

Editor's Note

Afro-Hispanics comprise a vital and growing sector of the world's Hispanic populations. The *Afro-Hispanic Review* continues to evolve and reflect the dynamic trends I observe in my readings, conversations, and travels. During the summer, I attended two international conferences. The first was the Latin American Studies Association meeting in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. As usual, there were many exciting sessions, with interesting topics, including the one in which I was invited to partake, titled Slavery, Literacy, and the Rise of the Afro-Latin American Intellectual. The panel promoted interdisciplinary studies; in this case, a literary critic joined a distinguished group of historians.

An important component of this and other conferences is to explore local culture, meet new people, and visit with old friends. I did most of my sightseeing with Evelyn Hu-DeHart and Kathy López, guest editors of the Spring 2007 *Afro-Hispanic Review* issue on Afro-Asia, and together we marveled at the Cristo Redentor and the Pão de Açúcar, which we visited one misty afternoon, among other spectacular sights, too numerous to mention in this note. I also joined Bob Márquez and his wife Maddie, to celebrate her birthday. She found a wonderful restaurant, Aprazível, high above in the old Santa Teresa district, with a beautiful view of downtown Rio and the Guanabara Bay, and we watched as the sun made its daily journey to the bottom of the horizon and the moon found its desired place amongst the stars. For those who have not had the good fortune to travel to Rio, it is an amazing city, full of activities, various styles of architecture, striking land formations, and, of course, wonderful restaurants. For me, the sea is always a major attraction, regardless of the location and weather; I am compelled to pay homage to Yemayá.

There were many conference participants, but we were scattered throughout the Rio tapestry. And, though the arrangements at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica were comfortable and well designed, they were not necessarily conducive to the casual interactions and accidental encounters with colleagues that are common at other venues. As I review the program, I am still surprised to find the names of Vanderbilt colleagues who attended, but whom I did not see, not even from a distance.

The conference theme, Rethinking Inequalities, seemed to mirror the city's location. The public and accessible spaces of central Rio were in sharp contrast to the *favelas* on the outskirts of the city. This became evident to me as I made my way to Petrópolis and saw what seemed to be kilometer after kilometer of shantytowns painted on the distant landscape, everywhere, from the top of rolling hills to the bottom of what appeared to be flood plains.

In August I attended the IX Seminario Internacional de Estudios del Caribe, in Cartagena, Colombia. I must confess that Cartagena has rapidly become one of my favorite places to visit. And like other coastal cities, Cartagena captures both the intellectual and the expressive spirit of the greater Caribbean. The fortification of the colonial district reminded me of those found in Havana, San Juan, and Santo Domingo, a visual reminder of the common history of pirate attacks, slave markets, and Spanish colonization. The Club de Pesca sits atop the Fuerte de San Sebastián del Pastelillo, overlooking the radiant Getsemaní bay of Cartagena. Once there, one can sample the Pescadito Frente al Mar—with coconut rice, green salad, and the famous *patacones*—or the Beef Tournedo with a red wine and blue cheese reduction. The sea, yes, the sea, is most spectacular when traveling to Barú.

Perhaps I ought to return to the purpose of this note. Professor Alfonso Múnera and his staff should be congratulated for organizing an important conference that underscored a broader definition of the Caribbean, one that goes beyond the geographical aggregation of island nations. As is to be expected, the mainland nations, like Colombia, share similar histories and cultures known to the islands. Manuel Zapata Olivella described this Greater Caribbean in his opus, *Changó, el gran putas*, by including Haiti with Colombia and Mexico, as well as Brazil and the United States. From Zapata Olivella's perspective, the Caribbean is present in all of these diverse regions, in spite of different languages and colonial pasts. However, I was surprised to notice that most scholars in attendance, though they understood the need to promote a broader understanding of the Caribbean, did not give Manuel Zapata Olivella the visionary status we confer upon him in the United States.

