

When we published our first issue of *ISLAS* back in Spring 2005, our project seemed like a dream whose realization would require overcoming tremendous challenges. Nearly three years have passed since then, and our journal is a palpable reality, available to all those interested in a very necessary debate about the issues of racism and discriminatory practices. Cuban writers living in Cuba have a special place in our publication because they face diverse obstacles. Their contributions have been increasingly enriching each subsequent issue of our journal. The enthusiastic response and acceptance by those who have had access to *ISLAS* not only encourages us a great deal, but also motivates us to redouble our efforts to offer a quality, polished product.



With this present issue, we would like to commemorate the founding of the Cuban Independent Party of Color, whose first meetings took place in Havana, August of 1908, ten years after the end of the Cuban War of Independence and six after the establishment of the Republic.

The last battle for independence (1895-1898) was based on a revolutionary program that proclaimed equality for all Cubans, regardless of race. Blacks and mestizos played a huge role in that battle's progress. Despite the enormous contradictions present in the new system of socio-racial relations that developed out of this close collaboration and shared goal with whites, one which served to fuel hopes that the new Republic would actually make the so often proclaimed ideal of equality a reality, the end result did not meet with those expectations, nor did the expected social changes come about as anticipated. The black population remained stuck in the least advantageous situation possible within a society whose initial intention had always been to enter the "civilized" world having erased any trace of the strong African presence from its history.

Early on, Cuban blacks manifested their inconformity with these circumstances in many ways. This was particularly true among the veterans of the Liberating Army. One of the most pronounced expressions of this inconformity was the establishment of the Independent Party of Color, in full compliance with the Constitution's laws for the creation of political parties in Cuba. While it is true that this party was created by and for the black population, its programmatic laws and principles never promoted the concept of black control over the governance of Cuba. Its primary objective was to achieve—via the electoral process—the equitable participation of blacks in the political, economic, and social life of the country, something that was otherwise entirely denied them.

It is not possible to explore all the errors that were committed during those years. Suffice it to say that from its very inception, the new party was constantly harassed and accused of racism. The attacks, which took place during a time of terrible racist hyste-

ria in which the press played an important role, led to the Cuban Senate approving a law prohibiting the existence of political parties whose constituency was made up of people of only one race or color. It was under these circumstances and in response to the campaign of harassment against them that the Independents of Color took up arms to protest this criminalization of their organization, a conflict that culminated in their violent and bloody massacre by the Constitutional Army.

We believe that this hundredth anniversary of the Independent Party of Color provides us with an excellent appropriate opportunity not to recall these events as part of a faraway and nebulous past without relevance today but rather to reflect—with the perspective that the passage of time affords us—on the reasons for the Party's creation, its criminalization, and its subsequent armed uprising. The lack of solutions to Cuba's race problems, which have become even worse in recent years, and the difficulties that blacks encounter upon trying to organize themselves without being considered bad Cubans or non-patriotic, should cause us to undertake just this kind of reflection.

José Hugo Fernández's article "Cuba. A Wound that does not Heal" touches right upon this issue. Fernández establishes a productive analogy between the circumstances that led to the creation of the Independent Party of Color, and the current situation of the black and mestizo population of Cuba.

His observations, which are echoed in a number of other articles in this current issue of ISLAS, as well as in previous issues, clearly establish the difference between the two historical moments and rule out the possibility or even need for a violent confrontation. Notwithstanding, these same differences are worrisome. In the context of Cuba, we are talking about a period one hundred years after the events of 1908-1912. Worse yet, in a contemporary era that is characterized internationally by well-established and renowned pro-civil rights and equality movements, Cuba is a country that has been subjected to a system of government that for 50 years has proclaimed ceaselessly the elimination of difference and full equality for all its citizens as one its fundamental achievements. Yet, things have not changed much with regard to race in Cuba. It is time to set aside these ineffective "comforting words," or half measures, so that political discourse on the island can better reflect Cuba's actual social reality and produce programs that if not identical to those mentioned above at least take into account the positions expressed by the General Political Project of the Socialist Democratic Current, for example (which we include in this issue in the article titled "The Race Problem in Cuba. A Silent Worry", by Leonardo Calvo Cárdenas).

The article "Founding Spirit," by Miguel Cabrera Peña, dedicated to the figure of Rafael Serra y Montalvo, further enriches this issue's evaluation of the Independent Party of Color. In it, the author establishes a strong relationship between this late nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century anti-racist combatant and this Party.

Jorge Camacho's essay "Fear and Gratitude in the *Patria* Chronicles of José Martí" leaps into the fray of this discussion about the Independent Party of Color precisely by contributing to our understanding of one of the factors that contributed to the criminalization of this Party and all the racist fury against its members that climaxed in 1912. He reminds us of the dominant ideology of the time, which emphasized that Cuba was an inclusive republic that celebrated racial brotherhood and was based, in principle, on the egalitarian and raceless ideals of José Martí. Any attempt to organize a unit such as the Independents of Color had no place whatsoever within a nationalist framework conceived in this manner.

Camacho sets forth an innovative analysis of Martí's anti-racist ideology, his motivation for it, and its inherent contradictions within a society whose goal it was to discriminate against and silence blacks. He places much emphasis on the myth of racial brotherhood that was embraced by the Creole elite and actually used against the Independent Party of Color, and attempts to show how "José Martí's *Patria* chronicles are an excellent place to read and discover the discursive political and literary strategies [Martí] used to convince his readers."

Finally, in this issue, we would like to mention a very special friend—the poet and novelist Osvaldo Navarro (1946-2008), who was working as the Spanish Editor of this very issue of *ISLAS* when on February 7, 2008 death caught him (and us, I might add) entirely unawares. Our anguish over this loss is difficult to put in words.

It is not at all possible to talk about Osvaldo, his live and extensive oeuvre in this brief note. Suffice it to say that he was one of the most relevant creators of his generation. The eloquent but profound, daring, restless, penetrating, and even visionary simplicity of his pen left us works of incalculable value for Cuban history and culture.

From the very beginning, when we approached him about collaborating with us on this journal, he responded with enthusiasm. Osvaldo was on the verge of becoming one of its most prominent contributors. I cannot forget the joy with which he accepted his charge as Spanish Editor towards the end of 2007. Our lengthy phone conversations between Miami and Mexico often concerned the journal's parameters and were chock-full of his observations, advice, suggestions and experiences: all the accumulated product of his fruitful life.

His consistent love for his island homeland, from which he found himself distanced during the last years of his life, and his vast breadth of interests for anything distinctively Cuban—the island's history and culture—prompted him to reward us with articles for *ISLAS* that ranged in topics from the daily life and work of the renowned Cuban babalawo Emilio O-Farrill to the acclaimed poet Regino Pedroso. I remember that when we published his article on Pedroso he sent me a simple and dignified message saying: "You have outdone yourself with my article on Regino." What better compliment could I possibly have received from a man like Osvaldo Navarro? Even Emilio Ichikawa, who spoke at the posthumous presentation of Osvaldo's poetry collection "*Horror al Vacío*" [Fear of Emptiness], said of this man that he "was one of those crucial individuals who should be defined only in his very own context, because there are no generalizations that would aptly fit him, despite his obvious place among others."

ISLAS has a long way to go. It has most certainly lost one of its principals. But his teachings are with us and enrich our daily work. Osvaldo's presence will continue on in *ISLAS* just as surely as *ISLAS* will continue on in him, like a tree with deep roots that despite the battering winter wind sprouts new life every spring.

Dr. Juan Antonio Alvarado Ramos
Editor-in-Chief