

**The Blood of Our Heroes:**  
**Race, Memory, and Iconography in Cuba, 1902-1962**

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## **ABSTRACT**

ROBERT C. NATHAN: *The Blood of Our Heroes: Race, Memory, and Iconography in Cuba, 1902-1962*  
(Under the direction of Louis A. Pérez, Jr.)

This dissertation examines how Cubans mobilized the memory of their wars of independence as the symbolic and narrative foundations of their nationhood. “*The Blood of Our Heroes*” argues that the creation of a set of heroes, icons, and parables was crucial to the consolidation of the Cuban republic and to the establishment of political and racial norms that sustained it. Cuban independence was threatened from its outset by the prospect of U.S. intervention. In this context, securing political stability and social unity became matters of national survival. The sanctification of national heroes enabled Cubans to demonstrate the historical legitimacy of their fragile republic, and Cubans circulated narratives emphasizing the cooperation of black and white Cubans in the anti-colonial struggle to deny and forestall conflicts over racial inequality. Because of the authority Cubans assigned to these narratives and symbols, however, memory became a decisive weapon for oppositional movements. Throughout the republic, Cubans reframed the independence wars to undercut the legitimacy of republican governments and assert a claim to power, a process of historical revision that reached its apogee in the successful revolutionary movement of the late 1950s.

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## **Introduction: Ends to Beginnings**

On the first of January, 1959, Fidel Castro and his surging army massed on the outskirts of Santiago de Cuba. The rebels had learned that the Cuban president Fulgencio Batista had fled the island, and sensed that, after nearly seven years of dictatorship and three years of armed insurrection, victory would soon be at hand. As a rapidly assembled military government in Havana pressed for negotiations to end the ongoing rebellion, Castro took to the airwaves of his movement's radio station to address the people of Santiago de Cuba. The military rulers, he declared, "want to prohibit the entrance into Santiago to those who have liberated the *patria*." As his 26 of July Movement assembled around the historic city, Castro issued a profound and powerful rejoinder to his opponents. "The history of 1895 will not be repeated!" he proclaimed. "This time, the *mambises* will enter Santiago de Cuba!"<sup>1</sup> Castro entered Santiago, and his forces quickly converged on Havana. The revolution, it seemed, was triumphant.

Castro's words announcing the revolution's triumph, however, spoke to a sense of a deeper victory that stretched back to the nineteenth century. Indeed, as the army of the 26 of July Movement spread across the island to seize the reins of government, Fidel Castro looked back more than six decades to invoke the Cuban *mambíses*, the army that fought Cuba's thirty year struggle for independence from Spain. Why, in this moment of profound

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<sup>1</sup> "Fragmentos de la alocución a Santiago de Cuba, leída por el Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro," in Ricardo Martínez Vicores, ed., *7RR: la historia de Radio Rebelde* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1978), 477.

importance for the future of Cuban nationhood, did Castro look to the past as a rallying cry for victory?

This dissertation examines the ways that Cubans used the memory of their independence struggle as the foundation of their new nationhood and their national self-image. The wars for independence became a common narrative that established a shared Cuban identity during the unsteady transition from colony to republic, and from republic to revolution. Instead of only tracing the consolidation of stories and symbols in the service of national unity, this dissertation will reveal how the authority of historical memory in Cuba served to sustain dramatic challenges to the status quo and unsettle the political and social structures of the Cuban republic.

“The Blood of Our Heroes” argues that the memory of the nineteenth century independence struggle emerged as the *lingua franca* of political debate during the Cuban republic (1902-1959), and served as the ideological foundation of the revolutionary movement that seized power in 1959. While Castro’s claim to embodying the *mambí* army of the anti-colonial effort is striking, his mobilization of that memory was the product of a long process of contestation and controversy over the meanings and purposes of the Cuban past. Immediately following the withdrawal of Spanish colonial authority on the island, Cubans set about affirming the victory of their long independence movement and elevating its heroes and stories into the iconography and narratives that would support a stable nationhood and enforce social cohesion. From the onset of national independence, the ability to define and lay claim to the legacy of the independence movement served as indispensable source of legitimacy for Cuban governments and leaders, providing a crucial connection to a shared and glorious past.

However, as Castro's invocation of the *mambises* at Santiago suggests, the memory of that glorious past was more complex and fraught than official commemorations would suggest. As quickly as some Cubans celebrated the heroic victories of Cuban insurgents as evidence of national fitness and unity, others challenged the claim that the ideals that motivated the Liberation Army had been achieved in the new republic. As narratives and icons could be deployed as symbols of the nationalist movement's victory, so too might they be reconfigured to undercut those claims and promote alternate visions of the nation.

As its title indicates, "The Blood of Our Heroes" speaks to the power of shared glory and sacrifice in the Cuban imagination, as well as to the symbolic functions of race within those narratives. Cubans hoping to affirm national unity routinely recalled the blood spilled in the service of independence, while celebrating the mixture of the blood of black and white soldiers on the nation's battlefields. I argue that race and memory were deeply entangled in Cuban life. My analysis centers on three questions: How did Cubans use narratives of the independence wars to create and sustain national unity and social cohesion? How did the memory of the alliance of black and white soldiers in those wars contribute to norms of inclusion and political participation for Cubans of color? And finally, how did critics of the republican conditions create alternative narratives of the nation's history to challenge the dominant nationalist framework and assert claims to power?

When Castro announced that his forces would not be kept from entering Santiago, just over sixty years had passed since the last time a Cuban insurgent army had descended upon that city in the summer of 1898. Then as well, the rebels sensed the approach of victory, the culmination of a thirty year struggle for national independence that began when a white slaveholder named Carlos Manuel de Céspedes inaugurated the first uprising against



Spanish rule by freeing his slaves and inviting them, as citizens, to join the fight for independence. From that moment, the political independence of Cuba was joined with the pursuit of racial fraternity at the genesis of Cuban nationhood. The cross-racial alliance that assembled to overthrow Spanish rule challenged both colonial power and racial hierarchy, advancing through its composition and political program the proposition of a raceless nation. Cubans of color filled the ranks of the Liberation Army, including Antonio Maceo, who joined the rebellion two days after its start and quickly ascended to the rank of General.

In the spring of 1898, the United States declared war on Spain, and entered the ongoing war for Cuban independence. By that time, the Cuban uprising had spawned three distinct conflicts: The Ten Years' War (1868-1878), the Little War (1879-1880), and the War of Independence (1895-1898). The Spanish army, already on the verge of collapse, held out only briefly against the newly arrived U.S. soldiers, and in July, Spanish forces surrendered to the United States. After three decades and three wars, the Cuban *mambises* were barred from accepting the Spanish capitulation or even entering the city.

The Cuban republic was born into instability in 1902. The Platt Amendment, which gave the United States the right to intervene in Cuban affairs, was forced into the new Cuban constitution as a condition of U.S. withdrawal. The fear that internal upheaval could prompt renewed U.S. occupation and threaten independence demanded that even greater emphasis be placed on maintaining social cohesion. As a consequence, the connection between the new republic and the long struggle to create it was at once fiercely asserted and profoundly tenuous.

Memory of the independence struggle became the foundational narrative of Cuban nationality and the source of its most sacred symbols. The proliferation of monument

projects, commemorative ceremonies, and nationalist mythologies in the early republic speaks to the desire of Cuban patriotic activists to demonstrate the country's fitness for nationhood and symbolically affirm its unity around shared stories and icons. Through newspapers, poems, political speeches, and public rituals, Cuban nationalists crafted and sanctified a vision of their heroic and unifying past.

In addition to creating a sense of national community, representations of the nation's history also established the terms of that unity and the beliefs that would structure national belonging. While ideologically committed to racial equality, the independence movement had been beset by anxieties over the empowerment of black and mulatto Cubans and fears that the African-descended population would ultimately challenge white authority. These fears persisted into the republic, and shaped how Cubans of all colors structured the memory of heroes like Antonio Maceo and others. My analysis will assess the construction of the black role in making Cuban nationhood, and examines the shifting and sometimes intransigent meanings of race and blackness in national historical narratives.

In a study that spans the inauguration of the republic to the consolidation of the Cuban Revolution, "The Blood of Our Heroes" interrogates the function of memory in shaping Cuban political culture and establishing norms of national inclusion. The first years of the republic prompted Cubans to formulate a nationalist civil religion upon the icons and narratives of the independence wars, which were described and commemorated with reverence and defended fiercely. The establishment of a new national identity called for the dissemination of stories to repeat and heroes to venerate.

As a part of this evangelizing effort, Cubans celebrated the feats of national heroes like Antonio Maceo, but pointedly minimized the importance of his racial identity. The

ideology of national racelessness functioned retroactively, erasing blackness from the Cuban story. Even as the memory of the independence wars was crafted and disseminated to ensure social cohesion, narratives that the power to unite were also imbued with great potential to unsettle. Challenges to the claim that racism and discrimination did not exist in the republic arose within the language of national memory, but repurposed nationalist symbols like Antonio Maceo in the service of a call for racial equality.

Periods of unrest animated the tensions embedded in national memory, unsettling the calm surface of the republic and fracturing the dominant narratives of the past. This dissertation alternates between Cubans' efforts to use memory to create and project national unity and the moments of political rupture that revealed what Tiffany Thomas Woodward has called "the soft underbelly of nationalist mythology."<sup>2</sup> These breakdowns, I argue, created space in which the meanings of the past could be overturned and redefined as the foundation of a new model of nationhood.

I view the presence and power of memory in Cuba as a story in itself. Historians have noted the prevalence of memory discourses in Cuba, citing the invocations of patriotic leaders like José Martí in political contests or references to the nation's independence struggle in debates over racial inclusions, but these have generally been described as isolated examples, a part of a different story. The research presented in "The Blood of Our Heroes" reveals a constellation and a shape where others have seen disparate examples. The ubiquity of memory might, ironically, belie its distinct authority to legitimate political and social programs and structure norms of national inclusion. Exploring the function of the narratives and symbols derived from the independence movement enables me to situate political

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<sup>2</sup> Tiffany A. Thomas-Woodard, "Toward the Gates of Eternity": Celia Sánchez Manduley and the Creation of Cuba's New Woman," *Cuban Studies* 34 (2003): 174.

confrontations and social debates within a distinct cultural imaginary, and to describe the framework through which Cubans interpreted and addressed the challenges of an unsteady independence.

By recognizing the central role given to memory in shaping national discourse, this dissertation represents a new direction in the study of nationalism and race in Cuba. Rather than assessing the execution of official claims of racial equality in the republic, or treating racial politics as a separate point of analysis, “The Blood of Our Heroes” approaches beliefs about race within dominant narratives of the nation. Interrogating the narratives of national history that shaped debates during the Cuban republic reveals the deep entanglement of racial and national ideologies. Constructions of the nation’s history established and communicated the values of Cuban nationality, and beliefs about the meaning of race and the place of Cubans of color in national society were created within the same processes.

Racial beliefs existed within and through nationalist beliefs –the memory of black and white Cubans uniting in the anti-colonial fight was at the nucleus of nationalist ideology, the premise on which nationality was founded. The enduring power of that belief, I argue, rested on the repetition and affirmation of the memory on which it was predicated. Thus, while other scholars have used the “myth of racial equality” as a premise from which to study persistent inequality, I approach that belief as a narrative that was constantly circulated, challenged, and reinforced, and therefore was not an outcome but an ongoing process that continued throughout the Cuban republic and beyond

## **Historiography**

Although the focus on memory and narrative represents a new, innovative approach to the study of life in the Cuban republic, recent scholarship has begun to address the centrality of historical myths and symbols in structuring Cuban nationhood. There is no shortage of excellent scholarly work on the sources of Cuban nationalism and identity, but historians have been largely silent on the crucial function of memory and iconography in giving meaning to the nation.<sup>3</sup> Several studies have drawn upon Castro's famous declaration, "History Will Absolve Me," to discuss how his government has used the past as a source of legitimacy for its revolutionary project, but none has examined the cultural and political meaning of history and memory that underpinned that legitimacy.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, these studies focus on the revolutionary period, when the government was able to exert great influence over the production of academic history. During the republic, the dominance of particular narratives illuminated the efforts of state power, but rested as well on the norms circulating through popular media and public events.

Recent scholarship suggests a growing interest in memory and iconography in Cuban studies. Lillian Guerra's 2005 monograph *The Myth of José Martí* focused on the symbolic uses of Martí in the early republic, as divergent nationalisms competed for primacy in national politics. Guerra joined other scholars, including João Felipe Gonçalves and Alfonso W. Quiroz in contributing essays to *The Cuban Republic and José Martí*, an edited volume that explored the variety of uses to which the image of Martí was put in republican and

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<sup>3</sup> Recent studies have focused on the development and content of Cuban identity. See, for example, Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); and Eduardo Torres-Cuevas, *En busca de la cubanidad*, 2 vols. (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> See: Nicola Miller, "The Absolution of History: Uses of the Past in Castro's Cuba," *Journal of Contemporary History* 38 (2003):147-162; and Louis A. Pérez, Jr., "In the Service of the Revolution: Two Decades of Cuban Historiography, 1959-1979," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 60 (Feb. 1980): 79-89.

revolutionary societies.<sup>5</sup> These studies built upon Richard Butler Gray's foundational work, *José Martí, Cuban Patriot*, which was among the first works to comprehensively examine the uses of historical symbols in Cuba. His 1962 monograph explored the many forms of Martí iconography that emerged in the decades following Cuban independence, including a close study of the national hero's image in official currency and postage. An inventive source base enabled Gray to illuminate the everyday encounters with iconography that shaped memory and circulated official representations of the national past.<sup>6</sup>

"The Blood of Our Heroes" mobilizes these methods to reveal memory and iconography as the symbolic terrain on which struggles over the meaning of nation would be fought during the anxious decades of republic and revolution. By interrogating the memories that achieved dominance as well as counter-narratives that promoted new visions of the past and present, this project significantly advances our understanding of the republican era and the beliefs that shaped its course. Many of the challenges to orthodox memory that emerged during the republic arose from Cubans of color who challenged the claim that racial equality had been achieved during the independence wars.

Until fairly recently, scholars had approached the meaning and function of race in the Cuban republic through a political framework which privileged class divisions and emphasized the distorting influence of the United States to explain the inequalities of the period. Interest in the conditions and cultures of African descended peoples under slavery in Cuba produced important work, notably the early and influential work of Cuban

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<sup>5</sup> Lillian Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Mauricio A. Font and Alfonso W. Quiroz, eds., *The Cuban Republic and José Martí: Reception and Use of a National Symbol* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Richard Butler Grey, *José Martí, Cuban Patriot* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1962).

anthropologist Fernando Ortiz.<sup>7</sup> More recently, scholarship has focused on the features of plantation slavery in Cuba and the uneven processes of emancipation that accompanied the rise of anti-colonial activity in the late 1900s.<sup>8</sup> Important studies of slave rebellion and maroonage have reemphasized the agency and experience of slaves in Cuba, affirming the political and social connections between free and enslaved people in the development of colonial society and anti-colonial movements.<sup>9</sup>

A significant set of works emerged from the Cuban republic, emerging from the path breaking work of the ethnographer and anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, whose studies of Afro-Cuban culture and religion were later joined by research on race relations and nationalist ideology.<sup>10</sup> Important works by Alberto Arredondo and Serafín Portuondo Linares attempted to illuminate the distinct struggles of African-descended Cubans in the colonial and national periods. Portuondo, an activist in the Communist Party and its anti-discrimination advocacy in the 1940s, produced a particularly distinguished scholarly lineage with his 1950 study of the Independent Party of Color, as historians like Aline Helg and Silvio Castro Fernández have continued to grapple with the anti-black violence that erupted

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Fernando Ortiz, *Los negros esclavos* (Havana: Editorial Revista Bimestre Cubana, 1916).

<sup>8</sup> Influential studies of slavery and abolition include Raúl Cepero Bonilla, *Azúcar y abolición* (Havana: Editorial Cinet, 1946); Franklin W. Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba During the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970); Rafael Duarte Jiménez, *El negro en la sociedad colonial* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 1988), and Rebecca Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860-1899* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Olga Portuondo Zúñiga, *Entre esclavos y libres en Cuba colonial* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2003).

<sup>9</sup> For further analysis of slave rebellions and their consequences in colonial Cuba, see Rafael Duarte Jiménez, *Nacionalidad e historia* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 1989), Robert L. Paquette, *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1990); Gloria García, *Conspiraciones y revueltas: la actividad de los negros en Cuba, 1790-1845* (Santiago de Cuba: Editorial Oriente, 2003); Matt D. Childs, *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle Against Atlantic Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Fernando Ortiz, *Martí y las razas* (Havana: Comisión Nacional Organizadora de los Actos y Ediciones del Centenario y del Monumento de Martí, 1953) and “The Relations between Blacks and Whites in Cuba,” *Phylon* 5 (1<sup>st</sup> Quarter, 1944), 15-29.

after the party's armed protest of 1912.<sup>11</sup> The organization and suppression of the country's first political party organized to defend the interests of Cubans of color figures prominently in this study, both as an event in itself and as a memory that became deeply entangled with that of black participation in making the nation.

While race relations in the early republic and the events of 1912 have remained a focus of scholarly attention, the literature on race has grown increasingly diverse and sophisticated. A rich scholarship has also emerged on the contributions of African-descended Cubans to national culture and identity, with a strong focus on the contours of Afro-Cuban religions and folklore in Cuba.<sup>12</sup> Writers have further elaborated the experiences of Afro-Cubans through diaries and testimonial works that have illuminated the functions of race and nationalist ideology in the lives of individual Cubans.<sup>13</sup>

The historiography on race relations and the problem of discrimination in the republic and revolution has developed rapidly in recent decades. The work of Tomás Fernández Robaina has been especially influential in the development of this literature. The publication of his *Bibliografía de temas afrocubanas* in 1985 and *El negro en Cuba* five years later helped to galvanize new scholarly interest in the question of racial inequality politics during the republican era, establishing new frameworks through which scholars began to assess the

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<sup>11</sup> Alberto Arredondo, *El negro en Cuba* (Havana: Editorial Alfa, 1939); Serafín Portuondo Linares, *Los independientes de color: historia del Partido Independiente de Color*, 2 ed. (Havana: Editorial Caminos, 2002); Silvio Castro Fernández, *La masacre de los independientes de color en 1912* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2002).

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Fernando Ortiz, *Los negros brujos: apuntes sobre un estudio de etnología criminal* 2d ed. (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1973); Lydia Cabrera, *El monte* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1993), Jorge Duany, "Stones, Trees, and Blood: An Examination of a Cuban Santero Ritual," *Cuban Studies* 12 (1982), 37-53

<sup>13</sup> Notable examples of this genre include Miguel Barnet, *Biografía de un cimarrón* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1980) and María de los Reyes Castillo Bueno, *Reyita: testimonio de una negra cubana nonagenaria* 4 ed. (Havana: Ediciones Verde Olivo, 2000).



causes and consequences of discrimination. His recent collection, *Cuba: personalidades en el debate racial*, explores the racial dimensions of Cuban republican life through essays on prominent writers and analyses of political debates.<sup>14</sup>

Scholarship on race has continued to grow as writers have assessed the continuities and contrasts between the republican era and the revolutionary period. In recent years, Esteban Morales Domínguez has written extensively on the past and present of Cuban race relations, notably in his 2007 monograph *Desafíos de la problemática racial en Cuba* and in subsequent pieces published in the Cuban journal *La Jirabilla*.<sup>15</sup> Scholars have also brought trans-national perspectives to the study of race in Cuba, notably in the work of Frank Guridy and in a collection edited by Lisa Brock and Digna Castañeda Fuertes.<sup>16</sup>

Monographs by Aline Helg and Alejandro de la Fuente have shaped the study of Afro-Cuban political engagement, advancing the premise of a “myth of racial democracy” as the dominant framework of Cuban racial politics. In *Our Rightful Share*, Helg suggests that this ideology confronted Cubans of color with “an unsolvable dilemma,” as to accept the logic of myth was to endorse their continued marginalization, while contesting the myth itself

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<sup>14</sup> Tomás Fernández Robaina, *Bibliografía de temas afrocubanas* (Havana: Biblioteca Nacional “José Martí,” 1985), *El negro en Cuba: apuntes para la historia de la lucha contra la discriminación racial* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1990); Tomás Fernández Robaina, *Cuba: personalidades en el debate racial* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Esteban Morales Domínguez, *Desafíos de la problemática racial en Cuba* (Havana: Fundación Fernando Ortiz, 2007); Esteban Morales Domínguez, “Cuba: raza y república,” *La Jirabilla* 6 (13-19 October, 2007), n.p. On the race in revolutionary Cuba, see especially John Clytus, *Black Man in Red Cuba* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1970); Mark Q. Sawyer, *Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Pedro Pérez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs, eds., *Afro-Cuban Voices: On Race and Identity in Contemporary Cuba* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006).

<sup>16</sup> Frank Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Lisa Brock and Digna Castañeda Fuertes eds., *Between Race and Empire: African-Americans and Cubans before the Cuban Revolution* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).

would prompt accusations of anti-nationalism or racism.<sup>17</sup> De la Fuente allows for greater nuance and complexity in his treatment of race in Cuban political life, suggesting that a myth of racial equality in Cuba served as well to offer Cubans of color a powerful and resonant discourse through which to assert political power, and limited the options of the white political figures to marginalize or ignore their claims.<sup>18</sup> This scholarship has focused on evaluating the veracity of that claim through exposing racial discrimination and assessing the political and economic strategies that Cubans of color advanced to redress inequality. Rather than exploring the electoral consequences of the equality myth, my study proposes that this national ideology is best approached as a process rather than as an outcome. Moreover, exploring these processes through memory illuminates the entanglement of racial and national ideologies at the very foundation of Cuban identities.

Recent scholarship has begun to illuminate these decisive cultural components of nationality and nationalism. Works by Alejandra Bronfman and Robin Moore have suggested that the meanings of nationality were negotiated through symbolic practices as Cubans sought to define the social and cultural trajectory of the nation. In *Nationalizing Blackness*, Moore reveals that concerns about the modernity of the nation shaped how Cubans perceived and represented African-derived cultural forms in the early republic, while Bronfman's research uncovers how intellectuals instrumentalized the growing symbolic power of science to legitimate racial categories and connect them to competing ideas of

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<sup>17</sup> Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 7.

<sup>18</sup> Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Politics, and Inequality in Twentieth-Century Cuba*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

nation.<sup>19</sup> My research joins these inventive approaches to the study of race and nation with the growing international literature on memory and iconography to examine how anxieties about blackness and Cuban nationhood influenced representations of iconic Cubans of color, as well as how Cubans in turn mobilized alternative representations as a means of refashioning the content of Cuban nationality.

Recent research into the origins of Cuban nationalist symbols and ideologies informs my approach and provides fertile ground in which to analyze the iconographic and narrative foundations of the republican era. Ada Ferrer's *Insurgent Cuba* locates the origins of Cuban national ideologies in the internal struggles over race in the armies of the nineteenth century independence wars. Ferrer masterfully addresses the complex relationship of race and Cuban nationalism in the crucial period wherein Cubans of all colors envisioned and fought for their nationhood. Moreover, she notes that memory of the independence movement was constructed in the midst of the struggle, as nationalist writers began crafting narratives that emphasized racial fraternity and minimized the threat posed by black insurgents.<sup>20</sup> These constructions of an idealized black soldier pervaded narratives of the independence wars that gained dominance in the Cuban republic.

### **Methods and Theory**

While scholars have long recognized the power of history in Cuban life, recent academic interest in memory and the construction of national narratives has offered new

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<sup>19</sup> Alejandra Bronfman, *Measures of Equality: Social Science, Citizenship, and Race in Cuba, 1902-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Robin Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: AfroCubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

strategies and theoretical frameworks through which to assess popular and political representations of the past. My methodological approach to the study of memory in Cuba is grounded in the deep connection between identities and the pasts that sustain them, and will draw upon the insights of scholars in a variety of fields whose work has traced the contexts and conflicts that shape how societies represent their pasts.

The growing scholarship on collective remembering offers new challenges and opportunities to historians of Cuba whose efforts to illuminate the tense structures of Cuban nationhood remain incomplete without attention to the narratives of the past upon which it has been built. Indeed, just as a nation can be understood to be an “imagined community,” that nation is defined by an imagined past. Benedict Anderson's famous conceptualization of nations as “imagined political communities” is the natural starting point for this study, but this dissertation will attempt to engage with memory to move beyond Anderson's elegant but ultimately limited formulation of nation and nationality.<sup>21</sup>

I use the term “memory” to describe the various ways Cubans represented the events, icons and meanings of their shared history. The term “memory” refers “not to the past, but to *the past-present relation*.”<sup>22</sup> That is, memories are representations of the past as constructed through the context of the present. Of course, at a given moment, any society will produce or hold many visions of the past which compete for social resonance and political acceptance. John Narone and others have argued that nationalized collective memories like those

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<sup>21</sup> See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Press, 1983).

<sup>22</sup> Popular Memory Group, “Popular Memory: Theory, Politics and Method,” in *The Oral History Reader* 5<sup>th</sup> ed., ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomas (London: Routledge, 2004), 78. Emphasis in original.

promoted by the Cuban government tend away from complication and controversy and toward presenting “a unified society with a unified past.”<sup>23</sup>

The set of symbols, icons, and narratives that emerged from the independence wars served as the foundations of Cuban nationhood. Heroes like Antonio Maceo, José Martí, and Carlos Manuel de Céspedes became indispensable symbols of the nation, and were thus heavily laden with meaning. My approach follows that of scholars like Wilbur Zelinsky who have connected the construction of a mythology of the nation with the norms and ideologies they sustain. As symbols are venerated and stories retold, they develop into parables that represent the meaning of the nation and its people, the values and beliefs that connect them into a cohesive whole.<sup>24</sup> In “The Blood of Our Heroes,” I examine the implications of these insights for Cuban national development by analyzing the creation and circulation of national memories, symbols, and stories, and I illuminate the ruptures that emerged when Cubans challenged the meanings of those heroes and advocated alternative narratives of the shared past.

Scholars of Latin American nationalism have long recognized the centrality of historical representations in sustaining social cohesion and government legitimacy around the region. The case of Mexican state iconography has attracted significant attention from historians analyzing the creation of a mythology around that nation's long revolution of 1910-1920. Ilene O'Malley's 1986 study, *The Myth of the Revolution* traces the construction of “hero cults” around the major figures of that struggle, and illuminates the centrality of narrative representation in the circulation of an official nationalism in the first decades of

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<sup>23</sup>John Narone, “Professional History and Social Memory,” *Communication* 11 (1989): 93, 94.

<sup>24</sup>Wilbur Zelinsky, *Nation Into State: The Shifting Symbolic Foundations of American Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

post-revolution government in Mexico. More recently, Thomas Benjamin has looked beyond political discourse to analyze the content of national monuments and commemorative festivals in the making of the Mexican revolutionary state.<sup>25</sup>

Scholars exploring the consolidation of nationalism elsewhere in the Americas have revealed the tense interaction of race and official iconographies. Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo has emphasized the nationalist resonance of indigenous iconography, revealing that the idealization of a pre-conquest Aztec civilization helped Mexican elites resolve nationalist debates and project an image of modernity abroad in the early twentieth century. In *The Return of the Native*, Rebecca Earle argues the image of the pre-conquest Indian emerged as the central feature of national iconographies in many Latin American states. This vision of a glorified indigenous past provided newly independent states with symbols of a unifying and distinctive history around which to assert national legitimacy and offered a framework through which elites could reconcile aspirations to modernity with the racial composition of their nations.<sup>26</sup>

The anxieties of Cuban elites were similar, but the historical, ideological, and racial foundations of the nation were quite different. The analysis presented in “The Blood of Our Heroes” joins the methodological and theoretical insights of Earle’s work and the growing scholarship on collective memory to the study of Cuban nationalism, which historian Mariel

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<sup>25</sup> Ilene V. O'Malley, *The Myth of the Revolution: Hero Cults and the Institutionalization of the Mexican State, 1920-1940* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986); Thomas Benjamin, *La Revolución: Mexico's Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Rebecca Earle, *The Return of the Native: Indians and Myth-Making in Spanish-America, 1810-1930* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

Iglesias Utset argues has taken “for granted the spontaneous manifestation of... '*el sentimiento nacional*' (national feeling) associated with the independence campaigns.”<sup>27</sup>

In her landmark study, *Las metáforas del cambio en la vida cotidiana*, Iglesias notes that “the construction of a metanarrative that finds in the independence struggles the glorious origins, the foundational deeds, and the emblematic images of the nation has been... little studied in Cuban historiography.”<sup>28</sup> She argues that the transformations of statues, street names, flags, civic festivals, and other daily markers of group identity helped circulate nationalist sentiment and patriotism in the period of occupation by the United States that divided colony from nationhood in Cuba. My study expands on her research to trace the function of these “emblematic images of the nation” in the decades of republic that followed the U.S. occupation, and seeks apply her fruitful methods to the interaction of race and memory in the continuing construction Cuban nationality.

In attempting to illuminate the anxious relationship of race and nation that shaped the content and function of national iconography, the scholarship on divided memories in the U.S. South has offered both an inspiration and methodological model for this study. Indeed, the contentious effort to create and commemorate the Civil War in the racially divided Southern states offers useful parallels and instructive contrasts with Cuban representations of the national independence struggle. Kirk Savage's examination of monuments in the post-war South illuminates the challenges posed by contemplating the meaning of race in a public sculpture, and this dissertation seeks to apply those analytical insights to the selection and design of monuments to Afro-Cuban national heroes in the twentieth century. In his 2005

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<sup>27</sup> Mariel Iglesias Utset, *Las metáforas del cambio en la vida cotidiana: Cuba 1898-1902* (Havana: Ediciones Unión, 2003), 180.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

monograph, Fitzhugh Brundage argues that “[t]he enduring presence of white memory in the South’s public spaces and black resistance to it... is a central theme of the southern past.”<sup>29</sup>

The Cuban case differs from the U.S. South in many critical ways, and indeed these constitute the basis of my intervention. While superficially, Cuba may appear to have “white memory” and “black memory,” my research seeks to demonstrate that the entanglement, not the separation of race, memory, and nation is crucial to understanding the continuing processes of national becoming in Cuba.

The concept of narrative figures heavily in my analysis. Memories and symbols are not static devices or stable representations. I follow the pioneering work of Hayden White in finding meaning in the form in which stories are told. While representations of the past might be easily understood as objective descriptions of a former reality, White notes that the structure of a story – the ordering of events that implies causation, the choice of “important” elements for inclusion and the silence of those deemed irrelevant – speak to a series of choices and assumptions on the part of the narrator. The structure of a narrative, then, reveals some of the motives behind its construction. I use White’s important insight to ask new questions of historical narratives and icons in Cuba, recognizing that historical narratives in popular memory can be examined as deeply as fiction can be, and can be even more revealing.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, Mass: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 7.

<sup>30</sup> Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).



## Organization

The structure of this dissertation follows the ongoing contestation of national memory, alternately exploring the construction of narratives intended to symbolize and sustain national unity and the challenges that sought to overturn or re-imagine those dominant narratives of the nation's history. The first chapter centers on the consolidation of a nationalist iconography and set of sacred narratives in the first decade of independence. The first years of nationhood were marked by an effort, spearheaded by prominent nationalists and veterans, to establish a pantheon of national heroes that would solidify the young nation's unity and national character against the tangled specters of North American influence and internal instability. These projects were embarked upon without government sponsorship or support, and many languished for lack of funds or land.

With the proliferation of memory projects in the first years of republic came the rapid dissemination of a nationalist mythology that centered on the wars of independence. This chapter reveals the formulation of a nationalist civil religion in Cuba through the selection and veneration of patriotic heroes and sacred stories. As this iconography structured national self-image, the narratives that Cubans disseminated in this period established patriotic values and communicated norms of national belonging and political engagement.

Chapter Two reveals how the same narratives that could be invoked to codify national cohesion served as a powerful weapon for oppositional forces. A political party calling itself the *Partido Independiente de Color* (PIC) organized in 1908 to advocate for the interests of Cubans of color. Led by a pair of independence veterans, the PIC mobilized behind a counter-narrative of national history, arguing that enduring discrimination against blacks violated the memory of black participation in the independence struggle. The challenge

posed by the PIC was closely tied to the memory of Antonio Maceo, a Cuban of color and among the most revered heroes of the anti-colonial struggle. As the Cuban government prepared to select a design for a monument to Maceo, the PIC rose in revolt against the government, initiating a violent repression against Cubans of color which, I argue, was activated by a claim that blacks had blasphemed against a racial covenant forged on the battlefields of the nineteenth century. In the aftermath of this racial violence, the victorious Cuban government inaugurated its monument to Antonio Maceo, a massive ritual that sutured a fragile national unity and signaled the rise of governmental authority over national memory.

While the construction of monuments and the ritual celebration of national heroes allowed the government to harness the symbolic power of memory, many Cubans viewed the consolidation of patriotic fervor and unity as a more difficult and urgent goal. Chapter Three uncovers how teachers and education officials identified Cuba's new public schools as nurseries of nationalism. The cultural, economic, and political influence of the United States convinced many educators that the nation's survival depended on solidifying a strong national identity and patriotic fervor. In the early decades of independence, patriotic history was the centerpiece of education as pedagogues advocated teaching the national past to create and excite nationalist sentiment in a generation of Cubans who had not lived through the independence wars. These Cubans, having been spared that shared struggle, would need to be initiated and socialized into the norms of nationhood by learning of its glories and sacrifices. I argue, however, that even as schoolhouse nationalism became a preferred method of patriotic proselytizing, the history textbooks used in Cuban classrooms circulated

a vision of the nation's history that minimized the contributions of Cubans of color and seemed to endorse national whiteness.

By the 1920s, however, many Cubans of the post-war generation began challenging the republican government and its claim to the legacy of the nation's founders. In Chapter Four, I examine the re-imagining of Cuban nationalist beliefs between the 1920s and 1940s, following a new generation of student revolutionaries, historians, and political leaders who developed new interpretations of the nation's history to sustain an assault on republican state and society that was directed at the rule of President Gerardo Machado. After the collapse of his regime, a widening assembly of oppositional groups instrumentalized memory to steer the creation of a new republic. The memory of black contributions to Cuban nationhood became the source and rhetoric of a demand for an anti-discrimination clause in the new constitution being debated in 1940. At the same time, a new wave of historical writing marked the rise of a revisionist memory that emphasized the social philosophies and progressivism of the nation's heroes.

By the early 1950s, with the republic again collapsing under authoritarian rule, an emerging movement adopted this revisionist narrative as the foundation of a revolutionary nationalism. My study concludes by revealing how the 26 of July Movement, led by Fidel Castro, used memory as a political ideology and call to arms, undercutting the legitimacy of the Cuban government and identifying its own insurrection as completing the unfinished work of the nation's nineteenth century founders. Once in power, the 26 of July consolidated and disseminated this new historical narrative in support of its revolutionary project, signaling the ascendance of a new past that would remake the Cuban future.

# **I**

## **Myths, Monuments, and Meanings: Cuban Civil Religion in the Early Republic**

In the spring of 1913, former Cuban army captain Felix Zahonet penned a furious, frantic letter and presented it to representatives of the Cuban legislature. His missive excoriated the government for its failure to begin work on a proposed mausoleum in Havana, a “National Pantheon” that would house the remains of the country’s greatest heroes. Zahonet, a veteran of the Cuban wars of independence and the Secretary of the project’s Managing Committee, had been advocating for the project for years. While the idea of a Pantheon had been first proposed in 1905, Zahonet took up the cause after it had languished through nearly a decade of national turmoil and instability. He wrote letters and manifestos detailing his design for a huge memorial in the capital, and even composed a sonnet about the project, titled “What the National Pantheon Must Be.”

Zahonet envisioned a massive monument, “at a minimum cost of \$200, 000,” in which “it would be possible to build a vast crypt with a number of respectable tombs in which to place the bodies of our citizens. An ossuary to protect the remains. The land would be encircled by an enormous iron gate, and at the front of the pantheon, flowers and shrubbery in such profusion that it would be necessary to enter the compound in order to see the monument.” While the mausoleum would house icons from the long history of the island, including its colonial period, most of its honorees would be heroes of the independence struggle, including Antonio Maceo, Máximo Gómez, José Martí, Carlos

Manuel de Céspedes, Igancio Agramonte, and Francisco Vicente Aguilera.<sup>1</sup> The Senate had promised to organize celebrations to raise awareness and excitement behind the Pantheon project and to circulate “the idea of a National Pantheon is a high exponent of public spirit, entailing the most transcendental affirmation of the idea of the State.”<sup>2</sup>

In the unsteady years that followed the end of Spanish authority on the island, Cubans sought to define the meaning of their nationhood and to establish a cohesive nationalism through the sacralization and commemoration of the past. The thirty year struggle for independence initiated by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes in 1868 emerged as the foundation of narratives of national becoming, the story of the nation that introduced and sanctified Cuba’s heroes, icons, and unifying parables. With the departure of Spanish authorities in 1899, Cubans began the process of elevating the memory of their independence struggle into the texts and symbols of a nationalist civil religion with which the nation’s citizens could identify and whose example they might emulate. Nationalist activists like Felix Zahonet worked to inscribe representations of heroes and history on the landscape and imagination of the young nation, enacting projects to build monuments and memorials to patriotic heroes. Commemorative ceremonies and written retellings of national glories enabled Cuban writers, elites, and political figures to circulate visions of the nation that affirmed social cohesion while normalizing the terms by which inclusion and unity would be structured.

In the first decade of independence, Cuban nationalists worked with varying degrees of success to replace Spanish symbols with a Cuban iconography drawn from the wars of

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<sup>1</sup> Felix Zahonet, “Diseño para el proyecto del monumento del Panteón Nacional,” n.d. [ca. 1913], Fondo Academia de la Historia, Caja 500, Num. 5, Archivo Nacional de Cuba (Hereafter abbreviated as ANC), Havana, Cuba.

<sup>2</sup> “Reglamento, programa del Comité Central, constituido para gestacionar la creación de un Panteón Nacional,” 15 February 1912, Fondo Academia de la Historia, Caja 500, Num. 575, ANC.

independence. Although Zahonet had dreamed of a monument that would represent both national greatness and governmental power, the nascent Cuban government had little role in efforts to mark the newly independent nation with monuments to its heroes early in the republic. Many monument projects, including Zahonet's elaborate National Pantheon, languished for lack of funding or governmental support. Nevertheless, the fervor with which Cubans worked to assemble a national iconography on the island illuminates the importance assigned to the memory and symbols of the independence struggle as a means of cultivating a national identity.

The narration of national history also served to affirm the cohesion and unity of the nation, both by sanctifying shared heroes and achievements and by minimizing the conflicts that marked the independence struggle. Nevertheless, representations of the past illuminated the very tensions and ambiguities that they set out to subsume into a unifying narrative. With their independence and nationhood threatened by internal social turmoil and the potential of further North American intervention, Cubans venerated heroic icons of cohesion and national strength. Building monuments and commemorating patriotic events also served to affirm durability of Cuban nationhood, as many Cubans viewed the proper commemoration and statuary representation of a nation's heroes as an indication of a modern society comparable to the states of Europe and North America. The affirmation of national fitness also necessitated minimizing or marginalizing potential sources of conflict by socializing Cubans into a normative nationalist mythology.

This chapter traces the creation of nationalist symbols and narratives in the first years of the Cuban republic. Through monuments and memorials, newspapers articles and illustrations, political speeches and other forms of public culture, Cubans elevated the events

of the independence struggle into the idolons and parables of a Cuban civil religion, wherein the nation, its myths, and its symbols served as a locus of para-religious worship and the sites of memory offer the possibility of social transcendence into the nation. First proposed by the sociologist Robert Bellah, the framework of “civil religion” has been used by scholars to describe the structures of North American patriotic belief especially, but the period immediately following the withdrawal of Spanish forces from the island in 1898 reveals the slow but energetic ascendance of the heroes, events, and stories of national history to mythical stature that demanded adherence and sacrifice, but promised transcendence into a national community that was both timeless and powerful.<sup>3</sup>

The civil religion framework illuminates how the consolidation of Cuban nationhood was shaped by an intricate system of belief and blasphemy wherein nationalist ideologies were deeply and emotionally held. While observers of North American culture and politics have long drawn on the concept of civil religion to describe nationalist ideologies in the United States, scholars have not fully explored this phenomenon as it developed in Cuba, a country whose patriotic practices and rituals drew heavily on the influence of its North American occupiers. As Marial Iglesias has rightly argued, many Cuban ritual forms, such as the oath to the flag performed in public schools, were taken directly from North American traditions. Until recently, many observers of Cuba have treated the formulation and function of nationalist symbols as discrete or separate, discussing the role of heroes and narratives in support of other social or political analyses without noting their instructive ubiquity. Civil religion, as Michael Angrosino notes, “seems to give a coherent reality to a set of attitudes and behaviors that some observers would prefer to treat as separate (and hence less

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<sup>3</sup> Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus* 96 (Winter 1967): 1-21.

meaningful).”<sup>4</sup> In Cuba, these practices tended to focus on the events of the independence struggle which began with the *Grito de Yara* in 1868 and ended with the U.S. intervention of 1898 and the 1902 inauguration of the republic. The long anti-colonial effort emerged as a nationalist epic and the source of symbols and stories that could be used to represent what *Cuba* would be, what the nation should be.

Illuminating how Cubans created a system of nationalist belief enables us to assess the codes of conduct and norms of national inclusion that this system helped to circulate. The process of ritual and mythmaking that made the nation itself the focus of worship emerged from the profound instability of the Cuban republic, a condition built into its foundation, both in law and in narrative. The heroic story of Cuban independence from Spain was cut short by the intervention of the United States, complicating the narrative of a victorious Cuban revolution. That same intervention ended with the Platt Amendment, a clause that the United States forced into the Cuban constitution allowing U.S. intervention in Cuban affairs at its discretion, promising that even Cuba’s nominal independence could be withdrawn at the slightest sign of internal instability or conflict.

As Cubans emerged from thirty years of intermittent warfare and into a four year occupation by U.S. authorities, the consolidation of nation and republican government were foremost priorities. As we will see, the process of defining and sanctifying nationalist symbols was fraught with failure and anxiety as efforts to commemorate heroes and stories of the national past confronted financial difficulties, a weak national infrastructure, and enduring tensions over the role of race in the nation’s past. As Cubans began planning a broad array of monuments to signify the continuity and unity of the nation, their efforts to

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Angrosino, “Civil Religion Redux,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 75 (Spring 2002): 241.



define national memory served to affirm and disseminate the terms of that unity and underlying ideologies of racial inclusion.

### **Embodying the Nation: Myths of Antonio Maceo**

On December 7, 1899, more than five thousand Cubans gathered in a small town in the outskirts of Havana to mark a powerful and somber date in island's history. Trains left the capital twice hourly, while others loaded into coaches or pedaled their bicycles to El Cacahual to witness the reburial of Antonio Maceo famed leader of Cuba's independence wars. The interment of Maceo and his aide, Francisco Gómez Toro, marked the end of a period of uncertainty and displacement that began with the pair's battlefield deaths, the hasty recovery and secret burial of their bodies, and their disinterment by a council of Cuban political leaders. Maceo and Gómez, who was the young son of General Máximo Gómez, were killed in a Spanish ambush on December 7, 1896, on the outskirts of Havana. Their remains, retrieved and protected by Cuban soldiers, were secretly buried near the battlefield as Cubans continued their march across the island. Months after the 1899 withdrawal of Spanish authority, the bodies were retrieved and prepared for a ceremonial reburial that would bring solemn, ritual closure to the armed struggle for independence to which they had given their lives. From the moment of his death to the enormous patriotic celebrations that accompanied his reburial, the uneasy combination of reverence and anxiety with which Cubans treated the body of Antonio Maceo highlighted the anxious interaction of race, reverence, and memory produced by Cuba's transition to nationhood.

Writers of the Cuban patriot cause reacted to the death of Antonio Maceo with predictable anguish, but rapidly moved to elevate the General to iconic status. In December

1896, *Patria*, the newspaper of the Cuban Revolutionary Party, announced “the death of the generous paladin of Cuban liberty, the legendary hero of our wars of independence, the bravest among the brave.” In nearly thirty years of service to the revolutionary cause, Maceo had already achieved enormous fame, and patriotic writers rapidly began assembling the symbolic scaffolding of a Maceo mythology. Declaring the General “the victorious warrior of a hundred battles,” *Patria* emphasized Maceo’s size and corporal power as figurative evidence of the enduring strength of the independence armies.<sup>5</sup> Ironically, by enabling his elevation to mythical status, Maceo’s death affirmed the invulnerability of the cause for which he died.

The first anniversary of his death offered the opportunity to establish Maceo’s meaning for the ongoing rebellion and to amplify the mythification of the hero. With a war against the Spanish raging, the revolutionary journal remembered Maceo as a warrior of unequalled strength in body and character, elaborating a vivid universe of metaphor to communicate his physical enormity, strength and invulnerability. The year of combat that passed since his death prompted a nationalist writer to lament that the ambush that killed Maceo had “deprived Cuba of one of the strongest arms among those who were laboring on the edifice of liberty.”<sup>6</sup> Hagiographic poetry mourned “a man of iron” and the “last of a race of titans.”<sup>7</sup> “¡Oh, Maceo gigante!” cried one poet, “victim of your own superhuman courage.”<sup>8</sup> Enrique José Varona, the editor of *Patria* and later Vice President of the Cuban

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<sup>5</sup> “Antonio Maceo,” *Patria*, 16 December 1896, 1.

<sup>6</sup> “José Antonio Maceo,” *Patria*, 8 December 1897, 1.

<sup>7</sup> “Nota biográfica,” *Patria*, 19 December 1896, 1; N.A. González, “Antonio Maceo,” *Patria*, 19 December 1896, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Francisco Sellén, “A la memoria de Antonio Maceo” *Patria*, 15 December 1897, Suplemento, 1.

republic, recalled that “in the first moments” after receiving news of Maceo’s death, “nobody believed it. Without thinking about it, we all had taken Maceo for invincible, like Achilles.”<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, that Maceo fell at the hands of the Spanish did little to discourage suggestions of invincibility. If anything, his death solidified this image. Ten years after his death, Havana’s *La Lucha* continued to describe Maceo as an “invincible gladiator.”<sup>10</sup>

As writers formulated a nationalist memory of Antonio Maceo, Cubans confronted a challenge to nationhood that Maceo himself had anticipated. The 1898 intervention of North American forces removed Spanish authority from Cuba, but denied Cubans not only the political but, crucially, the symbolic or narrative connection to victory and the nationhood that it would ultimately engender. Efforts to socialize Cubans into a nationalist ideology through commemorative ceremonies were often suppressed by the U.S. occupation authorities. The presence of an occupying force prompted Cuban nationalists to assert and glorify national symbols with increased urgency, and Cubans found opportunities to commemorate their independence struggle even as independence itself was deferred.

In 1898, city of Santiago de Cuba, occupied by U.S. forces, saw one of the earliest and most powerful scenes of commemoration and nationalist ritual, even as the United States had yet to take formal control over the rest of the island. Two years after the death of Antonio Maceo, the church bells of Santiago rang out to announce “a period of official mourning” which began, according to colonial ritual, “whenever its highest authority... had died.” Maceo, whose body remained buried at a secret location across the island, was mourned in the city of his birth by a swelling crowd of *Santiagueros*, flanked by a guard of Cuban soldiers and rebel leaders, including several Afro-Cuban generals. The funeral

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<sup>9</sup> Enrique José Varona, “Lo que significó Maceo,” *El Fígaro* 46 (10 December 1899), 474.

<sup>10</sup> “El titán,” *La Lucha*, 7 December 1906, 1.

ceremony, accompanied by patriotic speeches, enabled Cubans to assert and celebrate their achievement of independence and to deny the United States a place in the nascent national narrative. Indeed, according to Emilio Bacardí, the speakers at the Reina Theater after the funeral rites “made virtually no reference to the Americans,” instead “speaking about the independence that Cubans had won.”<sup>11</sup>

The occupation posed both practical and teleological problems for Cuban nationalists. North American hostility to Cuban patriotic celebrations limited opportunities for Cubans to consolidate national symbols, while rendering that process even more urgent. Moreover, the narratives of national origin that Cubans developed were complicated by the intrusion of foreign troops. The presence of the United States precluded the very Cubans who fought for independence from taking control of the island, but also denied the republic from a narrative continuity with the thirty year struggle to achieve nationhood. Cuban nation builders thus faced a struggle in writing a nationalist narrative. Any story connecting anti-colonial uprising to the Cuban republic would have to address the intervention of the United States and its implications for the independence movement. As we shall see, Cuban nation-builders responded by vigorously circulating a nationalist symbology, taking every opportunity to commemorate and celebrate the memory of the independence struggle.

The funeral rites for Antonio Maceo underscore the deep emotional desire to commemorate patriotic heroes, but also illuminate how efforts to sanctify the past were formulated through the political and social anxieties of the emerging nation. As Cubans began consolidating their nationhood under U.S. occupation, the body of Antonio Maceo became both a literal and figurative locus of national aspirations and anxieties, and the

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<sup>11</sup> Mariel Iglesias Utset, *Las metáforas del cambio en la vida cotidiana: Cuba 1898-1902* (Havana: Ediciones Unión, 2003), 130.

reverent ambivalence with which Cubans contemplated his mortal remains illuminates the deep tensions at the heart of the Cuban national project. Even as Cubans began contemplating a monument to José Martí at the center of a new national capital, Antonio Maceo's body was hidden, moved, measured, analyzed, sanctified, reburied. The memory and meaning of Antonio Maceo, like his body, was in flux in the years following his death. Even as Cubans reverently celebrated his military achievements in the service of independence, his symbolic significance would be far more complicated.

Less than a year after the public funeral in Santiago de Cuba, a national commission prepared an equally solemn but more complex ceremony. On 17 September 1899, this commission presided over the exhumation of the bodies of Antonio Maceo and Panchito Gómez. Their bodies, once buried secretly to guard them from enemy hands, would now be moved to a new site where they could be publicly mourned and celebrated by the citizens of an independent Cuba. The commission presiding over the ritual reburial, however, determined, as many Cubans would, that Maceo's body was of a special significance. While the deification of Antonio Maceo had accelerated in the immediate aftermath of his death, his body now became a sacred site. Lyman Johnson has written on the importance of physical remains in the political and social imaginary of predominantly Catholic Latin America, noting that "the dead bodies and burial places of both saints and patriotic martyrs have proved useful, linking remembered acts of sacrifice and treasured virtues to specific places and times and attaching illustrative human narratives to abstract beliefs and ideals."<sup>12</sup>

The remains of Antonio Maceo came to embody not only the confluence of patriotic and religious worship, but also the interaction of Cuban racial ideologies and anxieties.