In June of 2009, Benin's Ambassador to the UNESCO and Chairman of the UNESCO Executive Board, Olabiyi Babalola Joseph Yai, presented Cuba with the Cultural Diversity Medal, which was received by the Minister of Culture, Abel Prieto. The event took place during the inauguration of the museum La Ruta del Esclavo, at the San Severino castle, in Matanzas, Cuba. The Slave Route Project unveils the tragedy of slavery, studies the effects of that system in the contemporary period, and attempts to alter its cultural legacy by promoting mutual understanding among all people, regardless of race or color. Individual Cuban intellectuals were honored for their contributions with the following awards: Alicia Alonso, the Mahatma Gandhi Medal; Rogelio Martínez Furé, Jean Stubbs, Tomás Robaina, and the Familia Baro de Jovellanos, the Toussaint L'Ouverture Medals; Miguel Barnet, the Simón Bolívar Medal; Nancy Morejón, Abel Prieto, and Pedro Pérez Sarduy, the Victor Hugo Medals; Gloria Rolando, the

Federico Fellini Medal; Manuel Mendive and the Yoruba Cultural Association, the Cultural Diversity Medals.

On a more somber note, we mourn the death of our great friend, Blas Jiménez, who passed away of a stroke on November 13, in his native Dominican Republic. A poet and essayist, Blas was a kind and soft-spoken person who expressed himself with commitment and determination. He made enormous contributions to the redefinition of Dominican identity. His pioneering Afro-Dominican discourse challenged the Dominican cultural and political establishments with readings that defied the national and racial dichotomies that represented Haitians as the only blacks on the island of Hispaniola and constructed Dominican identity as Spanish, Catholic, and “indio.” He authored *Aquí . . . otro español* (1980, 2000), *Exigencias de un cimarrón (en sueños): versos del negro Blas III* (1987), *El nativo (versos en cuentos para espantar zombies): versos del negro Blas IV* (1996), *Caribe africano en despertar* (1984, 2006), *Desde la orilla: hacia una nacionalidad sin desalajos* (2004), and *Afrodominicano por elección, negro por nacimiento* (2008). Blas was an outspoken opponent of injustices. In “Como cimarrón bailando al caer la noche,” the speaker becomes a symbol of Afro-Dominicans:

Sentir los foetes sobre las espaldas
sobre mi lomo indómito
sobre la raza.

Sentir los grilletes alrededor del cuello
alrededor de las piernas
alrededor de mi alma.

Sentir las cadenas que arrastran los años
que arrastran las historias
que arrastramos.
Sentir el odio contra el odio.

Blas received numerous recognitions, including the Premio Internacional de la Diáspora Africana “Ethel L. Paine” (1998), and an appointment as Secretary General of the Comisión Nacional Dominicana para la Organización de las Naciones Unidas para la Educación, la Ciencia, la Cultura y la Comunicación of the UNESCO (2000–2003). I last saw Blas in May of 2006, when he invited me to give the keynote address at a symposium he had organized at the Biblioteca de la República Dominicana, where I spoke about Afro-Hispanic writers, from Juan Francisco Manzano to Blas Jiménez himself. In a subsequent e-mail, he wanted me to return to Santo Domingo to speak about the Asian experience

in the Caribbean. I owe Blas a debt that I am unable to repay. Blas is survived by his wife Dulce María Guzmán and their children Iván, Isis, and Alan.

The present issue on Equatorial Guinea contains new and exciting materials and is unlike any other we have published. It is interdisciplinary and gathers contributions in literary criticism, history, economics, anthropology, political science, dance, cinema, music, and sociology, but also includes poetry, fiction, drama, testimony, essay, interviews, and art. In many respects, certainly linked to the Equatorial Guinean post-Colonial condition, the contributions are fluid and dynamic and cannot be defined by any one particular area of study. Rather, they crisscross different fields, and some are difficult to classify. For this reason we have tried to rethink how best to present these collaborations to our readers. We began with the guest editors' thematic Table of Contents, which undid the traditional categories known to the readers of the *Afro-Hispanic Review*. For example, "Entering and Leaving Exile/Migration and the (Political) Future" opened with Michael Ugarte's essay about exile, in which he invites Guinean writers to respond. This category included Francisco Zamora Lobo's "En septiembre de 1969 Madrid no era ninguna fiesta," but also interviews with Ciriaco Bokesa and Juan Balboa Boneke, and M'bare N'gom's "Writing from Exile: Memories, Displacements, and the Construction of National Identity in the Poetic Production of Equatorial Guinea" and Jeremy Rich's "*Nous, les équatois*: Equatorial Guinean Immigrants in Contemporary Gabon," both comprehensive articles about the existing Equatorial Guinean exile conditions. And after many fruitful conversations, we offer our readers the organization of the present issue. The section "Contested Narratives and Multidisciplinary Interventions" incorporates the contributions by Ugarte, Zamora Lobo, the interviews with the writers Bokesa and Balboa Boneke, in addition to Justo Bolekia Boleká's "Escritores guineoecuatorianos y diáspora" and Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel's "Dos reflexiones sobre la práctica del poder." Similarly, the section "Entering and Leaving Exile/Migration and the (Political) Future" groups articles by M'bare N'gom, Jeremy Rich, Baltasar Fra-Moliner, Ibrahim Sundiata, Enrique Nzang Okenve, and Remei Sipi Mayo. There are others such as "Curated Spaces: Visual Perspectives," containing artwork by Ramón Esono Ebalé and Luis Royo del Pozo, and notations by Almudena González Vigil and Eloísa Vaello Marco, which remained unchanged. Though we are aware that our audience is accustomed to reading fiction and non-fiction in their respective categories, for this issue we have sought to represent the uniqueness of the contributions. But since the *AHR* is an academic journal, many of the peer reviewed contributions appear in the first half of the journal. We have tried to gather original manuscripts from writers

