

## Editor's Note

The *Afro-Hispanic Review's* transfer to Vanderbilt University marks an important moment for both the *Review* and the University. The *Afro-Hispanic Review* began some twenty-five years ago at Howard University under the auspices of professors Ian Smart of Howard University and the late Stanley Cyrus of Clayton State College. Subsequently, professors Marvin Lewis and Edward Mullen of the University of Missouri-Columbia continued to edit the journal at their institution, where it remained until the publication of the present issue. The *Afro-Hispanic Review* is indeed the oldest and most distinguished journal to consider the African Diaspora experience in the Hispanic World. The approach allows scholars of various disciplines to transcend geographic, temporal, cultural, linguistic, and other differences that emerged as a result of African slavery, the slave traffic, and the creation of nation-states. Though slavery is no longer a viable institution, racism and discrimination against blacks, and the need to consider them as members of Pliny the Elder's "Monstrous Races," continues to persist, regardless of country, region, period, economic, social, and political systems.

The *Afro-Hispanic Review's* mission, as stated by the previous editors, is to reflect the richness of Afro-Hispanic cultures and their contributions to the development of national and cultural discourses. Unfortunately, most scholars tend to gloss over the black presence in literature, culture, and society. Very few ever recognize the contributions of blacks and, when they do, usually the same writers, artists, and works are cited. The *Afro-Hispanic Review* attempts to question hegemonic approaches to academic disciplines, encourage pluralistic inquiries into cultural studies, and challenge ideological and cultural assumptions associated with canon formation, of which blacks and works about blacks have been conspicuously absent. I remember some years ago the response I received from a reputable publisher in Madrid, after submitting a scholarly edition on the works of the slave-poet Juan Francisco Manzano, which contained unpublished materials. The editor explained to me that the press could not publish Manzano's works simply because "Manzano was not a classic." Apparently, the editorial staff did not consider a black to be part of the white or European aesthetics. However, the black experience helps to visualize another, albeit different, aspect of Western society. At the risk of overgeneralizing, blacks have influenced all aspects of Western society. There is no lack of works written by or about blacks; there is only an absence of knowledge about them. The

*Afro-Hispanic Review* will continue to provide a broad forum for the discussion of blacks and works about blacks, which includes black authors who write about subjects other than race.

The *Afro-Hispanic Review* is also an important milestone for Vanderbilt, as the University moves into the twenty-first century as a leading academic institution. With the challenging agenda set by Chancellor E. Gordon Gee and other high level administrators, especially the Dean of Arts and Science, to raise standards, increase diversity, and consider the Americas as a unified region, as embodied by the newly created Center for the Americas, the *Afro-Hispanic Review* represents a strong commitment to these and other initiatives. The *Afro-Hispanic Review* is the first step in making Vanderbilt a major institution for researching Afro-Hispanics and Latinos.

Many colleagues are responsible for bringing the *Afro-Hispanic Review* to Vanderbilt. First and foremost, I want to thank Richard McCarty, Dean of Arts and Science, for his unwavering support of my contributions to our institution and the academic profession. His enthusiasm made possible the transfer of the journal to Vanderbilt. Also, I am grateful to colleagues in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese for their excitement and, in particular, to our Chair, Cathy Jade, for making the arrangements to provide me with the necessary conditions to edit and publish the *Afro-Hispanic Review*. Special mention goes to Lucius Outlaw, Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education, who embraced the idea and put me in contact with Dr. Frank Dobson, Director of the Bishop Johnson Black Cultural Center. It was over a memorable lunch that Frank welcomed the *Review* into his Center, and it is there that the *Review* has found a home. The Bishop Johnson Black Cultural Center is featured on the back cover of the *Afro-Hispanic Review*. To provide my editorial signature, the *Review* welcomes interdisciplinary works as they relate to Afro-Hispanics in Spanish, English, and Portuguese. Also, the *Review's* format and appearance has been changed.

Since the publication of the last issue, in the field of literature we mourn the death of three great authors: one from Colombia and two from Cuba. Manuel Zapata Olivella (1920-2004) is without a doubt one of the most important writers of African descent of the twentieth century. A writer, doctor, and anthropologist, he defended the rights of all blacks and inspired generations of writers and critics to rethink issues pertaining to the African Diaspora. He wrote numerous works, but he will be remembered for his novels *En Chimá nace un santo* (1961), *Chambacú corral de negros* (1963), and above all his *Changó el gran putas* (1983), which is mandatory reading for any serious student of Latin American literature. In this masterfully written work, Zapata Olivella convincingly shows what we attempt to illustrate in the *Review*, that the African Diaspora represents a point of coherence and convergence in the

Americas.

Antonio Benítez Rojo (1931-2005) was one of the few intellectuals I have met who knew everything about the Caribbean. Professor, writer, and critic, he will be remembered for his collections of short stories, *Tute de reyes* (1967), *Escudo de hojas secas* (1968), his novel *El mar de las lentejas* (1979), and certainly *La isla que se repite* (1989), a postmodern meditation about the Caribbean. Many of his stories underscore the significance of African religions for understanding Caribbean society.

Guillermo Cabrera Infante (1929-2005), winner of the 1997 Premio Cervantes, needs no introduction. Cabrera Infante was simply one of the best writers that has ever lived. A tireless promoter of Cuban culture, his literary supplement, *Lunes de Revolución* (1959-1961), of the newspaper *Revolución*, helped create the conditions that led to what later became the novel of the Boom period in Latin American literature. Although short lived, *Lunes de Revolución* was the vehicle for disseminating all national and world literatures and cultures, and provided a forum for writers to meet each other. Critics rightfully celebrate *Tres tristes tigres* (1967), as a postmodern novel written in Cuban about Havana, language, music, cinema, race, and the nightlife. In his masterful novel, Cabrera Infante recognizes that blacks and Afro-Cuban religious myths are also an essential part of Cuban culture. This is evident, for example, in the section “Seseribó,” but also in the character La Estrella, who is a symbol of Yemayá, the Yoruba representation of our Lady of Regla. Cabrera Infante highlights this protagonist in *Ella cantaba boleros* (1996), which also includes another character from his admirable *La Habana para un Infante Difunto* (1979). With the passing of these luminary figures, we are at the crossroads of a period in which Afro-Hispanics will play an increasing role in scholarly studies. This is the case, not only because of their rightful contributions to literature, history, culture, and society, but because their condition allows scholars to problematize contemporary concepts related to identity, the nation, and nationality, as well as modern, postmodern, and postcolonial studies.

Finally, I want to thank our Guest Editor, Professor Lourdes Martínez-Echazábal, for her tireless work in assembling the present issue of the *Afro-Hispanic Review*, “Homenaje a Manuel (‘Manolo’) Granados,” and professors Marvin Lewis and Edward Mullen for entrusting me with the stewardship of the *Afro-Hispanic Review*.

William Luis  
Editor

