

We cannot sit idly by and not be concerned about what happens in Cuba and beyond. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.

Although paraphrased, these words written by Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. in his letter from a Birmingham Jail are as true today as they were in 1963. We open this magazine with these words, because for us no other words better articulate why we are introducing "Islas" to you today. Islas is a magazine dedicated to the issues and challenges of the Afro-Cuban people on the island of Cuba. When we use the term Afro-Cuban, we are referring to all people of color, including blacks, mulattos, and moros. The issues Afro-Cubans faced in the past and continue to face are the same issues faced by people of African descendants all over the world.



We share a common ancestry and a common sense of pain. More than a century has elapsed since the institution of slavery was abolished in the western world. Yet for many of our African descendants they continue to be plagued by prejudice, racial stereotypes, segregation, and discrimination, the legacy of slavery. Sadly, for millions of black people this is true, whether you live in

Brazil, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Benin, Cuba, or the United States. But if we reflect on this truism/situation, the questions before us are, does it have to stay this way? And, how can we help each other move beyond this predicament? These are the questions we started with in our early vision of *Islas*, and through *Islas* these are the issues we will tackle and address.

For Cuba, addressing issues of racism and discrimination takes on a unique challenge. For it is a country that for more than four decades embarked on a revolutionary process that quickly declared the elimination of centuries of racial discrimination dating from the arrival of the Spanish in 1492, when the indigenous people of the island were massacred and the black slave trade was introduced. Almost four decades of silence supported the assertion that the problem of racial discrimination had been eradicated. The results of which can be seen today in the all too familiar signs of racism in Afro-Cuban's daily lives, such as by the lack of representation in the political system, their weaker economic position, higher representation in the prisons and the most dilapidated neighborhoods. While the revolution increased access to education and health care for Afro-Cubans, what does it matter when it does not translate into access to work that pays enough to support themselves and their families.

The first step in beginning to address these issues is to develop a forum for the expressions and views of the multitude of ideas and opinions. Our hope is that "*Islas*" will be that forum. *Islas* will address culture, history, art, and literature. But it will also dedicate special attention to the most pressing contemporary problems that affect the Afro-Cuban population on the island. We will include perspectives from all sides of the issue. To achieve this goal, we invite the experiences, achievements and tactics of civil rights in other countries, such as in the U.S. and Latin America; discussions on the hidden history of slavery and racial discrimination in Cuba; and how to organize to bring about change.

Our premiere issue is dedicated to one of the most prominent figures in the fight for civil, human, and democratic rights in the United States, the black clergyman Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968). The magnitude of his pacifist movement, his courage and achievements reached the ideals that we hold so dear. We dedicate this issue to Dr. King with the hope that the light from his torch will illuminate the path to fight social injustice around the world. So let us end where we began with a quote from Dr. Martin Luther King from a message on "**Why We Can't Wait**" — Freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed.

Jaqueline H. Arroyo
Dorothy L. Jenkins