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<sup>12</sup> Lyman L. Johnson, "Why Dead Bodies Talk," in Lyman L. Johnson, ed. *Death, Dismemberment, and Memory: Body Politics in Latin America* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2004), 5-6.

Cubans attending the disinterment ceremony collected clothing scraps, bullets, and dirt that was found with Maceo's body. Far from being illicit souvenirs, these became patriotic-religious relics of a sanctified icon, "the authenticity of which was confirmed in the presence of a notary at the very moment of exhumation."<sup>13</sup> The ceremony, then, joined religious and patriotic reverence with a nascent proto-state power in the form of the commission and its official notaries.

The physical remnants found in the grave of Antonio Maceo were not merely distributed among his relatives and collaborators. In a report published the following year, the "Comisión Popular Restos de Maceo-Gómez" recalled that "in the moments when the box containing the skeleton of Maceo was to be soldered, closed forever, the individuals who comprised the committee of exhumation understood that those remains merited something more than a dry anatomical description or a simple certification of identity." Maceo's body, they decided, should be measured and studied. In this moment, the commission members confirmed Maceo's elevation to national icon and simultaneously illustrated the ambiguity at the heart of that symbol, confirming the scientific and symbolic importance of race for the still-forming nation. In order to determine, to a scientific certainty, Maceo's racial category and to equip his race with symbolic meaning, the commission convened a research team composed of Drs. J.R. Montalvo, C. de la Torre and Luis Montané that would complete "a profound anthropological study... of the skull" of Antonio Maceo.<sup>14</sup>

Using methods popularized in Europe by Paul Broca and Paul Topinard, the Cuban doctors attempted to reconcile the physical dimensions of Maceo's bones, and his skull in

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<sup>13</sup> Iglesias, 122.

<sup>14</sup> José R. Montalvo, C. de la Torre and Luis Montané, *El cráneo de Antonio Maceo: estudio antropológico* (Havana: Impr. Militar, 1900), 1.

particular, with positivist ideas about the biological basis of racial difference. The technique of skull measurement to determine both intelligence and racial difference – and the two categories were, in essence, the same – represented a cutting-edge, modern scientific strategy in the late nineteenth century. While nationalist ideologies had emphasized the patriotism and duty to country of black soldiers, while subsuming racial categories into the new, encompassing category of “Cuban,” the apparently uncontroversial decision to study Maceo’s skull reveals an enduring fascination with his blackness, both as a component of his physical character and as a pillar of his symbolic significance for the nation.<sup>15</sup>

The study, first published in 1900 but reprinted in popular newspapers like *La Lucha* into the 1920s, is illuminating as much for the questions its authors asked as the conclusions they reached. Crucially, while both bodies were disinterred, neither the commission nor the anthropologists appear to have been interested in examining the skull of Panchito Gómez, Maceo’s white aide. The primary interest in undertaking such an “anthropological study” of Maceo was to assess and assert his racial identity while simultaneously demonstrating Cuba’s embrace of European scientific methods, thus affirming the modernity of the Cuban national project. Foremost in the minds of the “doctors,” however, was making scientific and social meaning of Maceo’s race. “We remember, as a prelude” began Montavalo and the other anthropologists in their report, “that Maceo was a mestizo; that the crossing of the white and the black, creates an advantageous group, when the influence of the first predominates; but an inferior group when the two influences are balanced, and even more so with the black is

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<sup>15</sup> For further discussion of the exhumation of Maceo’s remains, and a detailed analysis of the scientific premises, methods, and theories undergirding the measurement of his skull, see Alejandra Bronfman, *Measures of Equality: Social Science, Citizenship, and Race in Cuba, 1902-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

advantaged.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, the conclusions were set in advance – measurements and dimensions assessed to be beneficial would be attributable to Maceo’s whiteness, any disadvantages would be the result of a too-high proportion of blackness.

Throughout the study, the authors located Maceo’s skull within a spectrum of cranial dimensions marked, on one extreme, by “Modern Parisians,” and on the other, by “African Negros, while occasionally including Basques or the Pariahs of India for comparison. “In general,” continued the study, “one can affirm that intellectual development is in direct relation to the development of the brain.” Maceo, whose skull was larger than even modern Frenchmen, seemed to have even exceeded the best of his racial lineage. Moreover, the study concluded, the frontal curve of Maceo’s skull, which corresponded to “elevated physical functions: intelligence, creative thinking, imagination, noble and generous beliefs” was much larger than his posterior slope, which related to the “animal part” of the brain, the “savage and material.”<sup>17</sup> Their clear conclusion, then, was that Antonio Maceo had a mind of significant intellectual advancement and noble capacity.

The examining doctors, however, remained curious about the other consequences of Maceo’s blackness, the areas in which African lineage may have won out over the European in his physical form. “The study of the rest of the skeleton,” they suggested, would “provide us with interesting data from the point of view of stature and race.” After measuring the long arm and leg bones of the hero, whose physical strength and size were already becoming mythologized, Montalvo and his colleagues reached some perhaps inevitable but instructive conclusions. Citing European authorities from the preceding century, the anthropologists explained the different limb lengths of whites and blacks. The measurements of Maceo’s

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<sup>16</sup> José R. Montalvo, et al, *El cráneo de Antonio Maceo*, 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.



extremities, they declared, “prove that in these characteristics, Maceo was of the black race.” The so-called “Bronze Titan,” it seemed, had the skull and brain of a European and the body of a black man:

As we have seen... many anthropological characteristics reintegrate Maceo to the black type... But he approximates the white race, equals it, and even exceeds it in the general formation of the head, the likely weight of the brain, cranial capacity... [g]iven the race that he belonged to, and the ways he developed his activities, Antonio Maceo can rightfully be considered as a *truly superior man*.<sup>18</sup>

It should come as little surprise that the methodology of scientific racism enabled the examining anthropologists to reach a conclusion that would satisfy the needs of Cuban nation-builders. The study, motivated by anxiety over the meaning of Maceo’s blackness, ultimately allowed Cuban elites to reconcile his racial makeup with persistent racist ideologies and aspirations toward national fitness.

Locating blackness in his arms and legs, while centering white characteristics in his skull and brain, had multiple narrative advantages. First, it permitted the anthropologists and those who read their widely publicized report to minimize the blackness of their national hero in body and, by extension, in political and social ideology. If African lineage was peripheral in his body, white Cubans who feared the symbolic power Maceo held for Cubans of color might see blackness as peripheral to his social vision for the nation. Moreover, locating blackness in Maceo’s limbs drew upon persistent stereotypes of black physical prowess that neatly coincided with the growing mythology surrounding Maceo’s own strength and power. Ada Ferrer has argued that the nationalist literature of the independence wars sought to alleviate the anxieties of white Cubans fearful of arming Cubans of color in the fight against Spain by emphasizing the loyalty and docility of the black soldier, thus minimizing the threat

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

posed by the physical advantages many believed they had.<sup>19</sup> The conclusions of the anthropological study of Maceo reinscribed the underlying belief in black male physical dominance. Indeed, it is only by joining his white intellect with the arms and legs of a black man that Maceo was able to become a “truly superior man.”

The methods, language, and conclusions of the anthropological study illuminate the instructively ambiguous ideologies of race that shaped, and were shaped by the memory of the independence struggle. Antonio Maceo’s body represented both the confirmation of race as biological determinant and the transcendence of racial categories by this iconic Cuban man. Maceo thus emerged as the exemplar of a patriotic blackness, a memory of the black combatant that celebrated his commitment to the national cause while minimizing his political interest or capacity. The identification of an independence figure as “of color,” then, would be made only as evidence of the irrelevance of racial categories in the republic. If Maceo was represented as mulatto, black, or of color, it would be as evidence of his devotion to his nation instead of to his race. Maceo’s patriotic blackness meant that he would be identified as black only in the service of demonstrating the achievement of racial fraternity, and never to call attention to racism or discrimination.

As Cubans formulated a heroic, iconic image of Maceo to represent the new nation, the symbology that emerged to describe him reveals that beliefs about racial difference continued to define how many Cubans remembered their most famous hero of color. These representations often fixated on the size, strength, and power of his body. This emphasis on physicality was accompanied by an equal emphasis on Maceo’s single-minded and self-sacrificing commitment to the nation, a figurative balance which suggested that his physical

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<sup>19</sup> Ada Ferrer, “Armed Slaves and Anticolonial Insurgency in Late Nineteenth-Century Cuba,” in Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan, eds., *Arming Slaves From Classical Times to the Modern Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006), 304-329.

power existed only in the service of the nation and which celebrated his unwillingness to devote his strength to any purpose other than national unity and independence.

At the time of his death, Maceo was best-known (if not known only) for his feats in battle in Cuba's Ten-Years War and the War of Independence, which he died fighting. It is unsurprising, then, that representations of his heroism would emphasize glory in combat and military leadership. However, from the immediate response to his death, images of Antonio Maceo fixated on his body as the source of his value to the nation. The earliest efforts to define the meaning of Maceo, from the first expressions of loss that followed his death to the anthropological study in 1899, reveal a singular focus on physicality that helped reinscribe racial frameworks that the memory Maceo, as we shall see, was also tasked with overcoming.

The linguistic and metaphorical material with which Cubans began constructing a Maceo mythology was comprised of references to solidity, strength, and physical size. Two years after his death, one nationalist writer wondered, "What can we say of this man, already poeticized by legend? [Maceo was] solid of spirit and body like the inaccessible mountains" of eastern Cuba "where he first opened his eyes."<sup>20</sup> Maceo was so physically powerful that he fought on with "twenty-five wounds in his body... which were powerless to kill him, as though his flesh were made of granite."<sup>21</sup> "He was a Titan!" shouted a poet in the Havana magazine *El Fígaro*: "In his warrior's eyes sparkled the gift of glory; and victory, spreading its wings, awakened his steely spirit."<sup>22</sup> Felix Zahonet, in a sonnet titled, "On the death of General Antonio Maceo," offered this description: "Colossal figure: bronzed complexion,

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<sup>20</sup> "Maceo," *Patria*, 7 December 1898, 1.

<sup>21</sup> Nicolás Heredia, "Una pincelada," *Patria*, 19 December 1896, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Juan M. Macías, "Antonio Maceo," *El Fígaro* 46 (10 December 1899), 474.

energetic expression, proud face and a gaze, penetrating and alive like the point of a sword.”<sup>23</sup>

The fixation on the body and metaphors of strength and power were not limited to descriptions of Maceo's military heroism, nor was this symbology a feature of wartime journalism. Indeed, the image of Antonio Maceo that gained dominance in the first decades of the republic centered primarily on depictions of power and physical strength. In 1919, the Havana daily *La Lucha* declared that Maceo had a “soul [as] solid as the bronze in which his body seemed to be cast.”<sup>24</sup> An orator at Maceo's burial site several years later declared that the “heart and soul” of the Cuban people were “incarnated in [Maceo's] body of steel,”<sup>25</sup> while according to another writer, he had a “body of bronze and a soul of steel.”<sup>26</sup> *La Discusión* remembered him both for his “bronze body” and as a “man of iron.”<sup>27</sup> A poem, written by conservative Afro-Cuban journalist and politician Primitivo Ramírez Ros, declared:

He was a colossus or titan, never a pygmy;  
Invincible in the mountains or on the plain...  
A marvel of valor was Maceo,  
Brandishing his machete in his skillful hand,  
He appeared like a superhuman warrior,  
Sublime, victorious and gigantic.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Felix R. Zahonet, “En la muerte del General Antonio Maceo,” *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> “El aniversario de hoy,” *La Lucha*, 7 December 1919, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Miguel Angel Céspedes, quoted in “El recuerdo del Titán puso ayer,” *La Lucha*, 8 December 1923, 8.

<sup>26</sup> Editorial, *La Lucha*, 7 December 1920, 1.

<sup>27</sup> “La sombra del Titán,” *La Discusión*, 7 December 1924, 1.

<sup>28</sup> Primitivo Ramírez Ros, “Antonio Maceo,” *La Discusión*, 8 December 1904, 3.

While the writers and their language varied, the persistent emphasis on bodily strength and size affirmed Antonio Maceo as a hero whose contributions to the nation were exclusively physical. His value to the independence wars was located in his corporal strength and his ability to marshal violence in the service of a *patria* he sought no role in defining. *La Discusión* memorably celebrated his physical invulnerability by representing Maceo's body as the willing recipient of violence and pain through which the nation would be forged: "It seemed to us that enemy weapons only touched him to kiss him, or to write on a human body, with the symbolic characters of wounds, the history of the Freedom of a people."<sup>29</sup> While these representations of Maceo were intended to be positive, they implicitly denied him any influence over the direction of the Cuban national project and enabled Republican elites to negate efforts to imbue his memory with more complex political and social ideals.

With the widespread cultural fixation on Maceo's body, it should come as no surprise that the disinterment and study of his bones and skull prompted such attention and produced such multilayered, ambiguous conclusions. The excavation and reburial of Maceo's remains, however, was a part of a wider, urgent effort to establish national figures as the heroic iconography for the new nation. This process relied not only on the identification of national figures and the formulation of heroic narratives around their lives, but also on the nascent republic's ability to properly commemorate and memorialize these figures. Cubans were concerned with the need to establish visual, physical representations of their nation from the moment nationhood came into view. Marial Iglesias has uncovered the often unsteady efforts through which Cubans attempted to break down the symbolic framework of Spanish colonialism and to construct, in its place, a universe of national place names, rituals,

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<sup>29</sup> "Editorial: duelo nacional," *La Discusión*, 7 December 1903, 2.

monuments, and ceremonies. These multiple processes emerged during the period of U.S. occupation, and accelerated with the inauguration of independence in 1902.

### **Monuments and Memorials in the Early Republic**

The 1899 reburial of Antonio Maceo and Panchito Gómez marked a ceremonial end for the independence wars and the first major commemorative ceremony for a Cuban national hero after the Spanish defeat. As we have seen, the process of exhumation, study, and reburial illuminated the instability of Antonio Maceo's memory and meaning for many Cubans who felt the need to reconcile his racial composition with the history and future of Cuban nationhood. Pointedly, there was no study of Panchito Gómez's skull, nor any suggestion that Martí's remains should be examined to determine his intellect. As Maceo's body was being unearthed and his memory deconstructed and refashioned, Cuban veterans and elites were envisioning the creation of a monumental iconography through which Cubans could circulate the values and ideologies of the new nation. Despite the evident ambiguity of Maceo's meaning, his body was exhumed precisely in order to properly honor him with a resting place and ritual burial appropriate for a national hero.

The instability of the early republic, punctuated by an armed rebellion and a three year U.S. occupation from 1906 to 1909, limited the ability of Cubans to orchestrate ritual and physical remembrances, but also amplified their importance. Despite the solemnity and patriotic fervor that accompanied the departure of the Spanish and the inauguration of Cuban independence on 20 May 1902, the construction of national monuments and memorials was a halting, uneven process in the early years of independence. Indeed, even with the success and solemnity of the reburial ceremony in 1899, five years later the planned mausoleum to

Maceo remained incomplete. General Máximo Gómez, the father of Panchito Gómez and General of the Liberation Army, organized a benefit in the summer of 1904 to raise money for the completion of a mausoleum at Cacahual. Held at Cuba's National Theater, the function appealed to Cubans at home and abroad to donate funds to complete a worthy burial site and memorial.<sup>30</sup> Cuban elites saw a connection between the proper commemoration of national heroes and demonstrating their fitness for nationhood. In the first decade of the republic, however the number of proposed monument projects was inversely proportional to those successfully completed.

While funds and organization were often difficult to corral for major monument projects, Cubans nevertheless pursued more modest, if equally symbolic avenues to creating commemorative sites. In the winter of 1902, a coalition of Cuban veterans and political leaders initiated a plan to mark the site of an important moment in the struggle for national independence. On 8 December, the day after the sixth anniversary of Antonio Maceo's death, veteran Federico Pérez Carbó wrote to the Railroad and Warehouse Company of Santiago de Cuba, asking the company for permission to survey the land of the finca Baraguá and to establish and conserve the site of Antonio Maceo's legendary "Protest of Baraguá." Specifically, Pérez Carbó hoped to conserve the two mango trees under which Maceo had met a Spanish captain, as these trees "constituted a glorious monument of our struggles for independence."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Máximo Gómez to Cosme de la Torriente, 25 June 1904, Fondo Academia de Historia, Caja 570, Num. 10, ANC.

<sup>31</sup> Federico Pérez-Carbó to Luis de Hechavarría y Limonta and Gabriel Martínez Badell, 8 December 1902, Fondo de Donativos y Remisiones, Caja 32, Num. 41, ANC.

On 15 March 1878, Maceo met with Spanish Captain General Aresenio Martínez-Campo to discuss the Pact of Zanjón, a peace agreement recently signed by the independence movement's political leadership. Maceo famously stared down Martínez-Campo and, denouncing those Cubans who had agreed to a ceasefire, announced that he would continue leading his troops against the Spanish in contravention of the treaty. This protest, which split Cuban revolutionaries at the time, later emerged as a symbol of enduring resistance and commitment to independence. As indicated by the haste with which Pérez Carbó moved to protect the sacred ground, the narrative and symbolic importance of the event was quickly established. The company immediately responded, "offering these trees to posterity as a glorious monument of the struggle for independence."<sup>32</sup>

In the winter of 1906, a group of independence leaders, including Pérez Carbó and General Saturnino Lora, gathered at the site to dedicate a bronze plaque, donated by the provincial government of Oriente. Gathering under the famous Mango trees, the assembled veterans declared Baraguá a protected historic site. The trees stood a natural monument, a living iconic representation of national history. The provincial government of Oriente province established a fine of ten pesos for any mistreatment or desecration of the trees.<sup>33</sup> By identifying and sanctifying the land and features at the center of Baraguá's visual iconography, Cuban memory activists drew a remote location into the Cuban nationalist imagination and further elevated the mythical stature of Antonio Maceo. The memory of Baraguá, then, was folded into the narrative of Maceo's own masculine strength and valor,

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<sup>32</sup> Luis de Hechavarría y Limonta to Federico Pérez-Carbó, 16 December 1902, Fondo de Donativos y Remisiones, Caja 32, Num. 41, ANC.

<sup>33</sup> "Los orientales colocan este día en los Mangos de Baragua una placa de bronce levantando a la siguiente acta," *El Cubano Libre*, n. d., [ca. 1906]. Newspaper clipping in Fondo de Donativos y Remisiones, Caja 32, Num. 41, ANC.



which in turn affirmed the durability of Cuban nationhood: “In the shade of those copious Mango [trees],” one writer recalled dramatically, “Maceo the great, that Titan... pronounced the most virile protest of an imprisoned people against its oppressors. It served as an example to all Cubans during the most difficult days.” In the early republic, Baraguá thus became the site of a defining moment in the national narrative, a “protest [that] saved the honor of the Liberating Army” and shaped national character.<sup>34</sup>

Even as Cubans surveyed their national territory to establish and conserve sites of national memory like Baraguá, nationalists identified the need to build monuments, statues, and other visual sites of memory to replace colonial. In the spring of 1899, mere months after Spanish troops had departed the island and U.S. authorities assumed control, the Havana magazine *El Fígaro* posed a survey to its readers, asking what statue should take the place of the Spanish Queen Isabel II in the city’s *Parque Central*. Patriotic monuments would join the physical with the imagined, helping Cubans to formulate a tangible, experienced sense of nation while replacing the enduring symbolic dominance of the Spanish past with a new iconography.

Doing so would prove to be more difficult and uneven than might be expected. As we have seen in the ambiguity with which Cubans contemplated the meaning of Antonio Maceo in the early post-war period, the selection and elevation of national heroes was a tense, fraught process that required the definition and circulation of narratives and symbols. Notably, in the survey of *El Fígaro*’s readers José Martí barely edged a plurality, besting an allegorical depiction of Liberty by only four votes and a proposed statue of Christopher Columbus, which finished third. While the readers of *El Fígaro* certainly constituted a small, elite subset of Cubans, the fact that these literate, culturally engaged voters only barely

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<sup>34</sup> Letter published in *El Cubano Libre*, n. d., [ca. 1908] in *Ibid.*

preferred Martí, often credited as the intellectual author of Cuban nationhood, to Columbus, the practical founder of Spanish colonialism on the island, underscores the difficulty faced by nation-builders in establishing consensual national symbols.

Despite the slim margins of *El Fígaro*'s informal poll, Cubans began organizing the creation of a Martí monument. In January 1900, led by veteran leader Emilio Nuñez, a group of Cuban elites met at the home of José de la Cuesta to begin organizing the erection of a monument to Martí through popular subscription. Creating a template that would be followed to plan and sometimes to build other monuments around the island, the newly founded "Asociación Monumento a Martí" (AMM) worked to solicit donations from wealthy Cubans, expatriates, veterans, and other national elites to fund the construction of what would become Cuba's first monument to an independence figure.<sup>35</sup> At nearly the same time, an expanding group made up of veterans, politicians, and other Cuban elites began organizing funds for a monument to Ignacio Agramonte in the city of Camagüey, as well as monuments to Carlos Manuel de Céspedes and Francisco Vicente Aguilera, leading figures in the Ten Years' War.<sup>36</sup>

In 1902, months before the withdrawal of U.S troops and the formal inauguration of Cuban independence, the Martí commission enlisted Italian-trained Cuban sculptor José Vilalta de Saavedra to design and sculpt a marble statue of the hero known as "El Apóstol." Vilalta was the best-known Cuban sculptor at a time when the island lacked schools of instruction in the plastic arts. Vilalta's nearly eight-meter tall monument to Martí affirmed

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<sup>35</sup> *Reseña de los trabajos realizados por la comisión ejecutiva de la Asociación Monumentos Martí-Céspedes hacia el acto de inaugurar la estatua del ilustre José Martí en el Parque Central de la Habana, el 24 de Febrero de 1905* (Havana: Imprensa Adversador Comercial, 1905), 3. Pamphlet located in Fondo Academia de la Historia, Caja 195, Num. 597, ANC.

<sup>36</sup> "Agramonte (Ignacio) documentos acerca de la erección de su monumento en Camaguey," n.d., Academia de Historia, Caja 459, Num. 4, ANC.

his position as a maker of Cuban visual memory. His first memorial, devoted to Cuban medical students who had been executed by Spanish authorities in 1871, was the first monument in Cuba to be designed by a Cuban sculptor. With the laying of the keystone for the Martí monument in November 1904 and the dedication of the monument three months later, Vilalta offered Cubans their first monument as an independent nation.<sup>37</sup>

More than simply providing Cubans with a visual, physical representation of perhaps their most beloved founder, the monument to José Martí represented a new stage in the consolidation of the national project through the symbols of independence. As with the narratives that emerged with Antonio Maceo, the Cuban press emphasized that Martí's death in his first engagement with Spanish forces had elevated him to spiritual immortality, and that he "has not died yet, and his spirit still lives in the heart of Cubans."<sup>38</sup> The elevation of Martí to an icon of religious worship had, as with Maceo, begun with his death, and accelerated in the young republic. His designation as the "Apostle" of Cuban independence affirmed his position as the carrier and messenger of a sacred belief, that of Cuban nationhood. Members of the Monument Association advanced civil religious rhetoric as a central rationale for the monument's construction, calling the memorial a "pious work" of "sacred" importance. As João Felipe Gonçalves has pointed out, a note "left in the box

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<sup>37</sup> *Reseña de los trabajos realizados por la comisión ejecutiva de la Asociación Monumentos Martí-Céspedes*, 3. See also Luis de Soto y Sagarra, "La escultura en Cuba" in Arturo Alfonso Roselló and Juan Otero, *Libro de Cuba: una enciclopedia ilustrada que abarca las artes, las letras, las ciencias, la economía, la política, la historia, la docencia y el progreso general de la nación cubana* (Havana: Publicaciones Unidas, 1954).

<sup>38</sup> *El Fígaro*, 5 March 1905, quoted in João Felipe Gonçalves, "The 'Apostle' in Stone: Nationalism and Monuments in Honor of José Martí," in Mauricio A. Font and Alfonso W. Quiroz, ed. *The Cuban Republic and José Martí: Reception and Use of a National Symbol* (Lanham, Md; Lexington Books, 2006), 21.

buried under the cornerstone referred to the statue as the ‘altar that the motherland erects’” to Martí.<sup>39</sup>

The dedication ceremony in 1905 signaled the ascendance of Cuban civil religion, as the ritual sacralization of the national past joined a display of civic and governmental power. The statue was dedicated on 24 February 1905, the tenth anniversary of Martí’s “Grito de Baire,” which began a new uprising against Spanish authority in 1895. That date joined October 10 and December 7 as patriotic holy dates which structured the Cuban calendar around the remembrance of the independence struggle. With the inauguration of a monument in 1905, Martí took his place at the head of the Cuban national pantheon, occupying a position at the height of intellectual, patriotic, and religious nationalism. Even as the monument was built by popular subscription rather than through public funds, the ceremony represented a signal moment for the Cuban government in its efforts to assert its inheritance of the national independence narrative.

President Tomás Estrada Palma unveiled the monument, surrounded by military and civilian armed forces and military bands. The dedication, writes Conçalves, “was a rite of reinforcement of hierarchies, with a display of power, status symbols, and rhetoric by the political and urban elite.”<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the celebration enabled Cubans to draw a direct connection between the republic as constituted in 1902 and the independence struggle that had been cut off by the intervention of the United States in 1898. The civil religious significance of the Martí monument was crucial to the effort to consolidate Cuban nationalism around the structures of the republic, as Estrada Palma affirmed before the statue

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<sup>39</sup> Conçalves, 21.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 20.

of Cuba's beloved hero: "Martí!" he shouted, "[i]t is he with his triple halo of Superior Genius, Apostle and Martyr. Let his spirit descend unto our hearts and there be the subject of religious cult."<sup>41</sup> Estrada Palma, uttering these words of worship, asserted a claim to be the head of this Cuban civil religion in his power as head of state. Ironically, the president would soon find himself at the center of a crisis of Cuban politics and nationhood, accused of betraying the same national heroes that he claimed to worship.

The success of the Martí statue and the patriotic pomp surrounding its dedication belied the ongoing difficulty of constructing a wider monumental iconography. Indeed, the Martí monument project itself had drawn upon the funds of a different failed proposal. As the Executive Committee of the AMM was completing its plans for the Martí statue, its members received a letter from a group in the city of Manzanillo who, in 1899, had begun gathering money to erect a monument to Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, architect of the Grito de Yara that began the Ten Years War. That group had failed to raise the needed money, and elected to donate the sum of their funds to support the Martí monument in Havana. Emilio Nuñez, the President of the Monument to Martí Association, recalled that the Executive Committee, "inspired in its feeling of justice, of love, and gratitude to the memory of the unforgettable Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, resolved to take as its own the aforementioned project," putting the Manzanillo funds toward a new effort to raise money toward a statue of Céspedes as soon as the Martí monument was completed.<sup>42</sup>

By 1905, the commission had adopted the name "Asociación Monumentos Martí-Céspedes" and began fundraising in earnest. The project's announcement made clear the

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<sup>41</sup> *La Lucha*, 25 February 1905, 2.

<sup>42</sup> *Reseña de los trabajos realizados por la comisión ejecutiva de la Asociación Monumentos Martí-Céspedes*, 6.

position Céspedes was to hold in the nationalist imagination, demanding that “all who feel themselves Cuban, or at least lovers of Cuban freedom” to give generously to the cause

of building the monument due to the memory of the Padre de la Patria, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, the bold caudillo, hero and martyr of the glorious revolution of Yara, of that Ten Year epic, unprecedented in History, in which the foundations of Cuban Nationality were cast in countless torrents of blood and sacrifice, which few years later culminated in the definitive establishment of our young republic.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to formulating a narrative of Céspedes’s patriotic achievements that located Cuban nationality in the shared struggle for independence, the organization’s manifesto declared that “honoring the memory” of Céspedes “is not only the duty that patriotism and gratitude demands, but rather deserved glorification to the... illustrious patriots who responded to the dignifying cry of Country, Independence, and Freedom launched by the immortal of Yara... offering blood, life, property, and so much more in the catastrophe of our political and social regeneration.”<sup>44</sup> These narratives, produced in the process of commemoration and monumentalization, framed the independence wars as a redemptive struggle through which Cubans forged their collective identity.

This sacred narrative of national origins, then, was meant to inspire glorification and patriotic devotion. Céspedes would come to personify the uprising that he initiated, and Cubans were obliged to praise and glorify that memory. As the independence struggle was remembered as a collective, transcendent movement, the Association hoped that the “monument to Céspedes will be an eminently popular work.” The Executive Committee invited the “Congress of the Nation, provincial councils, town halls, employees, political and private parties, and, in a word, those who live in the refuge of the republic that those

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

immortals initiated” to give generously to the project. The Association presented contributions to the monument as a patriotic tithe, a shared, unifying sacrifice to glorify the national past and to honor its icons.

A year later, the desire to mobilize the nation behind a statue to Céspedes had crumbled under a lack of funds and support. In a letter to the Cuban Senate, the Executive Committee begged for assistance and lamented the difficulty of raising monuments through popular subscription. While Emilio Nuñez trumpeted the success of their first project, the monument to “the illustrious Martyr of Dos Ríos, José Martí,” he acknowledged that “unfortunately, the Commission... despite its efforts, has been unlucky in completing with the second part” of its project. “Heretofore those efforts have translated into small contributions,” Nuñez reported, “most of which proceeded from the valorous region which served as the base for the heroic call to rebellion at the Demajagua, and generous offerings of the governing bodies of the province and municipality of Havana. But all of this,” he noted, “is insufficient if we want to dignifiedly honor the memory of the immortal hero, who in Yara signaled the Cuban people to the path of honor and duty.”<sup>45</sup>

The people, parties, and local governments of Cuba, Nuñez suggested, had failed to heed the example given by Céspedes. He appealed to the national Congress, “the illustrious and dignified representation of our people,” to lend the funds necessary for the completion of the project. The Commission asked for the Senate’s help in “properly realizing the holy and worthy task that has been undertaken to honor, equal to Martí, the venerated memory of the august caudillo, initiator of the greatest epic that modern history records.”<sup>46</sup> While the

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<sup>45</sup> Asociación de Monumentos “Martí y Céspedes” to Cuban Senate, 20 May 1906, Fondo de Donativos y Remisiones, Caja 32, Num. 4, ANC.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

Estrada Palma government had joined in the spectacle that accompanied the dedication of the Martí monument, it was a last resort for those seeking to erect a memorial to Céspedes.

Whether the Senate considered the request is unclear. Within months of the Commission's patriotic letter, the republic would be beset by accusations of electoral fraud against President Tomás Estrada Palma. Fewer than eighteen months after Estrada Palma piously proclaimed José Martí the object of religious worship in the Cuban republic, his government would collapse against an armed rebellion, giving way to a second occupation by U.S. forces.

In August 1906, members of the Liberal Party rose in rebellion against the government, accusing Estrada Palma and his Moderate Party of electoral fraud in winning the previous year's elections. The United States, invoking the Platt Amendment to the Cuban constitution, intervened to end the uprising and reestablish government. Four years of unsteady independence gave way to three years of U.S. administration. The collapse of Cuban independence into renewed occupation cast a pall over patriotic celebrations and prompted widespread anxiety about the feasibility and future of Cuban nationhood. Many in the press accused Estrada Palma of betraying both the republic and the nation's sacred past by using force, fraud, and intimidation to secure his reelection and a landslide for his party in the elections of 1905.

While invocations of the sacred past could promote social unity, their emotional resonance also made them a powerful weapon. In the fall of 1905, members of the Liberal party challenged the legitimacy of the government, leveling accusations of intimidation and threats coming from the Moderate party. In September, a Liberal party leader in Cienfuegos was murdered, ramping up tensions between the major political parties. *El Liberal*, an



official organ of the Liberal Party, accused the Moderates of the attack, and offered a political cartoon with a damning image and narrative of Tomás Estrada Palma. Representing the President and his followers as marauding “Cossacks,” the cartoon depicts him on horseback, trampling on portraits of Antonio Maceo and the recently deceased General Máximo Gómez, along with a shield representing the United States. In his hand, he proudly displays a picture of José Martí, which he has stabbed through with his sword (see Figure 1 below).<sup>47</sup> While clearly a partisan attack, the image in *El Liberal* illuminates the anxiety over how the republic and its leaders were both claiming and betraying the legacy of the nation’s founding heroes.

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<sup>47</sup> “Los cosacos en campaña,” *El Liberal* 22 September 1905, 1.



Figure 1: "The Cossacks in the Field."

A political cartoon in *La Lucha* offered the same argument more pointedly the following year. As political tensions had devolved into open rebellion and, by September, a renewed U.S. occupation of the island, *La Lucha* marked a somber anniversary of Céspedes's Grito de Yara by confronting the disgraced former president with the images of the nation's founders. The cartoon, published on 10 October 1906, depicts Estrada Palma hunched over,

holding a knife behind his back. His shadowy figure was confronted by the enormous, ghostly figures of José Martí and Carlos Manuel de Céspedes. The two nationalist icons towered over Estrada Palma, demanding, “What have you done with the Republic?” (see Figure 2 below).<sup>48</sup> The cartoon in *La Lucha* invoked the anniversary of October 10 to contrast the heroes who had initiated the two major independence wars with the politician who had cast the republic into another foreign occupation. The same day, an editorial piece lamented that a foreign power again occupied Cuba, signaling to the author “that here, everything has died: the memory of past greatness and the hope in the glorious destiny of this people.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>“Céspedes y Martí: ¿Qué has hecho de la República?” *La Lucha*, 10 October 1906, 2.

<sup>49</sup>“¡¡Quivicán y el glorioso aniversario!!,” *La Lucha*, 10 October 1906, 2.

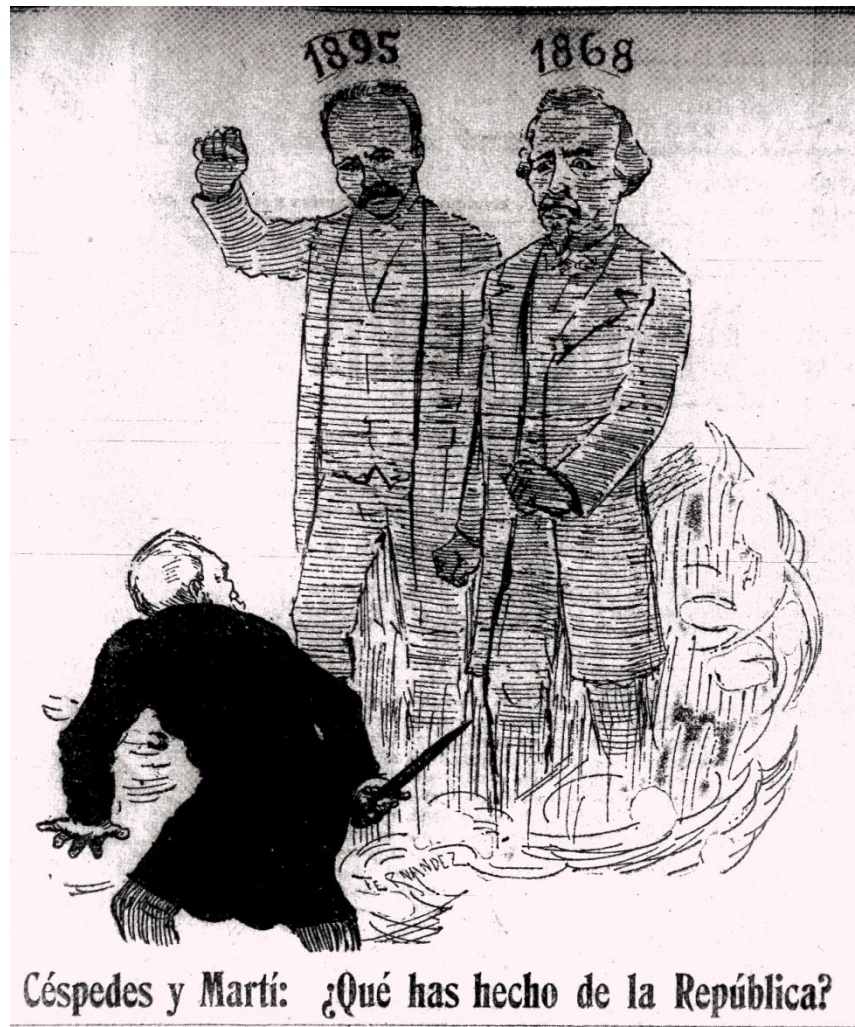


Figure 2: Céspedes and Martí to Estrada Palma: "What have you done with the Republic?"

The specters of José Martí and Carlos Manuel de Céspedes staring down a black-cloaked, villainous Estrada Palma suggest that the icons of the nineteenth century would be the ultimate arbiters of political behavior in the twentieth. The content of that memory, beyond merely the ideal of an independent republic represented by the two heroes in *La Lucha*, would serve a subtler purpose, shaping and circulating norms of national inclusion.

## **Cuban Geneses: Creation Myths of Racial Fraternity**

The effort to raise monuments to national heroes reflected and contributed to a growing feeling of nationalist sentiment. As the U.S. occupation of 1906 to 1909 suggested, the most powerful threat to Cuban independence was the Platt Amendment, which authorized the United States to intervene in Cuban affairs. This provision, which functioned as both a threat and a promise, necessarily shaped Cuban responses to crises and put the independence of the nation in perpetual flux. During the 1906 rebellion, many Cuban political figures openly demanded the intervention of the United States, alternatively to unseat the corrupt president or to put down the uprising – in either case, to restore stability and discipline the country's politics. With the constant specter of U.S. intervention, any internal unrest carried the possibility of collapsing the national project.

Within this context, enduring anxieties about the racial composition of the nation took shape as tensions that would define the early republic. Nationalist ideologies emphasized a Cuban racial fraternity developed on the anti-colonial battlefields of the nineteenth century. In the republic, this ideology continued to rely on sanctifying narratives of the independence wars that centered on racial cooperation and harmony. The prevalence of this belief system benefitted Cubans of color by offering a clear avenue to levels of civic, political, and economic opportunity that might have otherwise been closed to them, but the sacredness of these narratives also precluded Cubans of color from challenging the enduring instances of racism in a society only a few decades removed from slavery.

Cubans seeking to affirm racial unity as tenet of nationalist belief located the genesis of racial fraternity in battlefields of the anti-colonial rebellion. As they built a nation from the

ruins of a slave society, Cubans formulated stories of national origin, seeking to find the moment in which Cubans overturned the structures of colonial society and created something new. Cubans found moments of genesis in both narrating the past and in elevating iconic scenes to myth and metaphor. In the early republic, two historical moments emerged as complementary scenes of racial harmony and transcendence. Racial fraternity as a national value came into being at the Grito de Yara, as Carlos Manuel de Céspedes freed the slaves at his sugar mill and invited them to join the fight for a new Cuba. Nearly thirty years later, the nearly simultaneous deaths of Antonio Maceo and his white aide, Panchito Gómez, came to represent the metaphorical transcendence of racial difference.

Cubans had long identified the Grito de Yara of 1868 as the moment in which Cubans asserted their nationhood. In the first year of Cuban independence, Enrique José Varona, a writer, academic, and veteran of the anticolonial wars declared that “in our annals, no date has the supreme importance to Cubans as... the 10th of October, 1868... The consecration of certain solemn dates in the history of any people,” he argued, “eloquently reveals that successive generations recognize the iron bond that unites them with their pasts.”<sup>50</sup>

October 10 was the starting point for the national story, and the commemorations of that date communicated not only the nation's history, but also its meaning. Faced with the permanent anxiety that social or political unrest would destabilize the republic or provoke a new intervention by the United States, Cubans articulated a vision of the past as a sacred story that would promote a sense of unity and belonging. These national narratives emphasized shared sacrifice and martyrdom for the nation, conveying both social cohesion and the moral and civic values of the new Cuba. One article detailed the odds faced by the

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<sup>50</sup> Enrique José Varona, “Día glorioso,” *El Figaro* 39 (12 October 1902), 481.

1868 conspirators and the sacrifices incurred by the “Cuban family” in their fight for independence. Anticipating the narrative that would be used by Emilio Nuñez in requesting money for a monument to Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, *La Lucha* hoped that “Cuba will know...to make endure an achievement for which so many sacrificed, and [Cuba] will make it endure for the honor and the glory of those who offered the lives of their women, their sons, fathers, and brothers in the tragedy of the *patria*, and who destroyed their own plantations with their own hands.”<sup>51</sup>

Imagery of suffering and redemption pervaded narratives of the anti-colonial struggle. *El Fígaro* declared that October 10 “evokes the memory of the... heroes and martyrs to the cause of Cuba” who served as examples to the magazine's readers “of virtue and patriotic abnegation.”<sup>52</sup> Enrique José Varona insisted that Cubans were morally indebted to those who “had prepared” the present “through their sweat and blood.” The “martyrs of Cuban independence had to complete a Herculean task of physical bravery and moral sacrifice. We, the inheritors of their work, must undertake another labor... We need to have civic value and perseverance to reform ourselves” and maintain the republic.<sup>53</sup> Thus, by sanctifying the martyrs of Cuban nationhood, Cubans would honor their sacrifice in the name of the nation and commit to civic virtue that would ensure the success of the national project. The veneration of iconic heroes served to imbue Cuban patriotism with religious devotion. The writer and journalist Conde Kostia reflected this impulse clearly on October 10, 1902 when he proclaimed that “today the Religion of the *Patria* commemorates the sacred day that

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<sup>51</sup> “10 de Octubre,” *La Lucha*, 10 October 1904, 2.

<sup>52</sup> “10 de Octubre,” *El Fígaro* 41 (11 October 1903), 503.

<sup>53</sup> Enrique José Varona, “Día glorioso,” *El Fígaro* 39 (12 October 1902), 481.

signaled the glorious awakening of the Cuban consciousness that was lulled to sleep by the brutal opiate of degrading servitude.” Kostia suggested that the *patria* itself was a religion, and declared Carlos Manuel de Céspedes “the august Christ of the first Revolution.”<sup>54</sup>

From the inauguration of independence in 1902, commemorations of the Grito de Yara presented a unifying and affirming narrative of the national past that legitimated the republic as its natural end. Carlos Manuel de Céspedes emerged as the “Padre de la Patria,” the leader who envisioned the nation that Cuba would become and set the course for independence. Writers formulated narratives that affirmed social unity and urged patriotic fervor in the face of threats to Cuban nationhood from internal unrest and from the specter U.S. intervention. This meant that potentially complicating or divisive elements of the past were marginalized as a consensual narrative became dominant.

In the second half of the twentieth century, the emancipation and incorporation of the slaves of La Demajagua became perhaps the central feature of the October 10 narrative. The interpretation of the Grito de Yara that opened this chapter, in which Céspedes invited the slaves of his sugar mill to join the fight for a new Cuba, emerged at the foundation of a socially progressive narrative of Cuban nationality. However, in the early republic, most retellings and commemorations of the 1868 story emphasized only the political vision and Republican aspirations of Céspedes and his allies. While history texts and print media of the Revolutionary period after 1959 have celebrated Céspedes's decision to emancipate his slaves and invite them to join the rebellion against Spanish rule as a crucial part of the October 10 story, those events were all but absent from patriotic narratives in the first years of statehood.

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<sup>54</sup> Conde Kostia, “Fechas – 10 de Octubre,” *La Lucha*, 10 October 1902, 2.



The few occasions in the early republic which Céspedes's emancipation of slaves did appear help illuminate the complex interactions of race and memory in the Cuban imagination. The fortieth anniversary of the Grito de Yara in 1908, marked under U.S. occupation, offered a fecund moment for remembrance and reevaluation of the October 10 narrative. That year, the Havana daily newspaper *La Discusión* published a tribute to Carlos Manuel de Céspedes as the architect of Cuban independence. While such commemorative editions traditionally featured a photograph of Céspedes's face, and often an image of the sugar machinery at his mill, *La Discusión* centered its tribute on an artistic depiction of Céspedes with a kneeling slave. The artist depicted a man of color in a supplicant position. He kneels, half-clothed, before a benevolent Céspedes, who seems to be granting him his freedom by touching his head. The directionality of this exchange is clear - Céspedes is bestowing freedom on a passive, grateful recipient. The freed slave, on the other hand, is in a non-threatening position which conveys subordination and deference. Shackles lay at his feet, bonds of slavery which have just been broken. The first version of the Cuban national flag stands in the foreground, underlining the emancipation of slaves as a moment of Cuban national genesis:



Figure 3: Céspedes freeing his slave, *La Discusión*, 1908

The relative postures of Céspedes and the unnamed slave convey the beneficence of the former and the obedience and gratitude of the latter, and their position beside the flag suggests the significance of this even for the forging of a new nation.<sup>55</sup> The magnanimity of

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<sup>55</sup>“Carlos Manuel de Céspedes – La Demajagua,” *La Discusión*, 10 October 1908, 1.

Céspedes's actions suggests that his selflessness and anti-slavery vision were important elements of his heroism and significance to the nation. The lack of a caption, or any mention of slavery and emancipation in the accompanying article render it difficult to ascertain the artist's or publisher's intent, but also suggest that while this was not a central element of the October 10 narrative, the content and story of the image would have been recognizable to readers of *La Discusión*.

Even as Cubans marked the fortieth anniversary of the Grito de Yara, the proposed monument to Carlos Manuel de Céspedes had languished due to funding problems and the intercession of U.S. authorities in 1906. Weeks after *La Discusión* offered its tribute to Céspedes, a group of activists in Santiago wrote a letter to his son, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes y Quesada in Havana, declaring their intention to erect a monument and a mausoleum for Céspedes in Santiago de Cuba, "a grandiose work... similar to that which French patriots built to the great Napoleon." Led by Nicolás Valverde and calling itself the "Carlos Manuel de Céspedes Patriotic Junta," the group envisioned an elaborate and ornate mausoleum in the Santiago cemetery, and announced that they had already commissioned proposals from Cuban and European artists.<sup>56</sup> As their announcement made clear, however, the group had a particular vision for the visual iconography that would adorn the mausoleum. The design joined religious and patriotic imagery in elaborating a powerful narrative of Céspedes's contribution to the national project.

The mausoleum proposed by the junta would feature a marble pedestal and columns, atop which would rest an elaborately decorated dome covering the tomb. Surrounding the

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<sup>56</sup> Junta Patriótica Carlos Manuel de Céspedes to Carlos M. de Céspedes y Quesada, 31 October 1908, Fondo Academia de Historia, Caja 352 Num. 22, ANC.

dome would be two human figures, “a female body representing Cuba Libre” on one side, joined by another figure of “a black man.” Unlike the allegorical depiction of “Cuba Libre,” the black man was described in detail. “In his right hand,” wrote the Junta, he “carries a machete, and in the left a broken chain.”<sup>57</sup> This image evokes both slave emancipation and their incorporation into the ranks of the Liberation Army, marking an aggressive effort to incorporate freed slaves into the national narrative, even if subsumed into the memory of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes.

An editorial in *La Lucha* affirmed the connection between the liberation of slaves and the greatness of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes. *La Lucha* praised Céspedes and the other conspirators of 1868 for “giving up their comforts, their rest, their well-being, their fortune, and throwing themselves into the horrors of war. They emancipated their slaves: they joined with them to go conquer freedom for all.” The juxtaposition of the patriots’ sacrificing their wealth and liberating their slaves implied that these were related categories, that the emancipation of slaves was a sacrifice made to the cause of war. Unlike *La Discusión*, the editors of *La Lucha* elaborated the social and ideological significance of October 10, declaring that Céspedes and his allies “proclaimed the gospel of equal rights.” In asserting racial equality as a nationalist ideology, the editors continued, “they opened a new era for the country.”<sup>58</sup> The apparent celebration of the cross-racial coalition that fought for Cuban independence is striking here insofar as it forms a part of almost no other mainstream narrative of October 10. These invocations of emancipation did not signal the incorporation of slavery into the dominant narrative. While it is clear that the abolitionist story would have

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> “10 de Octubre,” *La Lucha*, 10 October 1910, 2.

been recognizable, even meaningful to Cubans of the early republic, the memory of 10 October 1868 that achieved broad salience minimized this potentially complex vision of Céspedes's role and, by extension, the complex position of slavery and freed slaves in the national narrative.

Cubans similarly made few mentions of race in mainstream commemorations of Antonio Maceo. Much as it appears Cubans were aware of the emancipation of slaves as a part of the October 10 story, the public was certainly cognizant that Maceo was himself of mixed race. In both cases, however, it appears that major political figures and writers –the producers of popular culture – did not view these as useful elements in the construction of useable past. In the first decade after his death, race was rarely a part of Maceo remembrances. Early tributes that appeared in such patriotic newspapers as *Patria* and *La Lucha* made no mention of his race at all.

The anthropological study of his remains in 1899 is a visible and important exception. As discussed earlier, defining Maceo's racial category and determining its significance for the man and the nation was the motivating factor behind the study itself. Given the publicity surrounding that report, the disappearance of race from the dominant narrative of Maceo is all the more striking. It appears that minimizing the importance of racial categories in national history was an important strategy for denying the endurance of social divisions in the republic, and those that did raise the issue of Maceo's race in mainstream forums did so in order to declare Maceo a symbol of racial unity. His racial identity, then, was described only as evidence of its irrelevance, or to accuse those who wanted to address racial inequality of blaspheming his memory.

Much as Maceo's body offered a symbol of national strength and endurance, so too did it become the locus of Cuba's racial harmony. The connection of body and race, drawn in bold relief by the analysis of J.R. Montalvo and his colleagues, continued to structure responses to Antonio Maceo in the republic, even as his body became a racialized symbol of raceless nationhood. In the words of one member of the Cuban House of Representatives, Maceo, as a mulatto, was "the balanced product of the two races that populate the Republic." This internal unity allowed him to "nourish the fraternal union of all Cubans... united by misfortune, sacrifices... and by the ideal which...has given Cuban society a single heart to overcome any obstacle, economic or ethnic."<sup>59</sup>

Although the anthropologists of 1899 chose to measure Maceo in isolation, the narrative of his death was irrevocably connected with that of Panchito Gómez. The image of the two dying side by side, a white soldier and a black General, is an iconic moment in Cuban national memory. Speakers at Cacahual and in Congress declared this moment to represent not only racial unity but the forging of an inclusive national identity. Speaking at the December 7 commemoration at Cacahual in 1908, Vice-President-elect Alfredo Zayas declared that Maceo and Gómez, "falling together at Punta Brava, were the representation of this society, since while one was the exponent of the African race in Cuba, the other was of the Caucasian [race], and... they fell together like both races live together in our society."<sup>60</sup>

Racial fraternity emerged as a salient category in the narratives of October 10 and of Antonio Maceo is suggestive. The fall of 1908 saw the unity of black and white Cubans invoked as the centerpiece of October 10 and December 7 ceremonies. Months earlier, in the

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<sup>59</sup> José Manuel Cortina y García, "1909 Discurso de Cortina," in Rafael Estenger, ed. *Homenaje a Maceo: los discursos de la Cámara de Representantes* (Havana: Editorial Selecta, 1945), 16.

