the photo of Cape Coast Castle, in Ghana in this issue of *ISLAS*, which is on page 80, not only recalls this tragic chapter in the history of humankind but is intended to inspire writers, historians and other parties interested in this topic to send us their work.

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