

Editor's Note

The election of a new US president in November of 2008 marks the official beginning of the Age of Obama. As a candidate who received unprecedented support from an overwhelming majority of the population, including those who continue to be at the margins of society—African Americans, Hispanics, and Latinos—I expect that the newly elected president will articulate national and world visions that will be dramatically different from those of the outgoing administration. I am hopeful that this other vision will be more compatible with the lives and cultures of the many different people who reside in the United States. It will communicate a more accurate and representative concept of the nation and the national, one that reflects the country's multiracial and multiethnic peoples and cultures.

Indeed, in growing numbers, scholars are paying close attention to topics and regions of the world that in previous decades were considered unworthy of serious academic research, studies that the *Afro-Hispanic Review* has unwaveringly promoted. Nevertheless, the shifts we are witnessing are not totally serendipitous, nor are they without historical, political, demographic, and literary considerations. These factors have always been present but are currently more noticeable and represent a force that cannot be silenced or made to disappear.

With the increase in Hispanic immigrants and a growing Latino population, centers of higher education have had to make the proper adjustments and reorganize priorities to address trends in the population and the most recent interests of students and scholars. Many universities across the country have transferred resources from the more “prestigious” European languages and programs to accommodate growing demands for Spanish language and Spanish American literature courses. A similar case can be made for the invaluable presence of African American, Afro-Hispanic, Latin American, and Latino Studies programs, which have become an inherent part of any serious academic offering. Certainly, the guiding principles enacted to increase admission of underrepresented groups in previous decades were instrumental in diversifying student population, thus reflecting more accurately the ethnic and racial composition of society. These decisions would have long-term effects, such as “legitimizing” studies that reflect a more comprehensive approach to a diverse society; they also create avenues for researchers that guide current dialogues about pertinent topics such as race, gender, politics, criticism, and the canon. With the election of Obama, I expect greater awareness of significant matters previously considered marginal by those interested in promoting singular issues that are closer to their own racial, ethnic, sexual, and cultural backgrounds. While the

Afro-Hispanic Review supports an open dialogue on any and all topics, one can only expect the usual and predictable resistance by the traditional quarters of society that have a personal interest in upholding a rapidly fading status quo.

The shifting patterns are visible in the lives, actions, and activities of people throughout the Americas and evident in my recent travels. In the summer of 2008, I attended the Afro-Latin American Research Association meeting held in the beautiful city of Cartagena, Colombia. The conference, which was well attended and organized, included two distinguished guest speakers, Prof. Alfonso Múnera Cavadía, of the Universidad de Cartagena, who presented a provocative interpretation of Colombian history, and Edelma Zapata Pérez, who shared her poetic talents with the attentive audience; some of her poems appear in the present issue of the *Afro-Hispanic Review*. Edelma has become a close friend of Vanderbilt University and the *Afro-Hispanic Review* in particular. Edelma is the daughter of the famed Afro-Colombian writer, Manuel Zapata Olivella (1920–2004), and was instrumental in preparing a monographic issue on his life and works (AHR 24.1). Vanderbilt has been fortunate to acquire Zapata Olivella's archives, which will be housed and preserved in the Jean and Alexander Heard Library; these manuscripts will be made available to researchers and students wanting to explore further the Afro-Hispanic experience.

While the ALARA Advisory Committee worked hard to ensure the success of the conference, Prof. Ligia Aldana was the site coordinator and her contacts proved invaluable. For example, participants were invited to visit the Palenque de San Basilio, founded by Benko Bioho in the sixteenth century, currently housing over 3,000 inhabitants. There, we were treated to Champeta music, with the sounds of Viviano and his Ane Swing, among other musicians, and dancers expressing movements that recalled those poeticized by negrista writers, in poems such as José Zacarías Tallet's "La rumba," Emilio Ballagas's "Rumba," Ramón Guirao's "Bailadora de rumba," and Marcelino Arozarena's "Caridá." In my own writings I had researched the *palenques* of El Frijol, Bumba, and Maluala, in Cuba, and read about Zumbi's Quilombo dos Palmares, of Brazil, but this was my first visit to the Palenque de San Basilio. The Palenque continues to survive into the present, maintaining its traditions of language, governance, dance, music, and matrimony, including polygamy. As we toured the Palenque and saw the schools, homes, and recreational centers, some of us walked to the stream that traverses the land; in the distance, our guides pointed out the women washing the clothing contained in their straw baskets. We were informed that this is the same stream *palenqueros* use to bathe. However, a member of the community was quick to explain that men and women gather in different areas of the stream, apart from

each other. According to local customs, neither one is permitted to go outside of his or her own space to see or watch the opposite sex, without serious consequences to the voyeur.

My interaction with Edelma was another high point of my visit to Cartagena. While I had corresponded with Edelma, this was our first, and much-anticipated meeting. In one of our many conversations, Edelma invited me to visit her in Bogotá, where we could continue our exchanges. Approximately one month after the Cartagena conference, I returned to Colombia, this time to Bogotá, where Edelma received me in her apartment, in the company of her companion, Martha, also from Manuel's native town of Lorica. Edelma showed me Manuel's work, which included numerous articles, manuscripts, letters, cassette recordings, and other materials packed into boxes that outlined Edelma's vast living area, too many to examine during my brief visit. Our conversations were as numerous and as varied as the documents contained in the boxes in Edelma's livingroom. Some of these included the US elections, the stock market crisis, the war in Iraq, politics in Colombia, and Edelma's own health, which continues to fail.

The visit would not have been complete without tasting the typical *bandeja paisa*, with rice, beans, ground beef, pork rind, sausage, fried bananas, arepa, and a fried egg on top; and *ajiaco santafereño*, with a thick chicken soup, corn on the cob, three types of potatoes, and aromatic herbs, which reminded me of the different ingredients in the Cuban dish of the same name, but also the Puerto Rican and Dominican *sancocho*; the Cuban *ajiaco* is closer to the *sancocho*. Of course, while in Bogotá I enjoyed the wonders of the city. I rode the funicular up to the Cerro de Monserrate, then walked down to the Plaza de Bolívar, and meandered through the Candelaria, listening to the sounds, voices, and *vallenatos* of the area. I also had the opportunity to see the much talked about salt cathedral, in Zipaquirá, and typical colonial cities like Ráquira, Villa de Leiva, and Tunja. Indeed, the trip was memorable.

Most recently, the day after the elections, I attended the 24th Annual Symposium on African American Culture and Philosophy at Purdue University, this year entitled "(Re)Visioning the Black Caribbean: Spaces, Places, and Voices," organized by Prof. Antonio Tillis. This most exciting symposium considered the Caribbean region as a whole, with its many languages, cultures, and traditions. It was a real pleasure to sustain dialogues with scholars interested in a multilingual and multicultural area known for generating many beginnings, produced by the Encounter between the Old and New Worlds. The Caribbean is a heterogeneous space where differences combine and coexist. I propose to read the Caribbean as a metaphor from which to consider the rest of the Americas.

As we look towards the year 2009, the *Afro-Hispanic Review* will prepare a monographic issue on Equatorial Guinea, to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of this country's independence. Professors Benita Sampedro Vizcaya and Baltasar Fra-Molinero will be the guest editors. The issue will coincide with the conference, "Between Three Continents: Rethinking Equatorial Guinea on the Fortieth Anniversary of its Independence from Spain," April 2–4, 2009, to be held at Hofstra University, also organized by professors Sampedro Vizcaya and Fra-Molinero. Both the conference and the monographic issue will prove to be of permanent value.