<sup>60</sup> "La peregrinación al Cacahual," *La Lucha*, 8 December 1908, 2.

summer of 1908, a group of Afro-Cuban political leaders formed the *Agrupación Independiente de Color*, later the *Partido Independiente de Color* or PIC, the first and only political party in Cuba formed to represent the interests of Cubans of color.<sup>61</sup> While these examples do not themselves constitute a significant trend, the period between 1908 and 1912 was one of public debate about the relationship between race and national belonging. These more inclusive narratives advanced a vision of the national past that placed racial fraternity at the genesis of Cuban nationhood, and perhaps posed an implicit critique of the PIC. Indeed, the rise of the PIC and its challenge to the sacred narratives of Cuban nationhood dramatically destabilized Cuban nationhood and the memory that sustained it.

## Conclusions

In the first years of national independence, Cubans aggressively worked to mark the national landscape with monuments and memorials. The veterans, political leaders, and nationalist writers who spearheaded this effort sought to sanctify the memories and heroes of the independence struggle and to convert these into an iconography that would unify and represent the young nation. Elaborating a nationalist civil religion would affirm the durability and timelessness of Cuban nationhood while simultaneously initiating Cubans into the values that defined that national community. The processes of monument- and myth-making were uneven in the early republic, as the nascent government was ill-equipped to lead in the creation of national monuments. Most projects were initiated by private subscription, most notably the famous monument to José Martí in Havana's *Parque Central*,

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<sup>61</sup> The party's names translate to "Independent Group of Color" and "Independent Party of Color."

while the government mobilized behind the symbolic power of the completed statue. The 1906 intervention of the United States, resulting in an occupation that lasted until 1909, highlighted the fragility of Cuban independence and the instability of its government.

In the aftermath of the U.S. occupation, however, the newly reformed Cuban government seems to have embraced the political and cultural value in connecting itself with the sacralization of the national past. Occupation authorities initiated reforms to deepen the authority and stability of the Cuban government, including the creation of a standing army to defend against internal rebellion. This new emphasis on government power prompted the administrations of José Miguel Gómez and Mario Menocal to actively pursue the consolidation of a national narrative and iconography using public money and governmental initiative. As the failure of the National Pantheon discussed at this chapter's opening suggests, this effort was not without its false starts and failures, but the years following the 1909 reestablishment of the Cuban republic was marked by a rise in official, government-sponsored nationalism. The Cuban government aggressively pursued the conception and construction of national monuments and asserted its ability and responsibility to define the nation's history. This effort confronted equally energized challenges to nationalist ideologies, exemplified by the protest of the *Partido Independiente de Color*, which confronted narratives of national history which, like those that described the events of 10 October 1868 and the meaning of Antonio Maceo, affirmed the cooperation of black and white Cubans but denied the possibility that anti-black racism had survived the independence struggle.



## II

### **Black and Bronze: Memory, Race, and the Antonio Maceo Monument**

Throughout the night of 19 May 1916, habaneros and visitors from around the island began filling the streets of the capital; the next day would be a busy one. The anniversary of national independence brought Cubans to the streets in celebration. A race at Marianao's speedway excited the city's attention. The main event, however, would be the unveiling of Cuba's first national monument – the first memorial financed and planned by the Cuban government. Before midnight Cubans began gathering in increasing numbers around Parque Maceo on the Malecón, hoping for a view of the tarp-covered monument of Antonio Maceo that would be unveiled the following morning. At midnight, the whistles of the cities factories signaled the start of the celebration, and the low boom of foghorns in the city's port announced the new day. As Cubans marked their fourteenth year of independence with the inauguration of a monument to an iconic national figure, the city thronged with visitors from all over the island. Havana daily *La Discusión* declared, “since the inauguration of the Republic, there has never been a 20<sup>th</sup> of May with a more extraordinary affluence of visitors to this capital.”<sup>1</sup>

The inauguration of the monument to Antonio Maceo offered a dramatic display of national unity and patriotic fervor. As the first commemorative memorial proposed, funded, and built under the auspices of the Cuban state, the monument also seemed to announce a new arrival into nationhood and the consolidation of governmental authority over the past.

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<sup>1</sup> “Los festejos del 20 de mayo,” *Diario de la Marina*, 21 May 1916, 1; “Programa de las fiestas de hoy,” *La Discusión*, 20 May 1916, 2; “Entusiasmo patriótico,” *La Discusión*, 20 May 1916, 2.

Addressing the thousands of Cubans gathered around the park, the famed general and chronicler of the independence struggle José Miró wondered, “What account” he could give that “would be able to contain the pages” of the country’s history “that [Maceo] wrote with his blood?”<sup>2</sup> Amidst the regattas, military guards, and patriotic songs, that question was perhaps more poignant than Miró intended.

Indeed, as Miró addressed the mass of celebrating Cubans, the “*narración*” of the past was at the very heart of the national project that Maceo and his monument represented and at the center of its enduring tensions. The monument project coincided with a period of intense social crisis that unsettled the nationalist ideology that Cubans had begun to consolidate in the first decade of republic. As Cubans gathered to celebrate their national independence, the nation quietly reached a more somber, unsettling anniversary. Four years earlier, the country was riven by violence after the *Partido Independiente de Color* (PIC), a political party organized to represent the interests of Cubans of color, rose in protest against a law outlawing their participation in the country’s elections. The ensuing conflict, which many newspapers deemed a “black uprising” or “race war,” prompted a crisis of national ideology and the narratives of the past that were its foundation and source of resonance. From its inception in 1910, to the selection of the design in August of 1912, to the monument’s dedication four years later 1916, the construction of a statue in the likeness of Cuba’s most iconic person of color created a space in which Cubans directly and indirectly assessed the history of racial inequality and the enduring significance of racial categories in their national narrative.

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<sup>2</sup> José Miró Argenter, *Discurso del General José Miró en el acto de la inauguración del monumento a Maceo el 20 de Mayo de 1916* (Havana: El Siglo XX, 1918), 28.

The universal reverence toward Antonio Maceo both obscured and accommodated divergent visions of the national past. As the previous chapter suggested, Antonio Maceo emerged as the symbolic and historic representation of the transcendence of racial division, a figure whose body and blood offered a physical locus of black and white unity and whose death marked the genesis of a raceless nationality. The armed conflict between the PIC and the Cuban government, narrated in many national newspapers as a “race war” that threatened white Cubans and the ideal of racial fraternity, created a moment of social rupture and panic over the sustainability of national cohesion and, indeed, independence. The deeply held beliefs about the relationship between race and national identity that Maceo had come to embody structured the coming and course of the PIC crisis. Cubans formulated their responses through the memory of national history, giving meaning to the events of 1912 within and against a longer narrative of black patriotism. The memory of Antonio Maceo shaped Cuban reactions to the PIC conflict and, in turn, the monument project forced Cubans to debate and reformulate the meanings of Maceo amid a crisis of racial cohesion.

### **The Patriotic Race: National Ideologies and Afro-Cuban Activism**

By the time of the second U.S. military intervention in 1906, many Cubans increasingly questioned the political and economic structures of the long-sought republic. The political appeal of a racially defined party had its origins in the struggle to gain access to highly prized public jobs, and the apparent ineffectiveness of the major parties to remedy the disproportionately low number of black Cubans in these positions. However, the demands of many Afro-Cubans for greater access and representation in the public rolls were grounded in the ideology and memory of the independence wars. Certainly, for many Cubans of color in

the early republic, this connection was not merely symbolic, but experienced. Still, many Afro-Cuban critics of the mainstream parties drew powerful symbolic sustenance from the experience and memory of black participation in the anti-colonial struggle, building upon a nationalist narrative that emphasized the joining of black and white Cubans in the field of battle to criticize racial divisions in republican society.

The narrative of black participation in the independence wars, embodied in the memory of black national heroes like Antonio Maceo, served as the source of a nationalist discourse through which to formulate critiques of state and society, even as republican leaders themselves laid claim to that very memory. Activists articulated their claims to equal access for Cubans of color to public jobs as a right earned through the wide participation of Cubans of color in the independence wars, arguing that black Cubans had demonstrated both their commitment to country and their fitness for full participation in the republic. The electoral conflict of 1906 convinced some Afro-Cuban leaders that the major political parties would continue to favor white Cubans over blacks, and would never address the concerns of Cubans of color beyond electoral campaigns. The disproportionate awarding of public jobs, they argued, was “unjust, because blacks were as Cuban as whites and had made up the majority of the troops in Cuban revolutions.”<sup>3</sup>

The following year, two black veterans, Ricardo Batrell and Alejandro Neninger, issued a “Manifesto to the People of Cuba and to the Race of Color,” raising black participation in the independence wars to undercut the legitimacy of Republican leaders and to enumerate the failure of white Cubans to live up to the principles of the independence movement. Batrell and Neninger challenged both the nationalist ideology and historical

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<sup>3</sup> *La Discusión*, 29 November 1906 and *La Discusión*, 17 December 1906, in Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 142.

legitimacy of white Cubans, arguing that “[a]fter the War of Independence... our white brothers told us that they were not giving us our rightful participation in the jobs of the country, because the Americans” were in control. After the withdrawal of the United States, Afro-Cubans “became convinced that the Cubans were responsible for discrimination, not the Americans.” White Cubans were not entirely at fault. Invoking the memory of Antonio Maceo, Batrell and Neningen argued that Cubans of color had enabled their own marginalization by refusing to protest it, and thus “no longer deserve to be called a patriotic race, but, on the contrary, a race unable to occupy the true position that History recognizes at the cost of many acts of heroism.”<sup>4</sup>

Batrell and Neningen’s manifesto claimed that the white Cubans who held the reins of Republican government had used the intervention of the United States to obstruct the course of racial equality, which had been a founding principle of the independence movement, and had thus betrayed the sacrifices of the Cubans of color who had fought to bring that ideal to power in the republic. The same manifesto then condemned these Afro-Cubans for failing to equal their own history of courage and struggle by accepting the status quo. Following the logic of this narrative, Afro-Cubans, the “patriotic race,” must reclaim these rights, but could not rely on the cooperation of white Cubans. This was not be the first time, nor surely would it be the last, that Cubans would invoke the betrayal of the nation’s history, which had taken shape as a collective text of moral and social instruction.

The premise of a racially-defined political party to represent Afro-Cuban interests emerged from and relied upon a narrative that emphasized black patriotism and sacrifice, contrasted with white self-interest and betrayal. This construction enabled black Cubans to

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<sup>4</sup> Ricardo Batrell Oviedo and Alejandro Neningen, “Manifiesto al pueblo de Cuba y a la raza de color, *La Discusión*, 11 August 1907, 4.

identify themselves as a group distinguished by their patriotic history as much as their skin color, thus endorsing a positive interpretation of national history while identifying Cubans of color as a distinct collectivity with shared interests. Evaristo Estenoz, a veteran of the War of Independence and former member of the short-lived Committee of Veterans of Color, organized the *Agrupación Independiente de Color* in the summer of 1907 to prepare a slate of candidates to stand in the congressional elections the following year. The group, which later changed its name to *Partido Independiente de Color* (PIC), began publishing its official newspaper, *Previsión*, shortly thereafter.<sup>5</sup>

PIC leaders used the pages of *Previsión* to develop and publicize a narrative of national history that legitimated their oppositional project and undercut the dominant narrative and the republican leadership that it supported. This interpretation of events identified Cubans of color as a distinct group whose past actions demonstrated their particular bravery and patriotism, while affirming racial unity as a nationalist value. In October 1908, Eligio Cantón argued in *Previsión* that, “[n]ever has the *race of color* denied any work of elevated principles tending toward progress, equality, and concord, and so great is its love for human rights that the Cuban [independence] campaign is soaked with the generous, united blood of the Céspedes, the Agramontes... and the innumerable patriots that fell in the great labor of independence.”<sup>6</sup> This vision of the blood of black and white Cubans mixing and together nourishing the nation offered a foundational construct of Cuban nationality, one almost universally endorsed in the republic.

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<sup>5</sup> The original name translates to “Independent Association of Color,” while the group later became the Independent Party of Color.

<sup>6</sup> Eligio Cantón, “Los negros y los políticos,” *Previsión*, October 1908, 1-2. Date illegible.

Whereas in the dominant narrative of national history, writers rarely identified racial categories except when asserting their disappearance or irrelevance, the PIC narrative emphasized these categories to demonstrate their commitment to unity and to emphasize the role of Afro-Cubans in forging the nation, converting memory into an indictment of their marginalization in the republic. Cantón continued, “the history of Cuba will never deny a preferential place to the Maceos, [Flor] Crombet, [Guillermo] Moncada, [Quintín] Banderas,.. and others... Now is the time that the so-called *race of color* that has contributed so much to the freedom of Cuba, upon seeing ...the harm that white compatriots have done to their fate, try to take and drive the wheels of Government together with the white race to see if, by the love of both, we can do better than we have up to now.”<sup>7</sup>

Indeed, the party’s political and social critique of the republic was predicated on the power of memory and the nation’s heroic iconography. One letter to *Previsión* laid plain the connection, demanding, “it’s incredible that the race of Maceo and Moncada, who made war on the bravest and most hardened nation in the work, indomitable Spain, to bequeath to their children and those of the creole whites a free nation... are seen totally excluded from running public administration, scorned, covered in misery and gravely threatened with disappearing from the land that they conquered with their blood.”<sup>8</sup> If the grievances of the PIC and its supporters were articulated through the memory of patriotic glory and sacrifice, then the redress of these critiques would be achieved by reclaiming that past and reformulating the narratives that sustained the status-quo. Through *Previsión*, PIC leaders affirmed and celebrated the dominant interpretation of the independence struggle as forging racial equality,

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<sup>7</sup> Cantón, “Los negros y los políticos,” *Previsión*, October 1908, 2. Date illegible

<sup>8</sup> “Aún quedan hombres,” *Previsión*, October 1908, 6. Date illegible

positioning itself within the accepted framework of Cuban nationalism while challenging the structure of its narrative to sustain their political and social critique of the republic.

As the PIC and its opponents crafted narratives of the independence struggle to sustain their competing arguments and programs, the figure of Antonio Maceo emerged as a symbolic battleground. The *Independientes* were keenly aware that how Cubans understood their history was closely connected with how they understood their present. As a Cuban of color and icon of national independence, Maceo provided powerful support to those who sought to define and claim ownership of his memory. From its inception in 1907, the PIC sought to convince Cubans that the failure of Republican governments to establish national autonomy and foster racial equality resulted from a betrayal of the nation's glorious past.

*Previsión* identified Antonio Maceo as a contested figure and asserted a claim to redefine his memory and meaning for the young nation. "History," the newspaper declared in its 1908 tribute to Antonio Maceo, "sometimes does not give the whole truth... Truth is instead utterly corrupted, mixed up." The accomplishments, achievements, and importance of Antonio Maceo, they suggested, had been obscured by historians seeking to minimize the role of Cubans of color in winning independence. The truth, continued the newspaper, "is changed, disguised, to suit the needs of the historian." According to the PIC, this corrupted narrative of the past underwrote Republican order, sustaining North American dominance and unequal access to power.

Correcting the historical record offered an avenue for addressing and correcting discrimination and marginalization. The party offered a vision of Antonio Maceo that had remained largely beyond the mainstream, one that emphasized his importance for Cubans of color in particular, an image that suggested a more racially and socially progressive Maceo



whose program for the nation had gone unfulfilled. These elements of the Maceo symbol were woven into a traditional celebration of his military prowess, strength, and bravery, but sought a dramatic reevaluation of one of the nation's most beloved icons, and with it, of the meaning of the national past.

The Antonio Maceo found in the pages of *Previsión* served as a symbolic indictment of the republic, one that extended beyond racial inequalities to the very foundations of Cuban independence and the influence of its apparent benefactor, the United States. *Independiente* writers laid out a continuity between Spanish domination and the two U.S. occupations of the island, arguing that, "Maceo was a convinced and pure revolutionary, because he realized that Spain was holding back Cuban sovereignty." He was lucky, then, "not to have witnessed the unforgettable shames of the... Platt Law, and the weakness of those who asked for the second American Intervention." Those who had accepted the intervention and occupation of the United States, according to *Previsión*, had committed a sin against the nation equivalent to enabling Spanish control, and were unfit to claim the mantle of icons like Antonio Maceo.

The PIC undercut the continuity between the long struggle for independence and the Republic, but the party's critique of Cuban society required a wider reframing of the national narrative from which the government and major political parties drew support. That Maceo would have opposed the broadly-derided Platt Amendment was only mildly controversial. In the pages of *Previsión*, however, *Independiente* writers argued that the unjust nature of republican society itself would have prompted Maceo to rebel:

How indignation would have risen in his chest, and with what rage would he have stigmatized the evil Cubans who, not content with having destroyed Cuba in ten years, have done nothing to rebuild its ruins; and instead of opening the way for modern progress, divided citizens by the color of their skin, establishing social classes... Today, Maceo would be more revolutionary than anyone. And not in words, but in constant and enthusiastic action, like when, with immense patriotism,

his body riddled with twenty-six wounds, passed the flag of the *Patria* triumphantly past the planters of Baracoa, to the cliffs of Guane and Viñales, falling in the end, crowned in glory, after a hundred battles.<sup>9</sup>

The passage elaborates a florid, poetic narrative of Maceo's invasion of western Cuba, grounding a contemporary attack on the republic in an emotionally compelling narrative of patriotic heroics. By evoking Maceo's legendary strength and bravery in carrying the rebellion to the heart of colonial wealth, the PIC traced a lineage from their efforts to remake the republic and the resistance Maceo faced in achieving his greatest feat.

Lauding Maceo while giving new meaning to his story enabled the PIC to claim a place within the acceptable bounds of Cuban nationalistic belief and to assert a sharply different interpretation of the nation in its present and its past. In the moment of his death, Maceo's "final thoughts were for the Revolution, for the union of all Cubans," *Previsión* declared, "and for his race."<sup>10</sup> The *Independientes* thus argued that Maceo identified as a Cuban of color, and had a particular concern for the advancement of black Cubans within the framework of national unity – a model of racial harmony predicated on the achievement of equality for Afro-Cubans.

This vision of Maceo was a powerful rebuke to the displays of national unity that marked annual commemorations of his death. The PIC emphasized Maceo's desire for racial and economic equality and characterized the decade that followed the end of Spanish rule in 1898, more than half of which had passed under U.S. occupation, as shameful and ruinous. For the PIC, the figure of Maceo, perhaps more so in death, was the embodiment not of the independence struggle or the transcendence of race, but of the unfulfilled promise of true

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<sup>9</sup> "Antonio Maceo," *Previsión*, 7 December 1908, 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

equality. Because he was such a universally revered figure, Maceo assumed an important position as a symbol whose meaning could be inverted by those on the margins against those in power, an icon that could represent both the historic and nationalist legitimacy of the PIC's program and simultaneously challenge the legitimacy of the republic as constituted after 1898.

The *Independiente* critique of the republic sprung from the conviction that national history had been configured to celebrate Cuban whiteness while normalizing black deference. *Previsión* suggested that historical narratives legitimated the outsize power of white Cubans while minimizing the contributions of Cubans of color, arguing that “[m]any triumphs [attributed] to [the white General] Máximo Gómez belonged entirely to Maceo. Do we say it loudly?” the article continued, apparently recognizing the risk of such a bold challenge to the national story. “The colored race should pride itself on this great *Oriental*,” *Previsión* argued. “It gave great masses to the revolution, just as the Revolution, in its two wars, had in [Maceo] its premier general.”<sup>11</sup>

PIC leaders argued that powerful Cubans had deliberately minimized the importance of Maceo in the independence struggle in order to limit black Cubans' claim to national inclusion. The resolution, then, would be predicated on appropriately remembering Maceo and redefining his meaning as a precursor to carrying out his vision. “What have Cubans done?” the paper demanded. “What have Governments done? What has the Nation done to perpetuate the fame of this great man?” Racial discrimination, the party insisted, could account for the absence of Maceo within the nation's iconography: “Martí, white, already has a statue,” the article noted. “So should Maceo, black, have one... We must give him

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<sup>11</sup>“Antonio Maceo,” *Previsión*, 7 December 1908, 1.

historical worship.”<sup>12</sup> Memory emerged as a potent political weapon, one that bolstered the party’s position while undercutting the nationalist qualifications of its opponents.

### **History in Bronze: The Monument to Maceo**

The following year, the PIC raised its indictment to a crusade. After excoriating the Cuban government for failing to follow through on a 1904 law authorizing funds for a monument to Antonio Maceo, the editors of *Previsión* announced plans to take over the task and build a statue by the subscription of its readers. “*Previsión*,” the paper declared, “fulfilling one of the highest patriotic duties...to the great heroes of its race and the *Patria*, has formed an Executive Commission to render to... the immortal Maceo... a Monument that will perpetuate his great memory through the ages.” By assuming direction of the monument project, the PIC folded a debate over historical truth into a claim to control over the memory and representation of one of the nation’s most revered heroes. In so doing, the *Independientes* challenged the ability and willingness of the republican government to fully incorporate Cubans of color into the nation and its iconography.

The PIC reinforced the compatibility of black identity and Cuban nationalism, asserting Maceo as both a hero of “his race” and of the *Patria*, while announcing plans to build a national monument. The party promoted the monument project as evidence that blackness was a part of Cubanness, to ameliorate concerns that its mission was anti-white and a threat to the republic. The monument, *Previsión* insisted, “would not be the offering of the race of color, no... We say this very loudly... it must be and is the Cuban offering” to

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

Maceo.<sup>13</sup> The monument project, then, assumed a moderate posture. Alongside PIC leader Evaristo Estenoz, its executive committee featured Elizardo Maceo, the nephew of Antonio, and prominent veteran and journalist Lino D'ou, and was headed by famed General Agustín Cebreco. As the announcement in *Previsión* emphasized, the Maceo monument was not to be a memorial by and for Cubans of color, but for all Cubans, even as it was planned and promoted by the PIC. The party's leadership thus asserted the necessity of mobilizing Cubans of color to define and commemorate national history where the government and other private citizens had failed to act, while simultaneously seeking to demonstrate that Cubans of color could offer a national commemoration that would represent all Cubans.

Even as the *Independientes* articulated a moderate, pointedly nationalist discourse around the Maceo monument, the party continued to provoke anxiety and anger from many Cubans, including those in the government of President José Miguel Gómez. The aggressive, confrontational tone taken by the PIC unnerved many Cubans, some of whom raised the specter of an Afro-Cuban conspiracy against the state. Only months after announcing its intention to sponsor the monument, *Previsión* published a bold condemnation of discriminatory practices by North American businesses and the Gómez government, which the PIC claimed was their benefactor. Addressing the statement "To the Government and to the Blacks of Cuba," *Previsión* angrily declared that "The *Partido Independiente de Color* will only cease to exist when a Black punishes severely, killing like a dog, any of those who come to Cuba to humiliate the brothers of Maceo, and the government encourages and protects them."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "Pro-Maceo," *Previsión*, 28 October 1909, 1.

<sup>14</sup> "Al gobierno y a los negros de Cuba," *Previsión*, 30 January 1910, 8.

The apparent threat against foreign interests and the Cuban government prompted swift action. On 10 February, *Previsión* breathlessly announced the government's response: "IMPRISONMENT OF OUR DIRECTOR," the headline declared. "Attempt against the rights of the black race."<sup>15</sup> The imprisonment of PIC leaders and the seizure of *Previsión* marked a surge in governmental action against the *Independientes*, although the legislative response was more threatening to the party's political fortunes.

As the Gómez administration assembled a case against the PIC for allegedly organizing an anti-government conspiracy, Liberal Senator Martín Morúa Delgado proposed an amendment to the Cuban constitution that would outlaw political parties organized or defined by race, a move clearly directed at eliminating the *Partido Independiente de Color*. *Previsión* challenged the proposed amendment, and argued that Morúa, himself a Cuban of color, would be denied service at the Hotel Plaza "the same as the other members of his race."<sup>16</sup> Morúa, another writer declared, had "taken advantage of the most opportune moment he could to show the white family the vehemence of his love for her, giving the first squeeze with all the strength of his barrel-maker's fingers on the throat of the *Partido Independiente de Color*."<sup>17</sup>

The increasing tensions over the PIC and the perceived danger it represented illuminated the centrality and fragility of memory in Cuban life. Aline Helg has noted that "the most incriminating evidence" uncovered by police during the roundup of PIC members in the spring of 1910 was a note found on the person of detained PIC member Tomás Landa

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<sup>15</sup> "Encarcelamiento de nuestro director," *Previsión*, 10 February 1910, 1.

<sup>16</sup> Joaquín Barbosa, "¡Justicia y no venganza!", *Previsión*, 20 February 1910, 1.

<sup>17</sup> P. Mira, "¡Adelante!" *Previsión*, 20 February 1910, 2.

which declared “No doubt, it is necessary to secede, to divide the Republic... I will help to destroy you, evil whites... Maceo’s pantheon is asking for revenge.”<sup>18</sup>

This invocation of Maceo is particularly compelling. If the document were authentic, it would suggest that PIC members did employ Maceo as the foundation for a call to racial separatism and anti-white violence. Alternately, if the paper were a forgery, then its use to accuse and condemn the PIC reveals the extent to which some Cubans feared the potential divisiveness of Maceo’s symbolic power. The growing concern that the PIC sought to overturn the deeply-held national mythology that sustained the republic apparently convinced many Cubans that the party posed a real threat to the nation. Maceo’s own nephew, Elizardo Maceo, who had only months earlier joined the committee organized by the PIC to build a monument to his uncle now condemned the party as racist and separatist.

Even if the Landa document was forged, the memory of Maceo was undoubtedly at the center of the anxious debate over the meaning of race in Cuban national life. Santiago police reported that at a 1911 *Independiente* meeting in Santiago de Cuba, party member Francisco de Paula Luna rose to commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of Maceo’s death. Echoing his party’s belief that the dominant narrative of the national past had obscured historical truth, Luna declared that Maceo had been shot by one of the white soldiers under his command. Seeking to cover up this crime, the white soldiers killed Panchito Gómez, the son of General Máximo Gómez, and circulated the story that a Spanish bullet had felled the caudillo and his aide. The Santiago police reported the incident to the Governor, noting as well that the Independientes had called white Cubans ungrateful, because they had forgotten

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<sup>18</sup> Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 177.

that the greatest feats of Cuba's revolutions had been accomplished by blacks.<sup>19</sup> The Santiago newspaper *El Cubano Libre* assailed the story as "slanderous" and "monstrous," while *La Independencia* pleaded that national heroes be kept from political debates to maintain the "moral peace and good of Cuba."<sup>20</sup>

Heroes and historical narratives, however, were a vital instrument of those working to marginalize and discredit the PIC. The acceleration of government action against the *Independientes* was intimately entangled with the struggle to define the ownership and meaning of the national past. In February 1910, only months after the announcement in *Previsión* of a project led by prominent Afro-Cubans to erect a monument to Maceo, and mere days after the arrest and imprisonment of Evaristo Estenoz, the Gómez administration triumphantly announced that the Cuban government would proceed with an official, publicly funded memorial to Antonio Maceo in Havana. Elizardo Maceo, the nephew of Antonio who had joined the executive committee of the PIC's monument project now attacked the party for its invocations of Maceo's memory, and agreed that its members were plotting a rebellion.<sup>21</sup>

The announcement of a publicly funded monument to Maceo came as a part of a rapidly building consensus that the PIC posed a danger to the survival of the republic. Even as the passing of Morúa's amendment signaled the party's exile from electoral politics, Cuban writers worked to marginalize the movement from Cuban culture and national history. A black political party, as Alejandro de la Fuente has argued, "was a sensible strategy... If

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<sup>19</sup> Agent to Chief of Police, 11 December 1911, Fondo Gobierno Provincial, Leg. 1790, Num. 5, Archivo Histórico Provincial, Santiago de Cuba (Hereafter abbreviated as AHPS).

<sup>20</sup> "Los 'independientes de color,'" *El Cubano Libre*, 11 December 1911, 1; "Versión imprudente," *La Independencia*, 12 December 1911, 1.

<sup>21</sup> Elizardo Maceo Rigo, "Mal proceder. Para todos los cubanos," *La Discusión*, 23 April 1910, 2.



successful, a black political party could become a key broker in Cuban elections... What was sensible politically, however, was unacceptable ideologically.”<sup>22</sup> That ideology derived its moral, social, and political norms from the parables of the national independence struggle, which had, in the narrative that structured the republic, had drawn white and black Cubans together to overcome the colonial system, and with it, racial inequality. As such, historical narratives were also the preferred means of marginalizing the PIC from nationalist orthodoxy.

While the PIC insisted that their project was to carry out the vision of the nation’s founders, its opponents condemned the party as betraying the memory of the independence struggle. One editorial writer condemned the formation of the PIC as an attempt “to destroy, in times of peace, the fecund and admirable unity... that, in those terrible days of war, combined in the most absolute sense of patriotism of all Cubans – blacks and whites, rich and poor, the ignorant and the learned – that together undertook the heroic task of founding... the loving home of the democratic Republic”<sup>23</sup>

Many reactions to the alleged *Independiente* conspiracy revealed a belief that race relations in Cuba were defined by a covenant set out in the previous century. The “fecund and admirable unity” forged between black and white in the battlefield laid the foundation for Cuban nationalism. The simplicity of that formula was perhaps central to its resonance, but it obscured the conditionality of that agreement. By challenging the dominant story of the nation’s founding, the PIC provoked competing revisions that elaborated a narrative of racial covenant and black betrayal.

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<sup>22</sup> De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 66.

<sup>23</sup> “Arbitrariedad e ingratitud,” *El Cubano Libre*, 22 September 1910, 2.

These narratives, which emerged primarily from the politicians and press associated with Cuba's Conservative Party, centered on white sacrifice for the benefit of black Cubans. In a published Conservative circular, Enrique José Varona argued that "the conduct of the white element of our population, with respect to that of color, is the greatest mark of our national history. From the beginning of the past century," he argued, distinguished white Cubans had advocated for the end of slavery, and "as the fruit of their patriotic vision, they received persecution and exile." The Cuban Liberation Army, which declared an end to slavery at the start of its rebellion, also made "the unconditional freedom of those men of color" that joined the rebellion "its first condition... of the pact with Spain." The behavior of Cuban whites toward people of color, which included the "moral elevation" of freed blacks and allowing them access to national politics was, Varona argued, "unprecedented in the history of slave colonies."<sup>24</sup>

Black Cubans, he noted, had distinguished themselves in the fight for independence. "The great majority" of Cubans of color, he argued, "had remained faithful to a line of conduct that had permitted them to progress and to occupy an estimable place in our public life." Varona's historical narrative, then, argued that that black participation in the nation was at the discretion of whites, and predicated on their continued gratitude and appropriate political behavior. The abolition of slavery and incorporation of Cubans of color into national society constituted an agreement between black Cubans and their white benefactors, a pact, Varona suggested, on which the future of the Cuban nation rested. The selfish

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<sup>24</sup> Enrique José Varona, "A los conservadores: circular," *Diario de la Marina*, 23 April 1910, 2.

aspirations of the PIC's leaders, he argued, had violated these norms of acceptable behavior, threatening to destroy Cuban society and "bury us under its ruins."<sup>25</sup>

This Conservative narrative found traction as the crisis deepened. One press editorial traced the long history of race relations in Cuba, arguing that

if one studies the history of African slavery dispassionately, he will see that [slavery in] Cuba was more humane than in other places... and once white Cubans began to have consciousness of their destinies they shared with their slaves the arduous task of founding an equalitarian Republic. It is unnecessary for us to repeat here the features of altruism and generosity which, at great risk of their lives, the forerunners of the revolution of Yara gave in manumitting their slaves, and few societies can boast feelings more pious and edifying in the relationship between black and white as Cuban society can.<sup>26</sup>

The emergence of the PIC prompted an energetic recalibration of national narratives in search of one that would support the unacceptability of an Afro-Cuban political party.

### **A History of Violence: Narrating 1912**

On 20 May, the tenth anniversary of Cuban independence, members of the PIC staged an armed uprising in an attempt to force the government to repeal the Morúa Law and allow the party to participate in the November elections. What began as a limited threat to foreign property in Oriente province shifted rapidly into a bloody and widespread assault against Cubans of color by the Cuban army and volunteer paramilitary groups. As violence broke out between the PIC and the Cuban government, these narratives amplified and radicalized. Although the government was initially slow to respond, the national press quickly characterized the protest as a "racist" uprising of black Cubans against the nation's whites. The widening bloodshed, joined with the racial dimensions of the conflict, accelerated the

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> "Lección objetiva," *El Cubano Libre*, 14 October 1910, 2.

process of marginalization and condemnation of the PIC that began years earlier. The violence prompted near-universal condemnation, but the threat the PIC posed to the Cuban republic was immediately less important than the threat to national cohesion, signified by its violation of the nation's history.

Cuban journalists in 1912 tasked themselves with reconciling *Independiente* uprising with the history of a nation that had been founded through cross-racial sacrifice. Havana's *El Mundo* offered an editorial that extended the Conservative narrative articulated in 1910, locating whites at the center of Cuban nationality. Cubans of color entered the nation through the generosity of whites, and could only progress through continued cooperation and deference. "Men of color," the editorial argued, "have won something in all of our revolutions. In [the Ten Years' War which began in] 1868, [they won] manumission. With [the War of Independence in] 1895, equality in civil and political rights and access to public doors. On the other hand, white Cubans, who were the rich ones, have impoverished themselves as a consequence of such wars. But all of this has been forgotten." Not only had white Cubans sacrificed wealth and standing in wars that benefitted black Cubans, but "[t]he best white youth of the country... have accepted the leadership, in times of war, of popular *caudillos* of color like Maceo, like his brother José, like Flor Cronvet [*sic*]... like [Augustín] Cebreco, like Quintín Banderas, like [Guillermo] Moncada. The white offered in this way... a sign of confidence, of cordiality, of consideration at his compatriot of color."<sup>27</sup> The apparent uprising of the PIC suggested, then, that Cubans of color were ungrateful for the sacrifice of whites and unequal to their selfless patriotism.

Writers in 1912 converted national history into a parable of racial cooperation and deference that reinforced white dominance and communicated the conditions of black

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<sup>27</sup> "La convulsión racista," *El Mundo*, 20 June 1912, 2.

inclusion. Cuban national independence and statehood was the work of whites who had selflessly given up their privilege and control to grant black Cubans freedom, equality, and political power. A column the following morning in *El Mundo* sought to establish the European origins of Cuban nationhood, arguing that:

This Spanish race, to which we belong, from which we descend, a race that possesses, with certain lamentable defects, a great level of nobility, fought for pure ideals, for noble feelings... for love of country... The liberators of Latin America have been true offspring of the Spaniards. Bolívar, San Martín, Páez... Narciso López, Céspedes, [Ignacio] Agramonte, Martí, Máximo Gómez. All of this legion, of distinguished Americans, sons of Spaniards, fought for liberty and independence.<sup>28</sup>

The line of descent set out in the editorial pointedly excluded Afro-Cubans, reinforcing the message that Cuban nationhood was bestowed and, significantly, controlled by whites. The hope of Cuban independence relied on the bravery and sacrifice of white leaders and on the deference of black Cubans to their leadership: “Our intelligent and thoughtful Cubans of color,” *El Mundo* continued, “remember that their race has always won something living with the whites, marching with them, and their side, and that, in turn... have won nothing when they have operated on their own. Nothing won,” the article continued, “and indeed the black race lost much with its movement [the “Escalera” slave rebellion] in 1844. Nothing has been won either with this deplorable movement of Estenoz and Ivonet.”<sup>29</sup> The equation of the *Independientes* with an anti-slavery rebellion suggested that there were no circumstances in which Cubans of color should operate without the approval and leadership of whites, even against forced servitude at the hands of whites themselves.

The *Independiente* conflict did not so much unsettle the fraternity of black and white Cubans as it exposed the conditions of that ideal, revealing deep fissures in nationalist

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<sup>28</sup> Gastón Mora, “El conflicto de razas,” *El Cubano Libre*, 24 June 1912, 5.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

ideology. While some Cubans reacted to the outbreak of violence by affirming the sacrifice of white Cubans as the source of Cuba's racial progress, other writers delegitimized the PIC by contrasting the party's project with the behavior of patriotic black heroes. The architects of this narrative simultaneously advanced a vision of patriotic blackness built upon the model of Antonio Maceo and other figures of the independence struggle. "Successors to the Maceos, to the Moncadas, the Crombets, they call themselves," wrote *La Lucha* soon after the 1910 arrests. "This title insults the men of the black race who don't share in their deviance... All the great revolutionary figures who came from the black race constantly maintained total opposition" to any racism."<sup>30</sup>

Indeed, even as the violence between government forces and the PIC prompted some writers to declare a generalized black rebellion, the memory of Afro-Cuban heroism offered a valuable avenue to separate the PIC from patriotic Cubans of color. As they celebrated the fealty of black Cubans to the nationalist cause, these narratives affirmed and circulated norms of patriotic blackness that those heroes represented. In Santiago, *El Cubano Libre* cautioned that, "We have to take into account that the Cuban intellectuals of the colored race, and in general, the Cubans of color who have some mental culture, are opposed to the racist movements." What separated these patriotic and cultured Cubans of color from the PIC was fidelity to the lessons of national history. White leaders like Ignacio "Agramonte called out for the ideal" of independence, argued *El Mundo*. "Martí succumbed, in Dos Rios, for the ideal." On the other hand, the writers noted, it was "[f]or this ideal, Maceo resigned himself to be second in the revolution and the Republic, so that nobody would see any racist

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<sup>30</sup> "Basta con la equidad," *La Lucha*, 22 April 1910, 1.

tendency in this era. These were the lyrical times of Cuban patriotism.”<sup>31</sup> While white figures were heroic for their leadership and martyrdom, Antonio Maceo’s “lyrical patriotism” was identified as his willingness to abandon influence in order to assure white leaders that he would not threaten their control.

*El Cubano Libre* reinforced this interpretation, arguing that “the colored race *has always gained* when it has marched with whites, and those that have distanced themselves *have always lost*. This is a great historical lesson... maintaining harmony with whites means maintaining the politics of the great Maceo [who was] made the Lieutenant General of the Liberating Army by whites.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the claim that black independent mobilization had historically threatened Cuban aspirations suggested that the national narrative supported not racial equality but racial cooperation through a clearly defined power relationship. Maintenance of harmony relied on the continued cooperation of black Cubans, rather than on the achievement of social progress.

The simultaneous circulation of these narratives illuminates the ambiguity of racial and historical narratives in the Cuban response to the PIC. On consecutive days, *La Lucha* published front-page cartoons centered on the traditional, feminine personification of the republic under attack by the PIC rebellion. In the first, which appeared on 9 June 1912, “Liborio,” a male figure frequently used to represent the Cuban people, calls the nation to battle as he attempts to save a white, female figure representing the republic, who has been forced onto her knees, from the advances of two armed black Cubans. One of these men has a machete raised above his head, while the other has leaned forward, and is depicted sinking his teeth into her arm. That image evoked allegations of cannibalism by the rebels, while

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<sup>31</sup> “La guerra impía,” *El Mundo*, 21 June 1912, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Gastón Mora, “El conflicto de razas,” *El Cubano Libre*, 24 June 1912, 5.

metaphorically characterizing the PIC as a threat to Cuba, and civilization itself (see figure 4 below).



Figure 4: The PIC as cannibals, 9 June 1912

The very next day, the newspaper published a cartoon built upon a similar iconography, but with a very different message. In this image, a woman with dark skin is kneeling, similar to the posture forced upon the republic in the previous day's image. Behind her stands a shirtless black man, carrying a torch and a machete in his hands, who appears to be calling out to her. With a Cuban flag leaned against her shoulder, she has turned away from him, covering her eyes in apparent shame and disgust. Beside her, the caption reads: "The colored race: Cuban before black" (see figure 5 below). Whereas a white woman, under cannibalistic assault by black Cubans, represented an idealized Cuban republic, the artist used a kneeling black woman to represent the idealized "raza de color," embracing its



Cuban-ness and rejecting the temptations of blackness.<sup>33</sup> The juxtaposition of these images of blackness – the first, brutal and cannibalistic, the second divided between race and nation – illuminates the struggle to reconcile the emergence of the PIC with the memory of racial fraternity forged in the independence struggle.



Figure 5: “The colored race: Cuban before black,” 10 June 1912

The caption of the second cartoon demanded that Cubans of color choose between identifying as black and identifying as Cuban. Narratives emphasizing the historic fraternity of black and white under a national banner positioned the PIC as a betrayal of both groups and their shared aspirations. Despite breathless declarations that the conflict between the PIC and the government had become a “race war” pitting whites against blacks, a great number of prominent Afro-Cuban veterans and black societies immediately condemned the party in similar terms. In a manifesto released to the Havana press, the city’s black societies had

<sup>33</sup> *La Lucha*, 9 June 1912 and 10 June 1912.

roundly condemned the PIC in 1910 amid reports that the party was conspiring against the republic and white Cubans, declaring that the “from the beginnings of our yearnings for independence... blacks and whites have labored together, heart with heart to solidify the beautiful reality of the Republic that shelters all of us.” The PIC, the statement continued, sought to “tear the solidarity that needs to exist between blacks and whites in Cuba if we want to save a republic molded with the blood of our heroes.”<sup>34</sup>

Not all of Cuba’s heroes, of course, were killed in the wars against Spain. As debate grew over the PIC and its relationship to race and the independence struggle, veterans of the Liberation Army asserted a role as keepers of that memory. The PIC itself had emerged from a black veterans’ organization, and had counted famed Afro-Cuban veteran Agustín Cebreco among the planners for its Maceo monument. The Veterans Councils seemed to be natural arbiters of the past, as their members could draw from direct experience in forging the multi-racial armies of independence. Two days after the conflict began, the National Council of Veterans met to discuss the spreading violence and the national panic that ensued. The council offered a resounding condemnation of the revolt, but sought to minimize the racial element of the rebellion and the response.

Their condemnation, declared Council President Emilio Nuñez, would be the same if the rebels were white as if they were black. The council reaffirmed the lessons of the independence war in the face of this apparent challenge to that memory: “Now more than ever,” said Nuñez, “we must remember that it is a small group of the colored race that has forgotten the fraternal embrace in the sacred fields of San Pedro. The embrace... given by the two races to mix the blood of the immortal Maceo with that of Panchito Gómez.” The Council unanimously adopted a resolution condemning the rebellion, but asking that the

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<sup>34</sup> “La cuestión racista: manifiesto de las sociedades de color,” *La Lucha*, 3 May 1910, 2.

national media remove the word “racist” from its coverage. To call the movement racist, argued Lieutenant Frederick Madrigal, would be “to sew a state of division in the country.” The very idea of a racist rebellion, then, was more dangerous than the threat posed by a group which, the veterans noted, represented a small segment of the country’s Afro-Cuban population. As the Council of Veterans defended the durability of nationalist ideology, declaring themselves “the guardians of the sacred space of our liberties,” they were motivated by a more pragmatic concern as well. Attributing a racial motive to the present unrest would only further enflame the conflict, a result which the veterans feared might prompt an intervention by the United States. “It is untrue,” Madrigal continued, “that this is a race movement... and what proves it is that the majority in this room are liberators from the colored race.”<sup>35</sup>

As the veterans noted, Afro-Cubans were among the most vigorous critics of the PIC. Martín Morúa Delagado, of course, authored the law which banned the formation of racially-defined political parties, and most other prominent Cubans of color publicly condemned the PIC as a threat to social cohesion and national ideology. Jesus Rabí, a celebrated Afro-Cuban general, offered his services to combat the rebellion, as did other black veterans of the independence wars. Certainly, the emergence of the PIC represented a debate among Cubans of color over the most sensible and advantageous mode of political engagement, but as Alejandro de la Fuente has argued, the ideal of racial fraternity remained emotionally resonant to Cubans black and white, and many Cubans of color continued to believe that the major parties offered the best avenue for advancing their positions. Indeed, the national narrative of racial unification in the anti-colonial struggle was resonant and useful to a large number of Cubans, and strong criticism of the PIC and its vision of the national past came

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<sup>35</sup> “El Consejo Nacional de Veteranos,” *La Lucha*, 22 May 1912, 2.

from Cubans of color as well as whites. A letter to *El Mundo* accused the PIC of threatening “this generous Republic for which Martí, Céspedes, Agramonte, and many other whites died.” Whereas the narratives advanced by the PIC noted the decisive role of Afro-Cubans in winning national independence, the letter insisted that “the wars that took place in Cuba to achieve independence have most benefitted the race of color. The fruit of white sacrifice has principally been for them, having attained among many things the abolition of slavery, inclusion in the government of the republic.”<sup>36</sup>

The course of this narrative, then, supports the opposite conclusion of those found in *Previsión*: unity with whites had benefitted Cubans of color in the past, and thus would continue to do so. The writer suggested then, that Cubans of color should be grateful for that sacrifice “for them,” and thus the organization of the PIC was a betrayal of those efforts. The letter’s author, writing as the army’s suppression of the PIC drew to a close, declared that “[a]s a member of the race of color, I congratulate General Gómez and his government... and the victorious army, and give my vote that we will return again to the reign of harmony between the white race and ours.”<sup>37</sup>

The suppression of the PIC proceeded swiftly, as the Cuban army and armed groups of white Cubans pursued suspected collaborators, which included virtually all Cubans of color in Oriente province. The fear that racial conflict would doom the Cuban national project acquired even greater weight under the specter of the Platt Amendment. Rumors of U.S. intervention spread quickly. Like the Liberal Party rebels of 1906, the PIC did reach out to the United States to mediate the conflict after the Cuban army launched its assault in Oriente. According to the U.S. Consul in Santiago, Evaristo Estenoz argued that the

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<sup>36</sup> Venancio Milián, “Patriótica carta,” *El Mundo*, 17 June 1912, 2.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

government had “made the whites believe the negro hates them,” and that his just campaign for equality “has become purely a race war, though Estenoz asserts the contrary is true.”<sup>38</sup>

The PIC’s reaching out to the U.S. had already become a *de rigeur* strategy for Cuban opposition movements, who might seek power by provoking intervention or mediation by the United States. Estenoz’s claim that the government had created a race war speaks to the power of narrative in defining events, and reveals the PIC leader’s knowledge of the propaganda being deployed against him. The State Department advised the Consul to make no response to the letter.<sup>39</sup> Estenoz was killed soon thereafter, and other leaders were pursued. By August, the brutal conflict was over.

As it had shaped the course of the PIC rebellion and the public reaction, the specter of independence icons hung over the aftermath of that bloody summer. Cuban journalists had framed events through a discourse that conveyed black-white cooperation in Cuba as a sacred covenant, an agreement that the PIC had violated with their rhetoric and armed protest. On 17 June 1912, *La Lucha* marked the seventh anniversary of the death of General Máximo Gómez with a cartoon that placed the independence hero on the field of battle once again. Standing as a ghostly apparition on horseback, Gómez is depicted under a ray of light, surveying the dead, defeated black fighters, their horses, guns, and machetes scattered around their bodies. Gesturing toward them, he asks God to “Pardon them... they do not know what they do.”<sup>40</sup> The image, titled “The Shadow of the Liberator,” invokes the plea for divine forgiveness made by Jesus Christ to his executioners, drawing a narrative parallel between

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<sup>38</sup> “Paraphrase of telegram to State Department from Consul at Santiago de Cuba, 13 June 1912, 837.00/796, United States Department of State, Record Group 59 (Hereafter abbreviated as USDS RG 59).

<sup>39</sup> Philander Knox to U.S. Consul at Santiago, 20 June 1912, 837.00/796, USDS RG 59.

<sup>40</sup> “La sombra del libertador,” *La Lucha*, 17 June 1912, 1.

that act and the uprising of the PIC. The forgiveness in this case is asked on behalf of the PIC combatants, whose blasphemy against Cuban civil religion, it seemed, has been punished by the sacrifice of their lives.

As the PIC had accused ungrateful whites of forgetting Afro-Cuban efforts in the independence struggle, so too did newspaper writers frame the PIC uprising as black ingratitude for the generosity of white Cubans. The events of 1912 fractured the national narrative as writers reframed the terms of Cuban national belonging to isolate the *Independientes* and to suggest that Afro-Cubans had violated the covenant established in the independence struggle. These narratives made possible the brutal and bloody repression of the PIC and widespread assaults against Afro-Cubans across the island.

### **Making Antonio Maceo: Monument and Memory after the PIC Conflict**

The national government emerged from the conflict more muscular and powerful, marking its bloody but swift suppression of the PIC with a dramatic display of unity and governmental authority. Fewer than ten days after PIC leader Pedro Ivonet was killed by government troops, the administration of José Miguel Gómez hosted an outdoor banquet to honor the victorious Cuban military whose campaign had inflicted thousands of casualties upon Cubans of color, mostly civilians, while suffering fewer than twenty of their own.<sup>41</sup> The enormous celebration, which hosted more than three hundred soldiers, military leaders, government officials and prominent veterans, represented more than the army's defeat of an insurgent threat. In a move that affirmed the centrality of memory in the coming and course of the 1912 violence while solidifying the government's role as keeper of national

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<sup>41</sup> See Lillian Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 232; Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 194-96, 200-201.

memory, the banquet was held in Havana's Parque Central, with the tables organized around the imposing statue of José Martí, which had been dedicated seven years earlier.<sup>42</sup>

Eight tables radiated around the statue, which stood at the physical and symbolic center of the banquet. General José de Jesús Monteagudo, the chief of the Cuban armed forces, had been venerated at the banquet with the playing of a new patriotic song named in his honor. At the main table sat José Martí y Zayas Bazán, the son of Cuba's great hero and a Colonel in the armed forces who had helped lead the campaign against the *Independientes*. As the banquet drew to a close, Monteagudo asked the soldiers, politicians, and veterans to rise to their feet as he faced the Martí statue and offered "a sincere and profound pledge...to the elevated one... who is the emblem of the Cuban ideal... that never again in Cuba will Cuban blood be spilled."<sup>43</sup> Mario García Kohly offered the keynote address, thanking the armed forces and General Monteagudo, for "saving the republic for civilization and Cuban freedom." Kohly stood beside Martí's son, and declared that the statue was the most appropriate place to celebrate the patriotism and valor of the Cuban army, whose service in suppressing the rebellion "had demonstrated" themselves to be "worthy inheritors and sustainers of the liberating army that won our independence with such greatness and glory."<sup>44</sup>

As García Kohly spoke underneath the statue of Martí, another heroic figure loomed large on the horizon. Only weeks after the banquet in Parque Central, the design submissions for the Antonio Maceo monument were to go on display in Havana. As the head of the monument project's Executive Committee, Mario García Kohly was charged with helping

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<sup>42</sup> Rafael Conte and José M. Capmany, *Guerra de Razas: Negros Contra Blancos en Cuba* (Havana: Impresa Militar, 1912), 180-192.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

select a design that would alter the Havana skyline and serve as a daily invocation of the hero's memory and meaning. On its surface, the design competition, announced in the wake of the first wave of arrests against the PIC, offered a world of artists the opportunity to plan and create a lasting and important work that would help define a newly emerging nation. However, the details of the monument project reveal a closely controlled process meant to affirm the centrality of the government in defining the past and to communicate a model of modern Cuban nationhood across the country and across the ocean.