living under the current regime as well as those in exile, and from scholars in many parts of the world.

The issue we offer our readers has also presented challenges we have not previously encountered. While it is the policy of the journal to oppose censorship and allow an honest and meaningful exchange of ideas, we had to place that concern to one side. For example, we requested that Ramón Esono Ebalé's drawings be returned to their original condition, since certain political statements were removed from the submitted comics, leaving glaring, empty text boxes. However, we withdrew our request upon learning that the words could place his life in danger. As Edward Said expressed in his original "The World, the Text, the Critic," the text does not exist in a vacuum; it gains greater meaning when placed in its proper context, and the critic helps to uncover its significance. This situation meant taking into account the artist's safety and respecting his self-censorship. I want to thank Benita Sampedro Vizcaya and Baltasar Fra-Molinero for their generous and tireless work in producing what we are certain will be a work of permanent value.

As we prepare to go to press in early January, I feel compelled to express some thoughts about the devastating earthquake that has weakened the already fragile underpinnings of Haitian society. Founded as a proud and victorious nation, the first in Latin America to free slaves and shed the yoke of European colonialism, it seems as if this nation state has been suffering ever since. Other countries in the region have followed Haiti's example to become sovereign nations, but none has been made to pay the price for slaves having dared to rise up and liberate themselves from whites, who robbed them of their livelihood. Let us not forget that Simón Bolívar, architect of the liberation movement against Spain, favored liberation without emancipation. The French were the first but not the only Western power to ransack the infant nation's economy, by demanding war reparations in wood, a decision that contributed to the deforestation of the countryside. Other nations throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries made similar demands without considering how their actions would impact the country's infrastructure, political system, and people.

It is unfortunate that it takes a catastrophic event of this magnitude to make the world's citizenry respond in a humane and caring manner. However, the suffering of Haitians, whether caused by external or internal factors, is not of recent vintage. It has been largely ignored and not given the seriousness it deserves. This is particularly the case with those countries that used their power to control the Haitian economy, fill their coffers, and then turn their backs on the misery they created. Haiti is experiencing a natural disaster which could not have

been prevented. But the historical neglect of the conditions on the island produced a weakened economy with high unemployment, minimal infrastructure, poor sanitation, lax building codes, and inadequate healthcare, hospitals, roads, schools, and other services taken for granted by other countries of the hemisphere. As a result of this neglect, many lives that could have been saved have been lost. Indeed, this is the greatest catastrophe. I fear that once the recovery period comes to an end, and the newscasters leave the island, Haiti will once again be abandoned by the community of nations.

We are proud to announce that the next monographic issue of the *Afro-Hispanic Review* will be on Afro-Brazil, a topic deemed important in relation to the Afro-Hispanic experience. Professors Emanuelle Oliveira, of Vanderbilt University, and Isis McElroy, of Arizona State University, were kind to accept my invitation to be our next guest editors. If you would like to contribute to another groundbreaking monograph, send your queries to professors Oliveira and McElroy. Finally, I want to thank Jason Parker for his help in completing the monographic issue we now present to our readers.

William Luis
Editor