

Another lamentable and wrenching event has shaken the Cuban nation; it has marred its public image. Fortunately, though, it has not been possible to silence it. After an 86-day hunger strike, prisoner of conscience Orlando Zapata Tamayo died on February 23<sup>rd</sup>. For many, this has brought to mind Pedro Luis Boitel, and others, who are often anonymous, and who have given their lives in defense of an ideal that for fifty years has opposed that of the Cuban government. Zapata Tamayo died even as many condemnatory international declarations and calls for the release of another well-known peaceful opposition leader in Cuba—Dr. Darsi Ferrer—were circulating the globe. Yet, despite the fact this caused the regime in Havana quite a bit of consternation, it, in turn, did all it could—with help from its intellectual



cronies—to counteract the campaign on Dr. Ferrer’s behalf. The regime held obstinately steady and indifferent in its absolute non-recognition of the reasons that caused Zapata Tamayo to decide to start his hunger strike, on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009.

Manuel Cuesta Morúa’s article in this issue best defines the way in which the so-called Cuban Revolution behaved

in facing this sacrifice: “The cynical question posed to a Cuban diplomat when asked about the spelling of Zapata’s name—whether it was written with an S or Z, when he was questioned about the whereabouts of the then still living Zapata Tamayo, was answered with an attitude only an aristocratic mentality could summon up: disdain for “those who are nameless.” Ultimately, cynics exercise certain psychological privileges when facing reality because they feel well protected by the immunity and impunity of their class, and even by their belongings, privileges and securities. This sample of diplomatic sarcasm serves to highlight the cruel distancing of real power; only the aristocracy can mix the following ingredients into a ‘cocktail’—arrogance, disdain, underestimation and racism.”

Till now, revolutionary practice had often employed death to create heroes, by aptly using men and women who had at some time given their lives for their own professed ideals, or those of the Cuban Revolution’s leadership. The current situation concerns a humble man who to top it all off is also black (which makes him doubly guilty for his rebellion against established dogma). He is a member of that army of “nameless” Cubans who the ‘Messianic leadership’ has obliged to spend their lives thanking it for its ‘emancipatory act.’

Zapata Tamayo has written his name in the book of history in a dramatic way; he further enriched the contribution that Cuba’s African descendants have been making for several centuries. Given the current circumstances, the only thing he could do for this purpose was to sacrifice his only possession—his own life.

This time, the regime failed in its attempt to ignore his fate. Because Zapata Tamayo rejected the government's imposed power, it is significant that the government's attempt to characterize him as a delinquent—through stigmatizing, anti-black, racist stereotypes—also failed. Both the growing civil rights movement (whose actions would have been impossible just ten years ago) and international public opinion, and the martyr's own mother, with her "Zapata Lives!" cry, ensured that the very same government that expressed indifference to a dying man would pay a price.

Our readers will be able to learn detailed information about the life of this Amnesty International-recognized prisoner of conscience from a number of the articles published herein. Several authors, most of them well-known leaders of what must now be called the Cuban Civil Rights Movement, provide their own perspectives concerning this man's heroic decision. Orlando Zapata Tamayo, and independent journalist Guillermo Fariñas, another Afro-Cuban who is persevering in his decision to make his citizen's demands known and recognized—despite the price—are examples of Cubans born and educated after 1959, who as integral participants in the revolutionary effervescence of the years that ensued, have not only decided to break with the regime but also to challenge it—even if it costs them their lives. This is now an increasingly common decision in Cuba, a place that is full of deceptions and frustrations, but also of dreams of a democratic society, courage and a strict sense of patriotic duty.

It is under these circumstances, and because of the strengthening debate about the race problem, that "Inconsequence's Triple Rhetoric" continued trying to impose itself on the scene, as Leonardo Calvo Cárdenas so aptly shows in his article. The inconsistent arguments of politicians and intellectuals who have sold out to those in power often feed this rhetoric. Such is the case with one of Cuban television's well-known *Mesas Redondas* [Roundtables], which did not approach the subject from a critical, analytical perspective, but rather attempted to discredit and devalue the already impressive national and international campaign against racism in Cuba. It attempted to accomplish this by using obviously subjective, ambiguous and puerile language. This tendency is seconded by all the effort and even repression that the Cuban government puts into and exercises in trying to stay the growth of this unstoppable rights movement on the island.

If we understand this context, María Ileana Faguaga's book review of *Los fuegos fatuos de la nación cubana* [The Fatuous Flames of the Cuban Nation] is an extremely interesting read. Its principal goal is to focus on race "as a historical construction... as an ideology of hatred, of coldness; one lacking human solidarity, disdain, arrogance, exploitation, genocide and the psychological destruction of its victims." The book's authors "need to reconstruct the framework that conventional culture and history, in all their manifestations, have imposed" on the current situation of Cuba.

This issue also offers readers two pieces about the recently created *Observatorio Ciudadano contra la Discriminación* (OCD) [Citizens' Observatory Against Discrimination], which is "a civil effort whose purpose it is to build a network of assistance, legal aid and communication to help any Cuban citizen who has anywhere been the victim of discrimination of any sort."

Yet another set of articles fits right into our regular section of reflections, analyses and testimonies about the race problem in Cuba. "Songs of Pluralism in Afro-Cuban Religion," by Rodolfo Bofill, which is dedicated to the Letter of the Year, offers us insight into religions of African origin in Cuba and their current situation. This yearly, the publicly shared letter is crafted by a large group of Cuban *babalawos* [Yoruba priests] after carrying out divinations.

For his part, Dinizulu Gene Tinnie takes us back to the time of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, on the occasion of the historic voyage this year of the schooner *Amistad*, a replica, to Key West, after having visited several Caribbean cities, among them Matanzas and Havana, in Cuba.

In addition, we have “Authenticity and Keepin’ it Real: From Hip-Hop to Hip-Pop.” Inspired by reading our last issue’s articles on Hip-Hop in Cuba, Jerome Crooks, a young writer based in Pittsburgh, offers us a thorough review of this movement’s origins, successes and contradictions, as well as analyses to promote our understanding of it.

I could not finish this note without gratefully acknowledging the warm welcome I received from professors and students at Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh during my recent visit to the City of Pittsburgh. My visit coincided precisely with the time during which we were preparing this issue. I am especially appreciative of my collaboration with students from Kenya C. Dworkin’s Spanish and Translation classes. As our readers will see, they translated into English several of this issue’s articles. I would like to offer them all my sincerest thanks.

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Editor-in-Chief