From its inception, the publicly funded monument to Antonio Maceo was intimately entangled with the PIC conflict and the struggle to lay claim to the national past. Only months after the announcement in *Previsión* of a project led by prominent Afro-Cubans to erect a monument to Maceo, and mere days after the arrest of Evaristo Estenoz, the government of President José Miguel Gómez, announced the publicly funded memorial to Antonio Maceo in Havana. This decree marked a departure from past commemorative projects, which had been promoted and funded by popular subscription, like the project proposed by the PIC had proposed. In the aftermath of the second U.S. occupation of the island, the Cuban government appeared inclined to assert a more forceful and proactive claim to national heroes and symbols. The law, authored in the *Cámara de Representantes* by Orestes Ferrara, announced an international competition for the design and construction “a monument to the memory of Major General of the Liberating Army Antonio Maceo, which will represent him on horseback and in a combat posture.” In addition to setting out the context in which Maceo would be depicted, the Cuban *Cámara* insisted that the monument be built from bronze. The remainder of the design would then be left to the participating sculptors. The competition would be open “to artists from any country; to this effect the



contest will be published in Italy, France, Germany, Spain, Belgium, Holland, the United States, Mexico, and the Argentine Republic.”<sup>45</sup> Scale models would then be sent to the *Cámara* and then be put on public display before a winner was chosen. The executive committee, which would ultimately decide on the monument’s design, would be headed by Senator Salvador Cisneros y Betancourt, Secretary of Public Instruction and Fine Arts Mario García Kohly, and José Miró, a famed chronicler of the independence wars and close aide to Antonio Maceo.<sup>46</sup>

Anxiety and bloodshed shaped the intervening years between the announcement of the monument project in 1910 and the display of the model submissions only a month after the end of combat in 1912. Even as Cubans interpreted the growth and bloody suppression of the PIC through the memory of Antonio Maceo, the artists crafting models for the Maceo monument were unfazed by the turmoil gripping the country whose history they hoped to iconize in bronze. Indeed, the language and purpose of the monument competition reflected the Cuban government’s continued desire to establish a modern, European aesthetic for the new nation and would further support efforts to locate Maceo within a pantheon of European national and mythical heroes.

The response to the models, which went on display in August 1912 at the School of Arts and Crafts in Havana, reflected the same concern among art critics. There were no Cuban artists among those submitting models, nor sculptors from elsewhere in the Americas. In the early twentieth century, Cuba lacked a school for sculpture, and thus produced few home-grown artists until the 1920s. In its weekly *Ornato Público* section, *La Discusión*

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<sup>45</sup> “Proyecto de Ley sobre el monumento al Mayor General Antonio Maceo,” 22 November 1909, Fondo Academia de Historia, Caja 497, Num. 520, ANC. The law was officially passed on 26 February, 1910.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

evaluated the twenty-six submissions. The bulk of submissions came from Italian sculptors, with others from Germany, England, and Spain.<sup>47</sup> These critics identified a close connection between the aesthetic and symbolic quality of the monument and the fitness of Cuba as a nation in the international sphere, cautioning readers that Cuba must be very careful in selecting the best monument design “so that abroad we do not continue to be called “Indians in frock coats.”<sup>48</sup> Among the lesser submissions was that of Giulio Padolini, whose “model is very bad and is missing a head on the horse,” and another by Italian sculptor Buemi, known in Cuba for designing monuments to Ignacio Agramonte in Camaguey and José Martí in Matanzas, whom the paper criticized for depicting Maceo “not as a soldier, giving order to his troops...in the heat of combat, but as a conceited rider... having his portrait done, putting on a genteel attitude.”<sup>49</sup>

Critics in *La Discusión* argued that the monument should be “more symbolic than descriptive,” because Maceo was “more than a patriot, more than a soldier, more than a brave man, he was the incarnation of an ideal... of the spirit of rebelliousness of this people, so persistent in the fight against their oppressors.” The monument, the writers argued, needed to do more than accurately represent the man. It must be, they argued, “a hymn to the freedom of Cuba, a monument to independence” that would show for “two or three hundred years” that “Maceo will be a legendary figure in our history, like Garibaldi is in Italy’s... it

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<sup>47</sup> Santiago historian Aida Morales Tejada has pointed out that until the 1930s, Cuba had no school for instruction of sculpture, and thus produced very few sculptors in the early republic. Indeed, the enormous majority - perhaps all - of Cuba’s major monuments and statues were the work of foreign artists. This began to change in the 1930s with the ascendance of Teodoro Ramos Blanco. See Aida Morales Tejada, *La escultura conmemorativa en Santiago de Cuba, 1900-1958* (Santiago de Cuba: Ediciones Santiago, 2008).

<sup>48</sup> “Los bocetos para el monumento a Maceo,” *La Discusión*, 6 August 1912, 8.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 14

must be a page of our history, perpetuated in marble and bronze as an example and lesson for future generations.”<sup>50</sup>

The handwringing over what the monument’s design would convey did not cease with the choice of a winner. On 16 August 1912, the executive committee announced that Domingo Boni, an Italian sculptor living in Madrid, would design and build the nation’s monument to Antonio Maceo. The executive committee, it seemed, had struggled to choose between Boni’s work and that of another Italian artist, Giovanni Niccolini, a debate which centered on which monument’s design was more symbolic or more descriptive. By a vote of three against two, the executive committee voted in favor of Boni’s design, explaining that it better represented Maceo as he was in life.<sup>51</sup> The decision prompted a flurry of protest. Letters to the executive committee accused its leaders of choosing a winner without the votes of all committee members, who should have numbered nine rather than five.<sup>52</sup>

This and other writers supported Giovanni Niccolini, the Italian sculptor whose submission had lost to Boni by a single vote. Concerns about the winning submission centered on its potential to represent Cuba overseas and over time. One letter explained that Niccolini’s previous works could be found adorning plazas and government buildings around Italy and Germany. An artist with such a pedigree, argued J.A. González Lanuza, would offer a fitting tribute to the memory of Antonio Maceo and help Cuba produce artists of its own in future generations. Another letter, signed by Fernando Freire de Andrade, Havana’s mayor, offered an even more pointed critique of Boni’s design: “It is a cold project,

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<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> “The Maceo Statue,” *The Lucha* English-language supplement to *La Lucha*, 17 August 1912, 1.

<sup>52</sup> J.A. González Lazua to Jose Miró, n.d., Fondo Secretaria de la Presidencia, Caja 1045, Num. 69015, ANC.

anachronistic, without style, inspired in a wasted symbolism that appeals to ‘Theological Virtues’ and the heroes of ancient Greece to valorize a modern hero.” Nicolini’s monument, “filled with poetry, patriotic fervor, [and] artistic unction” would be “a work worthy of inclusion in the most advanced cities of the world, alongside the creations of the most famous ancient and modern sculptors.”<sup>53</sup> Domingo Boni ultimately received the commission over the concerns of artists, politicians, and attorneys, and won a sum of ten thousand pesos from the Cuban coffers, along with travel costs and materials. Nicolini received a smaller prize, in recognition of his work. By early 1915, Boni had begun assembling the enormous monument along the Malecón, at the center of what would become Parque Maceo.

#### **“What the Statue Said to Me”: Inaugurating the Maceo Monument, 1916.**

The inauguration of the Antonio Maceo monument offered Cubans the opportunity to reassert the durability of their nation through a grand display of unity and nationalism. Cubans looked to the coming of 20 May 1916 with great excitement and anticipation as they prepared to celebrate the memory of Antonio Maceo and commemorate the fourteenth anniversary of national independence. From its inception, the monument project had served multiple purposes, promising to affirm both the historical legitimacy and modernity of Cuban nationhood, to assert the Cuban government as the keeper and interpreter of national memory, and to subsume racial anxieties into a transcendent national symbol. In the aftermath of 1912, the latter was both profoundly important and notably silent. The Maceo monument, a project once proposed by the PIC and then announced as a government-sponsored endeavor, would be unveiled and dedicated on the fourth anniversary of the

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<sup>53</sup> Fernando Freire de Andrade, Isidoro Corzo, Emilio Heredia, Mariano Miguel, M. Angel Quevedo, Aurelio Meloro, Fernando Adelantado, Francisco de Paula Coronado, “El Monumento a Maceo: Una protesta,” *Diario de la Marina*, 24 August 1912, 5.

party's armed protest of 1912. Coinciding with a celebration of patriotism and unity, the anniversary of the PIC conflict was, not surprisingly, unacknowledged. The brutal campaign waged by the army and paramilitary groups had crushed the PIC, but had not resolved the underlying tensions that had given life to the party and its critique. The swiftness and violence of the party's suppression did, however, make clear the terms of national inclusion and the stakes of challenging nationalist ideologies.

The Cuban press heralded the arrival of 20 May 1916 as a national coming-out party. The fourteen years since the 1902 inauguration of the Cuban republic had seen two major internal conflicts and a three year occupation. "The most dangerous period," offered Havana daily *Diario de la Marina* "has perhaps now passed. The period of probation... of inexperience... The age of uprisings has ended."<sup>54</sup> The anniversary of independence, combined with the dedication of the Maceo monument and the country's recent economic boom seemed to mark the country's emergence as a progressive, modern nation. *La Discusión* heralded "a new era in national life," signaled by economic prosperity, sovereignty, and public institutions comparable to "the most advanced nations in the world." Cuban "nationality," declared the newspaper's editors, "has become as solid as a rock."<sup>55</sup> On the day before the monument's dedication, *Diario de la Marina* declared, "one feels the excitement to commemorate the date beating more lively, more intense than in other years... Perhaps," continued the editorial, "the inauguration of the Maceo statue, and the solemnity of the official and public acts that celebrate it; and the memories that famous revolutionary

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<sup>54</sup> "Las fiestas patrióticas," *Diario de la Marina*, 19 May 1916, 3.

<sup>55</sup> "A los catorce años," *La Discusión*, 20 May 1916, 2.

*caudillo* evokes in the Cuban people has served to revive the heat of patriotic celebrations.”<sup>56</sup>

Even merchants affirmed the connection between monumental representations of national heroes and fitness for nationhood, urging Cubans to attend the dedication by insisting that “peoples who honor their caudillos are worthy peoples.”<sup>57</sup>

Revelers from Santa Clara boarded overnight trains to the capital on the night of the nineteenth, while the United Railroads of Havana scheduled extra trains to transport Cubans to the city from outlying towns.<sup>58</sup> Expatriates returned from Key West and Tampa to witness the monument’s dedication, and Havana’s hotels swelled, unable to accommodate the visitors arriving to the city.<sup>59</sup> Guides and schedules to the day’s events filled the country’s newspapers as 20 May approached, enabling Cubans to sift through nearly twenty-four hours of events to mark the date. The ships in Havana’s port broke the midnight silence on 20 May by sounding their horns, met with whistles from the city’s factories and an eruption of fireworks. At 4 a.m., bands traversed the Havana streets, sounding the reveille to announce the day.<sup>60</sup>

By morning, revelers swarmed the new Maceo Park, perching atop balconies and roofs of surrounding buildings, as the “wide, expansive *Avenida de General Maceo*, formerly the Malecón, was unable accommodate the dense crowd.”<sup>61</sup> As the monument itself might serve to affirm Cuba’s status as a worthy, modern and stable nation, Cuban writers looked to

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<sup>56</sup> “Las fiestas patrióticas,” *Diario de la Marina*, 19 May 1916, 3.

<sup>57</sup> Advertisement for El Escudo Americano, Steinberg Bros., in *La Lucha*, 19 May 1916, 3.

<sup>58</sup> “Ferrocarriles Unidos de La Habana” advertisement, *Labor Nueva* 10 (30 April 1916), 5.

<sup>59</sup> “Entusiasmo patriótica,” *La Discusión*, 20 May 1916, 2.

<sup>60</sup> “Programa de las fiestas de hoy,” *La Discusión*, 20 May 1916, 2.

<sup>61</sup> “Cien mil personas se congregan alrededor de la estatua del Titán de Bronce,” *El Cubano Libre* 21 May 1916, 1.

the assembled crowd as confirmation of national unity and fitness forged in the independence struggle and consolidated by commemoration. *La Lucha* noted that the streets were crowded with Cubans of every background, from those who had built great wealth in the republic to “the peasant who abandoned his *bohío* for a few days to come and contemplate the monument to Maceo, the Titan that he knew in the field of battle.” Men on horseback mingled with well-dressed women in cars and carriages as they came to view the statue that, in the words of *La Lucha*, “merited the love of Cuba and the respect and admiration of foreigners.”<sup>62</sup>

By 8 o’clock, “one hundred thousand people invaded the Park bearing the name of the glorious *caudillo*.” Like the banquet honoring the Cuban military after the 1912 suppression of the PIC, the inauguration of the Maceo monument was a powerful display of governmental power. The arrangement and organization of the ceremony, like the monument project it culminated, served to join the government with the legacy of the independence struggle. The president, vice president and cabinet, Havana’s mayor and provincial governor, and members of Congress were seated alongside the side of the monument, juxtaposed with the surviving members of Maceo’s military staff and his relatives, who were given the place of honor at the foot of the statue. Among these was José Miró, a close aide to Maceo, chronicler of the independence war, and head of the monument’s Executive Committee.

President Mario Menocal opened the festivities, pulling down the tarp that had covered Domingo Boni’s enormous monument to Antonio Maceo. As the crowd cheered, a small plane piloted by Cuban aviator Domingo Rosillo appeared on the horizon. After making several passes over the monument, the pilot dropped an enormous bouquet of flowers

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<sup>62</sup>“Con inusitada brillantez celebró la patria el aniversario de su más gloriosa fecha,” *La Lucha*, 21 May 1916, 1.

that landed atop the equestrian statue, with petals raining down on the grandstands below. The crowd raucously cheered the display by the famous aviator as his airplane turned across the harbor and disappeared behind *El Morro* fortress.<sup>63</sup>

Even before it began in earnest, the inauguration ceremony offered a symbolic demonstration of Cuban government's claim to control over the past. The juxtaposition of the president and Congress with Maceo's surviving staff and family joined the current government with the national past, as military parades and the stirring aerial demonstration by Rosillo affirmed Cuban strength and advancement. Flanked by these symbols of government, memory, and modernity, José Miró ascended the steps at the foot of the memorial to offer his remembrance of Maceo and dedicate Cuba's first national monument. "I am going to speak of Maceo," he began, and was met with "deafening applause."<sup>64</sup>

Miró's address formally inaugurated the memorial and offered a stirring personal remembrance of Antonio Maceo. More crucially, however, Miró inscribed and consecrated an official memory and set out the meaning and purpose of Boni's monument. Echoing the image of Maceo that had become dominant in the early republic, Miró remembered a figure of legendary virtue and mythical strength, and ideal Cuban and iconic figure that would occupy a godlike position in Cuban civil religion. "What circumstances to speak in! And at such a place!" Miró declared, "on...the steps of an alter covered in flowers, blessed by the tears of children and Maceo's rough soldiers."<sup>65</sup> Miró affirmed that the monument represented the consecration of the memory of Maceo by the Cuban people and their

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, "Festejos del 20 de mayo," *Diario de la Marina*, 21 May 1916, 8.

<sup>64</sup> "Con inusitada brillantez celebró la patria el aniversario de su más gloriosa fecha," *La Lucha*, 21 May 1916, 1.

<sup>65</sup> José Miró, *Discurso del General José Miró en el acto de la inauguración del monumento a Maceo el 20 de Mayo de 1916* (Havana: El Siglo XX, 1918), 28.



government, generations and classes joined in the elevation of a national hero to an official icon.

As he guided the assembled crowd through the monument's images, forms, and effigies, Miró converted the monument to Maceo into the narrative that it represented, turning the monument itself into an experienced story. Miró described the allegorical figures that ringed the base of the monument, "molded in bronze, represent[ing] Thought and Action, the two great constants of conquered freedom," joined by depictions of justice and the law. "At the front of the pedestal," he continued, "begins the historic part of the monument." Here, the artist depicted scenes from the life of Antonio Maceo. The first, Miró announced to the crowd, depicted the mother of the Maceo family, Mariana Grajales, urging her husband and sons to join the fight for Cuba. The deaths of the Maceos, Antonio last of all, rendered the family "a symbol of love of country and a flag of faith." The Maceos, he read, were "a family of obscure lineage emulating" the Maccabees, "the most illustrious tribe of Judea" in giving themselves over to martyrdom. Miró continued, describing the monument's images of Antonio Maceo's greatest triumphs, from Peralejo to his arrival in Mantua, which capped his famous invasion of western Cuba during the War of Independence.<sup>66</sup> As he described the monument, he merged the visual images with the well-known stories of Maceo's career. Boni's memorial thus became both a depiction and a part of Maceo's heroic life, the monument serving as a visual and physical narrative that would communicate Maceo's meaning for the nation to its people.

At the center of Miró's address, and of the monument project itself, was the promotion of national unity and the display of cohesion. The Cuban government, only seven years removed from formal U.S. occupation and four years from an armed conflict that

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<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

threatened another North American intervention, orchestrated a muscular display of official power and nationalist legitimacy. As crowds cheered and wept over the dedication of the Maceo monument, the Cuban military paraded through the Havana streets and patriotic songs echoed throughout the country. The celebration also sought to demonstrate the durability and modernity of Cuban nationhood. The monument, as its supporters had argued and José Miró affirmed, would represent Cuban greatness on the island and prompt admiration abroad: “The *caudillo* atop the pedestal,” Miró predicted, will be “the thing foreign visitors see and pilots will point to before taking port” in Havana.<sup>67</sup> The multiple purposes of the Maceo monument were inextricably entangled, each goal supporting the others.

However, as evidenced four years earlier, a memory that carries the power to unify has an equal power to divide. The spectacular display of unity and national cohesion seen on 20 May 1916, like the military banquet at the foot of the Martí memorial, demonstrated the power of the government to discipline dissent and overpower threats to cohesion. Nevertheless, neither the military campaign that crushed the *Independientes* nor the triumphal rituals that followed had resolved the underlying critique of republican society that had mobilized support for the PIC. In the aftermath of 1912, the Maceo monument provided a focal point onto which Cubans could project enduring concerns about racial inequality and contest the racial contours of national history. As excitement built toward the inauguration of the monument, Cuban writers and public figures continued to contemplate the meaning of Antonio Maceo.

The racial panic of 1912 had been activated by the promotion of a national narrative that emphasized the leadership and beneficence of white Cubans. The end of enslavement, the overthrow of colonialism, and the achievement of civil rights by Cubans of color had

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<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

been an offering given by white revolutionaries, a gift that was conditioned on black Cubans' acceptance of social and political norms. If the suppression of the PIC marked the ascendancy of this narrative, however, the conflict had not foreclosed debate over the function of race in the Cuban national narrative. Indeed, the events of 1916 brought a renewed fixation on racial and national categories in public discourse.

By the middle of the 1910s, an influx of African-descended workers from Haiti and Jamaica prompted many Cubans to revisit and recalibrate their post-1912 formulations of race and nationality. At the same time, black journalists became increasingly visible in the national discourse. New voices and new outlets emerged for the discussion of issues facing Cubans of color, signaled by the emergence of Afro-Cuban columnist Ramón Vasconcelos in the pages of the Havana daily *La Prensa* and the launch of *Labor Nueva*, a journal edited by Domingo Mesa that centered on issues of race, politics, and the nation. Anxieties over the rising number of black migrants from Haiti and Jamaica reinvigorated a white nationalism that viewed blackness as a threat to the survival of Cuba as a nation. In 1916, however, these anti-black immigration narratives sought to recruit Cubans of color by downplaying the racial identity of Afro-Cubans and instead depicting blackness as an element of foreignness, thus enabling a virulent attack on the cleanliness and civilization of black immigrants while “appealing to black Cubans on the basis of a shared, Cuban identity.”<sup>68</sup>

*Labor Nueva* affirmed the importance of the past in how Cubans responded to their present. As Aviva Chomsky has convincingly argued, black and white Cubans celebrated “the patriotism and Cuban identity of Cuban blacks after 1912” as they formed an explanation for the breakdown of social and racial order. Many observers sought to

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<sup>68</sup> Aviva Chomsky, “The Aftermath of Repression: Race and Nation in Cuba after 1912,” *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 4:2 (December 1998), 15.

marginalize the *Independientes* from the Cuban narrative, depicting party members as racist and anti-national while holding up other Cubans of color, both contemporary and historical, as eidolons of patriotic blackness. “But paradoxically,” Chomsky continues, “white leaders’ insistence that black Cubans were loyal and patriotic also contributed to opening the political space for blacks to resurrect the language of racial justice by 1916.”<sup>69</sup> As the most revered, mythologized black national hero, Antonio Maceo had historically offered a focal point both for black and white Cubans seeking to navigate the complexities of race and national ideology. In the spring of 1916, the monument’s construction brought the memory of the independence movement literally into the public square and reinvigorated debate over the meaning of Antonio Maceo.

As the first journal since 1912 to be dedicated to issues affecting Cubans of color, *Labor Nueva* entered the growing conversation over race and memory. With the specter of black immigration looming, this debate centered on formulating the norms of national belonging, with some white Cuban figures sought to affirm the loyalty of black Cubans to national, rather than racial identity. These efforts, as in 1912, often relied on a narrative that depicted the independence struggle as a series of white sacrifices on behalf of black Cubans, efforts that should be met with continued loyalty and appreciation. In an article printed in *Labor Nueva*, the president of the House of Representatives, Orestes Ferrara argued that the “man of color has as his greatest duty the love of country. A duty more powerful in him, because the *patria*, in its true constitution represents his only redemption.” Cubans of color, he argued, must hold themselves to a high standard of patriotism and political activity than whites, because national unity and progress relied on their continued patriotism. Progress for Cubans of color, he argued, would take more time in a country “only a few years removed

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

from slavery... Moral emancipation, coming after political, must be slow... Estenoz, Ivonet and the others did not understand these sociological truths... And tried to solve with force problems that” could only be resolved “with time.”<sup>70</sup>

In another article, published in *Heraldo de Cuba*, Ferrara argued that the progress enjoyed by Cubans of color depended on the willingness of whites to sacrifice: “The slave has won much,” he noted, but “much has the master has had to give.”<sup>71</sup> Although the editors of *Labor Nueva* were in agreement with Ferrara’s criticism of the PIC, his invocations of slavery and emancipation prompted a strong rebuttal. “Slavery,” argued activist Lino D’ou, “was a crime. It was a robbery. To return a part of a plunder is not giving; it is giving back.” D’ou carefully assessed Ferrara’s interpretation of Cuban slavery and emancipation, demonstrating the importance of historical narratives for Cuba’s ongoing social debates. If Ferrara, a prominent and powerful figure in Cuban politics, understood the end of slavery as a gift given by slaveholders to their chattel, then the descendants of those slaves could be expected to be grateful, even subservient. D’ou argued compellingly that a different understanding of Cuban history was central to achieving racial equality. “Carlos Manuel de Céspedes,” he declared, invoking the Grito de Yara, “was never greater than on that luminous morning when, overcoming all prejudices...returned to the black all the rights of a citizen ripped to shreds by the awful chain of slavery.” Confirming the importance of historical narrative, D’ou continued: “If the owner did not give, because one cannot give

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<sup>70</sup> Orestes Ferrara, “Deberes y derechos de la raza de color,” *Labor Nueva* 1 (20 February 1916), 6.

<sup>71</sup> Orestes Ferrara, quoted in Lino Dóu, “Restituir no es ceder,” *Labor Nueva* 4 (12 March 1916), 6.

what he possesses illegally, how are the rights of civilized life now denied to the descendants of slaves?”<sup>72</sup>

Other national figures also attempted to reaffirm the narrative of white sacrifice that had been ascendant in 1916. Enrique José Varona, who in 1910 had written a Conservative Party circular declaring that the sacrifices of white Cubans on behalf of Cubans of color was “the greatest mark of our national history,” asserted himself again in the winter of 1916.<sup>73</sup> In a letter to *Labor Nueva*’s editor, Varona repeated his interpretation of national history, applauding “the element of color” for “improving their social conditions,” and cheering white Cubans for “persevering” in support of “justice toward compatriots of different races.” Like Ferrarra, Varona viewed the historical willingness of white Cubans to set aside racial prejudice and recognize the rights of Afro-Cubans as the signal achievement of Cuban history. “In this respect,” Varona continued, “I believe that what has been done by the whites of Cuba has no parallel.”<sup>74</sup>

Because this narrative relied on the memory of racial cooperation in the independence struggle, the figure of Antonio Maceo loomed large. Indeed, as the monument to Maceo took physical shape along the Malecón, the memory of Maceo emerged at the center of the renewed conversation about race and the Cuban nation. In another letter written to the editors of *Labor Nueva*, Varona articulated a multifaceted Maceo, an icon that represented the ideal of racial fraternity in politics, myth, and metaphor. Maceo, he argued, was “a Cuban who elevated himself from the lowest level to the highest, by the force of his patriotism.” Varona,

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> Enrique José Varona, “A los conservadores: circular,” *Diario de la Marina*, 23 April 1910, 2.

<sup>74</sup> Enrique José Varona, “Palabras del doctor Varona,” *Labor Nueva* 3 (5 March 1916), 1.

who had argued that Afro-Cubans' self-improvement would be the key to national progress, seemed to view Maceo's own ascendance in the liberation army as a model of black patriotism. Moreover, "he was a mestizo who saw, with perfect clarity, that the problem in Cuba was not, like it is not, a problem of races, but of culture and the progressive improvement of its institutions." Maceo, insisted Varona, must therefore not be a symbol to one group of Cubans, but rather "written in the sky as one of the great redeemers of the *patria*."<sup>75</sup>

The inauguration of the Maceo monument certainly confirmed Maceo's place as an icon of Cuban nationhood, but the dramatic patriotic ceremony did not foreclose continued discussion of Maceo's meaning. As Varona argued that Maceo should represent the irrelevance of racial division in Cuba, *Labor Nueva* contemplated a dialogue with the hero himself over his monument and meaning twenty years after his death. In the article, George Duruy imagined a conversation between the Maceo statue and a group of reverent Cubans who gathered around the monument after the crowds had vanished. As the author approaches the monument to read its inscriptions, the spirit of Maceo addresses him, wondering aloud, "what do Cubans think of the ceremony that took place today?"<sup>76</sup> What followed was a meditation on the legacy of Cuba's greatest icon, one which emphasizes the importance of race both to Maceo the historical figure and to his meaning for the nation.

In this imagined conversation, Maceo was shocked to hear the narrator speak of "blacks" in Cuba, and demands to know, "are Cubans not yet all equal? Do you, who are not white, not have the same rights as they do? Is the Republic of Cuba not – as Martí dreamed

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<sup>75</sup> Enrique José Varona, "Maceo," *Labor Nueva* 15 (21 May 1916), 8.

<sup>76</sup> George Duroy, "Lo que me dijo la estatua," *Labor Nueva* 15 (21 May 1916), 16.

– cordial and generous to all its children?” The Constitution, the narrator replies, says that all Cubans are equal before the law. Still, he continues, “[i]n the Republic which was founded with the strength of your arm, all Cubans are not treated equally.” Recalling the preference given to foreign whites that had so aroused the PIC, the protagonist continued, “there is greater respect given to a foreigner than to a member of your guard.”<sup>77</sup>

This story, in which the spirit of Maceo laments that Cubans of color continue to identify as black instead of Cuban, illuminates tensions within Cuban national ideology. Duroy suggested that the continued salience of black Cuban identity comes as a result of enduring discrimination, thus rejecting the white sacrifice narrative favored by figures like Ferarra and Varona. At the same time, the writer offers a sharp rebuke to the display of patriotism, unity, and government power witnessed on the morning of 20 May. Speaking as Maceo, the author suggests that the celebration of the monuments dedication may have obscured enduring inequality: “It is not my figure in bronze or marble that would make me happy or make me feel satisfied,” Maceo’s spirit declared. “I would feel much more content if they had forgotten the figure of Antonio but always followed the ideas that sustained him.”<sup>78</sup>

Despite the dissent found in the pages of *Labor Nueva*, the spectacular display of unity and patriotic fervor clearly dominated reaction to the Maceo monument. In the days that followed, however, George Duroy’s warning that the monument itself might obscure enduring racial inequalities and anxieties would prove more poignant than the author likely imagined. The coverage given to the national excitement for the monument, joined with the reaction to the day’s events suggest that the monument and dedication ceremony were

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> “*Ibid.*, 17.



intended both to reflect and to produce the feelings of Cuban unity and strength that Maceo himself was said to represent. The banner headline of *La Prensa* on 20 May declared that the Cuban people, “filled with faith and optimism” welcomed the “day of the *patria*.”

In the same cluttered edition, however, just below the banner headline, appeared an article titled “*Rosa fresca*,” authored by a young mulatto journalist named Ramón Vasconcelos. His article, along with the immediate, widespread, and virulent condemnation it provoked, illuminated persistent fissures in Cuban memory and the ongoing struggle to define the meaning of Maceo in the aftermath of the bloodshed of 1912. Vasconcelos had, like the new journal *Labor Nueva*, condemned the PIC uprising. His column in *Prensa libre*, titled “Palpitations of the Colored Race,” advanced a moderate, if strident Afro-Cuban activism. In his “fresh rose,” however, Vasconcelos took sharp aim at the displays of unity and patriotism prompted by the monument’s dedication. “It repulses me,” he asserted, “to accept as sincere this homage that social hypocrisy and affected patriotism rendered to Maceo.” “History,” he continued, “that old pimp and prostitute that only serves and smiles for the powerful,” had ignored the truth of Maceo’s life and death.<sup>79</sup>

Vasconcelos’s truth was explosive. As Antonio Maceo was “departing for Oriente, in the invasion,” he began, his brother “José... prophesized ‘you will fall in an ambush by some of our own. You will not come back alive. And if they leave me, I will take my machete to your body and avenge your death.’ First, [José] fell, assassinated by his own... Then, Antonio.” The plot against Antonio Maceo, he claimed, came from the east of the island, where nationalist leaders “slandered” him, claiming “that he aspired to be President of the Republic, and so they laid in wait, until one day ten Cubans, who were daily visitors to his

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<sup>79</sup> Ramón Vasconcelos, “*Rosa fresca*,” *La Prensa*, 20 May 1916, 1-2.

tent, treacherously assassinated him.” Vasconcelos was not finished. “Some of them are alive today, and live like princes,” he continued. “One day I will give their names.”<sup>80</sup>

Vasconcelos did not name those Cubans he claimed had assassinated Antonio Maceo, but his powerful, if somewhat vague accusation did destabilize the image of national consensus and unity that the dedication ceremony – and, indeed, the statue itself – was intended to represent. Taken alone, Vasconcelos’s “fresh rose for the Hero” might represent only the brief emergence of a fringe conspiracy theory into columns of a major news outlet. However, its echoes of the rhetoric of the PIC prompted fierce and vigorous condemnation, revealing that the ruptures of the preceding years had not been filled by the bronze and marble of the Maceo monument.

Days after the column’s publication, the Territorial Council of Veterans of Oriente gathered in Santiago de Cuba to discuss and plan a protest against Vasconcelos’s charge. The Council issued a statement demanding “that Señor Vasconcelos prove the allegation he makes about the cause of the deaths of generals Antonio and José Maceo, because these declarations hurt the honor of the Liberating Army, destroys the harmony and love between all elements of Cuban society and is damaging to Historical truth.” The veterans were wary, however, of the potential backlash that Vasconcelos’s accusation might prompt, and urged calm. Newspaper columnists were far less generous. In a front page article, the Santiago daily *El Cubano Libre* excoriated Vasconcelos:

The tremendous accusation, without proof, thrown out by Mr. Vasconcelos against the INVISIBLE CRIMINALS who... in the heroic battlefield in which all liberating warriors of Cuba lived together fraternally, without distinctions of race nor class, ASSASINATED generals José and Antonio Maceo... has provoked the resulting moral disturbance in those Cubans who feel all things that affect the sanctity of the *patria*... So monstrous, abominable and inconceivable is such an accusation, so in

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

conflict is it with the truth of the deeds, consecrated solemn and definitively by History, it signifies a shame for all who would be.<sup>81</sup>

*La Discusión* agreed, adding that “the Maceos are glorious figures of our wars of Independence; racial prejudice has no influence in the tribute of this free people to their memory. They were – they like the other martyrs of the cause – CUBAN HEROES.”<sup>82</sup>

As outraged as many Cubans were by the claims leveled in “Rosa fresca,” the anxiety and anger that the article provoked seems to have been motivated as much by the fear of reawakening racial divisions that recalled the brutality of 1912. Before the conflict, a similar claim voiced in a 1911 meeting of the PIC in Santiago prompted concern but not panic; in 1916, however, the stakes of national memory seemed far higher. *Heraldo de Cuba* insisted that “to claim that [Maceo] did not die in front of the enemy, face to the sun, like a valiant man, is a blasphemy and a slander. Maceo is not of any race; he is of all Cubans.” Calling Vasconcelos’s story “a sick fantasy,” the paper declared that “removing his remains, shaking his ashes, in order to divide Cubans is a sacrilegious act.” The vitriol that marked the response to Vasconcelos illuminates the ways in which Cubans had joined the memory of recent events with the meaning of Maceo.

From this juncture, a new narrative emerged in the pages of *Heraldo de Cuba*, one that folded the events of 1912 into a revised interpretation of Antonio Maceo:

One day, two men of color spoke of racial differences and in the name of these gathered a small group to rise against the *patria*... The colored race went back (retrograded) more than fifty years in their rapid pursuit of their demands. Those two deluded men did not understand the damage they were doing to their own race. There are those who try to remake a memory that is already at the peak of glory, they do not understand that they demean it, they diminish it. Estenoz and Ivonet harmed the

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<sup>81</sup> “Por el honor cubano y por la verdad histórica, *El Cubano Libre*, 26 May 1916, 1.

<sup>82</sup> “Rosa empoñozada,” *La Discusión*, quoted in *El Cubano Libre*, 26 May 1916, 1.

living. These others want to hurt the dead. The heart of all Cubans will never permit that.”<sup>83</sup>

Through the memory of 1912, writers reconfigured Antonio Maceo as both a representation of Cuban unity and as a powerful bastion against division, a symbol whose memory was so sacred as to serve as a trip-wire for racial conflict.

## Conclusions

From its proposal in the pages of *Previsión*, the project to erect a monument to Antonio Maceo emerged from the growing rupture between the *Partido Independiente de Color* and the Cuban government, between the dominant narrative of history and the *Independientes*’ bold challenge. In the early republic, the memory of Cuba’s history enabled Cubans to develop a shared set signs, symbols, and stories that distinguished Cuba from its Spanish forerunner and supplied a shared nationalist mythology from which Cubans could draw social norms and political direction. The consensual narratives that Cubans developed helped create a sense of nationhood from the memory of a shared experience, a universal and, crucially, cross-racial struggle, sacrifice, and triumph.

As historical memory became the foundation of Cuban nationalism, conflicts over the republican power and direction of the nation were fought on the same territory. Historians have rightly explained the mobilization of the PIC as a response to discontent with the major political parties and ongoing frustration over the unequal distribution of highly sought public jobs, but the very foundation of those demands was the memory of the independence wars, a long struggle that had forged the social and political norms of the republic. The *Independientes*, through their official newspaper *Previsión*, advanced a historical assault on

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<sup>83</sup> *Heraldo de Cuba*, quoted in *Ibid.*

the republic, accusing it of not only ignoring but actively betraying the memory of the anticolonial movement. As a Cuban of color and perhaps the most revered military figure of the Cuban independence wars, Antonio Maceo occupied a position at the intersection of race, memory, and the ideological foundations of Cuban nationhood. The monument to be built in his honor thus itself came to represent both the patriotic significance of the hero and the conflict over the right to define his meaning.

The monument, and the icon that it depicted, were meant to display the cohesion and stability of Cuban nationhood, and as a result both became viciously contested spaces. The national unity represented by republican governments had been, according to the *Partido Independiente de Color*, predicated on the marginalization of black Cubans from the history that their efforts had created. Opponents of the party, on the other hand, understood the PIC less as a practical danger to the government than as an ideological threat that could overturn the racial norms of Cuban society.

Both the PIC and its critics in the Cuban press came to depict race relations in Cuba as a covenant forged in the mythic stories of national history, a sacred trust that had now been betrayed, even blasphemed. Even after its suppression, Ramón Vasconcelos's article exposed the increased fragility of national cohesion in the aftermath of 1912 and the intense anxiety with which many Cubans responded to a challenge to the dominant narrative of Antonio Maceo. As the dedication of the monument in 1916 seemed to consolidate a unifying representation of the hero, one columnist's attack on that image prompted anger, outrage, and fierce condemnation. Party members had challenged a story held sacrosanct by the majority of Cubans, and their counter-nationalism, positioned as it was within a patriotic framework, threatened to collapse the social norms that girded the nation's stability.

The challenge that the PIC had posed to the sacred stories of national history had helped produce a narrative of national history at once more dominant and less stable. As the next chapter shows, the consolidation of nationalism became an increasing concern of republican governments. Public schools emerged at the center of a nationalist project spearheaded by historians and pedagogues seeking to socialize young Cubans into the symbols of the nation in hopes of cultivating a generation of ardent patriots that would serve as a bastion against internal fissures and foreign influence.

### III

#### **“Yes, We Make Patriots”: Schools and the Socialization of National Narratives**

Rosendo Márquez designed his game for up to four children. Using five dice and an elaborate set of calculations, each child would advance along the board's hundred-plus squares, hoping to be the first to reach the map of Cuba located at the board's center. The game, released in 1917 under the title “Objective History of Cuba,” billed itself as a “pedagogical game” which “no home must be without.” Players advanced through the game by identifying important personages and events in the history of Cuba, from the arrival of Christopher Columbus to the nation's entry into World War I. Although the complicated instructions might have limited the game's recreational appeal, its creator envisioned “Objective History of Cuba” as a “practical method for learning the history of Cuba and for children to unwittingly acquire such necessary knowledge.” Rosendo Márquez, who authored the game's accompanying rulebook and history reference, promised that traversing the complex rules and text would initiate young Cubans into “all the events of Cuban history, compiled and contained in a fun and innocent game.” Dedicating the game to Cuba's youth, Márquez declared that “patriotism cannot be reflexive, cannot be unconscious. Like Religion, it is necessary to establish it. Religion has the Sacred Scriptures as its foundation, Patriotism [has] History.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rosendo Márquez, *Historia objetiva de Cuba: juego pedagógico dedicado a la niñez cubana* (Havana: Impresa Charles Blasco, 1917), 2.

Even before independence in 1902, Cubans had commemorated and communicated the glories of their history, formulating a nationalist ideology through memory of the national past. The construction of monuments and memorials, while an uneven process, offered the opportunity for Cuban patriots and later, the Cuban government to codify a vision of history that conveyed national unity.

While the dissemination of nationalist narratives and icons served to initiate Cubans into a sense of nationhood, the government's role in controlling that process was uneven in the first decade of the republic. As discussed in previous chapters, the efforts of Cuban veterans and nationalist leaders to mark the island with monuments and historic markers often confronted a lack of funds or institutional support. The 1905 monument to José Martí, for example, had been dedicated by President Tomás Estrada Palma, but his administration played no major role in its construction. Until the inauguration of the monument to Antonio Maceo in 1916, the Cuban government had neither supported nor funded any monument. Republican officials thus sought out other avenues through which to guide the formation and consolidation of nationalist sentiment in the first decades of the twentieth century.

From the very outset of national independence, public education created an opportunity for Cuba's new government to instruct the nation's youth into particular visions of the nation and its past. By 1917, when *Objective History of Cuba* was released, the republic had seen its fourth intervention by U.S. forces. As Rosendo Márquez observed in the introduction, history was the sacred text of Cuban patriotism, and proper instruction in national history would assure the "future greatness" and endurance of the Cuban nation. Education in national history and civics emerged as a central pillar of an official nationalism in Cuba.



The children who entered the nation's schools at the turn of the twentieth century would be the first generation to come of age in an independent Cuba. They would be the first Cubans to learn of the long struggle for independence that forged Cuban nationhood without having any experience of it. This first generation of Cuban students would have little or no first-hand knowledge of the formative period of Cuban nationality, and would need, as Márquez's preamble suggested, to be initiated into nationalism as a child would be educated in the symbols, rituals, and strictures of a religion. As we have seen, Cubans elevated the stories and heroes of their past to a position of religious reverence, collecting relics, erecting monuments and mausoleums, and writing and rewriting stories that were sanctified through repetition and ritual. If history was the sacred text of patriotism, as Márquez argued, then young Cubans would need to be initiated into the catechism of Cuban national identity in order to forge a patriotic, unified nation.

Historical education offered a critical strategy for assuring national fitness, cohesion, and endurance. Cuba's public education system was formed in the image and under the tutelage of the United States. U.S. occupation authorities rapidly expanded and modernized a school system that had languished under Spanish rule and suffered through decades of conflict. On the other hand, North American officials viewed public schools as a means of Americanizing the citizenry of Cuba and cultivating their identification with North American culture and history.

While many Cubans seem to have viewed the adoption of North American and European pedagogical strategies as evidence of Cuba's entry into the circle of modern nations, many of the educators who began crafting public school curricula understood themselves to be nation builders, believing that educators would forge a new generation of

patriots and nationalists who would be steeped in the glorious, unifying narratives of their history. Magazines written by and for Cuban teachers illuminate the contours of this vision, and elaborate how young Cubans would be socialized into a nationalist framework.

As educators assumed a central role in cultivating patriotism, the lesson plans, discussion guides, and textbooks recommended for in Cuban public schools reveal the content of the nationalist ideologies into which Cuban youth would be initiated. While the victories, martyrs, and heroes of the independence struggle could excite a feeling of patriotic unity, race remained an unsteady fault line running beneath the surface of national memory. The new classrooms of the republic would, for the first time, be racially integrated, and the story of the nation taught in the classroom would be filtered through the nationalist belief that racial difference had been overcome through the independence wars.

The history textbooks written for use in Cuba's public schools reveal that the unity created by learning the national past rested on minimizing the role played by Cubans of color in that history. While the depictions of the independence wars featured in school texts were silent on the racial identities of soldiers and leaders, longer narratives of national history marginalized the experiences of black Cubans while reinforcing claims of white beneficence and black loyalty. In their treatments of the pre-independence era, textbook authors minimized the racial structures of Cuban slavery and presented its abolition as evidence of the generosity of white independence leaders.

The logic of popular memory was reproduced in Cuban classrooms. Schoolhouses became critical sites for the cultivation of patriotism and the codification of Cuban identity. Teachers and administrators identified national history as the foundation for this effort, as stories of the past could be converted into parables instructing students not just in historical

knowledge, but in civic virtue and morality. More subtly, however, historical lessons initiated students into national racial norms and the historical origins of Cuban racial fraternity.

### **Temple of the Patria: Schools and Nationalism in the Republic**

Cuban teachers quickly embraced their roles as keepers and carriers of Cuban patriotism. The education system in Cuba became perhaps the flagship reformist enterprise of the U.S. occupation as American pedagogues sought to restructure and remake Cuban schools in a modernist, progressive image. Ironically, schoolhouses became at once the focal point of U.S. cultural penetration and a crucial site for Cuban nationalism to develop and circulate. While under U.S. occupation, Cubans confronted the emergence of a new foreign control after decades of warfare to overthrow Spain. The military occupation of the island and the strategies undertaken by U.S. administrators to modernize and “Americanize” Cuba seemed to cut off opportunities to enact the independence that many Cubans had envisioned.

Cubans were initiated into North American norms at multiple levels, though the reform of Cuban schooling assumed great urgency and perhaps greater significance. During the occupation of 1898-1902, U.S. authorities remade the Cuban educational system in the North American model as part of a project to “Americanize” Cubans, that they might become “increasingly 'American' politically” and “would become more civilized.”<sup>2</sup> North American reformers seized the opportunity to expand and modernize Cuban schooling as a critical element of nation-building. Before the start of the Cuban War of Independence in 1895, Cuba totaled fewer than 900 public schools for its population of more than 1.5 million, leaving a ratio of a single school for every 1,800 Cubans. Far fewer still was the number of

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<sup>2</sup> Lillian Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí*, 99.

secondary schools.<sup>3</sup> In 1899, after assuming occupation of the island, the U.S. Military government initiated a sweeping reform of the education system, creating a new system of school districts, establishing a clear structure for the governance of public schools, and making school attendance mandatory for all Cuban children between the ages of 6 and 14. Led by Superintendent General of Schools Alexis Frye, North American reformers began training new teachers and rapidly augmenting the number of schools serving the island's youth. By 1900, there were more than three thousand primary schools in Cuba and U.S. authorities had trained thousands of teachers.<sup>4</sup>

The establishment of a Cuban educational system by North American authorities helped socialize Cuban youth into North American norms. During the U.S. occupation, North American authorities determined the methods that Cuban teachers would use, controlled the subjects taught and provided the teaching materials Cuban students used, including textbooks. Students educated under the U.S. occupation and even in the early republic were often assigned textbooks translated into Spanish from originals authored by North Americans, and class sessions relied on lesson plans that promoted familiarity with North American history and government. The *Manual for Teachers* that Frye authored for Cuban teachers used the map of the United States as the basis for its geography lessons, and minimized the role of Cuban forces in the defeat of the Spanish.<sup>5</sup> Louis A Pérez, Jr. has convincingly argued that the teaching of U.S. history in Cuban schools offered “a means of

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<sup>3</sup> Severin K. Turosienski, *Education in Cuba* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1943), 5.

<sup>4</sup> Rolando Buenavilla Recio, *Historia de la pedagogía en Cuba* (Havana: Editorial Pueblo y Educación, 1995), 148.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

Americanization, a way to reconfigure memory around another past.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the *Manual para maestros* explicitly advocated the usefulness of teaching U.S. history in order to demonstrate to Cubans how they might envision their country’s development.

The occupation authorities mobilized the power of memory to promote Cubans’ identification with the United States, using historical education to insinuate U.S. authority into national life. Even as many Cuban teachers engaged with this educational system as a means of finding opportunity and mobility, studies of the occupation reveal that the U.S. effort to control how and what young Cubans learned provoked acts of defiance among other educators. Ritica Suárez de Villar, a woman who had been deeply involved in organizing resistance to the Spanish during the War of Independence, became a teacher in a new U.S.-run Cuban school in Cienfuegos. Suárez de Villar, however, refused to oblige the U.S.-run school board by following the content guidelines set out in the *Manual para maestros*. A 1900 form that she submitted for her school indicates that she refused to teach “U.S. American history” in her classroom, and she defiantly noted that she had given her thirteen students of color the same level of instruction as her thirty-six white pupils. Her later attempts to commemorate Cuban patriotic dates, which were not recognized by the school boards of the occupation, put her in direct conflict with U.S. authorities and ultimately resulted in her firing.<sup>7</sup>

Under the first U.S. occupation, Cuban schoolhouses were sites of some of the first and most dramatic nationalist celebrations to follow the withdrawal of Spanish rule. Even as U.S. authorities governing the Cuban school system refused to recognize patriotic

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<sup>6</sup> Louis A. Pérez, Jr. *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 160.

<sup>7</sup> Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí*, 96.

anniversaries like October 10 and February 24 as official holidays, schoolteachers and domestic education officials mobilized the classroom as a vehicle for the celebration of nationalist rituals and the teaching of sacred stories. As Lillian Guerra notes, the 1899 anniversary of the Grito de Yara prompted teachers in the town of Guines to suspend classes in violation of U.S. authorities and their Cuban surrogates. In 1900, *Patria* reported that the Board of Education in Havana instructed its schools to devote 24 February to initiating students into “the meaning of the grand patriotic occasion” and “awakening in them a heartfelt devotion to the cause of our independence.”<sup>8</sup> Every school in Havana was decorated for the celebration in flags and colors, and each held “a rally to celebrate the meaning and the triumph of the Cuban Revolution.” The expansive and regimented structure of the public school system in Cuba enabled the gestational Cuban government to project nationalist sentiment into diffuse areas around the island.

If Cuban schools functioned as a bastion of nationalism against the influence of North American occupation, independence allowed Cuban leaders to employ schoolhouses as greenhouses for a new generation of patriots. The centrality of public education in the nationalist project relied as much on the social function of the schoolhouse as on the curricula that the teachers followed. Schooling provided a rare opportunity to define and normalize the nation and its iconography in a limited setting with a nearly captive audience. The sense of shared identity that might be cultivated by the popular celebration of a holiday could be accelerated and amplified in the pedagogical context of a school.

