

Editor's Note

In the last academic year, the *Afro-Hispanic Review* published two monographic issues: one on Hispaniola and the other on Cuba. The first envisioned Haiti and the Dominican Republic as two countries that share a common history, culture, and geographic space. It featured the works of Dominican writers like Julia Álvarez and Chiqui Vicioso and Haitian creators like Edwidge Danticat and Edouard Duval Carrié. The second focused on the events surrounding the Zurbano Affair. As we know, the previous director of the Publishing House of Casa de las Américas was dismissed from his position for writing what became a controversial Op-Ed in *The New York Times*, “For Blacks in Cuba, the Revolution Hasn’t Begun,” which addressed racism in contemporary Cuba. The title received much attention, which in its original form had been submitted as “El país que viene: ¿Y mi Cuba negra?” As Alan West-Durán indicated in his contribution, “Zurbano and *The New York Times*: Lost and Found in Translation,” Kristina Cordero, a staffer of the newspaper reformulated the title more than once. The monographic issue was launched in Evelyn Hu-Dehart’s Havana apartment, located next to Casa de las Américas. She hosted the event and prepared a wonderful meal for invited guests. Attendees included Tomás Fernández Robaina, Erik Olivera Rubio, Gisala Arandia, Martha Lesme, among others. Zurbano presided over the event and spoke eloquently about the actions that lead to his dismissal. The monograph attempts to present an objective view of the Zurbano Affair and gathers the most important and representative discussions of those critical of his essay as well as those who supported his position. Though Zurbano has explained more than once that the published title, “For Blacks in Cuba, the Revolution Hasn’t Begun,” was not his, a position that was confirmed when he later made public the original essay “El país que viene: ¿Y mi Cuba negra?,” none of his adversaries has retracted his or her position.

There was much discussion of the essay in the Internet, but those who did not have access to this medium of communication had little or no information about Zurbano’s statements about blacks in Cuba and the polemic that ensued. For this reason it was imperative that the discussion also appear in print, where it could circulate throughout the island and reach readers who did not have access to a technology we often take for granted. While I did take a box containing some twenty copies of the journal to Cuba, it was hardly enough to reach a substantial number of readers. Nevertheless, we do hope that the issue will circulate and help forge a conversation about race and

racism in Cuba. Zurbano presented copies of the journal to Roberto Fernández Retamar, Miguel Barnet, Zuleica Romay, and other key government officials.

The monographic issue was on display at the Tenth Conference on Cuban and Cuban-American Studies meeting, “‘More Than White, More Than Mulatto, More Than Black’: Racial Politics in Cuba and the Americas,” in February of 2015. It was addressed in a panel entitled “Afrointelectualidades: Blackness and Cultural Expression in Post-1959 Cuba,” with panelists Alan West-Durán, Odette Casamayor-Cisneros, César Salgado, and the present writer. For some reason the Florida International University (FIU) booksellers did not order the journal, and the few copies I carried with me were relegated to a smaller table detached from the book display.

In the month of November I attended an international conference on Manuel Zapata Olivella in Popayán, Colombia, organized by William Mina, arguably the foremost authority on the works of one of the most salient figures of the Afro-Hispanic world. On land once settled by Misak and Guambiano Indians, the Spanish conquistador Sebastián de Belalcázar founded Popayán in 1537. This beautiful colonial municipality, about two hours east of Cali, is located in the mountains of the Cauca, and rests over five thousand feet above sea level. Known as the “white city,” the architecture is characteristic of the period and features buildings with white facades and wrought iron ornamental gates, windows, and balconies. Of the city’s many attractions, I was most intrigued by the Humilladero Bridge, which connects the city center to the poor Bolívar neighborhood. According to one explanation, there are two bridges: one large, elegant, and well-built called Humilladero Bridge (1873) and another that sits below the main one—smaller, narrower, rustic, and inconvenient to access called Puente de la Custodia (1713). The main bridge looks down on the smaller one. Back in the day, whites and members of the upper classes used the main bridge, and the nonwhite populace was forced to traverse the smaller one, as if the Humilladero Bridge was meant to humiliate those who crossed the more primitive one.

Popayán’s prominent features include its many churches. Some of these are San Francisco (sixteenth century), the largest one and home to two mummies (I did not see them); Santo Domingo (1741); La Ermita de Jesús Nazareno (1546); the church and convent of San Agustín (seventeenth century); San José (1702); the Santuario de Belén (1681); and the Catedral Basílica de Nuestra Señora de Asunción de Popayán (1682). Except for the Ermita, all the other earlier buildings

were destroyed during the earthquake of 1736. I was told numerous times that the Holy Week procession that dates to 1558 is a sight not to be missed. The Crucifixion of Christ is represented by *cargueros*, who shoulder the floats with religious motifs on their backs, as if they were also carrying Christ's cross.

At fifteen thousand feet above sea level, the Volcán Puraceá surrounds Popayán, as do the Coconuco Hot Springs and the picturesque town of Silvia. I did not visit the volcano, but I was most impressed by Silvia. Like Popayán, the buildings have the typical white walls and a large indoor market; Tuesdays the Guambiano Indians sell produce and wears. Two images caught my attention. The first, a woman's wealth and prestige is determined by the number of white beaded necklaces she sports; the second, both men and women wear the same colorful blue with pink trim capes and skirts, and brown or black felt bowler hats.

The Universidad del Cauca sponsored the Homenaje Internacional a Manuel Zapata Olivella, in November of 2014. The three-day conference covered all aspects of Manuel's work: music, religion, theatre, ethnoculture, philosophy, human rights, anthropology, and history, among others. It highlighted distinguished speakers like William Mina, Marco Polo Hernández, Darío Henao, Clément Akassi Animan, Cristina Rodríguez Cabral, and the present writer. Indeed, Manuel is one of the luminary figures of the twentieth century. I am still perplexed by the little attention he has received.

Tribute was also paid to the great Nuyorican poet Tato Laviera at the Puerto Rican Studies Association meeting in October of 2014. Our panel featured four writers who contributed to the anthology *The AmeRican Poet: Essays on the Works of Jesús Tato Laviera*, Stephanie Alvarez and I coedited for the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, in 2014. Francis Aparicio, Larry LaFontain, Jacqueline Lazú, and I were present to remember a remarkable poet and friend. I was wordless to hear that one of Puerto Rico's best-known critics and a good friend, Juan Flores, unexpectedly passed away exactly one year after Tato's death. Needless to say, like Tato, Juan Flores will be missed dearly. I am tempted to read a connection between the two, because Tato's poems and Juan's scholarly ideas were inextricably tied.

The cover of the present issue features another of Erik Olivera Rubio's paintings. This first one appeared on the cover of the Zurbano monographic issue. The second one is an image of a black Christ. Olivera Rubio is the only artist who has been featured twice on the cover of the *Afro-Hispanic Review*. Without a doubt, he is one of Cuba's best artists.

William Luis

The *Afro-Hispanic Review* dedicates the present issue to the memory of Freddy Gray, who expired while in custody of a few Baltimore police officers. We join protestors in Baltimore, but also in New York City, Cincinnati, Philadelphia, Washington, DC, and other cities throughout the country in loudly proclaiming that “Black Lives Matter.” We support peace and justice for all.

William Luis
Editor