

The unique nature of the ongoing 2008 U.S. Presidential campaign has situated it among the most worldwide and newsworthy items in recent months. Little more than half a century after Rosa Park's anti-discriminatory acts of defiance in Alabama, in 1955, events that unleashed what came to be called the modern Civil Rights Movement, the Democratic Party has nominated an African-American man to the Presidency of the United States. This event and the person at its very core—the young and charismatic Barack Obama—are the daily stuff of the media all over. Neither his followers nor detractors can deny the impact of his campaign; his invigorating mantra of CHANGE has mobilized many folks from different walks of life. Young people, in particular, see in his message of integration and



transformation a possible and much needed renaissance and revival of U.S. national and international policies. More over, Obama has a real chance at winning the White House.

This is of particular significance to our journal, dedicated, as it is, precisely to people of African origin and to the struggle against racism. Barack Obama's rise and nomination

have transformed this nation's traditional political panorama.

The importance of Obama's run for the U.S. presidency has transcended national boundaries; he is acclaimed the world over. It is to this acclaim that one of this issue's sections is dedicated. The articles published therein offer our readers examples of the kind of confidence and optimism that the Senator from Illinois has inspired in Europe, India, Jamaica, Costa Rica, and Cuba.

Many see his unprecedented accomplishments not only as evidence of total change in the principles and values that have historically characterized U.S. society, but as a powerful blow to racial barriers around the world. During his visit to Germany, Berliners approvingly applauded the possibility of a change in leadership in the United States. India's Dalits (untouchables) also expressed their hope that Obama's ideas and projects would bring about non-violent change in their country, and contribute to the justice, peace, and progress they so desperately need. In Jamaica, young and old, blacks and whites all listen attentively to Obama's message.

For Manuel Cuesta Morúa, of the *Cuban Socialist Democratic Current*, the 'Obama Revolution,' as he calls it, "inspires hope for great change in Cuba. To have Cuban racism exposed from afar [from the U.S.] is not exactly what the Cuban government or a large part of Cuban society really want to have happen at this moment, particularly when racism is supposed to exist in the United States—but not in Cuba, according to them."

Despite the fact that in his campaign Obama has presented himself as a genuine candidate for *all* Americans, representing the country's own racial, ethnic, religious and cultural diversity, he has not been able to completely distance himself from issues like race or religion. One of his most difficult moments arose as the result of statements made by his former pastor, the Reverend Jeremiah Wright. Obama's response, in his speech of March 18, 2008, made it clear that his campaign for unity and change was beyond racial divisions, rejected any notion of racial confrontation, and acknowledged that the whole matter served as a reminder of the problem's complex nature. He emphasized that Wright's statements were not only erroneous but also divisive. According to Obama, only a constructive dialogue for true social justice could solve the problem of race and racism. Furthermore, he called upon the current generation of Americans to do its part toward this end.

Obama's nomination and the incredible degree of support he has garnered are both milestones in U.S. history, no matter what the final decision of the American people is on November 4th.

This issue of *ISLAS* also offers a humble tribute to Lydia Cabrera, one of Cuba's most prolific researchers of the presence of West African cosmivision and philosophy in Cuban culture. We offer here a brief selection from her book, *Cuentos Negros de Cuba* [Afro-Cuban Folktales], a unique, poetic, and revealing gift she bequeathed to us as just one product of her long and detailed work. Her stories reveal to us the multiple and complex processes of transculturation that resulted in what we know as Cuban popular culture. Images by Alejandro Aguilera illustrate the stories we have chosen to include; they are from a complete series he has dedicated to her.

During the final throes of finishing this issue, we found out about the creation in Havana of the Comité de Ciudadanos por la Integración Racial (CIR) [The Citizens' Committee for Racial Integration], among whose promoters are some of *ISLAS*'s most assiduous contributors. This initiative is supported by Proyecto Nuevo País [the New Country Project], which is backed by the Arco Progresista [the Progressive Spectrum]. The Committee is made up of Cubans of all races and colors, both inside and outside the island, who are interested in race issues. It is open to the most diverse points of view on subjects like discrimination, issues of identity, and the complete integration of blacks and mestizos into society and its cultural, historical and social debates. One of its priorities is to publish on the importance of these issues and promote initiatives that seek to use the idea of 'racial integration through difference' as their way to establish representational parity in all of Cuba's social and communicative spaces.

The CIR is planning to create a Debate Forum on the subject of race in Cuba and hopes to establish a permanent website on which exchanges about issues of race and identity can take place. From the pages of our very own journal, we applaud the creation of so commendable and necessary a project.

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