By law, all children between the ages of six and fourteen would be required to attend school in Cuba. In 1901, this meant that, for the first time, Cuban classrooms would welcome their first students born after the War of Independence began six years earlier. That

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<sup>8</sup> “El 24 de febrero en las escuelas,” *Patria*, 27 February 1900, 3.

year, Cuba's Board of Education published the first Course of Study authored by Cubans themselves, under the leadership of *Patria* editor Enrique José Varona. While still under the direct authority of the U.S. military government, the Cuban *Junta* devised a plan for public school education that emphasized national history and the creation of patriotic sentiment in a new generation of Cuban students. Classes would include lessons on "love of *Patria*, its symbols, national celebrations," and the lives of national heroes.<sup>9</sup> Cuban authorities firmly embraced the idea of schools as a nursery of patriotic feeling and love of country. In the 1904 manual given to aspiring teachers before their qualifying examinations, the Superintendents' Council of Cuba's public schools explained that historical education was critical in creating a sense of connection to the nation. Quoting a French scholar of pedagogy, the manual noted that history "is an admirable school of patriotism. Thanks to her, the *patria* ceases to be a cold abstraction and becomes a living and real being" that a child can invest himself in.<sup>10</sup>

Even after the withdrawal of North American authorities, there were still those who advocated teaching United States history over national history. "It is maintained," wrote one educator in 1904, "that *Cuba has no history*" worth learning, and that Cubans should "begin with the study of the history of the United States, leaving students unaware of patriotic history." In an article detailing the teaching of history in Cuban primary schools for the prominent education magazine *Cuba Pedagógica*, Carlos H. Valdés Miranda argued that "history makes the past present, brings close the distant, makes the secret known... It is the universal teacher of life, witness to time... light of truth, spur to virtue... monument of valor,

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<sup>9</sup> Emeterio Santovenia, Antonio Santovenia, et al, *La enseñanza de la historia en Cuba* (Mexico, D.F.: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 1951), 5-6.

<sup>10</sup> Enrique José Varona and others, *Manual ó guía para los exámenes de maestros cubanos* (Havana: La Moderna Poesía, 1904), 253.

stimulus to glory.”<sup>11</sup> Cuban teachers and education officials understood education to serve multiple ends. In addition to equipping students with a knowledge base and interpretive skills, many believed that schoolhouses ought to zealously instruct Cuba’s youth in the history and iconography of the nation in order to produce a future population steeped in patriotic fervor.

Given the outsized influence of the United States in the political, economic, and cultural life of the country, it hardly seems unreasonable that many Cubans would view the careful cultivation of patriotism in Cuban students to be an indispensable strategy to assure the survival of an independent Cuba. Taking on those who believed that U.S. history would be more valuable to Cuban youth than their own history, Valdés insisted that “peoples, surely as much as individuals, find support and strength in the belief... that among their ancestors there were men renowned for their knowledge, for their virtues, for their efforts. That they are the heirs of their greatness, and that they should perpetuate that glory.” A sense of collective identity and nationhood would need to be created and codified, especially among a generation that had come of age after the withdrawal of Spanish authority. “The teaching of history in primary school,” Valdés argued, “must begin with biographies of the most celebrated men of the country.”<sup>12</sup> Having been spared the shared experience of warfare, young Cubans would join the national feeling forged in that period only by being socialized into its memory and symbols.

In the first decades of the republic, many Cuban pedagogues and schoolteachers embraced their role in forging nationalist sentiment and molding a new patriotic generation,

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<sup>11</sup> Carlos H. Valdés Miranda, “La enseñanza de la historia en la escuela primaria,” *Cuba Pedagógica* 8 (29 February 1904), 18.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*



and pursued new strategies for achieving these goals. *Cuba Pedagógica*, founded in 1903 by the novelist and teacher Miguel de Carrión, emerged as forum in which teachers, education officials, and pedagogical scholars could share methods and materials and discuss the issues facing Cuban schools. By its second decade of publication, the magazine was edited by prominent education officials Arturo Montorí and Ramiro Guerra, the latter of whom would go on to be Cuba's superintendent of schools and one of its most prolific historians and educators. Unlike the more formal journals *Revista de la Educación* and *La Escuela Moderna*, *Cuba Pedagógica* joined treatises on pedagogical theory with opinion pieces, discussion outlines, and submissions from teachers around the island. Issues frequently featured teachers' reflections on their classes, first-hand reports of lessons taught, and samples of students' work. Thus, the pages of *Cuba Pedagógica* featured a variety of sources and perspectives that illuminated the ideals of pedagogical leaders and the experiences of the teachers who described their lessons and their classrooms. Furthermore, the magazine's contributors emphasized the importance of creating and mobilizing nationalist sentiment among Cuba's youth, revealing the ways that schoolhouses became a crucial location for the definition and circulation of patriotic narratives and iconographies.

On 24 February 1905, more than eight thousand students from more than two hundred and fifty classrooms descended upon central Havana, their "little blond and brown heads excited and stirring from the passion of youth."<sup>13</sup> *Cuba Pedagógica* reported that Havana's public schools orchestrated a mass march of students toward the center of the city, congregating at the statue of Martí that would be dedicated that afternoon. The patriotic parade, in the words of one observer, would achieve the "indispensable" goal of giving

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<sup>13</sup> J.M. Aramburu, "La parada escolar," *Cuba Pedagógica* 30 (28 February 1905), 13.

Cuban children an experienced, exciting connection with the heroes of their nation while also, in the words of *Cuba Pedagógica*, offering “a demonstration of the power of our [public] school, which is the school of the *patria*.”<sup>14</sup> Reflecting on the parade, J.M. Aramburu noted approvingly foreign visitors attending the dedication ceremony would have been most impressed the spectacle of Cuban students marching, in perfect formation, he noted, through central Havana.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, while the statue was planned and paid for by popular subscription rather than from public funds, its dedication provided an opportunity to engage students in a nationalist ritual while making a display of nationhood through the authority of public schools.

While commemorations were a central component of the general nationalizing project, this effort was even more crucial and urgent for Cuba’s youth. “In public schools,” wrote a journalist for *Cuba Pedagógica* before the 1905 parade in Havana, “nothing is as necessary as awakening and strengthening feelings of admiration and enthusiasm in the heart of children for the men whose deeds and heroism mark unforgettable dates in the history of human or patriotic history.”<sup>16</sup> Where they had once defied U.S. authorities in order to engage students in the commemorations of patriotic dates, the public schools of the republic made the cultivation of nationalist sentiment as a centerpiece of their project.

Schoolhouses surrounded students in national iconography, socializing young Cubans into Cuban nationalism by fusing education with patriotic rituals and symbols. Authorities attached such importance to the cultivation of patriotism that even relatively minor historic dates might determine an entire day’s lesson plan. In 1909, Gerardo Betancourt, the

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<sup>14</sup> “La parada escolar del 24 de Febrero,” *Cuba Pedagógica* 29 (15 February 1905), cuaderno 3, n.p.

<sup>15</sup> Aramburu, “La parada escolar,” 13.

<sup>16</sup> “La Parada escolar del 24 de Febrero,” *Cuba Pedagógica* 29 (15 February 1905), cuaderno 3, n.p.

Superintendent of Instruction for Matanzas schools, offered an example to guide teachers in formulating lesson plans around historical commemorations and patriotic themes.

Betancourt's lesson plan centered on the December 15 anniversary of the battle of Mal Tiempo, an engagement in 1895 in which an army led by Máximo Gómez and Antonio Maceo defeated Spanish troops sent to halt their advance across the island toward western Cuba. The first session of Betancourt's December 15 class would instruct students in arithmetic using "a problem designed to demonstrate how much time has passed between the date of the action and the anniversary being commemorated."<sup>17</sup>

After a geography study, in which students were asked to sketch a map of Santa Clara province and identify the path of the invading *mambí* army, the lesson shifted to writing. "At dawn on December 15, 1895," the teacher would begin, "the invading Column left the *Lomitas* encampment, where they had spent the previous night, and resumed their march to the West." Students copied down a detailed narrative of the engagement, one which emphasized troop maneuvers, strategy, weaponry, and heroism. Once the dictation was complete, the copied text was used for a reading exercise, as students read through their passages and helped one another correct errors in grammar and spelling.

A formal history lesson followed, as students were asked to respond to questions regarding the strategy and course of the Mal Tiempo battle. The second half of the day would feature another arithmetic lesson, in which students would attempt to calculate "the magnitude of the Spanish disaster," followed by "physical exercises" that consisted of a march underneath the Cuban flag to lay wreaths in memory of the battle's heroes.

Betancourt offered this as a model for teachers, to be adapted for other days and

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<sup>17</sup> Gerardo Betancourt, "Programa correlativo para conmemorar acciones de guerra en sus aniversarios," *Cuba Pedagógica* 168 (5 February 1909), 35.

anniversaries.<sup>18</sup> Historical narrative structured the entire educational enterprise that Betancourt advocated which immersed his pupils in the symbolic, narrative, and even numeric universe of national history. Cuban students, then, were thus living and learning through and within the memory of the independence struggle, internalizing its events as the stories and symbols that connected them to one another and to the nation.

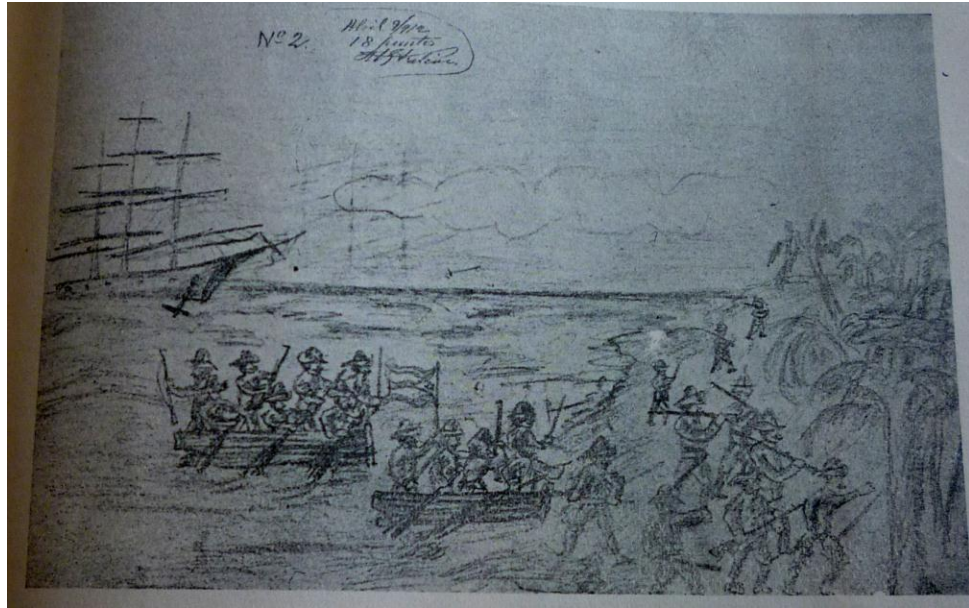
The memory of the independence wars was pervasive in Cuban classrooms. Describing the value of drawing pictures in the intellectual development of students, Manuel García Falcón offered a sample lesson in which children were asked to draw scenes from a book read to them by their teacher. The students heard selections from José Miró's *Campaigns of Maceo*, and drew images of Maceo's 1895 landing at Duaba that marked his return to Cuba to fight in uprising that began that year. García lauded the students' imagination in visually interpreting this historical event, and included samples of the best work from the class (see below).<sup>19</sup> This drawing exercise followed a previous lesson in which students were asked to draw images of the Cuban flag in accordance with official guidelines for its proportions and coloring.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Manuel García Falcón, "Dibujo libre," *Cuba Pedagógica* 9 (15 April 1912), 1037.

<sup>20</sup> "Dibujo: segundo grado," *Cuba Pedagógica* 9 (29 February 1912), 972-973.



**Figure 6: Landing of Antonio Maceo at Duaba, as drawn in the classroom of Manuel García Falcón**

Rogelio González, a teacher in the town of Veguita, won praise from education authorities for his nationalistic curriculum and enthusiastic instruction. Teaching in a small school situated between the historic towns of Yara and Bayamo, site of the first major battle of the Ten Years War and namesake of Cuba's national anthem, González structured his students' lives with images, symbols, and celebrations of the nation's recent past, "rendering," in the words of one writer, "true worship to the Patria." González adorned his classroom with multiple Cuban flags and portraits of heroic Cubans like Antonio Maceo, José Martí, and Carlos Manuel de Céspedes. He and his students marked patriotic dates by joining together to sing patriotic songs that narrated and celebrated the heroic feats of the nation's founders. Among these were many songs that González had composed himself, "Himno Patriótico," "Viente de Mayo," "Diez de Octubre" and "A mi Bandera."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> "Una escuela oriental," *Cuba Pedagógica* 184 (19 August 1909), 223. Song titles translate to, "Patriotic Hymn," "May Twentieth," "October Tenth," and "To my Flag," respectively.

While anniversaries offered fertile ground for nationalist instruction, Cuban students' exposure to nationalism would need to be normalized if children were to be socialized into patriotic beliefs. The cultivation of communal feelings was not limited to commemorations of particular events. González's pupils ended each Friday with a demonstration of ritual nationalism that affirmed their connection to and the sanctity of national symbols. At the conclusion of the week's classes, "One child, with the banner of the *patria* unfurled, occupied the tribune in front of his classmates." The child stood at the head of the class "in a reverent posture," and "slowly intoned our glorious national hymn." As students marched underneath the flag, each would join in the song, until the group had all passed the banner. The class would then continue their parade around the schoolhouse, singing and carrying the flag.<sup>22</sup>

Alongside formal instruction in national history, public schools also prioritized the moral and civic instruction for students of the Cuban republic. These courses, according to a 1914 Circular from the Board of Superintendents for Public Schools, were "not solely to establish in a child's mind a certain amount of knowledge of the political organization of the country, its government and its public institutions, but rather, from very early, to cultivate a love of country... History," the instructions continued, "offers abundant material for lessons" in morality and civics.<sup>23</sup>

In keeping with that directive, such courses were frequently taught through national history, as teachers used the past to create parables of ideal Cuban citizenship. The dairy of Cárdenas teacher Ovidio Méndez Rubí, published in the magazine *La Instrucción Primaria*, detailed his use of historical commemoration in a 1906 class on "Civic and Moral

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Junta de Superintendentes de Escuelas Públicas, Circular no. 75 (1914), 3.

Education.” As an exercise, Méndez asked one student to read aloud an article from the Havana daily *La Discusión* which narrated the recent celebration of the 24 February anniversary by children in Camagüey province. The teacher wrote that he hoped to “awaken in the students a love toward the glorious dates of the *Patria*; to offer them an example of civic enthusiasm, and awaken affection toward their comrades in that region.” Méndez’s observations affirm the success of his lesson: “In the class, there were outbursts of jubilation, applause, feelings of comradeship and a dignified spirit of unrestrained patriotism and a longing to imitate the Camagüeyan children prevailed.”<sup>24</sup>

In Havana, José Luis Vidaurreta led the students in his all female third grade class in a lesson designed to cultivate a nationalist sentiment and to shape its content. “Do you think,” he reportedly asked one of his pupils in the fall of 1905, “that we are obliged to fulfill certain duties to the *Patria*?” “Yes, sir,” replied a student, “we must love and defend her” alongside other Cuban compatriots. The *Patria*, Vidaurreta explained, was more than territory, but was defined by those who believed in, supported, and defended it. Recalling the horrors and glories of the independence struggle, he asked his students to contemplate what it might mean to “love and defend” the nation. He recalled the efforts of women and children, specifically girls, in resisting Spanish control and aiding the anti-colonial uprising.<sup>25</sup>

In a violent anecdote that fused nationalist memory with mythmaking, Vidaurreta recounted a story of a young girl whose father had joined the first rebellion in 1868. “Our heroine,” he continued, “wanting to show her appreciation to her comrades-in-arms, decided

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<sup>24</sup> Ovidio Méndez Rubí, “Hojas de un diario de clases,” *La Instrucción Primaria* 15 (10 March 1906), 487. See also, Yoel Cordoví Nuñez, “Las enseñanzas de la historia nacional y local en las escuelas públicas de Cuba, 1899-1930,” in María del Pilar Díaz Castañón ed. *Perfiles de la Nación II* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2006), 37-50.

<sup>25</sup> “Instrucción moral y cívica: clase dada en la Escuela Práctica Anexa á la Normal de Verano de la Habana, por José Luis Vidaurreta.” *Cuba Pedagógica* 46 (20 September 1905), 6.

to buy the supplies needed to make a flag that would be the purest and most beloved symbol of her people.” She lacked red fabric to make the triangle that marked the top of the flag, but began sewing its blue and white stripes. One afternoon while the girl was sewing the white star, Vidaurreta told his young students, a Spanish soldier came to her home in search of her father. Fearful, she ran from him, and he attacked her, grabbing the unfinished flag from her hands. The girl fought back, the teacher told his class, defending the symbol with fury and force. The soldier raised his knife, cut her throat, and ran from the house. “The flag unfurled on the ground,” he continued, “and the body of the girl... fell by chance on top of the star as her wound gushed the generous blood of this innocent victim. The flag was complete! It had lacked the color red, and the young patriot gave it with her blood!”<sup>26</sup>

The story of this young, patriotic girl was used as a parable of nationalistic devotion that the students in Vidaurreta’s class were told to emulate. The heroine’s graphically described apotheosis marked not only her martyrdom to the cause of Cuban independence, but the conversion of her blood into a literal component of Cuba’s flag. The narrative established the fusion of Cuba’s people and their sacred iconography while elevating the independence wars to the language and symbolic significance of mythology. The use of this story, violent as it was, in a third grade classroom further illuminates the importance Cuban educators placed on cultivating nationalist sentiment and identification among the country’s youngest.

Vidaurreta concluded the lesson by explaining to his students that their role in assuring the strength and endurance of the Cuban nation was to be good students and to work hard. “School is the guarantee of a glorious future *Patria*,” he assured them. “In school, you

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*



practice the most beautiful religion: it brings us together and shelters us so that, in your breast you elevate the leaders of our regeneration.” Hard work, education, and veneration of national heroes were elements of a religious nationalism that students would learn and practice in their classrooms. “Do not forget it, girls!” he declared. “School is the temple of the *Patria*!”<sup>27</sup>

### **We Make *Patria***

In the summer of 1910, President José Miguel Gómez issued a decree mandating that primary schools, in addition to secondary and upper schools, open each session with the “Juro de la bandera,” an oath to the national flag. This ritual, Gómez argued, would serve both to modernize and unite the country. “Every year,” he declared, “all newly arriving students swear an oath to the flag in the public schools of England, the Republic of Argentina, and other nations whose pedagogical and civic advancement are recognized and admired.” The President affirmed the religious metaphors used by Vidaurreta and others, celebrating the “apostolic labor” of Cuba’s teachers in improving the moral and intellectual state of Cuba’s youth “by principally using the examples that our history offers, to the end of awakening and strengthening the feeling of patriotism in them.” The act of swearing an oath to the flag, Gómez concluded, “by thousands of students from the entire republic” on the first day of classes would be more than a “sentimental celebration.” Rather, the oath ritual would be “a living lesson of great moral significance, which will support the work of the teacher in

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

his effort to help form the character of future citizens [who] love the land in which they live.”<sup>28</sup>

After the second United States intervention, which ended after three years in 1909, the consolidation of national unity around shared symbols assumed even greater importance. Cuban officials worked to reform the school system and reaffirm the fitness and durability of the Cuban nation. As the presidential decree of 1910 indicated, Cuban governments viewed the collective experience of public schooling as an opportunity to strengthen nationalism. Historians were at the vanguard of this effort, and the magazine *Cuba Pedagógica*, which was edited by historian and text book author Arturo Montorí, gave voice to advocates of schoolhouse nationalism.

As the above examples suggested, teachers themselves often embraced that role with great enthusiasm, and narratives of the independence wars formed the foundation of this effort: “Among the different subjects that our Public Schools offer in the Course of Studies,” wrote Rogelio González in a 1911 edition of *Cuba Pedagógica*, “History and Moral and Civic Education merit - without a doubt – preferential attention for the teacher who feels himself to be a true educator.” The teacher, who had won praise from provincial authorities in *Oriente*, argued that Cuba, a country “turned into a downtrodden colony, subjected to debasing servitude” by the United States, must “take upon itself, as a patriotic measure, the true education of citizens.” The instruction in and celebration of past glories, argued González, was the most effective way to engage young Cubans with the meaning of their national identity. His essay, titled “We make *patria*,” offered a proscription for strengthening the Cuban nation through education, and argued that schools were the vanguard of that project. “There no historical date, be it happy or painful, that passes without

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<sup>28</sup> “La jura de la bandera,” *El Cubano Libre*, 14 September 1910, 1.

notice” in González’s school. “Rarely do we fail to solemnize them with some small celebration; to every one of our principal dates we have dedicated a hymn or march... which are filled with simple, spontaneous patriotism. “We inculcate our disciples with a true historical education,” he continued. “We make them see that they constitute the hope and future of the *patria*. We inspire them to venerate and respect our illustrious predecessors.” The cultivation of national citizens, González argued, was the highest goal of education, and the “most sacred, beautiful” duty of the teacher.<sup>29</sup>

González received adulation for his commitment to patriotic education, but the attention he received suggests he was exceptional in this regard. In Matanzas, for example, the Provincial Superintendent of Schools published a circular for the region’s teachers elaborating a new set of required classroom rituals designed to, in his words, “to make the relationship between school and *patria* closer.” In his circular, Santiago García lamented that the “patriotic education” that Cuban students received in schools had been reduced to a few holidays and the weekly saluting of the national flag, which had been done since the first years of the republic “with more or less solemnity, depending on the enthusiasm of the professors.” Every Friday, García decreed, each Matanzas public school would an all-school assembly. There, led by a different teacher each week, the students would read aloud “an episode of our wars of emancipation, beginning with those that took place locally... The teachers of girls’ schools would highlight stories of the selfless and often sublime participation of our female compatriots.” This group ritual of remembrance would be followed by the students’ recitation of poetry centering on “the flag, the national shield, the

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<sup>29</sup> Rogelio González, “Hagamos patria,” *Cuba Pedagógica* 236 (15 November 1911), 832-833.

*patria* and its leaders.”<sup>30</sup> The traditional flag ceremony would follow, ending the school’s work for the week.

Not every observer of republican schools agreed that the excitation of patriotism were the appropriate aim of public education. While few, if any, would have argued against the teaching of national history in and of itself in public schools, prominent historian and educator Ramiro Guerra noted that many Cubans believed it to be fruitless to teach history to the country’s youngest students. As a subject of study, history was too complex for such young students, opponents argued, and they worried that primary school students would come away with inaccurate or false understandings of their national past.

Guerra, however, positioned himself alongside others who had written in *Cuba Pedagógica*. While he acknowledged that many aspects of historical study were beyond the comprehension of primary schoolers, Guerra insisted that young Cubans could and, indeed, should learn the fundamentals of their history. Despite the difficulties that students and teachers alike might face, Guerra argued that primary school instruction in history would serve three particular purposes: First, history had an “intrinsic value,” for understanding the development and evolution of human societies. Second, teaching history functioned “as an element of moral education.” Finally, Guerra promoted historical instruction “as a method of forming patriotic or national sentiment.”<sup>31</sup>

Over the course of the Cuban republic, Ramiro Guerra positioned himself as one of the nation’s most prominent scholars of pedagogy and of history, publishing volumes on Cuban and Latin American history. As Cubans reconsidered the organization of their public

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<sup>30</sup> Santiago García Spring, “El patriotismo y la escuela,” *Cuba Pedagógica* 284 (30 November 1914), 41-42.

<sup>31</sup> Ramiro Guerra, “Utilidad de la enseñanza de la historia en la Escuela Primaria,” *Cuba Pedagógica* 217 (30 January 1911), 579.

schools after the second U.S. occupation, Guerra was rising within the education system, becoming Superintendent of Schools in Pinar del Río province in 1913 and teaching pedagogy at the University of Havana. His writings on education policy represented the forefront of pedagogical thought in republican Cuba, and he emerged as a vocal advocate of historical education and its importance for developing nationalist sentiment among young Cubans.

For Ramiro Guerra and likeminded pedagogical advocates, the stakes of education could not be higher. In his multi-part 1911 article, “The Utility of Teaching History in Primary School,” Guerra developed a vision of history and education as inseparable from, even integral to the survival of the nation itself. “If we create in ourselves a weak, poor view of our country, of its history, of its men and its future,” Guerra argued, “our patriotic sentiment will not survive long against the contempt or indifference that our land inspires in us.” Guerra elaborated his own nationalist narrative, centered on the resonance of national bloodshed and redemption. “We need to teach our children to admire all of our history that is worthy of admiration,” he continued. “[T]he patriotism and indomitable valor demonstrated in our epic struggles for independence; persevering in sacrifice upon the altars of freedom that beckoned us.” Teachers, insisted Guerra, were tasked with “making our students understand the rich heritage that they are heirs to and, for the love of the past, they will love the present and the future.” Guerra, as others before and after him, understood the national past to be a force of cohesion, a unifying narrative with which all Cubans could identify. “While so many interests and passions divide us in the present,” he concluded, “we look to

the past for a common ground where we can unite ourselves in the love of the worthiest, the noblest, and the greatest of our *patria*.<sup>32</sup>

While pedagogical scholars like Ramiro Guerra and Arturo Montorí advocated for historical education as the foundation of a nationalist education, other observers took aim at the notion that schools were the best or most appropriate setting for cultivating patriotism. In a critique of the Cuban public school system in 1913, the journal *Revista de la Educación* lamented that civic education in the republic had “been reduced to a constant excitation of patriotic sentiment.” Moreover, argued the article’s author A.M. Aguayo, many teachers seemed to believe that their mission was to create patriots, men and women who intensely love their country.<sup>33</sup> Patriotism, he argued, was instinctive and natural, and required no excitation from school teachers. Schools should focus on developing universal human, rather than national virtues.

The Aguayo article amplified an ongoing discussion among observers of Cuban education over the place of nationalist instruction in schools. Even with Aguayo’s critique, the debate remained uneven. The responses to *Revista de Educación*’s challenging the cultivation of nationalism in Cuban schools illuminates the particularly Cuban contingencies that inspired that practice and, pointedly, the politics of the past that shaped the republic. In an article defiantly titled “Yes, We Make Patriots,” *Cuba Pedagógica* agreed that patriotism may not need to be aroused and strengthened in every society. Some countries had developed a feeling of nationhood over time, the journal argued, through the “sedimentation” of collective actions and beliefs, realized by equally common ideals. Cuba, on the other hand, was a “new country,” one with a short history of collective action or sentiment. Cuban

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 602.

<sup>33</sup> A.M. Aguayo, “El sistema escolar en Cuba,” *Revista de la Educación* 4 (April 1913), 243.

patriotism was closely entangled with the patriotic feelings of Spain, with which inhabitants of the island had so recently identified. Moreover, influence of the United States threatened to overtake Cuban culture as schoolchildren learned the English language and U.S. history in a country thick with North American companies, fashions, and people.

The case of Cuba, then, was distinct from that of European nations from which many Cuban pedagogues had drawn their educational philosophies. The new states of Latin America were besieged by a weakened sense of collectivity and pervasive foreign influence, the article continued. Even Argentina, which held itself as a progressive, modern state in the European tradition had used primary education to “Argentinize” its young population. Cuba, with its small size, multi-racial population, and quite recent independence, could hardly face down the “absorbing spirit” of the United States, whose economic and political influence had already insinuated itself into Cuban life as though it were a “conquered country.” Counteracting these influences, argued *Cuba Pedagógica* required Cubans to “remember and venerate the great deeds of their predecessors, to feel themselves the heirs to their greatness and to teach them to continue their glories.”<sup>34</sup>

The challenge posed to schoolhouse nationalism in the pages of *Revista de la Educación* drew Arturo Montorí, a historian and the executive editor of *Cuba Pedagógica*, into the fray. In a later article, Montorí deepened the previous edition’s critique of republican conditions that necessitated a nationalist education. Like Aguayo, he began:

we do not believe that the primordial aim of education, in an absolute sense, is to create patriots; but we are convinced that, taking into account the circumstances that insinuate into and surround our existence as an ethnic and political group... and accounting for the multitude of ferments of dissolution that actuate in the same entrails of our social organism, and the dangerous exterior powers that threaten us,

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<sup>34</sup> “Si; hagamos patriotas,” *Cuba Pedagógica* 268 (31 April 1913), 276-279.

the most important mission, because it is the most urgent, of education in our pueblo is *to create men and women who intensely love their country*.<sup>35</sup>

Cuba, Montorí, insisted, did not enjoy the long history of ethnic unity or national sentiment that might characterize European, or even other Latin American countries. Cuba had many recent immigrants, he continued, and “its wealth is almost entirely in the hands of foreigners,” since so many wealthy and landed Cubans “threw their fortunes into the revolutionary bonfire, and as a result, that generation finds itself totally dispossessed.”<sup>36</sup> The need to cultivate nationalism in classrooms, Montorí argued, was born of particularly national circumstances.

Cuban historical exceptionalism, then, was both the cause and the method of schoolhouse nationalism in the republic. The unique challenges faced by the nascent republic, specifically internal disunity, social flux, and especially North American economic power and political influence, demanded that Cubans purposefully and vigorously create a new generation of patriots that would serve as a bastion against these threats. If the purpose of education in the republic was indeed “to create men and women who intensely love their country,” then educating students in the glories of the national past offered a clear and crucial path.

### **Coloring the Past: Textbooks, Race, and National Narratives**

In 1900, Alejandro López published one of Cuba’s first textbooks, titled *A Brief Summary of Cuban History*. In an introduction included for teachers, López reflected on the

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<sup>35</sup> Arturo Montorí, “El patriotismo y la escuela,” *Cuba Pedagógica* 275 (15 July 1913), 372.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*



“arduous” work of writing a history of Cuba only two years after the country’s long struggle for independence had finally ended. Wounds were barely closed, he suggested, and the passions of war had yet to completely fade into memory. Cuba’s schools would now fill with the children of those who had fought for independence. Among the many challenges facing Cuba’s new teachers, López noted, would be the task of narrating Cuban history in classrooms that would include, for the first time, black students.

“Their fathers were the slave race,” López wrote, “who worked the land for their owners... who were white Cubans.”<sup>37</sup> Like the war that helped abolish it, the institution of slavery in Cuba had only recently ended. The presence of white and black students in Cuban classrooms, the children of slaves and slave masters, represented both an achievement of the independence movement and, in the eyes of Alejandro López, a looming challenge to social cohesion. For children whose fathers had been slaves and slave owners, the memory of slavery might unsettle the racial unity represented and maintained by the memory of the independence wars. However, López argued, this history did not have to be divisive. Slavery was a “common disgrace to all,” he declared, but “must not be a motive in our society for men to hate one another. There is no nation that has not done the same thing.”<sup>38</sup>

If history, as educators insisted, offered the path to create patriotic sentiment and assure national unity, then its events would have to be assembled and explained in the service of that goal. Educators excited nationalist fervor through the celebration of the heroic figures and glorious stories of the independence wars, but crafting a unifying past from the island’s longer history would prove far more complex. Whereas patriotic celebrations could focus

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<sup>37</sup> Alejandro María López y Torres, *Historia de Cuba en breve compendio* (Havana: La Propagandista, 1900), 9.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

exclusively on the heroic and uplifting, history textbooks were tasked with crafting a unifying narrative that would span centuries, from the island's conquest and colonization to the withdrawal of Spanish forces.

History textbooks written during the republic depicted Cubans as a cohesive people with a shared past that extended deep into the colonial period. As the preface of Alejandro López's textbook made clear, however, the nation's past had the potential to sew discord as easily as it could create cohesion. López identified the island's long history of slavery as a dangerous topic to broach in Cuban classrooms, suggesting that African slavery might be the divisive counterpoint to the glorious independence struggle in the national story. Because the national history presented in Cuban classrooms was created to unite Cubans and excite patriotic feeling, racial divisions would need to be minimized.

In his *Brief Summary of the History of Cuba*, López clarified how Cuban teachers might explain the enslavement of black in Cuba and maintain a unifying narrative of the national past. Universalizing African slavery offered a strategy for rejecting its racial basis. In Cuba, wrote López, "blacks were not enslaved for being black," but rather as a part of an ancient tradition of slavery, which he proceeded to trace. To López, schools offered the possibility of transcending old divisions in a new generation, for "it is in the social renovation created by children that it becomes so necessary to destroy resentments and sew reconciliation."<sup>39</sup>

Textbook authors thus assembled national narratives with the intent of cultivating admiration for the nation and its past. The content and form of those narratives would shape the kinds of patriots that schools made. Efforts to establish history as the source of an

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

invigorated nationalism relied on historical narratives that minimized social divisions and portrayed, as sociologist John Narone has argued, “a unified society with a unified past.”<sup>40</sup> In the service of this goal, textbooks presented a linear narrative that demonstrated the shared historic lineage of Cubans. While the note to teachers in López’s textbook represents the concerns of a single author, his warning about the dangers of teaching slavery in Cuba’s multi-racial classrooms offers crucial context in the evaluation of school texts and the narratives and norms they circulated to Cuban children. After the publication of López’s book in 1900, Cuban textbook authors appear to have taken his warning to heart, crafting historical narratives that minimized the brutality and racial dimensions of slavery while celebrating its abolition as a signal achievement of white leaders like Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, rather than that of black leaders or rebelling slaves.

While textbook writers confronted different challenges than did teachers or school administrators, they shared the same patriotic project. Authors saw the connection between history and the cultivation of patriotism, and composed narratives of national history that would excite nationalist feeling, affirming social unity around a shared past. Miguel Angel Cano, in his 1921 textbook *Lessons of Cuban History* affirmed that “the study of the History of the *patria* strengthens and secures patriotic sentiments.”<sup>41</sup> Vidal Morales struck a triumphal tone in the preface to his *Notions of Cuban History* which, by the 1920s was already in its fifth printing. Closing his introduction, Morales noted that “reading this book, we will learn the glorious deeds of those compatriots that sacrificed fortune, well-being, and life to achieve the liberty that we now enjoy, and we will always remember them with

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<sup>40</sup> John Narone, “Professional History and Social Memory,” *Communication* 11 (1989), 93.

<sup>41</sup> Miguel Angel Cano, *Lecciones de historia de Cuba* (Santiago de Cuba: Escuelas Profesionales “D” Bosco, 1921), 3.

reverence and gratitude.”<sup>42</sup> In 1922, Ramiro Guerra introduced his textbook by asserting that his mission was “to try to establish the essential characters and features of this gigantic task [of independence] undertaken by our fathers... and place them firmly in the thoughts and hearts of our youth and young adults. Thus, every one of its lines has been thought over with love and written with a patriotic longing.”<sup>43</sup>

Textbook authors like Ramiro Guerra thus constructed their narratives to glorify the nation and instill patriotic feeling in young students. As the textbooks’ introductions indicated, the wars of independence could easily be told as a glorious, unifying epic. Textbooks of national history, however, looked to a deeper past. The 1904 guide for teachers’ examinations explained that primary school classrooms should begin with the island’s discovery by Christopher Columbus and follow the political developments in Spain and in Cuba until the emergence of anti-colonial activity in the nineteenth century.<sup>44</sup> Textbooks tended to follow this structure, identifying the arrival of Europeans with the point of origin of Cuban history.

The construction of a unified and unifying past became more complex as the story extended into the colonial era. The content of history textbooks offers a unique glimpse into the creation of consensual, unifying narratives of the Cuban people and nation. These authoritative accounts told the national story with a simplicity that belied the subtle power and complexity of their messages. As previous chapters have suggested, nationalist ideologies held that racial divisions had been a condition of colonial life, and were overcome through the cooperation of white and non-white Cubans in overthrowing Spanish authority.

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<sup>42</sup> Vidal Morales y Morales, *Nociones de historia de Cuba* 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Havana: La Moderna Poesía, 1923), viii.

<sup>43</sup> Ramiro Guerra, *Historia elemental de Cuba* 2d ed. (Havana: Cultural, S.A., 1923), 5.

<sup>44</sup> Enrique José Varona et al, *Manual ó guía para los exámenes*, 254-256.

This claim relied on assembling the events of the nation's past in a particular structure, endorsing cohesion while minimizing racial difference and discrimination

Textbooks designed to simplify and unite unsurprisingly made no mention of the racial tensions that emerged within Cuban forces during the wars of independence. Instead, textbook authors avoided racial categories in their narratives of the independence struggle, focusing on the divisions between the rebels and colonial authorities. "The inhabitants of Cuba," Miguel Angel Cano wrote of colonial society just before the *Grito de Yara*, "were divided into two groups: Spanish and Cubans," the latter of which was politically repressed and kept from public office.<sup>45</sup> Slaves were excised from the narrative along with racial categories. Among the causes for which Cubans rebelled, the abolition of slavery did not merit mention.

As Alejandro López suggested in 1900, the memory of slavery had the potential to destabilize a unifying narrative of the past, and posed a challenge to writers seeking to minimize racial divisions. While racial categories could be rather easily elided in depictions of the wars for independence, the history of slavery posed a greater challenge. López had insisted that slavery in Cuba need not cause resentment because it had not been racially based. In the depictions of slavery in textbooks, then, we can see how writers, in the service of affirming patriotic unity, minimized slavery as an element of national history. In so doing, Cuban textbooks marginalized people of color within the national story.

López's instructions to Cuba's teachers at the opening of the twentieth century echoed in the pages of Cuban textbooks for decades afterward. In the first edition of his textbook, *Nociones de historia de Cuba*, historian Vidal Morales included virtually no

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<sup>45</sup> Cano, *Lecciones de historia de Cuba*, 117.

mention of African slavery, noting only the growth of Cuba's population with the rise of the sugar industry.<sup>46</sup> In his 1921 primary school textbook *Lessons on Cuban History*, Miguel Angel Cano noted that slavery was "nothing out of the ordinary" in the sixteenth century, when the first Africans were brought to the Americas. The introduction of African slavery to the Caribbean, he argued, was the result of two factors: "the rapid extinction of the [native] Siboneys, and, on the other hand, the physical superiority and resistance [to disease] of the black for the agricultural labor they would perform." Even as he noted that slave labor was a common feature of the era, Cano reinforced common beliefs about the physical superiority of Africans that, as the physical examination of Antonio Maceo's body in 1900 indicated, would inform racial ideologies and anxieties in the Cuban republic. Cano did condemn the slave system, arguing that "this odious institution... degraded all those who imposed it. Nevertheless," he insisted, slavery was "less severe in Cuba than in other places," owing to certain freedoms that Cuban slaves enjoyed, which Cano enumerated.<sup>47</sup>

The minimization of slavery supported Cuban educators' efforts to use schoolhouses to "make patriots," a place where young Cubans could develop an admiration for and devotion to the nation. As textbook authors like Miguel Angel Cano suggested that slavery was degrading to both slave and slaveholder, slavery became a symbol of the universal injustice of the colonial system, one in which the slaveholder was himself oppressed. To the extent that these narratives acknowledged racial divisions, then, those could be depicted as an element of the colonial era, in contrast to the unity of the anti-colonial effort.

While they minimized the importance of slavery and slaves in Cuba's past, history textbooks also separated black Cubans from the national story. Slavery was de-emphasized,

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<sup>46</sup> Vidal Morales y Morales, *Nociones de historia de Cuba* (Havana: La Moderna Poesía, 1904), 53.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-65.

and the slaves themselves were undifferentiated and unidentified. In descriptions of the colonial period, individual Cubans of color appeared only as leaders of slave rebellions. Textbook authors typically privileged the concerns of slaveholders, presenting slave uprisings as threats to order and public safety. According to author Vidal Morales, José Antonio Aponte, who plotted an 1812 slave rebellion, “aspired for the emancipation and dominance of his race,” Morales notes in a short paragraph, “for which he was hanged with eight accomplices for his criminal plans.”<sup>48</sup> Ramiro Guerra was less explicit in condemning the criminality of Aponte, instead characterizing the threat of slave revolts and the specter of the Haitian revolution as “a danger and a terrible threat to the tranquility of the island.”<sup>49</sup> These depictions of slave uprisings as threats to order illuminate how the country’s history was collapsed into the history of its white population.

As these textbooks moved toward 1868 and the independence wars of the late nineteenth century, the racial categories that had divided free and slave in the colony mostly disappeared from the page. White Cubans continued to be the focal point of the story, even while former slaves and free people of color joined the insurgency in growing numbers. As noted earlier, the emancipation of slaves had entered the popular memory of the independence wars unevenly, occasionally appearing in articles commemorating the *Grito de Yara* as evidence of the beneficence of slaveholding patriots like Carlos Manuel de Céspedes. Few textbooks mentioned that Céspedes emancipated his slaves in 1868, and none mention the inclusion of freed slaves into the rebel army.

As in newspapers and commemorative ceremonies, Céspedes’s abolitionist efforts appeared in Cuban classrooms as evidence of his selflessness and personal sacrifice.

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<sup>48</sup> Morales y Morales, *Nociones de historia de Cuba*, 139.

<sup>49</sup> Guerra, *Historia elemental de Cuba*, 182.

Abolitionism emerged as evidence of Céspedes's political will and moral authority, but textbook authors marginalized slaves themselves from the primary narrative of national history. While the abolition of slavery was not presented as a major event in Cuban textbooks, the emancipation of slaves often featured heavily in hagiographies of Céspedes included in textbooks or taught in lectures.

In a lesson designed to teach students about the life of Céspedes, a teacher planned to emphasize Céspedes's opposition to slavery as an important element of his personal greatness. Céspedes "protested against abuses committed against the poor enslaved blacks," the teacher would tell students. Spanish authorities "captured him and banished him from returning to Bayamo for some time. Joaquín, do you think Céspedes did the right thing in defending the slaves?" The lesson plan lacked answers, but the appropriate response seems self-evident. "How did Spanish authorities treat white Cubans, José?" the lesson would continue. "How did blacks live, Domingo?" By pairing these questions, the writer of the lesson plan fused the oppression suffered by Cuban whites and slaves as effects of colonial rule. "And how could this state of affairs be changed?" the teacher was expected to ask.<sup>50</sup> The answer would be as clear to students as it evidently was to Céspedes himself.

The decision to rebel against Spanish authority and his ascension to President of the Republic in Arms were, according to this lesson, not the most heroic acts carried out by the Father of the *Patria*. "Céspedes was quite rich when he initiated the war, and he lost all of his capital in it," the lesson on Céspedes continued. "It is said that before giving the shout of 'viva Cuba libre,' he called a notary and gave him a decree extending freedom to all blacks.

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<sup>50</sup> "Historia: grado tercero, segundo período," *Cuba Pedagógica* 266 (31 March 1913), 237-239.



What do you think of this action?”<sup>51</sup> The lesson thus connected the emancipation of slaves with the Céspedes’s sacrifice of wealth, implicitly depicting the abolition of slavery as an act of generosity and sacrifice by white Cubans.

In textbooks, October 10, 1868 appeared as the genesis of national independence. Authors emphasized patriotism and bravery and only mentioned abolition in passing, if at all. In a typical example, Miguel Cano’s *Lessons in Cuban History* celebrated the emancipation of slaves by nationalist leaders in its truncated section on slavery, but the only time Cubans of color entered its narrative of the Ten Years War comes in a brief reference to the 27 December 1868 decree by the Liberation Army calling for an end to slavery.<sup>52</sup> As slavery ended in the textbook narrative, so too did the salience of racial categories in Cuban history. While racial categories were already minimized in narratives of the colonial era, references to race or color disappeared from narratives of the independence wars. In textbooks recording the *historia patria*, race ended where nation began, and the slaves liberated by Céspedes and his allies vanish from the story.

As racial categories did not figure in the story of the independence wars featured in textbooks, the illustrations of national heroes that appeared in these books featured white leaders almost exclusively. Ramiro Guerra’s *Elemental History of Cuba*, for example, features more than fifteen illustrations of heroes or scenes of battle, of which only two feature a soldier of color, Antonio Maceo.<sup>53</sup> The 1937 edition of Cano’s *Notions of Cuban History* offers an illustration of the *Grito de Yara* that depicts slaves gathering on Céspedes’s plantation, but no depictions of black Generals or soldiers, save for a portrait of Antonio

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> Cano, *Nociones de historia de Cuba*, 119.

<sup>53</sup> Ramiro Guerra y Sánchez, *Historia elemental de Cuba* (Havana: Cultural, S.A. 1922), 182.

Maceo.<sup>54</sup> In this sense, textbooks are notable for replicating the contours of popular memory that affirmed the unity of Cuban society and normalized the irrelevance of racial identifications.

Maceo occupied an important position in history textbooks, as in wider popular memory. Narratives of his life emphasized his humble origins and lack of education, but not his racial identity. His image in most textbooks was the lone depiction of a non-white Cuban. In the interests of creating a unifying past and implicitly affirming the irrelevance of race, textbook authors did not address the multi-racial makeup of the Liberation Army. A notable exception to this pattern came in the publication of Juan Leiseca's 1925 textbook, *History of Cuba*. Leiseca's textbook declared that "white and black Cubans both fought for independence, he wrote, "the blood of one and the other ran together in glorious combat, and one of our greatest military leaders was of the black race, Antonio Maceo, until symbolically, in the catastrophe at San Pedro, the blood of white and black made a pact in eternal union."<sup>55</sup> This dramatic invocation of Maceo and his death beside Panchito Gómez came not in Leiseca's chapter on the War of Independence, but rather in his description of the violence of 1912 and the uprising of the *Partido Independiente de Color*.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the memory of Maceo was entangled with the rise of the PIC from the party's inception, and served as a powerful symbol both for the PIC and for its opponents. The narrative of a covenant between black and white Cubans became a powerful discursive tool in undercutting the nationalist qualifications of the *Independientes*, and enabled its proponents to accuse the party of blasphemy against the nationalist commandment of racial fraternity.

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<sup>54</sup> Miguel Angel Cano, *Nociones de historia de Cuba* 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Havana: Cutural, S.A., 1937), 96.

<sup>55</sup> Juan M. Leiseca, *Historia de Cuba* (Havana: Montavalo, Cárdenas & Co., 1925), 503.

Antonio Maceo had long functioned as a symbol of racial harmony and Cuba's raceless national identity. His own racial category, as the examination of his mortal remains revealed, was as malleable as the purposes to which it was put. Leiseca, for example, identified Maceo as "of the black race" in order to emphasize the contributions of black Cubans to the cause of independence. Maceo's mixed racial origins, however, allowed Cubans to invoke him as the embodiment of racial transcendence, an effort which assumed greater force and urgency as Cubans responded to the events of the PIC conflict. In 1914, Havana Mayor Fernando Freyre de Andrade addressed the Havana town hall. He spoke at length of racial fraternity, declaring that

Maceo is the incarnation of the *tipo cubano*. Here, we have combined men of all races, forming a small and united people... That is why, although made up of different elements, we are a united, harmonious people. Maceo... was, in his death, a symbol of harmony and accord... in the death of Maceo all of the union, all of the aspiration and all of the nobility of our race were synthesized.<sup>56</sup>

The Havana mayor spoke not only of racial harmony, but of a Cuban race, embodied in Maceo and forged from the fusion of black and white during the independence movement. Maceo thus represented a deracialized, inclusive national identity, a racial *cubanidad* that rendered divisions meaningless. Conservative politician José María Collantes addressed the Solemn Session of the Cámara de Representantes, declaring that Maceo, as a mulatto, "like no other symbolized to the Cuban people... the mixture of the two races that merge together in the supreme dilemma of dying united for Cuba, or, for Cuba, to live united!"<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Fernando Freyre de Andrade, quoted in "La conmemoración patriótica de ayer," *La Lucha*, 8 December 1914, 6.

<sup>57</sup> José María Collantes, quoted in "La conmemoración patriótica de ayer," *La Lucha*, 8 December 1914, 2.

If Maceo was the incarnation of this identity, the memory of his death was its genesis. The use of Antonio Maceo and Panchito Gómez's battlefield deaths as a symbolic consecration of racial unity emerged before the PIC conflict, but its iconic power amplified considerably in the aftermath of 1912. If the context called for an invocation of racial mixing, Maceo could be simultaneously mixed race and black, as Collantes revealed in his speech, calling out to "Maceo *mestizo*, Maceo dying in the young arms of his white assistant, united among blood two races."<sup>58</sup> Five years later Representative Horacio Díaz Pardo combined the symbolism of the moment with an ominous warning, perhaps shaped by the memory of the racial violence of 1912:

The fall of the white youth at the side of the bronze colossus is a symbol and a lesson: whoever tries to sow division between Cubans will be reduced, and he that tries to tear the symbol, who tries to betray the hope and idealism of the Cuban nation will be damned.

The transcript reported that Díaz Pardo's declaration was followed by "great applause."<sup>59</sup>

The symbol had enduring power. In an editorial in 1925, the same year that Leiseca published his textbook, *La Lucha* proclaimed: "The blood of one and the other, of the legendary *caudillo* and his aid merged in that tragic hour... Maceo-Gómez are... the highest symbol of our turbulent and bloody history."<sup>60</sup>

Juan Leiseca framed Maceo's racial symbolism as a counterpoint to the PIC rebellion, using his memory to affirm the contribution of black Cubans and to demonstrate the transcendence of racial difference. "This race," he wrote, "refused no sacrifice to the *patria*

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Horacio Díaz Pardo, quoted in "La Cámara en sesión solemne: recordó anoche a los héroes y los mártires de la independencia," *La Lucha*, 8 December 1919, 9.

<sup>60</sup> "Antonio Maceo," *La Lucha*, 6 December 1925, 7. *La Lucha* re-ran this editorial in 1926.

in order to create it.” The Cuban constitution, then, “combined blacks and whites in the noble title of Cubans” guaranteeing equal rights under the law. Leiseca argued that blacks could distinguish themselves by merit just as “in the war, the black man obtained higher rank by distinguishing himself in bravery.” Ascendancy in the republic, he argued, was as open as ascendancy through the ranks of the Liberation Army. “To want the title of color is an absurdity,” he declared, “and could even be a crime, because this pretension breaks with all law, as one cannot aspire to being more than Cuban.”<sup>61</sup>

## Conclusions

In 1900, the author of *A Brief Summary of Cuban History* approached the teaching of Cuban history with caution. The nation’s history, Alejandro López noted, was not so far past, and the divisions that shaped the preceding centuries might create fissures in the young republic. Pedagogues, historians, and schoolteachers in the early decades of Cuban independence had understood the teaching of *la historia patria* as an indispensable avenue for socializing a new generation into the stories and symbols of nationhood. Classrooms were decorated in flags and portraits of national heroes, and lessons were crafted so students would internalize and connect with the narratives of national independence.

National history had a clear power to unify, provided of course that the history itself was unifying. Classroom lessons and schoolhouse commemorations focused on the heroic and the emotionally resonant to actively create and cultivate a fervent patriotism in Cuba’s youth. The textbooks that historians designed for use in public school classrooms presented a past that affirmed national cohesion, depicting the ills of colonial life and celebrating the men who saw fit to challenge Spanish authority and forge a Cuban nation. The narratives

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<sup>61</sup> Leiseca, *Historia de Cuba*, 505-505.

advanced in Cuban classrooms, however, reveal how national unity was contingent on a vision of national history that largely marginalized people of color from the story of the nation. The “unified past” that emerged in schoolbooks celebrated the advancement of white leaders in envisioning independence and ending slavery, but presented students with an image of a nation forged almost entirely by whites.

