

Editor's Note

Dorothy Mosby • Mount Holyoke

Sonja Stephenson Watson • University of Texas at Arlington

It was a pleasure seeing many of you at the 12th biennial international/interdisciplinary research conference of the Afro-Latin/American Research Association (ALARA) hosted by the University of Houston where ALARA Treasurer Antonio D. Tillis serves as Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences. Although this was the first time that ALARA was held domestically, in her welcome address, ALARA President Sheridan Wigginton summarized perfectly why Houston was and continues to be an ideal place to host ALARA. She noted that Houston has “the third-largest population of undocumented immigrants in the country” and foreshadows what many cities in the United States will look like because of its racial, linguistic, and cultural diversity. Wigginton noted the following:

If the foundational work of ALARA can be boiled down to anything, it's found in the essence...that is: How do the people living as “the other” in a society negotiate their lived experiences within a society whose historical default setting is to diminish, if not destroy, what makes those supposed “others” human? And equals. Our membership tends to investigate this very question through the various lenses of cultural production.

Indeed, ALARA and PALARA seek to interrogate the notion of the “Other” and bring new voices to the table. The fall 2018 issue of PALARA seeks to continue this dialogue and engage scholarship on the past, present, and future of peoples of African descent in the Americas.

We open this issue with Wigginton's tribute to Dr. Flore Zéphir (1958-2017), one of the founding members of ALARA. Dr. Zéphir contributed not only to the advancement of French/Haitian Creole linguistics and foreign language education, but she also had an impact on the professional development of graduate students and scholars in the field. A faithful attendee of ALARA conferences, her presence was notably absent and missed in Houston.

In the world of Afro-Panamanian writing, we lost another key literary figure. Sonja Stephenson Watson offers a tribute to Panamanian West Indian poet and essayist Dr. Carlos E. Russell (1934-2018). Russell's work did not garner

the same level of critical attention as his contemporaries, Dr. Carlos “Cubena” Wilson (1941-2016) and Professor Gerardo Maloney (1945); however, his impact was equally significant because of his commitment to political activism and the development of Panamanian West Indian intellectual thought. Watson's tribute sheds light on Russell's black intellectualism, activism, and legacy.

As we look to more contemporary issues of race and national identity, this current volume of PALARA features several pieces on Puerto Rico and its diaspora. Violeta Lorenzo Feliciano's article, “Son asimilados”: Mayra Montero vis-à-vis Tomás Blanco y el discurso racial en Puerto Rico,” analyzes Montero's contemporary essay “El entierro de Chianita: un complot chino” through the lens of Blanco's seminal early twentieth-century text *El prejuicio racial en Puerto Rico* which perpetuated the image of Puerto Rico as a racial democracy and a country of *jibaros* and non-blacks. Will Guzmán's review of *Silencing Race: Disentangling Blackness, Colonialism, and National Identities in Puerto Rico* by Ileana Rodríguez-Silva provides another analysis of Puerto Rico's issue with race, national identity, and whiteness. These issues of course are not isolated to Puerto Rico and represent those in other countries with significant African Diaspora populations. Casarae Gibson's review of *Diasporic Blackness: The Life and Times of Arturo Alfonso Schomburg* by Vanessa K. Valdés illustrates how the Puerto Rican-born Harlemlite “forg[ed] cross-cultural connections between African communities in the Americas” and sought to incorporate “Afro-latinidad as part of the fabric of U.S. politics and culture.”

Yadira Nieves-Pizarro's “The Representation of Latin@s in the Media: A Negation of Blackness” provides another reading of Afro-Latin@ culture from a contemporary perspective through the lens of mainstream media and the portrayal or negation of black Latinos. Nieves-Pizarro reminds us that although there has been improvement in recent years, there is still a long way to go with respect to the representation of Afro-Latin@s in the media.

Just as representations of blackness circulate across borders, the same could be said of the transnational circulation of music. The global impact of US hip-hop is evident as

we read Jessie Denise Dixon-Montgomery's article on female underground hip-hop in Cuba and Sarah Ohmer's review of *Cuban Underground Hip Hop: Black Thoughts, Black Revolution, Black Modernity* by Tanya Saunders. In "Afro-Hispanic Aesthetics and Identity through the Cuban Underground Hip Hop of *Los Paisanos* and *Obsesión*," Dixon-Montgomery argues that female Cuban hip-hop artists "affirm their Afro-Hispanic identity through lyrics that examine the notion of beauty through an Afrocentric lens rather than one of the dominant Eurocentric culture, while examining critical issues of the day for Afro-Cubans." Meanwhile, Ohmer's review of Saunders' book, *Cuban Underground Hip Hop: Black Thoughts, Black Revolution, Black Modernity*, reads the work through the lens of Afro-feminist studies and critical poetic thought. Ohmer examines how Saunders' book "challenges the Eurocentric humanist Cuban culture, what and who counts as Cuban, and what and who counts as a 'worthy' contributor to U.S. Latin Americanist discourse." In turn, Saunders' monograph can be read as a companion piece to contextualize Dixon-Montgomery's article.

In another book review, Paulette A. Ramsay offers her reading of Marvin A. Lewis' *Nelson Estupiñán Bass: una introducción a sus escritos*, translated into Spanish by Grabiela Díaz Cortez and Valentina Goldraj, which brings to light the legacy of one of the most important Afro-Ecuadorian authors. The founding editor of *PALARA*, Lewis provides the reader

with a critical analysis of Estupiñán Bass' works that can be appreciated equally by academics, graduate students, and readers who are new to Afro-Hispanic literature.

We look forward to your submissions to the fall 2019 special issue, "Afro-Latin American and Afro-Latinx Cinema," edited by Dr. Vanessa K. Valdés (Associate Professor of Spanish and Portuguese at The City College of New York - CUNY). Valdés is the author of *Oshun's Daughters: The Search for Womanhood in the Americas* (SUNY Press 2014) and *Diasporic Blackness: The Life and Times of Arturo Alfonso Schomburg* (SUNY Press 2017), the latter which is reviewed in this issue. Most recently, she was named series editor of the Afro-Latinx Futures Series from SUNY Press. As Valdés suggests in the call for papers, the goal of this issue is to highlight Afro-Latinx films in less studied countries and "to serve as an evaluation of the representation of peoples of African descent as well their participation behind the camera."

Finally, we would like to thank Olyad "Oli" Chala Gemechu, a graphic design major in the College of Liberal Arts (University of Texas at Arlington) for designing the front cover. Without knowing the subject matter of this issue, Oli brought awareness to the issue's focus on black female performance artists, writers, and subjects in the Spanish-speaking Americas. We would also be remiss to not thank *ALARA* member Tyra Lewis for volunteering to copyedit many of the pages that color this issue.