Cuban pedagogues had long declared national history to be the foundation of nationalism, and school textbooks, by minimizing slavery, minimized the place of black Cubans in the national narrative and rendered heroic Cubans of color like Antonio Maceo as national symbols without national origins. While Cuban pedagogues and teachers energetically advocated for teaching history as a means of cultivating national unity, the narratives of the national past that they taught structured the terms of that unity, and advanced a vision of a unified nation through a past that only some had shared.

Even as many Cubans understood national history as a powerful source of unity and support for the republican project, the period during which these narratives were written had illuminated the potential of these sacred stories to prompt division and fear. A quarter century after López’s introduction spoke to the challenges of the multiracial classroom, Juan Leiseca’s more expansive textbook deployed history to condemn the PIC’s claims of racial marginalization and disenfranchisement. Indeed, the challenge posed by the PIC illuminated the power of history as an oppositional discourse. By the 1920s, as Cubans confronted economic hardship joined, in the latter half of the decade, with political repression, the nation’s past again took shape as a contested space in which to challenge the structures of republican society.

As the generation that entered Cuban schools at the outset of independence came of age in the 1920s, many came to challenge the nationalist narratives into which they had been initiated in Cuban schools. Young Cubans, frustrated with the economic and cultural hegemony of the United States began reassessing the narratives of national history that sustained republican power. As activists began to question the nationalist legitimacy of republican governments, the heroes of the anti-colonial struggle emerged as potent symbols through which to reimagine Cuban nationhood and reassert independence. The nationalism that took shape in the 1920s and beyond advocated a return to the nation's founding ideals, which demanded a refashioning of old narratives to sustain a new nationalist project. As we shall see in the coming pages, memory re-emerged as a powerful oppositional discourse as Cubans confronted the challenges of global depression and dictatorial rule, blurring the lines between historian and activist and between nationalist and revolutionary.

#### IV

### A People That Has Never Been Free: The New Politics of the Past

In the late winter of 1925, violence erupted in a public park in the city of Santa Clara. Black parkgoers had apparently violated an unspoken, traditional segregation of the city's public space, crossing into traditionally white sections of *Parque Vidal*. Mainstream newspapers blamed blacks for violating a settled convention and agitating racial tensions.<sup>1</sup> That March, a young student activist named Julio Antonio Mella responded to the violence by submitting a scathing attack on republican society in *Juventud*, the magazine that he founded two years earlier at the University of Havana. Mella described the attacks in Santa Clara as "a horrifying, embarrassing act... The whites hunted down blacks in a park of a provincial city like long ago slaveholders in the Gold Coast hunted slaves." The endurance of segregated public space in Cuba and the armed attack on black pedestrians led Mella to another conclusion. "This event has demonstrated one more time, as we have argued so many times in these pages: The Revolution of Independence has been a farce."<sup>2</sup>

At twenty-two, Mella was already a veteran political activist. Later that same year, he would help found the Anti-Imperialist League and the Cuban Communist Party, advocating direct action against the government and revolutionary social and economic

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<sup>1</sup> "El cisma racial de Santa Clara va a tener patriótica solución, *La Lucha*, 25 January 1925, 2. For an analysis of the reaction of the mainstream press to the violence, and the response of Afro-Cuban activists, see Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 79-80.

<sup>2</sup> Julio Antonio Mella, "Los cazadores de negros resucitan en Santa Clara," in María Antonieta Juliá, ed. *J.A. Mella, documentos y artículos* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1975), 165. The original article appeared in *Juventud*, 25 March 1925, 5-6.



change. In 1923, Mella had joined the nascent Movement of Veterans and Patriots Movement to advocate for political reforms. A decade later, the republican edifice would collapse, as a broad coalition of Cubans rose up to oust the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado and demand that the republic be reborn.

By the late 1920s, the social cohesion and ideological placidity that circulated in Cuban schoolhouses could not be reproduced beyond their walls. As the first generation of post-independence Cubans came of age, the contradictions between nationalist ideology and republican reality continued to deepen. Many of the Cubans who entered school in the first decade of independence transitioned, by the 1920s, into a cohort of young nationalists that critiqued the social inequality and political corruption of the republic and located the source of its dysfunction in the North American intervention of 1898. These activists criticized the independence generation for its apparent failure to resist U.S. imperialism and enact the progressive, autonomous republic that, many argued, its founders had envisioned. By decade's end, republican government eroded under the increasingly autocratic government of Gerardo Machado, prompting Cubans to question the narratives of national history on which the legitimacy of the government rested.

The contradictions of the Cuban republic had reached a crescendo by the twentieth anniversary of independence. Sugar prices collapsed in 1920 after years of booming exports, precipitating an economic crisis that gripped the entire island. The industry's decline only deepened the control North Americans exerted on Cuban sugar and the economic dependence

of the island on the U.S. market which, by mid-decade received ninety-five percent of its harvest.<sup>3</sup>

Economic catastrophe in the early 1920s was joined by political crisis. Between 1902 and the presidential elections of 1920, “no incumbent seeking a second term ever lost an election.”<sup>4</sup> Robert Whitney has persuasively characterized the first decades of the republic as ruled by an oligarchic class which traced its governing legitimacy “from their past roles (real, imagined, or invented) in the independence war of 1895-98.”<sup>5</sup> As we have seen, the inheritance of the revolutionary legacy was a prime concern for Cuban political leaders and for the government more broadly. This ruling group faced few challenges from outside its ranks, with the notable exception of the *Partido Independiente de Color*, whose uprising in 1912 was brutally suppressed by the government of independence veteran José Miguel Gómez. In 1920, it was Gómez himself who contemplated rebellion, believing himself to be the rightful victor in that year’s presidential election. As it had on three previous occasions, the United States invoked the Platt Amendment, sending General Enoch Crowder to resolve the election crisis of 1920 and improve republican administration.

Even as Crowder worked with incoming president Alfredo Zayas to reform the government, new factors converged to challenge the republican status quo. During the boom years of the previous decade, a Cuban economic elite began to take shape for the first time since independence. Although U.S. control of sugar had deepened during World War I, the economic expansion created conditions for Cuban entrepreneurs to develop local

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba: Mass Mobilization and Political Change, 1920-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001). See also Louis A. Pérez, Jr. *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 3d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Pérez, *Between Reform and Revolution*, 169.

<sup>5</sup> Whitney, 18.

manufacturing, and with it, new political interests. In the wake of the economic crisis of the early 1920s, this growing class of Cuban elites began to demand greater protection from the government for native economic interests, and increasingly sought a place in the political process. Workers began to organize against harsh labor practices as well, demanding that the government defend their interests against those of foreign companies.

Not all grievances that emerged in the 1920s were new. Since the intervention of the United States in 1898, many veterans of the independence wars had been frustrated by their treatment, both by U.S. authorities and the Cuban government. Veterans' associations had long been a powerful civic presence, frequently weighing in on matters of memory and nationalist belief, as in the 1912 PIC uprising and subsequent debate over the memory of Antonio Maceo. Indeed, the founders of the *Partido Independiente de Color* themselves emerged from veterans' movements, demanding access to public jobs and pensions as a right earned in military service. By the early 1920s, the pension issue had re-emerged, this time as a point of conflict between veterans' associations and the administration of Alfredo Zayas.

In the summer of 1923, a coalition of independence veterans and young intellectuals joined to form the National Association of Veterans and Patriots.<sup>6</sup> Declaring its purpose as "the regeneration of Cuba," the Veterans and Patriots proposed a reform of the nation's electoral system. Arguing that the republic needed to be reborn and rectified, the Veterans and Patriots demanded reforms to prevent re-electionism, protect Cuban workers against the importation of labor, and to enfranchise women in public life, arguing that Cuban

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<sup>6</sup> For a detailed discussion of this movement and its goals, see Ana Cairo Ballester, *El Movimiento de Veteranos y Patriotas* (Havana: Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1976).

governments had allowed the nation to be overtaken by foreign capital at the expense of “Cuban nationality.”<sup>7</sup>

The movement counted among its ranks such independence leaders as General Manuel Sanguily and Enrique José Varona, the former Vice-President of the republic, alongside a group of young students and intellectuals that had garnered attention in previous months for launching various challenges to the government of Alfredo Zayas. In the spring of 1923, Julio Antonio Mella led fellow students in an occupation of the University of Havana, and organized the Federation of University Students (FEU) to agitate for educational and governmental reforms, including the abrogation of the Platt Amendment. From beyond the University’s walls, a young writer named Rubén Martínez Villena mobilized a group of artists and intellectuals to protest the Zayas government in an incident that became known as the “Protest of the Thirteen.”

This potent coalition of independence veterans and activists of the republican generation clearly rattled the Zayas government, which declared the movement as rebellious and seditious, and sent word to local authorities that the organization would be banned.<sup>8</sup> Although its leaders attempted to organize resistance, including a planned uprising against the Zayas government, no rebellion advanced beyond the planning stages. Although the Veterans and Patriots movement managed only a short appearance on the national political stage, it marked the ascendance of a new political generation that would mount a profound challenge to the nationalist narrative and ideology that had dominated the early republic. Mobilizing the memory of the independence struggle, joined with a harsh critique of the

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<sup>7</sup> “Asociación Nacional de Veteranos y Patriotas: estatutos,” n.d., Caja 2623, Número 14, Fondo Gobierno Provincial, APHS; *Heraldo de Cuba*, 30 August, 1923, 1, quoted in Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba*, 33.

<sup>8</sup> Governor of Oriente province to Mayor of Santiago de Cuba, 30 October 1923, Caja 2623, Num. 5, Fondo Gobierno Provincial, APHS.

generation that had ruled the republic, activists and intellectuals articulated a vision of a history betrayed. In order to remake the nation for the future, they argued, Cubans must first develop a more complete understanding of their past.

Over the course of the next decade, the critiques offered by the Veterans and Patriots insinuated themselves into Cuban life as the younger members of the group forged new political movements and a new generation of public intellectuals mobilized popular media to advocate for and articulate the need for new historical narratives as the foundation of a reborn nationalism in Cuba. As the generation that came of age after national independence looked to the country's foundations, their discontent identified one particular event as the point of origin for the republic's failings: the United States intervention which, they argued, forestalled independence and transferred colonial control of Cuba to a new master.

In early 1923, as a swell of public discontent was beginning to build, a young intellectual named Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring took over as literary editor of the Havana magazine *Social*. Born in 1889, between Cuba's two major wars for independence, Roig was of a generation between that of young activists like Mella and that of the veterans who fought in the anti-colonial struggle. Nevertheless, Roig emerged as an intellectual leader of this new political and cultural mobilization. Although Roig was less a political activist than some of the other intellectuals with whom he collaborated, he used his position as a writer, editor, and historian to reshape popular memory behind a new nationalist movement.

Since its first publication in 1916, the pages of *Social* had focused on the insular world of Havana's elites, reporting on social events and fashions while rarely broaching overtly political topics. Roig's ascendance pointedly changed the focus and content of the magazine, reconfiguring *Social* as a vessel for anti-imperialist thought and the revision of

dominant historical narratives. In his first column as the interim editor of *Social*, Roig set out the magazine's new direction: "the program and flag of SOCIAL can be well synthesized in these two words: selection and nationalism." The magazine, Roig explained, would use its voice to promote nationalist feeling, a project that hinged on the promotion of Cuban culture and intellectual production, joined with "the remembrance, finally, of our History – men and events – that they will serve as teachings and examples for the present generation to imitate and follow."<sup>9</sup>

Roig used his position at *Social* to continue advancing an anti-imperialist vision of national history, a mission that he had begun as a contributor to the seminal journal *Cuba Contemporánea*, where his writings detailed the origins of the Platt Amendment and assailed the consequences of U.S. interventions around Latin America.<sup>10</sup> Although less intellectually and politically focused than *Cuba Contemporánea*, *Social* offered Roig and his collaborators a wider platform from which to influence Cuban political discourse and emphasize national history as a means of rectifying the nation. His effort centered on promoting knowledge of José Martí as the intellectual author of Cuban nationhood. These invocations of Martí represented not a wholesale revision of his memory, but rather the political mobilization of a national symbol. Writers like Roig sought to deprive the republican government of the sustenance provided by the memory of José Martí while arguing that a lack of fealty to Martí's vision had resulted in a dysfunctional republic.

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<sup>9</sup> Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, "De mí para ti, notas del director interino," *Social* 8 (January 1923), 5. Lillian Guerra discusses the remaking of *Social* under Roig's direction as it contributed to renewed interest in the life and work of José Martí in her excellent essay, "The Struggle to Redefine Martí and 'Cuba Libre' in the 1920s, in *The Cuban Republic and José Martí: Reception and Use of a National Symbol*, ed. Mauricio A. Font and Alfonso Quiroz (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 34-50.

<sup>10</sup> For a thorough discussion of the work of *Cuba Contemporánea*, see Ann Wright, "Intellectuals of an Unheroic Period of Cuban History, 1913-1923: The 'Cuba Contemporánea' Group." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 7 (1988), 109-122.

At year's end, Roig published a meditation on the political and social upheavals of 1923. "This has been a year of struggle," he began, "between the old and the new." The first decades of the republic, argued Roig, had been marred by the rapid betrayal of the efforts of the anti-colonial struggle: "The Republic barely consolidated, we saw the surfacing of the same vices and defects that the men who conceived and realized the emancipating revolution had tried to extinguish." The greatest affront to this legacy, Roig argued, was "that many times the *inri* was inscribed on the forehead of those who gave their blood so that these vices would disappear." Roig's invocation of "INRI," a reference to the inscription placed by the Roman government on the cross on which Jesus Christ was crucified, served as a powerful attack on the republic's governments which, Roig argued, had betrayed the veterans of the independence wars by failing both to achieve that movement's ideals and to pay pensions to its veterans.<sup>11</sup> As he suggested a comparison between the actions of the Roman and Cuban governments, Roig also deepened the enduring religious framework that had long guided memory of the independence struggle, condemning as blasphemers those who would reject the nation's founders.<sup>12</sup>

Roig's year-end article mobilized memory of the independence wars to undermine the historical and nationalist legitimacy of the republic and to lay the foundation for its rebirth. Since the republic's founding, Roig argued, "We have changed the flag and form of Government... but at the foundation, the difference between the Republic of today and the Colony of yesterday is almost imperceptible." The past year, he noted, had seen a rising tide of activism against the abuses of public authorities, a movement whose efforts came together

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<sup>11</sup> "INRI" refers to the Latin inscription meaning "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews," and also serves in Spanish as a word meaning an affront or mockery.

<sup>12</sup> Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, "Meditaciones en navidad," *Social* 8 (December 1923), 13.

under the Veterans and Patriots' banner of "Regeneration." Even as he advocated for "the new vitality of modern ideas," Roig looked to the past as the foundation for a new Cuba. The regeneration of the republic, he concluded, would require:

Consecrating and converting to reality the doctrines of the liberating Revolution which was made, according to Martí, 'with the hope of creating one *patria* more for freedom of thought, equality of treatment, and peaceful labor.' To this effort... we all devote ourselves, with the same faith and constancy that the men of [18]68 and [18]95 achieved the most arduous undertaking of creating *patria* for us. The year 1924 shall be called in our history *Year I of the New Republic!*"<sup>13</sup>

By 1924, Roig had already established himself at the fore of a cohort of young intellectuals and activists. This group, which organized itself in 1923 as the *Grupo Minorista*, committed themselves to the promotion of national culture and the rejection of North American dominance. Prominent *Minoristas* included Roig, Rubén Martínez Villena and Juan Marinello, his collaborator in the Protest of the Thirteen; writer and attorney Jorge Mañach, novelist Alejo Carpentier, and many others. With Roig and fellow *Minorista* Conrado Massaguer at the helm, *Social* became an important platform for the group's essayists, poets, and artists.

The organization joined a rapidly expanding constellation of nationalist, reformist, and revolutionary movements in the early 1920s. In 1923, Martínez Villena organized the Cuban Action Falange, a group dedicated to mobilizing resistance to the government. That year, he joined with Julio Mella, with whom he led the newly formed FEU, to create the José Martí Popular University, an educational cooperative designed to open the world of higher education and political philosophy to Cuban workers. Worker organization and mobilization increased throughout the 1920s, in 1925 culminating in the formation of a national labor federation. Mella, profoundly influenced by the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia,

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*



helped organize the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) in 1925, and was joined two years later by Martínez Villena.

As he moved from university politics to popular organizing and the Communist Party, Mella increasingly argued that North American imperialism was the enemy that would unite Cuban workers with political activists and join the PCC in common cause with movements around the region. Writing as the president of the FEU in 1924, Mella declared that the students “[a]spire to realize in the Republic in its full extent and in its new meaning the phrase of the Apostle: ‘with all and for all.’” Joining national iconography and internationalist objectives, Mella argued that “the greatest enemy that the peoples of America have is yankee imperialist capitalism... and so [the FEU] declares itself enemy of yankee capitalism and of all its allies in the national territory.”<sup>14</sup>

Ultimately, Mella’s critique of the republic went beyond that of many of his contemporaries. While he shared the belief that the republic had betrayed the memory of its heroes, he used that nationalist iconography in the service of an internationalist anti-imperialist agenda. In an article titled, “The New Liberators,” Mella argued that the rectification of the founders’ vision would not address the problem of global capitalism and imperialism. “After the war of Independence,” and two decades of republic, Mella wrote, we have a problem that only a new and modern revolution can resolve... We do not deny that the efforts of Martí, Maceo, and Gómez have been useful. But... [we] remember that we

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<sup>14</sup> Julio Antonio Mella and Leonardo Fernández Sánchez, “Declaración de principios de la Federación de Estudiantes de Cuba,” in María Antonieta Juliá, ed. *J.A. Mella, documentos y artículos* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1975), 104.

took a mortgage on our Independence with the Platt Amendment.” The result, in his view, was a failed democracy and an economy “strangled” by powerful foreign companies.<sup>15</sup>

In place of the old guard, the generation that had helmed Cuba since the inauguration of Spanish power, Mella identified the working class as leaders of a new revolution. His attack on the independence generation was focused and unforgiving: “The proletarians are the new Liberators,” he declared, using the term usually referring to the anti-colonial Cuban armies. “Our duty as advanced men is to join their ranks, he concluded. “We do not want to be the traitors, or the ‘warriors’ of [18]68 and [18]95.”<sup>16</sup>

Even as he rejected the reverence toward the independence struggle that dominated Cuban political discourse, Mella found its memory to be a powerful foundation for his analysis of the republic’s ills. His challenge to dominant historical narratives rested on the claim that the United States had assumed a colonial role in Cuba equal to that abdicated by the Spanish in 1899. In a pamphlet published in 1925, Mella argued that Cuba was “a people that has never been free,” having been transferred from Spanish to U.S. domination. For Mella, the emergent anti-imperialist historiography pioneered by Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring presented a compelling explanation for the republic’s ills. The United States, he insisted, had aided Cubans only in the interest of seizing control of the island. He pointed to U.S. efforts to purchase the island from Spain, as well as the desire of some politicians to use Cuba as a refuge for dispossessed slaveholders from the U.S. south. Mella elaborated a narrative of national history that emphasized the hostility of North American capitalism to the independence of Cuba, and traced a line of descent from the republic of the 1920s to

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<sup>15</sup> Julio Antonio Mella, “Los nuevos libertadores,” in *J.A. Mella: documentos y artículos*, 123-126. The article originally appeared in *Juventud* 2 (November 1924).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

those Cubans who advocated for annexation of the island to the United States in the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Mella cited an address that Roig had given in which the historian had detailed the circumstances of the interventions made by the United States under the auspices of the Platt Amendment, and repeated Roig's contention that these occupations of Cuba had been designed to protect and deepen the power of North American companies in the Cuban economy. Cubans, Mella argued, had ceded national sovereignty to the United States, replacing the colonial authority of Madrid with the new "Metropol of Latin America: the White House."<sup>18</sup>

Mella's confrontational rejection of nationalist narratives and embrace of communist revolutionary strategies kept him and the Communist Party on the margins of Cuban politics for much of the 1920s. Nevertheless, the reevaluation of the nation's history proposed by intellectuals like Mella and Roig in the early 1920s shaped the course and content of a burgeoning, ideologically diverse nationalist opposition. By undercutting the government's claim to continuity between revolution and republic, activists of the early 1920s unsettled the placid surface of national memory and began assembling new visions of the past as a precondition for a new nationalist movement.

Reformist efforts attracted a broad crosssection of prominent Cubans in the early 1920s. By the presidential election of 1924, the demands and language of government critics like the Veterans and Patriots had entered mainstream electoral politics as dissatisfaction with the republican status quo seemed to become a national consensus. Gerardo Machado, a general in the wars of independence, inaugurated his campaign for the presidency that year

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<sup>17</sup> Julio Mella, "Cuba: un pueblo que jamás ha sido libre," in *J.A. Mella: documentos y artículos*, 174. Originally published as a pamphlet in April 1925.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 180.

under a banner of national regeneration, promising to end corruption and curtail U.S. involvement in the country's affairs. Machado's nationalist campaign attracted the support of Ramiro Guerra. As a teacher and historian, Guerra had been a strong advocate for historical education as a means of assuring national unity and progress. Even as he had spent much of the previous decade insisting that the nation's future depended on the purposeful and vigorous cultivation of patriotism and nationalist fervor, by the time of Machado's election, he seemed to have concluded that these efforts had failed.

Writing in *Social*, Guerra diagnosed the national malaise and recalled the glories of the nation's past, both as a source of unity and as a contrast to its fractured present. "The war of Independence," he wrote, "did not only create the conditions of collective national life. More than that, it gave great depth to patriotic sentiment." Because the entire country, "from one end of the island to the other," experienced the struggles and deprivations of the war, those who lived through those times shared a strong, profound sense of patriotism. That fervor and excitement, Guerra wrote, was frustrated by the U.S. military occupation, but nevertheless "erupted in a memorable explosion of jubilation on May 20 of 1902," leading the nation into the first years of republic with confidence and excitement. "Those short, happy years," Guerra continued, "passed quickly." First, he noted, came "the reelection of [the first Cuban president] Don Tomás [Estrada Palma] with scandalous voting violations," followed by the "August Revolution" of 1906 and the subsequent U.S. intervention. Scandal followed scandal, Guerra lamented, challenging the nationalist feeling forged in the independence struggle with a growing pessimism about the nation's fortunes.<sup>19</sup>

Unlike Julio Mella, who challenged the reverence given to the independence generation, Ramiro Guerra joined Roig in advocating for a renewed immersion in the

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<sup>19</sup> Ramiro Guerra, "Difusión y afirmación del sentimiento nacional." *Social* 9 (November 1924), 22.

memory of the anti-colonial struggle. In the face of the republic's failings, he argued, Cubans must realize that having forgotten those patriotic ideals was "the cause of the present ills... Cuba returns its spirit longingly to Martí... in whom patriotic idealism, in all its purity, is incarnated." The survival of the republic required that Cubans take "possession of their own history, with its heroic episodes, popularized between generations." Implicit in this critique was a claim that the generation that had experienced the unifying struggle for independence had failed in its duty to develop that nationalist fervor in those that came after. As a result, Guerra argued, Cubans had tolerated political corruption which now threatened the survival of Cuban independence.

Machado took office in 1925 championing regeneration and promising an end to political corruption. He included former members of the Veterans and Patriots Movement in his cabinet and won endorsements from the Federation of University Students and several prominent *minorista* collaborators. By the time of his reelection campaign in 1928, however, Machado used bribery and coercion to extract the unified nomination of the Conservative, Popular, and Liberal parties. This unprecedented concentration of power by the mainstream political parties fractured Machado's reformist coalition and accelerated the pace of opposition to his increasingly autocratic rule. The effects of the global economic depression hit an already flailing Cuban economy at the start of Machado's second term in 1929. If his corrupt reelection campaign had pushed Machado's reformist supporters away from his camp, the combined economic and political crisis pushed new constituencies into the opposition and radicalized existing reformist movements. Students at the University of Havana formed the University Student Directorate (DEU), which advocated the overthrow of Machado. The *Union Nacionalista* (UN) formed the same year, made up primarily of

members of the dominant political class who had opposed Machado's reelection. Frustrated with the intransigence of the Machado regime, members of the UN launched an abortive rebellion against Machado, an uprising which Robert Whitney has characterized as the last rebellious gasp of the 1895 generation, a failure which ceded power to a strong, if fractured, cohort of young activists.<sup>20</sup>

Opposition to Machado grew rapidly and radically among the republican generation. In 1931, young members of the splintered *Union Nacionalista* coalition formed the ABC Revolutionary Society, an underground organization that advocated sabotage, assassination, and direct violent action to oust the Machado government. Although its membership was largely conservative, the ABC joined leftist activists like Julio Antonio Mella in rejecting the leadership of the 1895 generation, announcing in its 1932 manifesto that while membership would be open to all Cubans "of good will and clean hands," the "ABC is characteristically a movement of youths, because national evolution of the last 30 years has demonstrated that a great part of Cuba's ills derive" from the fact that "the generation of 95 has hijacked the leadership of public affairs for itself." The manifesto celebrated the previous generation's success in "realizing, gloriously, its historic mission, the conquest of Independence," but argued that the same Cubans had been unprepared to govern a republican Cuba, and had been unable "neither in power nor in opposition, to organize the defense of nationality."<sup>21</sup>

The ABC assembled the events of national history into a narrative that would support their program of economic nationalism and development. "In 1868," its narrative began, "Céspedes began by burning his own mill and giving freedom to his slaves. This initial act,"

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<sup>20</sup> See Whitney, *State and Revolution in Cuba*, 71.

<sup>21</sup> "El ABC al Pueblo de Cuba," in Organización ABCdaria del Exilio, *Cuba y el ABC* (Miami: Editorial Rex Press, Inc., 1977). 13.

alongside the “destruction of Bayamo by the *mambises*, reveals the character of economic sacrifice that the whole war had.” The ABC’s interpretation of the independence struggle advanced a clear economic teleology, in which the destruction wrought by warfare would lay the groundwork for peacetime expansion and development. That potential, however, went unfulfilled, and the culprit was easily identified: “As a result of the North American intervention at the last hour, Cuba was unable to exercise its natural authority at the end of the war; not even was it part of the Treaty of Paris... Spain did not have to pay any indemnification” to Cuba for the destruction of property and economic power.<sup>22</sup>

The ABC identified Machado as the “typical example” and “natural culmination” of this historical narrative. To break out of the historical process set off by the intervention of the United States, Cubans would need to attack Machado and change the conditions “that made his despotism possible.” The ABC positioned itself as the vanguard of a new revolution that would recall the anti-colonial efforts of the previous century. Invoking the battlefields of Cuba’s independence wars, the manifesto declared that “the ABC is already in the new *manigua*,” fighting the dictatorship. “Martí assured,” the manifesto concluded, “that after Independence, a war for freedom would have to be waged. This is the new war! All of us march together for the conquest of a free *patria*... We will nationalize Cuba! We take from the altar of the *Patria* whatever has been arrogantly put on its pedestal, and bring it an offering of sacrifice of new hands, of clean hands!”<sup>23</sup>

If the invocation of a “new *manigua*” and a “new war” did not emphasize the centrality of memory to the ABC’s program and mission, the organization further mobilized

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 18-19.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 53-54.

the symbolism and rhetoric of a religious nationalism. In the “Credo ABCdario,” or “ABCdist Creed,” members affirmed that they “believe in Cuba and in the supreme value of freedom and national sovereignty. I believe in the dignity of the historic destiny of my *patria*.”<sup>24</sup> The “Hymn of the ABC” affirmed the civil religious structures of the movement and the narrative of historical completion that its manifesto advanced. “The ABC is the vision of the future,” the song began. “It is the yearning of the new *mambí*. It is the light in a dark space. It is the noble passion of Martí.”<sup>25</sup>

The ideologically diverse movements that grew out of the discontent of the 1920s and 1930s shared the strategy of connecting their projects to the memory of the independence wars and challenging the dominance of the United States. Even as organizations like the ABC, the Cuban Communist Party, the Revolutionary Student Directorate, and other anti-Machado groups diverged radically in their proposed strategy and solutions, members of the independence generation gathering against Machado sought to imbue their movements with the cultural legitimacy of nationalist iconography while demonstrating the necessity of direct action and violence by invoking the narrative of an unfinished war for independence. However, the challenge that these groups mounted to the government’s authority over the past destabilized the narratives of national history that sustained the republic.

The ABC and other groups advocated a new war for Cuba, and the Machado regime obliged. As government forces increasingly resorted to brutal repression against protestors and activists, the political center collapsed and warfare broke out across the island. Escalating violence deepened the crisis in the early 1930s, prompting moderate opponents of Machado, even avowed anti-imperialists, to urge the United States to intervene. After

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<sup>24</sup> “Credo ABCdario,” *Ibid.* 7.

<sup>25</sup> “Himno del ABC,” *Ibid.*, 295.



mediation by the United States failed to secure Machado's resignation, a general strike paralyzed the country, and the army mobilized against the president. Machado fled the island on August 12, 1933.

The unrest had deeper roots than Machado's dictatorship, and his departure did not mark victory for many activists. The election of Machado in 1924 had grown out of an emerging consensus that the republic gone astray, having lost its connection to the ideals envisioned and represented by its founders. By September, the fragile new government was overthrown by a revolt of army officers, led by a young Sergeant named Fulgencio Batista. The provisional government elevated Ramón Grau San Martín, a University of Havana professor and reformist activist since his days in the Veterans and Patriots movement, to be the new president. Grau positioned himself as a revolutionary leader, one who would live up to the vision of the nation's heroes as the previous presidents had failed to do. On the day of his inauguration, Grau announced the end of the Platt Amendment, and his government embraced nationalist reforms that had mobilized activists since the surge began in the early 1920s.

### **Reimagining the Past in a New Republic**

Fewer than two months after assuming the presidency, Grau addressed an assembly of Cubans gathered at Cacahual to mark the anniversary of the death of Antonio Maceo. The newspaper *Ahora* reported that Grau addressed the crowd as the "free citizens of Cuba," proclaiming that: "the program of the revolutionary government would satisfy the aspirations, the longings, the intentions of Antonio Maceo." The new regime, Grau declared,

“reaches out to retrieve the flag of Maceo, of the heroic patriot. This,” he concluded, “is the program of the triumphant revolution.”<sup>26</sup>

Grau’s words at Cacahual seemed to signal that the new regime would mobilize the revolutionary call to restore the vision of the nation’s founders which, activists had argued, had been abandoned by the corrupt leaders of the first republic. If the activists of the 1920s had attacked the generation of 1895 for having betrayed the heroes of their own anti-colonial struggle, the ascendant nationalists of the 1930s sought both a reconnection with and a revision of that memory. Although Grau lasted only another month in the presidency in 1933, his call to “retrieve the flag” was echoed by other political figures seeking to connect the new republic with its glorious past. The challenge confronting Cubans in this new republican era was to the need to redefine the meaning of the past for a present that had dramatically changed.

A month after his speech, Grau was replaced as president by Carlos Mendieta. The 1930s saw a string of other presidents after Mendieta, the real political power in Cuba had transferred to Fulgencio Batista. As Batista’s authority grew, many political activists mobilized to demand that Cubans continue the work of remaking the nation.

The intellectuals who had challenged the historical premises of the republic in the 1920s set about the task of revising old historical narratives to create the foundation for a new republic. Critics of republican society and politics had advanced an interpretation of the past that stressed the betrayal of the founders’ vision for the nation. After the fall of Machado, Cuban historians and writers produced a flurry of articles and books dedicated to revising the nation’s history. In the pages of popular magazines and in formal works of

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<sup>26</sup> “El programa de la revolución triunfante está identificado con los ideales de A. Maceo,” *Ahora*, 8 December 1933, 1, 4.

history, writers argued that the simplistic, mythologized understanding that Cubans had developed of their independence wars had weakened the nation in the face of political corruption and foreign influence. Changing interpretations of nationalist leaders like Antonio Maceo and Carlos Manuel de Céspedes illuminate the shifting contours of memory at an untable moment for the Cuban nation.

As the originator of the Cuban independence movement and the revered “*padre de la patria*,” Carlos Manuel de Céspedes had long occupied a special place in the nationalist imaginary. In the first decades of independence, Céspedes had functioned as an affirmation of the country’s republican destiny, the embodiment of Cuban resistance to colonial rule and the endurance of the nationalist ideal. The anniversary of the *Grito de Yara* prompted reflections on the state of the republic and the patriotism of its people. Only very rarely, however, did narratives of the October 10, 1868 call to arms make mention of the liberation of Céspedes’s slaves or the integration of Cubans of color into the independence armies.

The mobilization to oust Machado appears to have prompted many Cuban writers to revisit the abolitionism of Céspedes and to present his liberation of the slaves at La Demajagua as evidence of the progressive character of the independence struggle. In 1934, a tribute to Céspedes in *Diario de la Marina* declared, “if in the patriotic order, October 10 has a special significance, it also has a singular place in the universal order, Céspedes, by proclaiming the freedom of his slaves, gave the world proof of his humanitarian feelings and the elevation of his purposes.”<sup>27</sup> The following October, the newspaper went further, hailing Céspedes as deserving a position “among the liberators of peoples, among the redeemers of

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<sup>27</sup> “1868,” *Diario de la Marina*, 10 October 1934, 1.

slaves.”<sup>28</sup> While some commemorations, and even some public school textbooks had included the abolition of slavery in their narratives of Céspedes’s life, it was only in the 1930s and afterward that the decision to free his own slaves became a pillar of the October 10 narrative. The insistence that Céspedes’s commitment to emancipation and equality earned him universal, rather than merely national greatness, suggests the writers’ desire to assert the revolutionary and progressive character of the Cuban nation after the traumatic failure of the republic.

Depicting Céspedes as the “redeemer of the slaves” demonstrated his moral vision, and also suggested the incorporation of former slaves into the national project under his leadership. This narrative strategy allowed the potentially divisive issue of slave emancipation to enter an affirming narrative of racial fraternity, without questioning the moral and political greatness of the white “*Padre de la Patria*.” Other writers sought to universalize the condition of slavery to the wider colonial condition. A 1938 article declared that October 10 was the date when “the Cuban decided to break the chains that enslaved him, to direct his own destiny among free men.”<sup>29</sup> Even the children’s page in *Carteles* fused the emancipation of slaves with the wider anti-colonial struggle. In October 1948, the magazine printed a poem on its *Edad de Oro* page for children:

One October 10, in Oriente,  
A bell tolled  
tolled for an enslaved people  
and the slave heard it.  
...  
Carlos Manuel in his ingenio  
said to the slave – Come

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<sup>28</sup> “1868-1935,” *Diario de la Marina*, 10 October 1935, 1.

<sup>29</sup> “10 de Octubre, 1868-1938,” *Diario de la Marina*, 10 October 1938, 2.

Come closer to this bronze  
that demands Liberty<sup>30</sup>

The centrality of slave emancipation in the 1930s and 1940s offers a stark contrast to the narratives of October 10 developed in the early republic, and suggests that the uprising against Machado had produced shifts in popular memory and the national identity that it defined.

The changes in popular memory that emerged in the wake of the 1933 uprising flowed, at least in part, from the efforts of professional historians and intellectuals. As Cuba emerged from the Machado dictatorship, a new school of historians rose to prominence in the Cuban Academy of History, advancing a revisionist narrative of Cuban history as a method of political opposition. Led by Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, revisionist historians largely focused on a reexamination of the War of Independence and the U.S. military intervention of 1898, seeking a fuller understanding of the leaders of that movement and their vision for the nation that could have been.

As Patricia Weiss Fagen has argued, this ascendant school of revisionist historians represented Antonio Maceo as “the personification of what might have been but had gone wrong.”<sup>31</sup> In December 1935, Emilio Roig published a two-part article in the magazine *Carteles* titled “Maceo: his ideals and political and revolutionary opinions.”<sup>32</sup> This seminal article set out the justification for a reevaluation of Maceo in Cuban consciousness and established the parameters of a new understanding of his life and his contributions to the

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<sup>30</sup> Nildo Pou, “10 de Octubre,” *Carteles* 29 (10 October 1948), 78.

<sup>31</sup> Patricia Weiss Fagen, “Antonio Maceo: Heroes, History and Historiography,” *Latin American Research Review* 11, no. 3 (1976): 75.

<sup>32</sup> Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, “Maceo: sus ideales y opiniones políticos y revolucionarios,” *Carteles* 24 (15 December 1935), 26.

nation. Roig declared that the greatness of Maceo as a warrior “has caused today’s generation of Cubans to ignore, perhaps completely, other facets of his enlightened personality, precisely those which the sons of this land are most interested to know,” as knowledge of Maceo could shed light both on the “unfolding of our nationality” and on the internal and international problems that plagued Cuba. He argued that Cubans had not taken the time to examine the motives and ideals that inspired him to keep fighting for the entire thirty-year struggle. Roig took direct aim at the dominant memory of Maceo:

Of course the motives and ideals that motivated Maceo were liberty and independence of Cuba, but these, so simply formulated, constitute something so vague and imprecise that, if not made specified and fixed could remain reduced to utopianism... to dreams more than realities.<sup>33</sup>

The historian condemned the political leadership of the 1868 and 1895 revolutions as motivated by personal aspirations, declaring their lack of “political ideals” as the source of “the painful ordeal of our Republican farce.”<sup>34</sup>

The following year, journalist Enrique Pizzi de Porras published an article in another widely read magazine, *Bohemia*, which lamented the prevailing memory of Maceo: “There are bronze and marble statues erected for the perpetuation of his memory. But it is a sad truth that the fervent worship that the Titan warrants has not been sewn in the Cuban consciousness... nothing has been written about his letters to represent him in all his greatness.”<sup>35</sup> Much as Roig had done, Pizzi de Porras looked to Maceo’s writings to illuminate his political character, contrasting his commitment to the rule of law and political

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Enrique Pizzi de Porras, “Aristas de Maceo,” *Bohemia* 28 (13 December 1936), 48.

order with the disloyalty and ambition of others in the revolutionary leadership. Pizzi de Porras concluded, however, that “the literature or, better, the bibliography about this great figure is insignificant. The bronzes and stones erected... to perpetuate his memory are insufficient. It is necessary to raise in the national consciousness the full knowledge of who Maceo was.”<sup>36</sup>

Scholarly approaches to Antonio Maceo varied markedly in the late republic, but all sought to articulate a more complete, human image of Maceo than had been attempted in previous decades. The first major historical study of Antonio Maceo was Leonardo Griñán Peralta’s two volume *Antonio Maceo: análisis caracterológico*, the first of which was published three years after Machado’s fall. Griñán Peralta set out to a modest agenda, seeking “an analysis of his character” for an unsteady moment in the nation’s history.<sup>37</sup> In the years that followed, revisionist historians looked to Maceo’s own writings as the source of his political mind. This effort centered on presenting Maceo as a thinker in addition to a warrior. Historian Leopoldo Horrego Estuch directly confronted the traditional image of Maceo as “the arm of the Revolution,” a strong soldier who enacted the ideas of others. That common appellation, he argued, was too literally understood, as “it is not only force included in the symbol” of Maceo, “but also brilliance of thought... As General Eusebio Hernández said, ‘...he was the arm of the revolution, but the arm was moved by his own ideas.’”<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>37</sup> Leonardo Griñán Peralta, *Antonio Maceo: Análisis caracterológico* (Havana: Editorial Trópico, 1936), 12-13.

<sup>38</sup> Leopoldo Horrego Estuch, *Maceo: estudio político y patriótico* (Havana: Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, 1947), 17.

Perhaps the greatest boon to Maceo's image was the emerging anti-imperialist consensus in Cuban politics. In the 1920s, Cuban nationalists had attacked present and past U.S. interventionism as the source of the Liberation Army's betrayal. Efforts to discredit the North American presence led Cuban writers to rediscover and reemphasize Maceo's warnings against possible U.S. involvement in the anti-colonial struggle. In the words of Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, Maceo was "in thought and feeling, the paladin of anti-imperialism." Roig presented Maceo's own writings as evidence that, as a "revolutionary leader and statesman [Maceo was] convinced that the Republic of Cuba must be the exclusive work of the people's will and the force of its liberating *mambises*." As evidence, the historian repeated the "admonitory and prophetic words of Maceo... 'We expect nothing from the Americans... it is better to rise or fall without help than to contract debts of gratitude with such a powerful neighbor.'" <sup>39</sup>

Leopoldo Horrego Estuch, writing in 1947, attempted to articulate Maceo's broader political vision for Cuba. In his seminal study: *Maceo, estudio político y patriótico*, Horrego Estuch declared that "Maceo set out a full political program. He did not determine the ideology of the Revolution, but he established and clarified its scope, summarized in these principles: equality, union and justice." <sup>40</sup> Although his depiction of Maceo to some degree reinforced the notion that he lacked sophistication but was instead guided by some inborn goodness, the mere acknowledgement that Maceo was politically influential was a marked shift away from the simplistic "Bronze Titan" narrative that dominated the early republic.

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<sup>39</sup> Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, *Revolución y república en Maceo* (Havana: Unión Interamericana del Caribe, 1945), 49, 59, 63.

<sup>40</sup> Horrego Estuch, *Maceo: estudio político y patriótico*, 135.



Some scholars also confronted the use of Maceo as the embodiment of Cuban racelessness, bringing the narratives advanced decades earlier by the *Partido Independiente de Color* back into the public sphere. Historians argued that Afro-Cubans, many of whom were emerging from enslavement even as they joined the struggle for independence, experienced that struggle differently from white Cubans. Juan Marinello, who was increasingly active in the Communist movement, published his polemic *Maceo, líder y masa* in 1936. He argued that while other leaders “knew the flagrant injustices of colonial life... none felt like Maceo did the aggression against the blacks and the poor,” whom he contended were the major force behind the revolution.<sup>41</sup> According to another historian, black Cubans required more than the national independence sought by whites. They needed “the extinction of the colonial regime” and the “feeling of inferiority that it had constantly imposed on them.” Maceo was the only revolutionary figure committed to and capable of achieving these goals:

With Maceo died the illusions of the majority of blacks who have not seen since then any Cuban capable of reviving them. From that fateful day, pessimism took hold over the mass of blacks. This pessimism... is one of the factors that is contributing to the maintenance of the distressing situation in which our country finds itself. With the death of Maceo, one of the elements that could have contributed to the perfect integration of Cuban nationality was lost.”<sup>42</sup>

The betrayal of Maceo’s vision was a central component of this revisionist narrative. Although Maceo had insisted that independence must be won before racial inequality could be addressed, Juan Marinello argued that with “Cuban democracy constituted, with what valid argument, with what institutional support, could one subjugate a Cuban with dark skin

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<sup>41</sup> Juan Marinello, *Maceo: líder y masa* (Havana: Editorial Páginas, 1942), 25.

<sup>42</sup> Leonardo Griñán Peralta, *Maceo, análisis caracterológico*, Vol. 2 (Havana: Cooperativa de Cultura Popular, n.d.), 145-146.

after stealing his sweat and blood? ...But in the same revolutionary action that sought an equalizing democracy, color prejudice was moving and acting... As has happened so many other times, deeds betrayed doctrine.”<sup>43</sup>

Although he had fought to create a republic in which all Cubans would be equal, Emilio Roig wrote,

Maceo’s offering to men of color still has not been completely achieved by the Republic he thought would arise on the ruins of the Colony, because the Republic born in 1902... was not the Republic that Maceo dreamed of... since in it, racial prejudice persists... The blood spilled in 1896 by Maceo in San Pedro has still not been able to wash away racial prejudices of our nation.<sup>44</sup>

Roig invoked the scene of Maceo’s death as symbolic of the failure of racial equality in the republic, directly confronting the dominant memory in which the “blood spilled” by Maceo and Panchito Gómez signified the physical union of races and the crucible of a de-racialized nationhood.

## Conclusions

The challenge to the republican that unfolded in the 1920s grew into a popular uprising the following decade. Unlike the political rebellions launched by aspirants to office in other years, the nationalists that emerged in the republic’s third decade crafted new narratives of the nation’s past to unsettle the legitimacy of the status quo. Although groups like the ABC differed radically from Julio Antonio Mella’s Communist Party, these and other

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<sup>43</sup> Marinello, *Maceo: líder y masa*, 41.

<sup>44</sup> Roig, *Revolución y república en Maceo*, 38.

movements that confronted the Machado regime shared a belief that the generation that preceded them had betrayed the vision of the nation's heroes. Their critiques of the republic rested on narratives of the independence struggle that provided a bold contrast with the corruption of republican governments and the growing dominance of the United States.

The republican generation, coming of age in the 1920s and 1930s, laid claim to the legacy of the Liberation Army and mobilized against the government by undercutting the historical premises on which the republic had been built and destabilizing the narratives that sustained republican power. The political achievements of that uprising would be hotly debated, but the challenge to the dominant narratives of national history succeeded in unsettling the placid surface of popular memory. The intellectual currents that helped produce the reformist and nationalist surge of the era ultimately empowered anti-imperialist scholars like Emilio Roig de Leuschsenring, who used his position as an editor, writer, and historian to circulate new national narratives that could serve as a foundation for a new political and social order.

The dramatic changes that produced and emerged from the 1933 revolution created openings to revisit the meaning of race in the nation's history. A new focus on the abolitionism of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes signaled the emergence of a more nuanced picture of the nation's foundational moments and an interest in demonstrating the socially progressive origins of Cuban independence. While the depiction of Céspedes as an abolitionist might have reinforced an existing emphasis on white beneficence and black gratitude, the reevaluation of the figure of Antonio Maceo by historians and activists reveals that challenges to nationalist orthodoxies in the 1920s and 1930s created space in which racism and discrimination, both present and past, could be openly confronted.

## V

### **The Heroic Race: Blackness in the New Cuban Past**

On 5 April 1940, the Federation of Black Societies of Havana called a rally in the capital's Central Park. The date chosen by the Federation was significant. As the writer Serafín Portuondo Linares pointed out, the fifth of April marked the forty-fifth anniversary of the death of Guillermo Moncada, a black General of Cuba's Liberation Army. "There is no date more appropriate to carry out two propositions: to honor Guillermon, and to express the longing for full rights that stirs in the heart of black Cubans." The Constituent Assembly that had gathered in Havana to write a new national constitution was preparing in April to consider a proposed article that would ban discrimination on the basis of race, and establish a legal punishment for those who violated that prohibition. Black and mulatto activists, in black societies, political parties, and in the press, had mobilized in support of legislating against racial discrimination. The rally had been called to show support for the rights of Cubans of color and to "honor the memory of one of our great patriots and warriors, to do him justice, and at the same time to demand justice for the black population of our country." These projects, argued Portuondo Linares, were inseparable. "Guillermon," he wrote, using the colloquial name given to Moncada, had been "as forgotten in Cuba as the rights of blacks."<sup>1</sup>

As activists across the political spectrum worked to remake the republic in the aftermath of Machado's ouster, the promulgation of a new constitution emerged as the

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<sup>1</sup> Serafín Portuondo Linares, "Guillermon y los derechos del negro," *Noticias de Hoy*, 29 March 1940, 2; "El gran acto de las sociedades negras," *Noticias de Hoy*, 5 April 1940, 6.

centerpiece of those efforts. The destabilization of nationalist belief in the 1930s created conditions for new political movements to take shape. As Serafín Portuondo Linares suggested, the inclusion of Cubans of color in national memory was a precondition for the inclusion of those same Cubans in national society. The new vision of heroes like Antonio Maceo advanced by writers like Emilio Roig and Juan Marinello suggested the possibility that doctrinal beliefs in the existence of racial equality might be opened for debate. Although there was obviously some distance between popular memory and political legislation, the effort to write anti-discrimination language into the new constitution would reveal the centrality of narratives in shaping the strategies of black and mulatto activists and defining the reactions of their opponents.

The challenge posed by writers like Roig, Marinello, and Portuondo Linares to the memory of Cuban heroes of color was a part of a widening critique of republican racial ideologies engendered by the nationalist movements that emerged in the 1920s. The dissatisfaction with the political and economic structures of the republic prompted an effort to identify and advance cultural forms that could be identified as distinctly Cuban. At the fore of this movement were *Minorista* intellectuals like Emilio Roig and Fernando Ortiz who, in 1923, joined the nascent *Sociedad de Folklore Cubano*, a group dedicated to advancing Cuba's distinct arts and culture. Ortiz, already a prominent ethnographer of Cuba's African-descended population, published his *Glossario de afronegrismos* in 1924, excerpts of which appeared in popular *revistas* like Roig's *Social*.<sup>2</sup> Ortiz's work contributed to a growing movement known as *Afrocubanismo*, which sought to promote a distinct national culture, in

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<sup>2</sup> See Fernando Ortiz, "Etimología de la palabra 'Mambí,'" *Social* 9 (February 1924), 32, 56; "Glosario de afronegrismos," *Social* 9 (November 1924), 16, 83.

part by recovering and highlighting Afro-Cuban art, music, and dance that had been marginalized in the early republic.<sup>3</sup>

Ortiz's work also appeared in and influenced less mainstream publications like *La Revista de Avance*, founded by a group of *Minorista* writers that included Juan Marinello and Jorge Mañach, who would later find themselves on different sides of Cuban political and social debates. Less concerned with politics than with art and culture, the editors of *Revista de Avance* promoted a nationalism that embraced the Afro-Cuban elements of national culture as a means of equipping Cubans to reject North American dominance and political corruption. Moreover, the editors argued, Cuba's very nationhood was owed to the efforts of Cubans of color. In a 1929 editorial criticizing those Cubans who located the nation's origins in the figure of sixteenth century indigenous leader Hatuey, the editors insisted that instead "of the deification of Hatuey, we sincerely believe that we must interest ourselves in the knowledge of Maceo. The interests of a race who cooperated in our emancipation are doubly ours: first, by the spirit of human solidarity; next by nationalist sentiment, which draws from the same roots of history."<sup>4</sup>

Of course, it was not only white intellectuals advocating the recognition of Afro-Cubans' contributions to the nation and its culture. The failure of the republic signaled by Machado's dictatorship created the space for a renewed confrontation with enduring racial inequalities. The belief, increasingly widespread by the early 1930s, that the republic had failed to carry out the political vision of the independence movement, offered the opportunity

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<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive study of the rise of *Afrocubanismo* as an artistic, musical, and intellectual movement in this period, see Robin Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> "La cuestión del negro," *La Revista de Avance* 3 (15 January 1929), 6.

to challenge the claim that the republic had accomplished the ideal of raceless national fraternity advanced during the independence wars. In the first issue of their newly revived magazine, writers from the Afro-Cuban club Unión Fraternal (Fraternal Union) struck a combative tone. Urging Cubans to fight the teetering Machado government in June of 1933, Gabriel Sánchez Solorzano incited his readers, “Now is the time to patriotically fight this mercenary politics... the Republic is still not consolidated.”<sup>5</sup>

As the uprising against Machado became increasingly widespread, the vitriol and violence directed at the dictatorship began to shift toward Cubans of color. The visibility of black workers amid rising labor discontent and communist mobilization prompted fears of a generalized black uprising. The circulation of these rumors in 1933 combined with a somewhat contradictory claim that black Cubans constituted Machado’s most loyal supporters, creating a climate in which Cubans of color and their organizations became targets of mistrust and violent repression.<sup>6</sup>

While the racial dimensions of the anti-Machado revolution emerged most forcefully in the immediate aftermath of the dictator’s flight, *Unión Fraternal* saw “unjust omens” in early August, as the uprising was reaching its crescendo. Reacting to suggestions that both the striking workers and the Machado regime they opposed were signs of a black uprising, the magazine’s editor Ventura Ruiz rejected as “absurd” the idea that Cubans of color must be of one political party,” and lamented the “propagation in a low voice” of rumors that would divide Cubans against one another. “In the present historical moment for our *patria*,” Ruiz wrote, “the voice of some have tried to distort the truth like they have tried to muddle

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<sup>5</sup> Gabriel Sánchez Solorzano, “Mensaje de orientación,” *Unión Fraternal* 3 (June 1933), 5.

<sup>6</sup> For a close analysis of the anti-black violence that followed the ouster of Machado, see: Frank Andre Guridy, “‘War on the Negro’: Race and the Revolution of 1933,” *Cuban Studies* 40 (2009): 49-73.

the principles of our redemptive struggles and, without foundation, auger great injustices for the future of the black man of Cuba.”<sup>7</sup>

While *Unión Fraternal* had urged its readers to join the revolutionary fray, the rise in anti-black rumors and eventually violence pointedly warned Cubans of color against bringing demands for racial equality into the revolutionary fold. As Frank Guridy has argued, claims that black Cubans had supported the dictatorship, coupled with the fear of communist mobilization prompted some groups within the anti-Machado opposition to launch “a full-fledged organized campaign against blacks throughout the island.” At the vanguard of this anti-black campaign were “elements of the ABC” revolutionary society, a group whose own creed, as described earlier, had described itself as the “new Mambí,” and the “noble passion of Martí.”<sup>8</sup>

As in 1912, the memory of the independence struggle offered a rejoinder to accusations of black disloyalty, or even of the existence of a black politics in Cuba. The nation’s history, argued Ventura Ruiz, “demonstrates clearly and precisely who conquered it and who were its heroes and its martyrs.” Cubans of color, Ruiz argued, had been essential during the wars and had demonstrated their commitment to democracy and civic participation throughout the republic, in every party and in every locality. Those who “harbor unjustified hatreds,” Ruiz cautioned, “must never, never forget the ideals of love and Cuban fraternity that animated the hearts of the apostle of Dos Ríos [Martí] and the Hero of a Hundred Battles [Maceo] who gave his life, as a sublime and beautiful example of fraternity and heroism,

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<sup>7</sup> Ventura Ruiz, “Injustos augurios,” *Unión Fraternal* 3 (1 August 1933), 1.

<sup>8</sup> Guridy, “War on the Negro,” 55.



along with the life of the son of our highest liberator,” Máximo Gómez.<sup>9</sup> Ruiz invoked this revered story to marginalize as anti-national those who would level such accusations against Cubans of Color.

In a dispatch from Santiago de Cuba, Manuel de Jesús Garbey struck a less conciliatory tone. Black and mulatto Cubans, he argued, were of “a race that, after having given all they could of the valor and patriotism cherished in their soul, has obtained as a prize: disdain, abuse, and every bit of mud that can be thrown at them by those who have forgotten the thoughts of that Great Teacher known as ‘MARTÍ.’” Cuba had become not a “nation with all and for all,” as Martí had envisioned, but “a nation with all and for some. It is past time,” de Jesús insisted, “for those Cubans who belong to this race” that is “a symbol of sacrifice, symbol of loyalty, and symbol of abnegation” to cease waiting for their service “as laborers for liberty” to earn them an equal place in the republic. Instead, “as payment for all of these sacrifices,” blacks “have received kicks with which our ungrateful master rewards a ‘FAITHFUL DOG’ who fights fiercely to defend him.” The letter closed, however, with an appeal to racial fraternity, as de Jesús hoped that *Unión Fraternal* would one day be “an excellent organ, not of the race of color, but of the Cuban race.”<sup>10</sup>

These seemingly oppositional readings of national history, one which firmly endorsed the achievement of racial fraternity through the independence struggle and the other which suggested Cubans of color had been far too willing to remain deferential to whites instead of demanding what their history had earned, suggest a deep ambivalence within even this one black organization. Indeed, the uprising of 1933 and the racist campaign that accompanied it

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Manuel de Jesús Garbey, “Ya era hora,” *Unión Fraternal* 3 (1 August 1933), 17-18.

marked a dividing line in black political activism, as some Cubans of color challenged the dominance of black clubs like Unión Fraternal and advocated a more confrontational stance.

At the vanguard of this new model of Afro-Cuban activism was a new organization that took the name *Adelante*. Founded in 1935, the group gave voice to intellectuals and activists who saw in the anti-Machado uprising and its violent anti-black reaction the collapse of the old order and with it, the narratives and norms that sustained it. Its contributors included the prominent activist intellectuals Juan Marinello, Salvador García Agüero, and others associated with the growing Cuban Communist Party. In the pages of *Adelante*, the club's monthly magazine, writers circulated a dramatic reorientation of the national narrative that centered on the historical agency of Cubans of color and assailed enduring constructions of national history that marginalized both blacks and their blackness. In its first issue, *Adelante* identified itself with the memory of Antonio Maceo and proclaimed that, in his honor, it would offer "deeds, not words," an indication of its confrontational stance and an implicit critique of traditional black societies like Club Atenas and Unión Fraternal.<sup>11</sup>

*Adelante* challenged the historical premises upon which Cuban race relations were founded, and identified the need for new narratives to guide the formation of a more inclusive republic. Even as it loosed a violent reaction against Cubans of color, the revolution of 1933 created an opening for Cubans of color to mobilize aggressively against inequality and discrimination that had been all but closed after 1912. Indeed, the republic's apparent failure signaled the need to begin anew, to remake the nation in the true image of its founders. The political opening created a narrative opening, and indeed the two were

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<sup>11</sup> Hechos, no palabras," *Adelante* 1 (June 1935), 3.

inseparable. For the republic to be remade, it would need to be reimagined, and the old narratives revised.

Black and mulatto activists might thus insist on a reappraisal of a national history that had abetted their marginalization, and instead promote a new national narrative that emphasized the contributions of Cubans of color as Cubans of color, that affirmed the ideal of racial fraternity but argued that without their full inclusion into the national story, the transcendence of racial divisions would be impossible. The fracturing of the republican narrative emboldened Afro-Cuban activists to insist upon its revision to rectify the marginalization of Cubans of color, from the period of enslavement so minimized in public school textbooks to the black heroes of independence who, they argued, had been written out of the country's past.

While less strident than *Adelante*, the editors of *Unión Fraternal* endorsed the view heroic black Cubans would need to serve as a model for younger Cubans, and that deserving national heroes of color should be integrated into the national story. In its 1933 tribute to Guillermo Moncada, for example, *Unión Fraternal* traced the General's heroic lineage to the rebellion of José Antonio Aponte, "which he knew about, because he spoke of it." Although he was born more than two decades after the conspiracy was discovered, *Unión Fraternal* included Aponte in the narrative of historical precursors to Moncada, citing his "uprising against slavery and insult" as the first in series of frustrated rebellions and nationalist martyrs "all sacrificed for the freedom of Cuba." As noted above, the authors of Cuba's public school textbooks had condemned Aponte's actions as criminal, emphasizing the threat his planned uprising posed to Cuban society. Citing Aponte as the originator of Cuba's long independence struggle signaled the formulation of a nationalist counter-narrative that would

redress the marginalization of black Cubans in the nation's story. Moreover, lamented Pedro Zulueta, Moncada's efforts as a leader of Cuba's three wars of independence "still has not been valorized in our History."<sup>12</sup>

In the case of Moncada, *Unión Fraternal* stopped short of assigning blame for Moncada's diminished position in the national pantheon. The more historically disputed figure of General Quintín Bandera, however, brought the tense structures of national memory to the surface. Bandera, a central figure in the Ten Years' War, the Little War, and the War of Independence, had - unlike Moncada or Antonio Maceo - lived to see the inauguration of the republic in 1902. Bandera, however, had ended his military career mired in controversy, after having been stripped of his rank following accusations of immorality and dereliction of duty in allegedly avoiding combat. As Ada Ferrer has persuasively argued, these claims were steeped in the anxieties of the movement's white leadership over black Cubans' fitness and degree of civilization as the insurgent victory came into view.<sup>13</sup> After leading Liberals in revolt against the fraudulent reelection of Tomás Estrada Palma, Bandera was brutally slain in the summer of 1906.

The memory of Bandera had been somewhat less fraught in his native region of Santiago, where a bust had been displayed in a position of honor since 1925. In 1930 the elite Club Atenas, whose exclusive membership included several members of congress, worked alongside Senator Alberto Barreras to organize the construction of an obelisk to Bandera at the site of his death.<sup>14</sup> Three years later, as both the revolution against the

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<sup>12</sup> Pedro Zulueta Galarraga, "Hombres eternos," *Unión Fraternal* 3 (June 1933), 7-8.

<sup>13</sup> Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 173-177.

<sup>14</sup> "Obelisco a Quintín Banderas," *Boletín oficial del 'Club Atenas'* 1, (20 June 1930), 2.

Machadato and the campaign against black organizations and activists gained momentum, *Unión Fraternal* contemplated the place of Bandera in the nationalist imaginary.

Invoking the universal reverence enjoyed by figures like Beethoven, Isaac Newton, and Jesus Christ, *Unión Fraternal* acknowledged that there are others whose “figures, if they don’t grow [in memory], must be reaffirmed.” Still there are others, continued Pedro Zulueta, “that almost disappear due to the intentional absence of memory... Among these last is Quintín Bandera Betancourt.” With the approaching anniversary of his death, *Unión Fraternal* vowed to dedicate itself “to the remembrance of the ‘Hero’ forgotten by all, to the ‘Martyr’ that our written history scarcely mentions.”<sup>15</sup>

Joining the chorus of other Cubans who advocated reengagement with the nation’s founders as a path to rebuilding the republic, *Unión Fraternal* insisted that the conspicuous “silence” surrounding Bandera was even more detrimental in the context of the anti-Machado revolution. “Precisely when uncontrolled passions, confusion and, most gravely, the absence of a true, just, and dignified national ideal prevail over a people,” wrote Zulueta, Cubans must “bring the figures of our predecessors into our memory and then” to put them into action. Bandera’s memory, like his life, had been attacked and insulted by his enemies, and his “assassination” by the forces of Estrada Palma signified, to *Unión Fraternal*, his elevation from hero of independence wars to “Martyr of Freedom” who should be celebrated by those Cubans seeking a better republic than the one culminating in Machado’s rule.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Pedro Zulueta Galarraga, “Hombres eternos: Quintín Bandera Betancourt,” *Unión Fraternal* 3 (August 1933), 7-8.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

The collapse of the republic in 1933 destabilized the legitimacy of dominant visions of the past, emboldening some Cubans of color and black societies to advocate a counter-memory to that which dominated the early republic and, to some extent, emerged from the upheavals of the 1920s and 1930s. As in earlier periods, confrontations emerged over efforts to consolidate dominant narratives of the past in monuments and commemorations. Between 1935 and 1936, the proposal of two new monuments prompted the new Afro-Cuban organization Club Adelante to confront what its leaders viewed as the inadequacy of dominant narratives that marginalized black Cubans from their own past. Through its official organ, *Adelante*, the club mounted a bold challenge to the dominant constructions of national history, and sought a position for Cubans of color both within that narrative and in shaping the iconography that Cubans would be asked to revere.

In the summer of 1935, the front page of the magazine reported that its editors “have read, a few days ago,” in a statement from the Secretary of Public Works, of the beginning of work in Havana dedicated to “the erection of a monument to perpetuate and glorify the memory – difficult to forget – of Gral. José Miguel Gómez.” A veteran of the independence wars and former president of the republic, Gómez was “difficult to forget” for his government’s swift and bloody suppression of the 1912 uprising of the Partido Independiente de Color.

The social and political power of monuments was clear to *Adelante*’s writers, who challenged the legitimacy of offering public, official approval to the memory of José Miguel Gómez. The monuments bestowed by Cubans must not be like those built in countries “without collective liberty,” where “an authoritarian minority equally imposes laws and adorations on the people,” as in “a monarchy, where every king receives the honor of a

statue.” In Cuba, a free people have the exclusive right “to confer... the everlasting glory of marble or bronze... Blacks,” *Adelante* continued, “constitute a bit more than one third of Cuban population. Thus, the black is also... the Cuban people. As such, in the duty of a people and a conscious people, the black wishes to record his protest against this monument.”<sup>17</sup>

Gómez’s attacks on Cubans of color during his presidency, *Adelante* argued, rendered him unworthy of sanctification in a country that considered black and mulatto Cubans as full members of the *pueblo*. Speaking as the “authorized spokesman of the black,” *Adelante* argued that it could not:

keep an indignant silence before this exaltation to the sublime... of a man who, after encouraging and driving the stupidity of... [PIC leader Evaristo] Estenoz and his men... sent the military against them, ordered the hunting of the “rebels,” resulting in the imprisonment of innocents; the massacre en masse of blacks uninvolved in the insurgency; and unleashing storms of hate between suspicious or worried whites and humiliated and persecuted blacks.<sup>18</sup>

*Adelante* thus rejected the “stupid” Estenoz and the armed protest of the PIC, but condemned Gómez for sewing racist panic and persecuting Cubans of color for political gain. “The black thus protests this monument, which will constitute approval – or an absolution at least – for the author” of racist declarations and the leader of massacres against black populations. The narrative of 1912 that appeared in *Adelante* represented a forceful, emotional rejection of the official memory of that conflict which had appeared in school textbooks as a racist uprising of blacks against white Cubans that was swiftly and necessarily suppressed by the government.

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<sup>17</sup> “El monumento al General José Miguel Gómez,” *Adelante* 1 (August 1935), 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

This willingness to challenge the contentious, fragile joints of national memory emerged again the following year, as the magazine lamented the dedication of the Gómez monument on the broad *Avenida de los Presidentes* in Havana. *Adelante* revealed that the approaching fiftieth anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Cuba had prompted Carlos Márquez Sterling, President of the *Cámara de Representantes*, to propose a new memorial to those who had fought against Cuban slavery. “The homage,” *Adelante* reported, “would consist of the construction of a public plaza in Havana which would be called the ‘Plaza of Abolition,’ in whose center would be a statue of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, surrounded by busts of those whom the author of the project considered *our most notable abolitionists*.”<sup>19</sup> These included prominent anti-slavery advocates like Father Félix Varela, Independence leaders Francisco Aguilera, Salvador Cisneros, and Ignacio Agramonte, among many others. “We believe,” continued *Adelante*, “that by an oversight, perhaps involuntary, Dr. Márquez Sterling left off the great black fighters for the freedom of their brothers.”<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps even more than the sanctification of José Miguel Gómez, *Adelante* viewed the exclusively white monument to the abolition of slavery to be indicative of a pervasive marginalization of black and mulatto Cubans from the positions within the national story. The suggestion of an “involuntary oversight” was perhaps a tongue-in-cheek mockery of the failure to include a single Cuban of color as agents of their own history. Much as public school textbooks had presented the end of slavery as an achievement won by whites, the proposed monument promised to reinforce the marginalization of black Cubans in national history. *Adelante* suggested that the memorial should include the leaders of slave uprisings, a bold suggestion given that Cuban public school students had been taught that colonial slave

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<sup>19</sup> “¿Olvido?” *Adelante* 2 (September 1936), 6. Italics in original.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*



rebellions had been dangerous and threatening to the Cuban population. Indeed, as earlier chapters have shown, the memory of slave uprisings was invoked by opponents of the PIC in 1912 to demonstrate the horrors of autonomous black violence.

In 1936, however, *Adelante* demanded that José Antonio Aponte, a free person of color who orchestrated an anti-slavery conspiracy a hundred years before the PIC, should be celebrated as a national abolitionist hero. “Unless,” the writer suggested, “the landowners still have a certain sympathy for those who hunted runaways... and a ferocious hate for the memory of one offered his life to protest the odious slavery of his brothers in race.” Even if Aponte were somehow too disputed a figure, *Adelante* suggested, Márquez Sterling might also remember the leaders of the Escalera conspiracy of 1844, or at least the figure of Juan Gualberto Gómez. “Are we also to bring discrimination to the point of trying to hide the support of blacks for their own liberty?” demanded *Adelante*. “Historical discrimination?” the magazine concluded, or “oversight? We do not know.”<sup>21</sup> In its pages, *Adelante* worked to redress the “oversight” of black historical agency in the national story. While *Adelante* advanced its agenda by opposing the continuation of “historical discrimination” through new monuments, the organization joined with other black societies to assemble a new historical narrative that would affirm the inclusion of Cubans of color rather than normalizing their marginalization.

*Adelante*’s narrative of the *Grito de Yara* similarly centered on the contributions of black Cubans in securing their own emancipation. Much as the organization had not challenged the inclusion of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes at the center of the proposed *Plaza de Abolición*, their tribute to Céspedes affirmed his political and social vision in liberating

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

the slaves of La Demajagua. However, the memory of October 10 that appeared in *Adelante* granted equal billing to the slaves themselves, and to other Cubans of color who had been reduced to background figures or foils in the dominant narrative. On the morning of Céspedes's declaration, "the black, clearly sensing the transcendence of that historical moment, rose to the occasion, and did not miss the opportunity to demonstrate his gifts as a man capable of the boldest and nobles human achievements." In place of a narrative that emphasized the gratitude and submission of black insurgents, *Adelante* wrote of "yesterday's slave, by right of his own conquest, represented by his cooperation in the holy cause of patriotic independence, won" the declaration of abolition issued by the rebel army in 1869.<sup>22</sup> Céspedes, in this version of the *Grito de Yara*, was heroic for his social vision in freeing his slaves, but it was the slaves themselves that ended slavery.

The critique of how Cubans had remembered the struggle against slavery as guided exclusively by whites carried with it an implicit critique of republican racial norms. The version of the Cuban past that emphasized the agency of blacks and mulattos laid the narrative foundations for a more confrontational demand for social and economic equality. As the young cohort of activists writing in *Adelante* looked to the future of Afro-Cuban political engagement, writers advanced a narrative of the independence wars that juxtaposed the efforts of Cubans of color in winning national independence with a tale of betrayal by white Cubans and the United States that legitimated an aggressive demand for the restitution of rights. Like many other activists of the era, writers appearing in *Adelante* challenged the formerly sacrosanct memory of the independence generation, insisting that despite their commitment and service to the cause of independence, Cubans of color had gained little from the first republic.

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<sup>22</sup> "10 de Octubre de 1868," *Adelante* 1 (October 1935), 5.

In a front page editorial, *Adelante* argued that racial prejudice had been fomented by the Spanish in order to keep Cubans divided and “incapable of rebelling.” The wars of independence, the narrative continued, “in which blacks and whites fought together, and in which the blacks were a superior factor, due to their valor, courage, heroism, and their numeric force,” which *Adelante* claimed had been estimated as high as “eighty percent” of the Liberation Army, gave Cubans of color reason to think that they could “once and for all banish the evil serpent of prejudice” from the island. A “false illusion,” *Adelante* argued. Before the war was even over, they saw that “the sermons of those great men of the revolution were not abided, that the words of equality, justice, and confraternity” had been “nothing but grease” to move the insurgency. “The black man in republican Cuba continues to receive the same treatment as in colonial Cuba.”<sup>23</sup> This narrative of betrayal deepened that which *Adelante* had introduced in its first issue the previous year. The independence wars, its editors recalled, had been “struggles in which the black has taken the preponderant role, always only to be deceived” in the end.<sup>24</sup>

This version of the Cuban past that young activists circulated in the 1930s laid the foundation for renewed demands for social justice, economic equality, and new political strategies through which to assert those demands. For those Cubans of color who witnessed both the opening of new political space in the revolution and the vicious attacks on blacks and mulattos that followed, the appropriate course of action remained unclear. José Armando Plá, editor of the Camagüeyan newspaper *El Noticiero*, argued in *Adelante* that the “best tactic” for black and mulatto Cubans would be to refuse to support any of Cuba’s political

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<sup>23</sup> “Por el bienestar de Cuba,” *Adelante* 1 (April 1936), 1.

<sup>24</sup> “Hechos, no palabras,” *Adelante* 1 (June 1935), 3.

parties. His rationale was historical, and his argument came from the memory of betrayal in the first republic's inauguration. At that time, "blacks had put much faith in the advent of a political freedom that had been set out as a panacea for all their pains," but "they witnessed a spectacle that surprised them painfully: the republic that was inaugurated was a white republic." Cubans of color were told that they would need to be "improved" in order to fully exercise their equality. Plá assailed the "so-called leaders of the unhappy race" for endorsing this strategy, which became the touchstone for many of the black societies that formed in the early republic.<sup>25</sup> Black Cubans had followed that path through the republic, and had gained little, argued Plá. The answer, then, was to abstain not from politics, but from political parties, voting for those candidates "who have not revealed themselves to be racists," much as they must use their "power as consumers" to boycott businesses that discriminate.

Frustrations with traditional black organizations and the failure of the republic to achieve equality for black and mulatto Cubans prompted Plá to return again to narratives of the independence wars, invoking their power as parables of racial harmony. The betrayal of blacks by the "white republic" and their own leaders did not shake the authority of nationalist mythology. "Those who aspire to racial indifference," he began, "are kept awake with the dates of the Campaign of the Demajagua, the story of Martí, born in the West and died in the East, and of Maceo, born in the East and died in the West." Cubans must wake up, he argued, and recognize "that great truth which they saw clearly in [18]68 and [18]95: that blacks are not here for a visit, that they are one hundred percent Cuban," and the republic

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<sup>25</sup> José Armando Plá, "La mejor tactica: abstención," *Adelante* 1 (August 1935), 5. The historian Melina Pappademos has called this tendency in black societies a "racial uplift ideology," which "depicted blacks as whites' social inferiors" by accepting the premise that Cubans of color needed improvement to better approximate European cultural norms. See Melina Pappademos, *Black Political Activism and the Cuban Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 174.

will have no success without Cubans of color, whose “cooperation has never been refused, despite having suffered from disrespect and injustice that subjugated them for four hundred years.”<sup>26</sup>

Gustavo Urrutia, who was perhaps the most prominent black journalist of the time, offered a different path toward political engagement and advancement, using a narrative of the transition to independence that diverged from the “white republic” model that Plá had advanced. Urrutia rejected the notion of assessing blame for the “ingritudes and disappointments of the republic.” The important point, he insisted, “is that internal and external reaction frustrated the best of the separatist Revolution. The Afro-Cuban,” he continued,” suffered this reaction in the form of racism, and the white in the universal form of economic and social subordination.” The internal reaction that Urrutia invoked pointed to the betrayal of black soldiers and generals by the white political leadership of the independence movement, while the external reaction, which had subordinated white Cubans, could be traced to the intervention of the United States. As a result, all of Cuba had suffered from the “reaction” against the independence movement.<sup>27</sup> Cubans of color had suffered doubly. Urrutia thus advanced a narrative of betrayal that seemed to join Afro-Cuban demands for equality with revolutionary critiques of capitalist exploitation and imperialist domination in Cuba.

The elaboration of a narrative centering on racial betrayal required confronting the emotionally and morally powerful icons of racial fraternity that had supported claims of national racelessness and republican equality since the onset of independence. While *Unión Fraternal* and *Adelante* had assailed narratives of abolition for whitening a struggle that had

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<sup>26</sup> Plá, “La mejor tactica: abstención,” 5.

<sup>27</sup> Gustavo Urrutia, “Opresores y oprimidos,” *Adelante* 1 (August 1935), 7.

been advanced by black and mulatto rebels, claims of the republic's transcendence of race rested primarily on memory of the independence wars, and drew authority from the beloved figure of Antonio Maceo. Decades earlier, the *Partido Independiente de Color* and later black journalist Ramón Vasconcelos found themselves accused of blaspheming against the sacred figure of a raceless Maceo. In the aftermath of the Machado dictatorship, the terms of political discourse and the structures of nationalist memory had shifted markedly, enabling writers and activists to challenge prevailing Maceo mythologies and configure the "Bronze Titan" as an iconic assault on racial discrimination.

The question of how Cubans should remember Antonio Maceo seemed especially salient in the winter of 1936, as delegates were chosen for the coming constitutional convention. *Adelante's* writers confronted dominant narratives of the nation's past with a revolutionary fervor, attacking the dominant structures of Cuban memory as the lingering vestiges of the old order, a framework that would need to be rebuilt in order to construct a republic in the founders' vision. Journalist Tomás Borrato Mora noted a dismaying formula in yearly commemorations of Maceo's death, in which every December 7 was met with "commemorative note" guided by "no concerns apart from those imposed by chronology." Writers would struggle to find new adjectives "to once more decorate the immortal name of the hero," while orators gave "kilometers of speeches" recalling his heroism in battle or the tragedy of his death. "If this is how one must honor the memory of General Antonio," Borrato continued, "then one must reach the conclusion that the Republic has faithfully complied with the maxim of its creators."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Tomás Borrato Mora, "7 de Diciembre," *Adelante* 2 (December 1936), 5.

The traditional image of Maceo, he argued, had served only to sustain “those who have held dominion over the public sphere” who have “so stained the ideal of the revolution” for independence. Forty years after his death, continued Borrato, the dominant memory constituted “an unpardonable sacrilege” against the memory of Antonio Maceo, for reasons too innumerable to count. Maceo, he argued, “was a black man, and proud of his lineage,” and new that he faced opposition from those who, motivated by “prejudice and envy,” viewed him as a “dangerous phantom.” The army that he joined and led, argued Borrato, was composed of “blacks and whites” carrying “no other banner but justice, equality, and fraternity.” The “Cubans of [18]95,” he insisted, would have opposed the “social injustice, racial prejudice, [and] the privilege” that characterized Cuban society.<sup>29</sup>

The narrative of Maceo as a crusader against racism and inequality contrasted sharply with the dominant image of an icon that embodied their transcendence. A similar vision of Maceo appeared in the pages of the newspaper *Noticias de Hoy*, the organ of the Cuban Communist Party that launched in 1938 after the legalization of the party. *Hoy* echoed *Adelante*’s characterization of the annual outpouring of reverence that accompanied the anniversary of his death. “Again,” the article began, “as has traditionally happened, the great *mambí*’s deeds in war have been remembered, his blazing machete, his epic invasion.” *Noticias de Hoy* followed *Adelante* in asserting that “the true Maceo,” a man who led a social revolution for racial and economic equality “still has not been recovered... Those who profited from the situation after the War of Independence,” *Hoy* suggested, “have done everything possible to confuse the real character of the Liberating Revolution, and the concrete objectives that its leaders pursued.” Those with an investment in maintain the power they gained from the frustration of the independence movement, *Hoy* alleged, had

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

disseminated a dishonest version of the past that kept Cubans from questioning their authority.

“For us,” the article continued, “for those who read the past as a useful lesson for the present and the future, with the sound intention of linking the present to the liberating Revolution, the figure of Maceo is not buried exclusively in the deeds of war,” but instead stood for equality, democracy, and “definitive national liberation.”<sup>30</sup> “As a black and as a Cuban,” wrote *Hoy* the following summer, Maceo “suffered doubly from colonial oppression,” and the “*patria* that he dreamed” had never come to be. “The same forces that he fought indomitably against,” the paper insisted, “live still and oppose him with the same intransigence as before.”<sup>31</sup> The Communists configured themselves as the “inheritors of the *mambises*,” who could finally achieve what Maceo’s life demanded, “that the black and the white – equals – cannot be divided but must be united in the pursuit of common interests and national interests.”<sup>32</sup> The revision of the Maceo narrative enabled the Communists to present themselves as carriers of the revolutionary tradition through their multi-racial constituency and opposition to discrimination.

Black and mulatto activists continued to assail the prevailing Maceo mythology as a pillar of enduring racism and a major obstacle to change. Jorge Mañach, a frequent contributor to, and later editor of *Diario de la Marina*, was a frequent antagonist, in part because of his leadership position within the ABC, which had taken part in the anti-black campaigns of 1933-1935. One such conflict emerged in the summer of 1939, when Mañach

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<sup>30</sup> “El Maceo verdadero,” *Noticias de Hoy*, 7 December 1938, 1,6.

<sup>31</sup> “Maceo,” *Noticias de Hoy*, 14 June 1939, 1, 6.

<sup>32</sup> “El Maceo verdadero,” *Noticias de Hoy*, 7 December 1938, 6.



wrote in the Havana daily *El Mundo* that Maceo did not have a racial consciousness that, Mañach argued, was being used to divide populations around the world, and that he rejected the idea of gaining any privilege from his skin color and popularity among black soldiers. In a response published in *Hoy*, the activist Ángel César Pinto assailed Mañach for minimizing the discrimination Maceo faced in his own life and equating racial consciousness among people of color with racism. Pinto argued that “racism always comes from the bowels of the dominant class, not from the dominated,” noting that Maceo’s own “consciousness of race... reflected the reality of racial prejudice that in his epoch, like in ours, was so ‘real’ that nobody could ignore it.”<sup>33</sup>

Characterizations of Maceo that minimized his racial identity and the prejudice he faced had been common throughout the republic, and gained renewed traction amid demands that the new constitution legislate against racial discrimination. *Diario de la Marina*, one of Cuba’s oldest and most conservative newspapers, was a frequent target of frustration and condemnation from anti-discrimination activists, galvanized especially by the topic of Antonio Maceo. In the year that the new constitution was promulgated, a *Diario de la Marina* editorial insisted that “the color of his skin was no obstacle for Maceo in his rise to the highest ranks of the Liberation Army... the Cuban revolution was made with a democratic consciousness, without discriminations.”<sup>34</sup>

Activists thus faced an uphill battle in winning acknowledgement of discrimination, much less legislation to redress it. The belief that the wars of independence had achieved racial equality endured through the constant, pervasive circulation of narratives that affirmed

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<sup>33</sup> Ángel César Pinto, “El prejuicio racial y el General Maceo: carta abierta al Dr. Mañach,” *Noticias de Hoy*, 1 July 1939, 2

<sup>34</sup> “Una fecha y un símbolo,” *Diario de la Marina*, 7 December 1940, 4.

racial unity and equality as sacred achievements of the anti-colonial struggle. Legislating against racism would thus require rewriting the narratives of national history that imbued the nation and its laws with moral authority and emotional resonance.

*Noticias de Hoy* joined with *Adelante* to challenge the vision of Maceo and the independence struggle that had dominated and sustained the republic since its inauguration. Indeed, *Adelante* was, in many ways, the forerunner of the Communist party newspaper. Although *Adelante* was more intellectually diverse, inviting vigorous debate from a broad swath of writers and activists, several of its leading contributors were affiliated with the growing Communist and Socialist movement and went on to positions within the Communist Party and helped form the historical narrative that mobilized its agenda for the coming constitutional convention. After it was legalized by Fulgencio Batista, the Cuban Communist Party militated in preparation for the new constitutional convention, mobilizing the memory of the Liberation Army and iconic Cubans of color to support a demand that the new constitution directly confront racial discrimination.

### **Constituting Change: Race and the Constitution of 1940**

As the dust settled after Machado's departure and the government stabilized under Batista's stewardships, Cuban activists fixated on the replacing the discredited Constitution of 1901, which had promised equality before the law but, in the eyes of many black and mulatto Cubans, delivered only continued subjugation. The failure to achieve equality, argued black intellectual and activist Salvador García Agüero, rendered the 1901 Constitution "a dead letter." Writing also in *Adelante*, Ramón Betancourt echoed this declaration, noting under a constitution that recognized the equality of all Cubans, it "would

be considered crazy” for “anyone from the race of Maceo or Guillermo Moncada” to launch a candidacy for president or vice-president.<sup>35</sup>

Those who had mobilized against Machado in the 1920s and 1930s demanded the promulgation of a new constitution to institutionalize the social and political reforms that the revolution of 1933 had demanded. For Cubans of color, a new constitution offered the greatest opportunity since the inauguration of the republic to write racial equality into the nation’s fundamental law and, in the process, to reshape norms of racial equality and national inclusion. Three years after Machado fled the island, the election of delegates for a new constitutional convention began the process of transforming narratives of injustice into demands for change.

The Communist Party assumed the role of standard-bearer for demands to legislate against racism in the new constitution. The party, which Julio Antonio Mella had founded in 1925, strengthened its position among Cubans of color by mobilizing workers against Machado while adopting a political platform that identified racial discrimination as among the republic’s most profound failings. Although Mella himself, and the early Cuban Communist Party (PCC) had de-emphasized racial divisions, instead focusing on class struggle, by the onset of the 1930s, the party’s tactics shifted.<sup>36</sup> Before the election of delegates to the constitutional convention in 1936, the Communists joined the new Revolutionary Communist Union (URC), choosing Juan Marinello as President and Salvador

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<sup>35</sup> Salvador García Agüero, “Una promesa estimable,” *Adelante* 1 (November 1935), 12; Ramón Betancourt y García, “Igualdad de derechos,” *Adelante* 1 (January 1936), 9. See also Alejandra Bronfman, *Measures of Equality: Social Science, Citizenship, and Race in Cuba, 1902-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 159-181.

<sup>36</sup> Alejandra Bronfman has noted that the new emphasis on racial discrimination followed the 1928 party congress, which adopted the Stalinist focus on oppressed nationalities. See Bronfman, *Measures of Equality*, 154.

García Agüero Vice-President of the new party. The two had been frequent contributors to *Adelante*, and now emerged as leaders of a Communist movement that pressed for anti-racism discrimination and crafted a revolutionary vision of the nation's past to lend support and urgency to that effort.

In the pages of *Noticias de Hoy*, anti-racism activists mobilized the memory of Cuba's black and mulatto heroes to make the case for legislating against discrimination in the new constitution. That effort rested on asserting a narrative that centered on the contributions of Cubans of color in forging nationhood and their betrayal in the foundation of the republic. Proponents of the law against racial discrimination crafted and asserted a version of national history that was both diagnostic and prescriptive, a teleology that necessarily concluded with the restitution of an equality earned in battle but denied in peace. Serafín Portuondo Linares, a journalist, historian, and activist in the URC, pointedly worked to overturn the traditional interpretation of the independence wars, arguing that "the efforts of united blacks and whites in 1868 and 1895 were not enough for racial discrimination, the practice of racist hatred, to disappear."<sup>37</sup> Another columnist in *Noticias de Hoy* noted the persistence and power of the dominant narrative of the independence wars. "In Cuba," began Iturri Barca, "racial prejudices do not exist. Blacks, who collaborated powerfully in the struggle for independence, have all the same rights as the whites. We have heard this affirmation many times...but is it absolutely true?" While he argued that the "Cuban people" were not prejudiced, there were many arenas of Cuban life that "had not been freed from the

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<sup>37</sup> Serafín Portuondo Linares, "El chauvanismo racista" *Noticias de Hoy*, Almanaque de Hoy, January 1, 1940, 48.

colonial legacy,” where discrimination persisted in public spaces, employment, and education.<sup>38</sup>

Comparing instances of discrimination with conditions in colonial Cuba enabled activists to fuse opponents of anti-racism legislation with the anti-independence forces of the nineteenth century and to depict them as both anti-modern and anti-national. Noting the anti-black violence that followed the revolution of 1933 and the numerous instances of discrimination and de-facto racial segregation in hotels, public parks, and other spaces, Serafín Portuondo argued that “in many parts of the island there is little difference from the times of colonial slavery.” Recalling her characterization of the independence armies, Portuondo argued that these conditions would be resolved by “the popular masses, the blacks and whites united,” who could “definitively defeat” racism and restore “equalitarian rights” to Cubans of color. Other writers deepened the connection between the present efforts of black and mulatto Cubans to achieve equality in a new Cuba with the nineteenth century independence wars. “The black Cuban,” wrote Humberto Hernández Mordoch, “now occupies his place at the front lines of the progressive legions, much as he did in the past, facing all sacrifices for the realization of an independent Cuba.” They did so, he argued, for a Cuba “in which the democratic and equalitarian principles” advanced by José Martí would be both “doctrine and practice.”<sup>39</sup>

The Communists were joined in their efforts to constitutionally prohibit racial discrimination by nationalist intellectuals and representatives of the country’s black societies. The politically heterogeneous Club Atenas invited representatives of various political parties

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<sup>38</sup> Iturri Barca, “Los derechos del negro ante la constituyente,” *Noticias de Hoy*, 6 June 1939, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Humberto Hernández Mordoch, “El negro y el progreso popular,” *Noticias de Hoy*, 25 July 1939, 2.

to address the group's members on how the new constitution might confront racial discrimination.<sup>40</sup> Activists from various groups around the country formed the National Federation of Cuban Societies of the Race of Color in 1938, which spawned provincial federations as well, marking a new front in anti-racist mobilization. The following year, a group of prominent intellectuals founded the Association Against Racist Discrimination in Havana, led by Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, Fernando Ortíz, and URC leader Salvador García Agüero.<sup>41</sup> The organization thus joined veterans of the 1920s nationalist resurgence with representatives of the growing Cuban Communist movement, and the group's membership included other prominent Cubans including Miguel Angel Céspedes, the president of Club Atenas, journalists Gustavo Urrutia and Tomás Borroto, and historian José Luciano Franco.<sup>42</sup> This collaboration signaled a unity of purpose in confronting racism and discrimination through a new constitution. Speakers at the group's organizational meeting challenged both the ideology of racial superiority and the historical roots of enduring discrimination, but speakers like Salvador García Agüero, who would be a URC delegate at the coming Constituent Convention, emphasized the need to write equality into the new constitution and create a mechanism for punishing acts of discrimination.

The convention opened in February of 1940 in a torrent of patriotic pomp and respectful solemnity. Its inauguration was framed by narrative and iconic invocations of the nation's founding as delegates positioned the new constitution within a historical sequence that began with the Grito de Yara. A group of Boy Scouts from Regla led the dedication of

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<sup>40</sup> "Las conferencias del Club Atenas y la discriminación negra," *Noticias de Hoy* 12 July 1939, 2.

<sup>41</sup> The group was initially named the "Committee Against Racial Discrimination," but adopted its new name in March, 1939.

<sup>42</sup> "Efectúa un magnífico acto el C. Contra la Discriminación," *Noticias de Hoy*, 19 March 1939, 1, 6.

the ceremony as they carried in “the flag of the ‘Demajagua,’” the banner designed by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes which “inspired and sheltered the constituent assembly of Guáimaro,” which produced the nation’s first constitution.<sup>43</sup> Various delegates rose to address the assembly on the task before them and its historical precedents. José Manuel Cortina, who had presided over the convention’s coordinating commission, presented the course of Cuban history as one of glory and tragedy, arguing that “there has not been a *patria* that has spent more effort for the fate of an adverse manifest destiny than the Cuban Nation, created by the fervent and constant force of its people and the sublime energy of its liberating warriors.”<sup>44</sup> Cortina laid blame at the feet of the intervening North Americans who prevented the Cuban army from achieving its victory and its leaders from assuming control of the new republic.

Delegates were acutely aware that the impetus for a new constitution was the failure of the previous document and the republic that it created. URC delegate Juan Marinello echoed Cortina’s critique of the compromised republic, focusing on the Constitutional Convention of 1900, which was “the culmination of a popular process consecrated by blood and sacrifice. The Republic of Céspedes, of Gómez, of Maceo, and of Martí was born from the efforts of those conventionists... [but] it would be a lie to affirm that their effort achieved the installation of the democracy that the mambí forces wanted.” The constitution that would have reflected the vision of the nation’s founders would have completely overthrown the old order, Marinello insisted, a task which now fell to the new convention forty years later. This new constitution, he demanded, must establish “a racial equality that comes not only from a

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<sup>43</sup> Cuba, Convención Constituyente, *Diario de sesiones*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 9 February 1940, 6.

<sup>44</sup> José Manuel Cortina, Convención Constituyente, *Diario de sesiones*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 9 February 1940, 10.

beautiful declaration” like that of the old constitution, “but from a sanction that assures its observance.”<sup>45</sup>

On the date of the convention’s inauguration, the Provincial Federation of Black Societies of Havana issued a statement to the delegates “to demand that our rights be fully recognized in the new constitution.” The group explained that “to give the history of why we are here to demand the specific inclusion” of the rights of Cubans of color “would be too great a task, that the limitations of space make impossible.” Nevertheless, the statement continued, “it is necessary to say loudly and clearly that in Cuba there is a great part of the native population of Cuba with dark skin.” Their skin, the Federation pointedly emphasized, “is as dark as the skin of Maceo, Moncada, Banderas, and others.” Those who committed acts of racial discrimination, the statement argued, “have forgotten that the Republic was forged by the white and by the black, and that this is a part of [Cuban] nationality that has a clear right to enjoy... all the rights of citizenship.”<sup>46</sup>

The memory of black and mulatto soldiers in the Liberation Army clearly formed a foundation for demands that racial equality be codified in the new constitution. However, like earlier efforts to address racism or discrimination, proponents found themselves confronting narratives of the same period that were configured to demonstrate the opposite point. Antonio Maceo had, since the announcement of his death, been widely cited as a representation and source of racial fraternity. As anti-discrimination activists mobilized toward the constitutional convention, they had faced the enduring power of Maceo and the belief in racial transcendence that he was said to embody. The Constituent Convention

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<sup>45</sup> Juan Marinello, Convención Constituyente, *Diario de sesiones*, Vol. 1, no. 1, 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 9 February 1940, 14.

<sup>46</sup> “Interesantes demandas hace la Fed. de Sociedades Negras a los delegados a la C Constituyente,” *Noticias de Hoy*, 15 February 1940, 4.



signaled the most direct confrontation of these different visions of the national past since the violence of 1912.

Although the issue was raised on the first day of the assembly, the convention did not take up the proposed article on individual rights and discrimination until the very end of April. Salvador García Agüero took the floor to propose an amendment, which would replace the proposed article's ban on "all discrimination due to race, sex, class, or any other insult to human dignity" with a more specific elaboration of rights that may not be denied because of "race, color, sex, class" or other motives.<sup>47</sup> The distinctions were subtle, but García Agüero hoped to focus the attention of the assembly on the question of race and the nature of discrimination.<sup>48</sup> His amendment also established a deadline of six months from the date of the constitution's promulgation for the government to establish the punishment for the acts of discrimination he described, a contrast to the open-ended pledge of the original article.

García Agüero explained that his more pointed amendment was intended to call the assembly's attention to the pervasive nature of discrimination in Cuban society, which was a reality that, he argued, "nobody can ignore." He noted, though, that in an earlier session of the convention, he had heard a delegate claim that "in this country there does not exist a discriminatory reality that merits mention in the Constitutional text." The proponents of his amendment, however, "affirm the contrary: we understand that there exists a discriminatory state... that proceeds" from the social and economic origins of Cuban society that were cast

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<sup>47</sup> Salvador García Agüero, Convención Constituyente, *Diario de sesiones*, vol. 1, num. 25, 25<sup>th</sup> sess., 26 April 1940, 21.

<sup>48</sup> For a further discussion of García Agüero's amendment and the contrast he hoped to create with the original article, see Bronfman, *Measures of Equality*, 172-178.

“in the process of slavery.”<sup>49</sup> Opponents of the amendment mounted a legalistic argument over the wording of the two proposals, arguing that the original would be sufficient to prevent racial discrimination, while those supporting García Agüero, like Liberal delegate Rafael Guás Inclán, invoked the open-ended language of the 1900 constitution as a clear indication that more focused language was necessary.

The debate, as it usually did, ultimately returned to the memory of the independence wars and the meaning of its heroes. Conservative delegate Delio Nuñez Mesa took the floor to explain his preliminary vote against the amendment. He characterized voting on García Agüero’s amendment as promoting the very racial division he hoped to redress, and added that “I think this racial discrimination does not exist in Cuba.” García Agüero shot back, “the discrimination is evident. It does not matter if one delegate feels himself so bold as to assert... that discrimination does not exist.” Cubans of color make up a considerable part of the country, he argued, and “are so rooted in the evolution of all our History.” He stipulated that the problem was not one “of races” in Cuba, but instead of color. Differences in color were at the heart of discrimination, and avoiding the mention of color in the constitution would allow those like Nuñez Mesa to deny discrimination by denying the existence of race.<sup>50</sup>

At the following session, Nuñez Mesa had recalibrated his argument. “I might have been wrong,” he said, “but I continue to believe there is not so much discrimination.” While in the previous day’s session, he had suggested that Cubans of color were simply incapable

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<sup>49</sup> Salvador García Agüero in Cuba, Convención Constituyente, *Diario de sesiones*, Vol. 1, num. 25, 26 April 1940, 21.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.

of defending their rights with dignity, the delegate now mobilized national memory to minimize the impact of racial discrimination:

“I do not believe that there can be insurmountable antagonisms between blacks and whites, because the fates, perhaps foreseeing this situation during the War of Independence, gave us an example that will serve forever so that blacks and whites were completely united, and acted not as blacks and whites, but as Cubans, [in] that extraordinary disgrace that occurred in Cacahual during the War of Independence when Panchito Gómez and Maceo, both embracing, died for the liberty of Cuba.<sup>51</sup>

He suggested that if any person felt himself victim of racism, “it would be patriotic of him” to invoke the existing constitutional statement of equality. On the other hand, he concluded, “I believe it is anti-Cuban and anti-patriotic to deal with this problem of racism in Cuba. I believe that everyone, without exception, must be very careful with this, because it proves very dangerous...”

Núñez Mesa was interrupted by Primitivo Rodríguez, a Congressman from the Auténtico party, who challenged his invocation of Antonio Maceo to deny the existence of discrimination. He decried the “pretenses of occasional jingoists who wield the heroism of Antonio Maceo as a motive and basis to throw a rosary of insincere praise upon miserable existence of the citizen with black skin.” The same politicians who celebrate the memory of Antonio Maceo, he insisted, were the ones who “try to avoid the opportunity to create the broadest constitutional precept to affirm the equality of all before the law” and provide protection from discrimination.<sup>52</sup> As Núñez Mesa responded to this challenge, he acknowledged that companies did discriminate, in violation of the previous constitution’s guarantee of equality, but again drew the debate back to the past. The delegates should be

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<sup>51</sup> Delio Núñez Mesa, in Cuba, Convención Constituyente, *Diario de sesiones*, Vol. 1, num. 27, 2 May 1940, 7.

<sup>52</sup> Primitivo Rodríguez in Cuba, Convención Constituyente, *Diario de sesiones*, Vol. 1, num. 27, 2 May 1940, 8.

very careful “putting this problem on paper,” he warned, because “we must remember... the most ominous pages of Republican Cuba were when some politicians...made racist politics in Cuba, because we all remember those days of thirty years ago, in Oriente especially, there was a racial war that was a shame for all Cubans.”

Nuñez Mesa’s ominous invocation of the 1912 violence caused a stir, and the session’s president Ramón Grau San Martín tried to reestablish order and return the debate to the text of the amendment. García Agüero again took the floor and elaborated a historical narrative of his own, tracing the origins of the “*peligro negro*” or “black danger” that Nuñez Mesa had conjured. He noted that the fear of black rebellion emerged from the middle of the nineteenth century, when the population of African descent had outpaced that of European descent, prompting white Cubans to fear that mistreated slaves might overthrow their authority and colonial power. The white anti-slavery activists that Cuban schoolchildren had been taught to revere, García Agüero insisted, were motivated more by the fear of such a fate than by a desire for racial equality.<sup>53</sup>

The heated debate over race in the national story was a detour from the linguistic and legal shuffling that occupied most of the constitutional convention, but the endurance and depth of this confrontation reveals the close entanglement of present with past in Cuban political life. Nuñez Mesa’s sequential appeals to national history, first in the iconic death of Antonio Mace and Panchito Gómez, and later in the cautionary tale of the *Partido Independiente de Color* suggests how the party’s uprising in 1912 had been written into the national narrative as a rejection of the Maceo-Gómez ideal. Similarly, García Agüero’s critique of the historical narratives that celebrated white anti-slavery activists illuminates the

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

profound connection that anti-racism activists saw between the ways that Cubans viewed their past and the norms that structured the present.

After further intervention from other delegates, the convention resumed discussion of the remaining point of contention in the wording of the amendment. García Agüero had argued that the final version must ban discrimination “for color,” because skin color was, he argued, the basis for enduring inequality among a people that often denied the existence of race. This argument, which affirmed the nationalist belief that racial difference had been overcome, won over supporters in the convention. Eusebio Mujal, an Auténtico delegate and labor leader, endorsed the inclusion of “color,” noting that “the black Cuban has no interest in having race spoken of, but rather wants Cubans to be of the same race... because all fought in the war of [18]95, and all consider themselves more Cuban than any other race.”<sup>54</sup> The full text of García Agüero’s amendment had failed to pass, but the convention approved the new language he proposed. By condemning discrimination by color instead of race, the Communist leader was able to navigate the gauntlet of blackness in the national imagination.

## Conclusions

The constitution was formally approved on 5 July 1940 in a ceremony orchestrated to confirm the fusion of the new Cuba with the memory of its founders. The official signing ceremony was held in the town of Guáimaro, the sight of the first constitutional assembly held by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes in 1869. The Convention had agreed in its early sessions to hold the ceremony there, and further to provide an original copy of the new constitution to the Provincial Museum of Camagüey, where it would be displayed alongside the Constitution of Guáimaro. The Constitution of 1940 would go into effect on October 10 of that year,

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<sup>54</sup> Eusebio Mujal, in *Ibid*, 16.

providing another point of connection between the inauguration of a new republic and the genesis of Cuban independence in the *Grito de Yara*.

After the uprising against Machado, the anti-black violence and political turmoil that followed, and the close debates over the contours of a new republic, the inauguration of the Constitution of 1940, alongside the popular new president Fulgencio Batista, provided a renewed opportunity to display national unity and affirm cohesion. *Diario de la Marina* celebrated the date as the dawn of “a new historical cycle,” declaring that “the historical past and the present, in becoming history, takes note of this 10th of October 1940.”<sup>55</sup> A paid advertisement by the Havana department store *Fin de Siglo* that appeared in several newspapers hoped that “the deep patriotic sentiment of the date enlightens... the new leaders, so they can lead the *Patria* on a path of peace and progress.”<sup>56</sup>

Historical narratives had formed the foundation and structure of the constitutional debates. Many black and mulatto activists viewed the Constituent Convention as a setback in their efforts to write anti-racism into the new Constitution. The convention rejected a Communist Party proposal for a guarantee of proportionality for black workers in the labor force, and adopted only a small part of García Agüero’s anti-discrimination amendment. Communist Party activists were incensed, and called for protests at the Capitol. The Federation of Black Societies condemned the convention’s actions, demanding that “in this land, created by the force of all, ALL have the right to live with the full dignity of a man, as Martí counseled.”<sup>57</sup> Moreover, the article approved by the convention offered no deadline

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<sup>55</sup> “Un nuevo ciclo histórico,” *Diario de la Marina*, 10 October 1940, 2.

<sup>56</sup> “10 de Octubre, inauguración de un nuevo período constitucional,” *Diario de la Marina*, 10 October 1940, 5.

<sup>57</sup> “La Federación de Sociedades Negras hace declaraciones sobre la igualdad de derechos,” *Noticias de Hoy* 17 April 1940, 1.

for the government to establish a punishment for discrimination, which García Agüero's had done.

The debates surrounding the new constitution revealed the power of memory as a foundation and language of political reform. Shaken by the corruption in the Cuban government and the cultural and economic specter of the United States, a generation of Cubans who came of age in the republic challenged the dominant narratives of the national past, undercutting the legitimacy of the political class and crafting an alternative nationalist agenda. By the late 1920s, a rising cohort of student activists, intellectuals, artists, and journalists had mobilized in the streets and in the national media, advancing a critique of the republic predicated on a narrative of the nation's past that emphasized the betrayal of the independence movement by political elites and their North American sponsors. The successful ouster of the Machado dictatorship forced Cubans to rethink their history not only as a means of challenging the status quo but as the source of a new republican authority.

The unsettling of the dominant narrative of national history created new space in which the nation's past and present could be reimagined. Like the uprising that preceded it, the consolidation of a new government depended on national history as the lingua franca of political debate. The new forces of black activism that emerged in the 1930s mirrored the broader challenges to republican realities, and struggled to write black and mulatto Cubans into the story of abolition and independence. Black agency in the nation's history could lay the foundations of a more active position in republican society. The constitutional debates of 1940 offered activists like Salvador García Agüero the opportunity to convert their critique of republican norms into legislation to redress persistent discrimination and racial inequalities.

The debates over the course and content of the nation also illuminated the durability of deeply held nationalist beliefs. The confrontation between Salvador García Agüero and Delio Nuñez Mesa on the floor of the Constituent Convention put the politics of memory in bold relief, and underlined the centrality of historical narratives in defining norms of racial inclusion and limiting the possibilities of reform. While writers in *Adelante* and *Noticias de Hoy* emphasized blacks and blackness in the nation's history, the foundational myths of the republic were resilient and enduring. Delio Nuñez Mesa invoked the image of Maceo's death as the genesis of a raceless nationhood, contrasted sharply with the bloodshed that he believed the PIC had caused. Around him, other writers continued to repeat the same memory and reinscribe the same beliefs.

Historians, journalists, and political activists succeeded by the 1940s in prompting a reengagement with the foundational narratives of Cuban nationhood as the centerpiece of a new national project. Cubans reconsidered the structures of their national history, revisiting the social and political writings of Maceo and Martí and challenging the role of the United States in national politics, economics, and culture. The failure of the republic and its rebirth under the Constitution of 1940 also ratified to some degree the belief that the first republican era had been built on a false claim to the glorious past. While the new constitution had included a recognition and more forceful denunciation of racial discrimination, activists continued to struggle against the appeal of a nationalist narrative in which Cubans had overcome the challenge of racial division through shared sacrifice and martyrdom.

The inauguration of Fulgencio Batista as president in 1940 seemed to signal the dawn of a new republic and a new nationalist consensus. The Communist Party actively supported Batista, as did a wide range of other parties unified by his populist campaign. The new



constitution, hailed as among the world's most progressive, marked the apparent apogee of reform and, in the eyes of many Cuban writers, the ascendance of the republic as envisioned by its founders. As the republic neared its fiftieth anniversary, the very man who was inaugurated as the first president under the new constitution would, in the words of a young lawyer named Fidel Castro, "make shreds" of that same document, plunging Cuba again into dictatorship and again mobilizing Cubans to confront the narratives and symbols of an unstable nation.

## **VI**

### **Epilogue: Making History in the Cuban Revolution**

In the predawn hours of March 10, 1952, Fulgencio Batista launched a military coup against the government of President Carlos Prío Socarrás. Batista, who had been the major power broker in Cuban politics after the Revolution in 1933, ascending formally the president in wave of patriotic fervor in 1940, now assumed autocratic rule of the state. Although he claimed that his coup was timed to forestall a seizure of power by the Prío regime before the approaching elections, Batista had returned the country to dictatorship less than twenty years after Machado's ouster and only twelve years from the inauguration of the new constitution. Although the departure of the unpopular Prío was little mourned by many Cubans, his overthrow signaled the end of democratic rule on the island and a renewed anxiety over the prospects for Cuban nationhood. To some, Batista's return to power in 1952 suggested that the republic did not need to be reformed to succeed. It would need to be revolutionized.

Sixteen months later, a new revolutionary movement announced itself to the Cuban people. In a manifesto that announced an audacious revolutionary assault against the government of Fulgencio Batista. The manifesto was written on a Thursday, on the eve of Santiago's Carnival celebrations, and appears to have passed with little notice. That would soon change. Three days later, as the city slept off the previous day's festivities, nearly two hundred men and women, led by a young lawyer and political activist named Fidel Castro, launched a daring attack on the Moncada army barracks in Santiago de Cuba in an attempt to

launch armed insurrection against the government. The armed phase of resistance to Fulgencio Batista had begun.

While the violent, bloody attack on the army barracks shocked the nation and announced the appearance of a new force that would dramatically reshape the future of Cuba, the movement's manifesto announced a revolutionary project steeped in the symbols and narratives of the national past. "In the dignity of Cuba's men," the group announced, "lies the triumph of Cuban Revolution." Tracing a narrative from the recent suicide of political leader Eduardo Chibás and the martyrs of the anti-Machado uprising, the proclamation proclaimed its writers the carriers of "the Revolution of Céspedes, Agramonte, Maceo and Martí, [Julio] Mella, [Antonio] Guiteras, [Rafael] Trejo and [Eduardo] Chibás, the true revolution that has not yet ended." The year 1953 marked a hundred years since the birth of José Martí, a milestone which, according to the declaration, signaled "the culmination of a historical cycle marked by progression and regression...: the bloody and vigorous struggle for liberty and independence..., the sorry process of foreign intervention, the dictatorships, the unrelenting struggle of heroes and martyrs to make a better Cuba..." Signing the document as "*La Revolución Cubana*," the group vowed "to honor the unrealized dream of Martí with sacrifice."<sup>1</sup>

From the immediate aftermath of the Batista coup, Fidel Castro mobilized the memory of the independence wars to legitimate his insurrection against the Batista regime and crafted a narrative of national history that served as the ideological center of his revolutionary project. Until socialism emerged as the guiding ideology of the revolution in the early 1960s, Castro and his *Movimiento Revolucionario 26 de Julio* (26 of July

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<sup>1</sup> Raúl Gómez García, "The Cuban Revolution (July 23, 1953)" in Rolando E. Bonachea and Nelson P. Valdés, eds. *Revolutionary Struggle: 1947-1958. Volume I of the Selected Works of Fidel Castro* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1972), 155-157.

Revolutionary Movement, or MR-26-7) launched an insurrection against the Batista government with a revolutionary memory as its ideology. In the years between the Batista coup and the declaration of the socialist revolution on May Day, 1961, Cubans saw the emergence of a revolutionary uprising that challenged both the authority of the Batista government and the historical premises on which Cuban state and society had been built. The foundation of this challenge lay in the narrative of historical completion advanced by the Moncada attackers and elaborated in the insurgents' communications, one which located the source of the revolution's moral authority and political legitimacy in the memory of the nineteenth century struggle for national independence.

The meaning of the narrative could be found in its proposition of an unfinished independence, a Cuban nationhood envisioned and fought for by heroic patriots like José Martí, Antonio Maceo, Máximo Gómez, and others, but which had been frustrated by the 1898 intervention of the United States in the Cuban War of Independence. The Cuban republic, founded under and compromised by the United States was historically and therefore morally illegitimate. Its repeated failures, evidenced by the dictatorships of Gerardo Machado and Fulgencio Batista, served as evidence that the nation would remain under the burden of economic dependence and political instability until the independence movement of the nineteenth century was finally fulfilled.

History, Fidel Castro would famously claim, would offer absolution for his armed rebellion against the Batista government. But absolution was not what Castro sought. Within the nationalist framework advanced by the 26 of July Movement, if history could offer absolution, a narrative of the past could also offer judgment and guidance, could bestow political and cultural legitimacy, and confer greatness upon its carriers. The 26 of July

Movement used this revolutionary memory as the foundation of all phases of the opposition struggle. Fidel Castro and his allies in the movement presented themselves as a force to complete the unrealized revolutions of the past, thus breaking free of the historical cycle of corruption and dictatorships that the group invoked in its manifesto of July 23. The public communications of the movement and of Castro himself reveal an effort to link the fight against Batista to earlier struggles in Cuban history, particularly to the decades of war against Spanish colonial rule and the resistance to Gerardo Machado decades earlier.

The manifestos, published articles, and radio broadcasts issued by the 26 of July Movement and its leadership during its insurrection, as well as the conduct and strategy in the war itself reveal that the group mobilized under the banner of a revolutionary narrative of national history, with the memory of the national past serving as the ideology of a movement seeking to explain and legitimate its call for political change, economic reform, and armed action against the Batista regime. Further, the 26 of July converted the idea of “history” itself into an actor on the Cuban political stage. History, writ large, served as a timeless arbiter of legitimacy which, alongside the movement’s revolutionary historical narrative, formed the basis for its revolutionary project.

Lillian Guerra has argued that the revolutionary state later instrumentalized a symbolic and narrative discourse to convert “fidelismo” and the revolution itself into a “moral paradigm” to mobilize support for a radicalizing government and to discredit rival reformers.<sup>2</sup> The discourse of the insurrectionary period of the 1950s reveals that the construction of what Guerra calls a “cultural religion” around the revolution began long before the Castro government accelerated its program of social and economic reform in 1960,

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<sup>2</sup> Lillian Guerra, “‘To condemn the Revolution is to condemn Christ’: Radicalization, Moral Redemption, and the Sacrifice of Cuban Civil Society, 1960,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 89:1 (2009): 74.

and had its origins not in the need to galvanize support for the government but in mobilizing the population behind the premise of armed revolution.

Over the course of the insurrection, the 26 of July Movement invoked the symbolic power of independence heroes like José Martí and Antonio Maceo to assert the illegitimacy of both the Batista regime and competing opposition groups. Moreover, the connection of the anti-Batista struggle with the icons of the national past allowed the revolutionaries to historicize their own actions, simultaneously constructing and enacting a historical narrative that had as its necessary conclusion the triumph of the revolution as the fulfillment of Cuban independence.

Castro was not, of course, the originator of this oppositional narrative of Cuban history. Even as Fidel Castro positioned himself as the carrier of a Cuban revolutionary legacy dating to the nineteenth century, he was equally the inheritor of a discursive and ideological lineage of Cuban oppositional activists who had destabilized, revised, and remade the national past in their efforts to challenge the republican status quo. In a compelling parallel, while Castro declared that his movement was the culmination of a historical process initiated with the birth of José Martí, his revolutionary movement was similarly the culmination of the decades-long development and dissemination of new nationalist histories that challenged the very foundations of the Cuban republic.

Although intellectually indebted to the revisionist historiography of Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, Juan Marinello, and others, the vision of the national past advanced by the 26 of July Movement forged their oppositional narrative into a revolutionary ideology. The national story that Castro told conveyed both a sharp criticism of republic society, politics,

and neocolonial dependence and a teleological narrative that endorsed armed struggle and dramatic, revolutionary change.

Only once in power would the 26 of July Movement address the issue of racism and discrimination that continued to motivate black and mulatto activists and leaders of the Communist Party. Castro was himself unaffiliated with the Communists, who opposed his proposition of armed revolution until the moment its victory became clear. The vision of national history that the 26 of July Movement advanced would incorporate the narrative of betrayal advanced by both the ABC and the Communists in the 1930s, while drawing on the sophisticated historical critiques formulated by scholars like Emilio Roig. However, the 26 of July Movement would also mobilize the unifying power of national history against the Batista regime, using a narrative that emphasized a shared past that had been betrayed by the dictatorship. Perhaps because of this emphasis on social cohesion against the government, the enduring questions of racism and equality did not figure heavily in the historical ideology of the revolutionary movement.

### **“To Be Cuban Implies a Duty”: The Case for Insurrection**

Batista’s ouster of a democratically elected but corrupt and unpopular government on March 10, 1952 was little mourned by much of the Cuban population.<sup>3</sup> Opposition parties were in disarray, unable to mount a coherent response to the coup. Still, criticism of Batista’s unlawful seizure of power was swift, and the most virulent came, as in the 1920s, from a young generation of Cubans that came of age in the aftermath of the 1933 uprising and had placed great hope in the new republic inaugurated with the Constitution of 1940.

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<sup>3</sup> Louis A Pérez, Jr. *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 289. See also: Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course and Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 52.

Quickly entering the fold of the unsteady anti-Batista opposition was Fidel Castro, then a young lawyer who had been organizing a campaign for congress from the *Ortodoxo* party, immediately entered the fold of the slowly emerging opposition.<sup>4</sup>

Writing a mere three days after the coup, Castro condemned the overthrow of the Prío government and called the Cuban people to stand against Batista. To delegitimize and attack the regime was a priority for the opposition throughout the six years of anti-Batista struggle. In his article, “Revolución no, zarpazo!” (Revolution, No – A Clean Sweep) Castro laid the early groundwork for a revolutionary memory through which he would attack the legitimacy of the government. In this first published attack on the Batista regime, Castro began to assemble the scaffolding of a revolutionary historical narrative. At this stage, Castro interpreted Batista’s seizure of power as a repetition of Machado’s dictatorial rule. “[O]nce again,” Castro warned, “the military boots.... Once again the tanks roaring threateningly in our streets; once again brute force ruling over human reason... This has been done by others before, but it did not change the spirit of the people.”<sup>5</sup> The reversion to state violence and dictatorship, he argued, should prompt the return to another national tradition: resistance and rebellion. “Cubans,” he began, “[o]nce again there is a tyrant, but once again we shall have Mella, Trejos and Guiteras.” Integrating the memory of the anti-Machado struggle twenty years earlier with the historic and symbolic sources of national identity, Castro invoked the Hymn of Bayamo, declaring, “I invite courageous Cubans to sacrifice and fight back... ‘to

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<sup>4</sup> *Partido del Pueblo Cubano (Ortodoxo)*, [Cuban People’s Party (Orthodox)], a political movement which had splintered from another political party, the *Partido Revolucionario Cubano (Auténtico)* [Cuban Revolutionary Party (Authentic)] over issues of corruption. The Auténticos held the presidency from 1944 until the Batista coup in 1952.

<sup>5</sup> Castro, “¡Revolución no, zarpazo!” in *Revolutionary Struggle*, 147.



live in chains is to live sunk in shame and dishonor. To die for the fatherland is to live!’”<sup>6</sup>

Deploying both the 1933 revolution and the anti-colonial struggle enabled Castro both to attack the political and cultural legitimacy of Batista’s rule and to argue that their national history demanded armed resistance.

In February 1953, Fidel Castro accused the *batistiano* police force of destroying the studio of a prominent sculptor. In an article published in the widely read magazine *Bohemia*, Castro focused on the nationalist sanctity of the sculptures themselves. “Dozens of statues of Martí rolled, destroyed by kicks,” he wrote, suggesting that Batista’s police had blasphemed against the sacred national icon. “The remainder were put in a trash truck and thrown in a corner of the police station.” If destroying images of a sanctified symbol was not enough of an outrage, Castro pointed out that the assault took place “two days after Martí’s [one hundredth] birthday,” thus violating the sanctity of both a nationalist icon and his holy day.<sup>7</sup> In an article steeped in the language of Cuban civil religion, Castro depicted the nation itself as martyr. The raid of the studio, he claimed, was punishment for the sculptor’s inscribing his statues with a quotation “pronounced by [Martí] on an occasion similar to today, ‘To Cuba, which suffers...’” If Batista were so threatened by Fidalgo’s work, Castro concluded, then “the entire work of Martí is going to have to be suppressed... because all of it... is a perennial accusation to the men who govern against the sovereign will of the people of Cuba.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 149. Alongside Mella, Rafael Trejo and Antonio Guiteras were leaders of youth opposition groups that fought against the Machado dictatorship. The final lines of the quotation (“to live in chains... to die for the fatherland”) are the concluding lines of the Cuban national anthem, also known as the Hymn of Bayamo, which was composed in 1868.

<sup>7</sup> Fidel Castro, “The Studio of Sculptor Fidalgo Has Been Destroyed (February 8, 1953)” in *Revolutionary Struggle*, p. 154.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* 154-155.

Creating a rhetorical space between “the people of Cuba” and the Batista regime eventually prompted Fidel Castro to position the dictator as a not only politically illegitimate but outside of Cuban nationality. In his most famous political statement, “History Will Absolve Me,” Castro likened the brutal tactics used by *Batistiano* forces against the Moncada attackers to those deployed by the Spanish against nineteenth century Cubans. Castro depicted government actions as a repetition of the tactics employed by the Spanish to suppress the Cuban revolt in the nineteenth century: “To kill defenseless prisoners and afterward say that they were killed in combat, this is all of the military capacity” of Batista’s generals. “This is how the Valeriano Weyler’s worst thugs acted in the cruelest years of our War of Independence.”<sup>9</sup> Those generals, he continued, “would not have been fit to drive the mules that carried the clothes for the Army of Antonio Maceo.”<sup>10</sup> The link between the Batista regime and Cuba’s former Spanish rulers persisted through the insurrection, enabling the 26 of July movement to convert Batista into an enemy of Cuban nationhood while simultaneously positioning his own army as heir to the nineteenth century *mambises*.

To call a nation to arms required more than the depicting the illegitimacy of the government. Armed insurrection demanded a more powerful justification, and 26 of July mobilized memory as the legitimizing force for armed rebellion. History served as both precedent and mandate for revolution. In *History Will Absolve Me*, Fidel Castro argued that the right of a citizen to rebel against a despot was universal, but located it within the Cuban national narrative. He declared:

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<sup>9</sup> Fidel Castro, *La historia me absolverá* (Havana: Sección de Impresión, 1960), 43. Valeriano Weyler was the Spanish Governor of Cuba during the War of Independence and architect of the “reconcentration” program, wherein Cuban peasants were forcibly removed from their villages and reconcentrated into camps to deprive rebels of their assistance.

<sup>10</sup> Castro, *La historia me absolverá*, 42.

But there is one more right on our side more powerful than all others: We are Cubans, and to be Cuban implies a duty... we are proud of our country's history... We are taught early to venerate the glorious example of our heroes and martyrs; Céspedes, Agramonte, Maceo, Gómez and Martí were the first names engraved in our minds... We were taught that October 10 and February 24 are glorious dates... because they mark the days in which Cubans rebelled against the yoke of a vile tyranny... We learned all this and we will not forget it, although today in our country men are being jailed and assassinated for practicing the ideas that they were taught from the cradle.<sup>11</sup>

Cuba's past not only justified insurrection, but demanded it.

Still, there remained no consensus in Cuba of the necessity of armed revolt. The need to establish the illegitimacy of peaceful opposition became a central part of the case for insurrection. Before and after the Moncada assault of 1953, a substantial portion of the anti-Batista opposition advocated non-violent opposition to the government, culminating in 1955 with talks between Batista and oppositionists that became known as the "Civic Dialogue." Through these meetings moderate anti-Batista groups sought to negotiate a political end to the dictatorship through new elections. History served as a powerful weapon for the MR-26-7 in condemning the Civic Dialogue and portraying revolution as the only legitimate course of action.

In July 1955, only months after being released from prison by a general amnesty, Fidel Castro left Cuba to organize the revolution from abroad. In a letter announcing his departure, he declared that "the hour has come to take rights and not to beg for them, to fight instead of pleading for them."<sup>12</sup> The use of this language was a clear allusion to a well-known statement by Antonio Maceo justifying rebellion against Spanish rule and criticizing those who opposed armed struggle to achieve independence. Writing in *Bohemia* in July

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<sup>11</sup> Castro, *La historia me absolverá*, 58-59.

<sup>12</sup> Fidel Castro, "Letter to Prominent Political Leaders (July 7, 1955)" in *Revolutionary Struggle*, 257.

1955, Castro claimed that “all the doors [had been] closed to the people for peaceful struggle, there is no solution except that of [18]68 and [18]95,” the years that marked the beginnings of Cuba’s two major independence wars.<sup>13</sup>

As other political parties entered into negotiations with the Batista government, Castro accused them of betraying the nation’s past. “The dates of “October 10 and February 24 are fervently celebrated,” he wrote. “These were not dates of submission or of resigned and cowardly acceptance of the existing despotism...”<sup>14</sup> Having previously linked Batista with the Spanish colonial government, the 26 of July Movement compared the non-revolutionary opposition with those Cubans who collaborated with the Spanish:

The peace Batista wants is the peace Spain wanted. The peace we want is the peace Martí wanted. To speak of peace under tyranny is to insult the memory of all those who have died for the freedom... of Cuba. Then as well there were reformists and autonomists who fought with cowardly rage the honorable attitude of our liberators and accepted as a solution the electoral scraps offered by the masters of that era.<sup>15</sup>

The new year of 1956 brought more pointed attacks: “The names of those who hinder the task of liberating their country must one day be written in the same place of dishonor and shame as the names of those who oppress it.” The 26 of July, by contrast, “understood clearly that the rights of the people would not be returned to them unless they conquered them with their own blood.”<sup>16</sup> The statement alludes to the dictum associated with Antonio Maceo that “freedom is not to be begged for, but to be conquered with the edge of the

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<sup>13</sup> Fidel Castro, “Against the Return of Carlos Prío from Exile (July 10, 1955)” in *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>14</sup> Fidel Castro, “Manifiesto No. 1 del 26 de Julio al pueblo de Cuba” *Pensamiento Crítico* 21 (1968), 216. The Manifesto was signed by Fidel Castro on August 8, 1955.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Fidel Castro, “El Movimiento 26 de Julio” *Bohemia*, April 1, 1956, 54.

machete.”<sup>17</sup> The language of that statement became a part of a revolutionary lexicon, defining the rejection of negotiations and the legitimacy of violence. Proponents of the Civic Dialogue had already rejected the use of force, leaving them, in Castro’s formulation, impotent against the dictatorship. Their demands for reform, he argued, would be similar to those made by José Antonio Saco to Spain, when he confessed beforehand that Cuba was unable to win them. Needless to say, the reforms were never granted.”<sup>18</sup> As efforts to negotiate with the Batista government foundered, the 26 of July became emboldened, viewing the apparent failure of the Civic Dialogue as a vindication of the armed struggle thesis and confirmation of its position at the vanguard of the anti-Batista struggle. It was with this attitude that Castro and his allies prepared to return to Cuba and inaugurate open warfare.

In an interview only months before setting sail for Cuba from his Mexican exile, Fidel Castro declared that those who fought were “a generation eager to fight and full of faith in the future of Cuba, aided by reason and history. We know that the Revolution cannot fail.”<sup>19</sup> The movement was indeed aided by history, at least as its writers and spokesmen mobilized it. The tactics of the guerrilla struggle formed a powerful symbolic connection between the 26 of July Movement and the Liberation Army of the nineteenth century, and the rebels lost no opportunity to discursively deepen their claims to be completing the unfinished struggle.

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<sup>17</sup> Antonio Maceo is the author of that quotation, although José Martí frequently used the same language.

<sup>18</sup> McCarthy, “Admite Fidel Castro cambio en su táctica,” *El Mundo*, August 7, 1956, A10. José Antonio Saco was a Cuban representative to the Spanish *Cortes* during the colonial period who argued for reforms within the colonial system and later for annexation of Cuba by the United States.

<sup>19</sup> McCarthy, “Admite Fidel Castro,” 1.

Having landed on the shores of eastern Cuba in December 1956, an act which itself recalled the landings of José Martí and Antonio Maceo in 1895, the 26 of July Movement sought to reestablish communication with the Cuban public. The chaotic, embattled landing of the yacht *Granma* and the dispersal of rebel forces that followed prompted rumors of Castro's demise and the quick defeat of the insurgents. By 1957, however, the 26 of July Movement had established itself, if somewhat unsteadily, in the mountains of Oriente province where, they reminded Cubans, the three uprisings for national independence had begun. The movement set up a radio station in the *Sierra Maestra* mountains to communicate with the surrounding population and give a platform for their revolutionary narrative. The station, called *Radio Rebelde* (Rebel Radio) was initially helmed by insurgent Captain Luis Orlando Rodríguez.<sup>20</sup> In the years 1957-1958, it became the rebels' primary means of communication with the public. The radio broadcasts reported almost daily rebel victories and coupled this with the invocation of past struggles to present the guerrilla campaign as destined for victory.

With limited forces and supplies, the rebels worked to obscure practical disadvantages by mobilizing the galvanizing power of national memory and, both tactically and discursively, joining their struggle with that of the nascent Liberation Army. *Radio Rebelde* broadcasts reminded the listener that they fought in the same terrain as the *mambises*, reporting that "in the last 72 hours, our columns have entered combat in the farthest points of Oriente province. The indomitable region is already an outburst of

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<sup>20</sup> Ricardo Martínez Viqueles, *7RR: La historia de Radio Rebelde* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1978), 144.

freedom. The map of Oriente now has no secrets for the rebels.”<sup>21</sup> In an early manifesto from the Sierra Maestra, the movement declared: “the people of Cuba...must have faith in victory, that faith that our men fighting in the most adverse circumstances have acquired that faith that the standard-bearers of just causes have always had, because what is important, as the Apostle said, is not the number of weapons in hand but the number of stars on one’s forehead.”<sup>22</sup> The words of José Martí served as evidence that obstacles would be overcome by the power of ideas, just as they had been in the past.

On *Radio Rebelde*, Numerical and technological disadvantages became evidence of historic destiny. As one broadcast explained:

the chroniclers of the War of Independence have arrived at the following conclusion: the reason for the continual triumphs of an army far inferior in number and arms was based on the great mobility of the patriotic army, its perfect knowledge of the terrain and the great system of espionage based in the total identification of the people with the Cuban cause. These fundamental reasons are also those that allow us to successfully fight against an enemy...in the Sierra Maestra... Against an insurgent people, there is no army that can win a war. That is the reason for our triumph up until today, that is the reason for our final victory, already near.<sup>23</sup>

By ascribing to its own war the characteristics of a past struggle, 26 of July Movement affirmed both that the present war would complete the “unfinished revolution” and that its triumph was inevitable. The connections were often even more direct: “those of us who took the path of armed struggle, we did what all patriots and citizens had to do; that which

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<sup>21</sup> “Combate de Estrada Palma” *Broadcast Transcripts of Radio Rebelde*, 26 July 1957 (Hereafter abbreviated as BTRR). Where a radio address was given a specific title, that title is included.

<sup>22</sup> Fidel Castro and Faustino Pérez, “Manifiesto del Movimiento Revolucionario ‘26 de Julio’ al Pueblo de Cuba.” *El Cubano Libre*, n.d. [ca. March 1958], 3. Article in BTRR.

<sup>23</sup> *Radio Rebelde*, 9 April 1958, BTRR.

the liberators did in [18]68 and [18]98... Everyone knew that the Revolution was the response of Cuba to and dictatorship.<sup>24</sup>

## **Making History**

When Fidel Castro sought the absolution of history in his most famous political statement, he signaled that not only would the 26 of July Movement connect itself with earlier national struggles, but it would mobilize the symbolic power of “history” as a timeless arbiter of legitimacy. By declaring “history will absolve me,” Castro suggested that the actions of July 26, 1953 would one day join a line of legitimate rebellions in Cuba. Even as the past offered a moral framework for national redemption, he discursively projected the past into the present and the future; current events were presented as future history. The revolutionary forces wrote themselves into the nation’s history, formulating a teleology in which the 26 of July Movement would bring the national narrative to its inevitable conclusion. As the revolutionary effort progressed, the 26 of July Movement used its public statements to write the history of its struggle, to commemorate its own actions as it would events of the wars of independence, thus converting itself into a force that would both make history and end it.

On May 15, 1956, *Aldabonazo*, a clandestine newspaper of the 26 of July Revolutionary Movement, published its first issue. In the opening article, titled “Revolution: the Only Way Out,” underground activist Armando Hart declared, “Cuba must find itself both by looking to the history of the *mambises* and patriots and by looking to our generation,

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<sup>24</sup> Fidel Castro, “Alocución del Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro,” *Radio Rebelde*, 25 October 1958, BTRR.



with the living example of a legion of contemporary martyrs.”<sup>25</sup> Perhaps better than any other, this statement represents the centrality of the past and the historicization of the present in the 26 of July Movement.

That Fidel Castro and his followers named their organization for the date of the Moncada assault pointed to an attempt to place the events of the present fight as moments of historic significance. The first manifesto declaring the formation of the *Movimiento Revolucionario 26 de Julio* explained, “October 10 and February 24 are fervently celebrated... The 26 of July Movement will send its revolutionary message to the farthest corner of Cuba,” suggesting that these three dates would ultimately be of equal significance in the national imagination.<sup>26</sup>

*History Will Absolve Me* revealed an earlier effort to elevate the July 26 actions to the level of the independence wars or anti-Machado movement. When recounting the actions of Abel Santamaría, one of the insurgents at Moncada, Castro declared that “his glorious resistance will immortalize him in the history of Cuba.”<sup>27</sup> Later in the pamphlet, he said of those killed and buried in the aftermath of the assault, “someday, they will be dug up and carried on the shoulders of the people to a monument which the free nation will have erected next to Martí’s tomb to the “Martyrs of the Centennial.”<sup>28</sup> This “future history” narrative immediately converted Castro and his movement into agents of history itself, an unstoppable

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<sup>25</sup> Armando Hart, “Revolución: única salida” *Aldabonazo*, 15 May 1956, in Armando Hart, *Aldabonazo: Inside the Cuban Revolutionary Underground*, ed. Mary-Alice Waters, trans. Olimpia Sigarroat (New York: Pathfinder Press, 2004), 133.

<sup>26</sup> Castro, “Manifiesto No. 1” *Pensamiento Crítico* 21 (1968), 216.

<sup>27</sup> Castro, *La historia me absolverá*, 16.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 38

and predestined force. Moreover, the imagined “Martyrs of the Centennial” memorial resolved the Cuban national narrative by bringing its end back to its beginning.

Throughout the struggle, the 26 of July Movement commemorated its own fallen combatants by writing them into the nation’s story. When rebel combatant Angel Ameijeiras was killed in November 1958, the insurgents broadcasted an poignant eulogy that emphasized Ameijeiras’s position in national memory. Ameijeiras was the third brother from his family to be killed fighting against Batista, and *Radio Rebelde* cast the family as heirs to a glorious tradition: “Five brothers. Three dead... The lineage of the Ameijeiras is a moving example of heroism that recalls the Maceo family,” which gave all of its men to the independence struggle. “The brave never die in the memory of the people,” the broadcast continued, “for they are the ones that lead our men... It is not without reason that [our] columns carry the names of fallen heroes.”<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, the elevation of anti-Batista figures into the national pantheon was revealed by the names given to the columns of the rebel army. As the war progressed and the guerrilla forces swelled, the MR-26-7 leadership adorned the different columns and battle fronts with the names of historic figures. These honorary names fused the martyrs of the anti-Batista struggle with icons of national independence. Among these were Column 1 “José Martí,” Column No. 2 “Antonio Maceo,” Column No. 8 “Ciro Redondo,” named for one of the original participants in the Moncada assault and the *Granma* expedition, and led by Ernesto “Che” Guevara; Column 17 “Abel Santamaría,” named for a leader of the Moncada assault who was tortured and killed in prison after the attack. In March 1958, another guerrilla front was opened, named “Segunda Frente ‘Frank País,’” commemorating the recently killed

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<sup>29</sup> *Radio Rebelde*, 9 November 1958, 5-6, BTRR.

leader of the urban underground in Santiago. The mix of anti-Batista fighters with established national icons signified the creation of a new heroic pantheon that reinforced the fusion between present and past.<sup>30</sup>

Writing the present struggle into the nation's history required elevating individuals and actions to a position of nationalist reverence, as when *Radio Rebelde* commemorated the first anniversary of the May 1957 Battle of Uvero, describing it as "one of the most glorious episodes of this revolutionary epic."<sup>31</sup> Direct historical parallels also helped the 26 of July achieve its goal of positioning the present struggle as part of a developing national story. In December 1957, the rebel newspaper *El Cubano Libre* marked the first full year of combat in the Sierra Maestra by giving a historical narrative of the war. The commemoration elevated the guerrilla conflict to the level of national history and raised its leader to the heights of national hero: "Rarely can it be justifiably said that a man was the creator of a revolution. Martí said that those who walk in front have an obligation to see farther ahead. Fidel walked at the front of a tiny guerrilla force and saw where nobody dared see. He saw triumph in those days of defeat."<sup>32</sup>

As that triumph appeared to draw closer, comparisons between rebel leaders and their apparent predecessors became more common. One broadcast on *Radio Rebelde* celebrated the military accomplishments of insurgent leaders Ernesto "Che" Guevara and Camilo

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<sup>30</sup> Ciro Redondo was an MR-26-7 combatant who died in battle in 1957; Simón Bolívar, known as "The Liberator" is venerated throughout Latin America for leading the struggle in South America that led to the independence of a broad swath of the region in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Abel Santamaría took part in the Moncada assault and was executed by the regime after being taken prisoner.

<sup>31</sup> "Uvero," *Radio Rebelde* (May 28, 1958). BTRR

<sup>32</sup> "Un año de combate" *El Cubano Libre*, n.d. [ca. January 1958], 2. BTRR.

Cienfuegos, proclaiming that “the strategy developed by [those] *comandantes*... recalls the grand feats of Antonio Maceo and Máximo Gómez...in [their] singular epic.”<sup>33</sup>

### Writing Pages of History

In May 1958, *Radio Rebelde* proclaimed that “every rebel knows” that even if he dies, “there will be a victory. There will be an eternal example for coming generations; it will revive in our *patria* the great epics of history and the glorious traditions of our *mambises*.”<sup>34</sup> *Radio Rebelde* repeated this mantra in several different broadcasts. Broadcasts referred often to the time “when the real history of this fight is written,” signaling an attempt to do just that. The broadcasts of its radio station gave the 26 of July the opportunity to report events on their own terms and thus, significantly, to write their own history. In addition to joining the actions and heroes of the guerrilla struggle with those of the traditional national narrative, the 26 of July Movement used the very idea of History to imbue its actions with the same legitimating power that Castro had invoked in his own trial years earlier.

One *Radio Rebelde* broadcast anticipated the success of a military operation and reported that the station would soon read “a detailed account of an extraordinary military achievement... to give the people an opportunity of knowing about one of the most thrilling episodes of the contemporary history of our country.”<sup>35</sup> MR-26-7 made “writing history” a literal and figurative component of their public communications during the war. The military

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<sup>33</sup> *Radio Rebelde*, 25 December 1958, BTRR.

<sup>34</sup> *Radio Rebelde* 12 May 1958, BTRR.

<sup>35</sup> “They Are Losing the War (July 21, 1958)” in *Revolutionary Struggle*, 393.

successes of the guerrilla army were depicted as “writing history” over and over again, particularly in the final year of the conflict. As early as 1957, Frank País wrote that the in Moncada assault, “the revolutionary youth of Cuba wrote a beautiful page of courage and idealism.”<sup>36</sup> This language became something of a refrain. *Radio Rebelde* announced that “we can do less than feel proud of the faith and heroism with which our men are writing one of the most beautiful pages of the History of Cuba.”<sup>37</sup> A report on the rebel offensive in August 1958 exalted those who died in battle, “each of whom wrote pages of heroism that history will not forget.”<sup>38</sup> Fidel Castro took the microphone on *Radio Rebelde* later that month, declaring that “our army and militias have already begun to write glorious pages for history.”<sup>39</sup> The discursive historicization of the anti-Batista struggle complemented the use of the national past in the public statements of the 26 of July Movement, enabling the group to present itself as a force that was mandated by history and was itself a force of History.

### **Winning the Past**

The strategies of the 26 of July Movement reveal that Castro’s historical ideology was defined by a belief that the independence struggle would need to be reenacted to be resolved. Thus, the past provided more than legitimacy for the 26 of July. It also provided a blueprint for a successful anti-government struggle. The determination to fight the Batista regime in the mountains of Oriente, as opposed to in Havana as other groups advocated, was in part an attempt by the 26 of July to reenact the wars of independence, to begin the new

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<sup>36</sup> Frank País, “La valerosa acción de Santiago de Cuba” in *Aldabonazo*, 213.

<sup>37</sup> *Radio Rebelde*, 25 June 1958, BTRR.

<sup>38</sup> *Radio Rebelde*, 18 August 1958, BTRR.

<sup>39</sup> “Declaraciones de Fidel Castro,” *Radio Rebelde*, n.d. [ca. August 1958], BTRR.

revolution where “one can still breathe the air of that glorious epic.”<sup>40</sup> In a speech to the rebels just before the Moncada attack, Castro declared that “as in 1868 and 1895, here in Oriente we make our first cry of ‘Liberty or Death!’”<sup>41</sup> From his travels in the United States to raise money from Cuban émigrés to his landing on the shores of eastern Cuba, Castro called attention to his efforts to reenact the path of José Martí and to recreate the conditions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century anti-colonial rebellion.

As the rebels gained momentum in 1958, however, Castro’s rhetorical focus shifted to breaking free from Cuba’s historical cycle, using memory of the independence movement to bring the nation’s story to its conclusion. This meant that the rebels would take on the discursive and strategic character of the Liberation Army, carrying out its actions while averting the errors and betrayals that had doomed Cuban independence six decades earlier. In October, radio broadcasts accused Batista of “trying to produce a grave incident between the rebels and the United States...to precipitate the intervention of the United States in the Cuban civil war” in order forestall the regime’s defeat:

The dictatorship must be very interested in provoking in Cuba a conflict of international order, because it believes that with a foreign intervention like that in the War of 1895, the traitors and assassins will save their heads and their ill-gotten riches, but the Revolution, which is ready to defend the sovereignty of the country at all costs, has no interest in giving pretext those who conspire against the freedom and sovereignty of our people.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Castro, *La historia me absolverá*, 23.

<sup>41</sup> Fidel Castro, “This Movement Will Triumph (July 26, 1953)” in *Revolutionary Struggle*, 159.

<sup>42</sup> *Radio Rebelde*, 25 October 1958; “Frustra el Ejército Rebelde el plan intervencionista de la dictadura” *Radio Rebelde*, 28 October 1958, BTRR.

The 26 of July thus suggested that as much as their army was reenacting the unfinished struggle for independence, its enemies would also deploy tactics from that era as a means of forestalling the rebel's victory.

The rebels mobilized that historical narrative to undercut Batista's governing legitimacy and to affirm that their movement would not fall victims to the interventions and betrayals that had forestalled the true victory of the independence movement. The resonance of this narrative was predicated on the premise of both ritualistically repeating the nation's independence struggle and breaking free from the historical cycle to which it had doomed the Cuban republic. Indeed, the 26 of July's final push against Batista took its strategy from the War of Independence, in which Antonio Maceo led an "invading army" in 1896 to cut through Spanish lines and bring the war to the island's western provinces. In the summer of 1958, Fidel Castro ordered Camilo Cienfuegos to lead a rebel force across Cuba to the westernmost province of Pinar del Río. He would command Invading Column No. 2 "Antonio Maceo," replicating the most famous military feat of the column's namesake.<sup>43</sup> On the anniversary of Maceo's death, the guerrillas broadcast that "as an homage to the memory of Antonio Maceo, *Radio Rebelde* now offers a report of the heroic actions carried out by the Invading Column that carries his name and which, at the command of Comandante Camilo Cienfuegos, has accomplished the singular deed of invading the island for the second time."<sup>44</sup>

In the service of this effort, the 26 of July Movement presented itself as embodying the independence armies in order to complete their unfinished revolution. In the same broadcast marking the death of Antonio Maceo, *Radio Rebelde* declared, "we commemorate

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<sup>43</sup> Fidel Castro, "Orders to Camilo Cienfuegos (August 18, 1958)" in *Revolutionary Struggle*, 398.

<sup>44</sup> *Radio Rebelde*, 7 December 1958, BTRR.

the sacrifice of all of the martyrs fallen for the freedom of the *patria*. Immense is the legion of Cubans who have offered their lives in this bloody and beautiful revolution against the tyranny of Batista... The *mambises* of yesterday are joined with the *mambises* of today.”<sup>45</sup>

Weeks later, Batista fled the island. As news spread on the island of the dictator’s flight and an apparent military coup in Havana, the forces of the 26 of July Movement surrounded the city of Santiago de Cuba. In an address to the city’s citizens carried on *Radio Rebelde*, Fidel Castro flatly rejected overtures for a negotiated solution to the surging revolution. He announced that the new military rulers wanted to “keep the rebels from entering Santiago... They want to prohibit the entrance into Santiago to those who have liberated the *patria*. The history of 1895 will not be repeated!” he declared, recalling the Spanish surrender of Santiago to North American troops as Cuban insurgents were prevented from entering the city. “This time,” Castro insisted, “the *mambises* will enter Santiago de Cuba!”<sup>46</sup> With this powerful statement, Fidel Castro signaled an end to the cycle and the final completion of the Cuban Revolution, one which in the eyes of the 26 of July Movement had gone unfinished for nearly one hundred years.

In the six years of struggle against the Batista government, Fidel Castro and his revolutionary movement had looked to history for the foundation and structure of the revolutionary project. The national past served as validation for a call to armed rebellion and as a weapon to undercut the regime and political opponents. The 26 of July represented itself as a force of destiny, reenacting the struggles of the past to break free of the historical cycle it cited in the manifesto released just before the Moncada assault. In that statement, the group

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<sup>45</sup> *Radio Rebelde*, 7 December 1958, BTRR

<sup>46</sup> “Fragmentos de la alocución a Santiago de Cuba, leída por el Comandante en Jefe Fidel Castro, en ‘Radio Rebelde’ el día primero de Enero de 1959” in Martínez, ed. *7RR: La historia de Radio Rebelde*, 477.



that became the MR-26-7 vowed “to honor the unrealized dream of Martí with sacrifice.”<sup>47</sup>

Five and a half years later, Fidel Castro entered Santiago de Cuba and declared that promise fulfilled: “The Republic was not freed in [18]95 and the dream was frustrated at the last minute. The Revolution did not take place in [19]33 and was frustrated by its enemies... This time its triumph is assured.”<sup>48</sup>

### **The Revolutionary Past in Power**

“Se acabó,” announced Nicolás Guillén in the summer of 1960. “It’s over.” Writing in the newspaper *Noticias de Hoy*, the famed Cuban poet addressed a nation in the midst of dramatic social and economic change. “Martí promised it to you and Fidel achieved it,” Guillén continued, “ay, Cuba, ya se acabó.”<sup>49</sup> Guillén, who had long been a contributor to the Communist Party newspaper *Noticias de Hoy* and a supporter of the anti-Batista revolution, proclaimed the completion of a cycle that had begun with the independence wars and culminated in the victory of the 26 of July Movement on 1 January 1959. The narrative that Guillén crafted in his poem echoed the historical memory that had mobilized Fidel Castro and his forces, but signaled as well the conversion of that ideology of insurrection into governing logic that promised to unify Cubans behind the revolutionary project.

As Tiffany Thomas-Woodard has argued, “if revolution is a process, then the processes of constructing collective memory are as much a part of revolution as are battles

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<sup>47</sup> Gómez, “The Cuban Revolution” in *Revolutionary Struggle*, 155-157.

<sup>48</sup> Fidel Castro, “Fidel Castro Speaks to the Citizens of Santiago: 01/03/59” University of Texas Latin American Network Information Center, <http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/cb/cuba/castro.html>. Translation by LANIC.

<sup>49</sup> Nicolás Guillén, “Se acabó,” in Luis Iñigo Madrigal ed., *Summa poética*. (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 2000), 212-213. The poem originally appeared in *Hoy*, 9 August 1960.

won and lost.”<sup>50</sup> In its call to arms, the 26 of July Movement had presented its struggle as both a repetition and culmination of the independence movement. If the insurrection of the 1950s had recreated and completed the War of Independence, then the nation would have to be imagined anew. Thus, in 1959 as in 1902, Cubans were called upon to articulate the meanings and values of their nationality. The consolidation of power by the MR-26-7 required reimagining old memories and inventing new ones that would sustain and legitimate a new national and revolutionary project.

Guillén was not alone in rapidly embracing the claim that the new revolutionary government was completing the work of the founders. Although the Cuban Communists, now organized as the Popular Socialist Party (PSP) had declined to support the 26 of July Movement’s insurrection until the summer of 1958, Communist leaders and publications quickly threw their support behind the new regime and the vision of the nation’s past that it advanced. The Communist youth magazine *Mella* was among the most ardent supporters of the revolutionary national narrative. In the summer of 1959, the cover of *Mella* depicted Fidel Castro wielding a Machete against bayonets mounded by the various threats he had faced down, including Fulgencio Batista and Uncle Sam. Behind him, as if fighting on his behalf, were ghostly images of José Martí and Antonio Maceo, joined by the magazine’s namesake, Julio Antonio Mella (see figure 7 below).

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<sup>50</sup> Tiffany A. Thomas-Woodard, “‘Toward the Gates of Eternity’: Celia Sánchez Manduley and the Creation of Cuba’s New Woman.” *Cuban Studies* 34 (2003): 174.



Figure 7: Castro backed by Maceo, Martí, and Mella

That fall, the cover illustration again endorsed the revolutionary historical narrative, declaring the end of “90 Years of Struggle.” The image depicted an allegorical image of Cuba as a woman, her arms raised showing two halves of a broken chain. On one side, in front of an image of a nineteenth century *mambí*, the chain spells out “España,” and on the

other side, in front of a bearded 26 of July guerrilla, the broken chain is made up of dollar symbols:



Figure 8: Mella: 90 Years of Struggle

An illustration inside the magazine again depicted Cuba as a women, her arms held down by Uncle Sam on one side and the Spanish king on the other. In the accompanying article, prominent communist intellectual Juan Marinello identified freedom from U.S. imperialism



as the central goal of the new revolution, and argued that in their nineteenth and twentieth century struggles, Cuba had to fight against a more powerful nation that “would condemn her, sooner or later, to ominous servitude. This concept,” he continued, “that of a free and sovereign nation, joins the effort of 1868 with that of 1959.”<sup>51</sup>

*Noticias de Hoy*, which would later be merged with the official 26 of July newspaper *Revolución*, offered a similar iconic representation of the historical fusion narrative. The PSP newspaper imagined that Carlos Manuel de Céspedes could not have imagined “that it would take ninety one years for the yearning for Cuba to be free of foreign oppression to be realized.” Alongside this celebration of the culmination of the independence struggle, the newspaper’s editors placed an image of a bearded *mambí* beside a bearded 26 of July *guerrilla*, the two differentiated only by the styling of their beards and the type of hat each wore (See figure 9 below).<sup>52</sup>

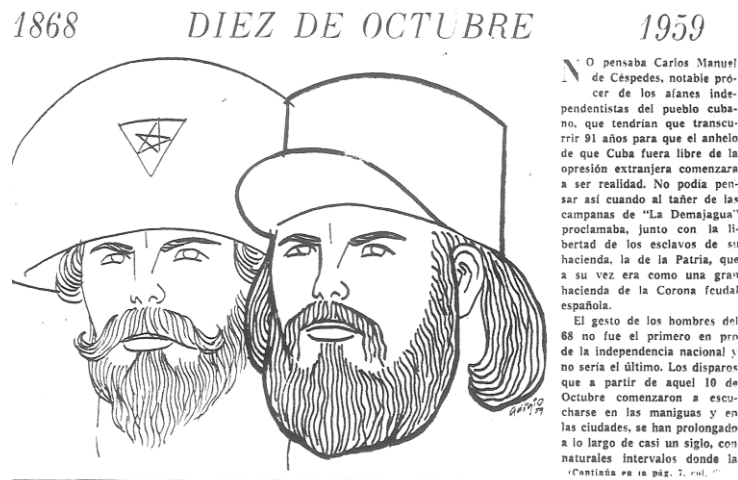


Figure 9: October 10 1868-1959

<sup>51</sup> Juan Marinello, “1868-1959,” *Mella*, October 1959, 13.

<sup>52</sup> “Diez de Octubre,” *Noticias de Hoy*, 10 October 1959, 1.

Of course, the 26 of July Movement, which had advanced that narrative as its *raison d'être*, would not leave its political rivals to remake national memory in the wake of the revolution's triumph. Historian Louis A Pérez has argued that "[i]n a very real sense, the triumph of the Revolution signaled the immediate ascendancy of the revisionist view of the past."<sup>53</sup> The revolutionary movement itself thus became in part a revolution of national memory, wherein the revisionist narrative of the Cuban past took power along with the revolutionary government. The ascendant revolutionary government set out to install its historical teleology as the official narrative of a new Cuba, deploying the memory that its leaders crafted during the insurgency to support the consolidation of their revolutionary project.

The consolidation of the revolutionary government rested on the circulation of a narrative that affirmed its legitimacy. Drawing from the revisionist historiography that grew out of the post-Machado republic, the revolutionary government and its supporters in the press looked to fuse 1959 with 1868, simultaneously assigning the revolution as both an end and a beginning, the conclusion of a fight for true independence that could now begin the work of installing the nation envisioned ninety years prior. In the months and years that followed their triumphant entry into Havana, memory and iconography served to support the particular projects of the revolution and to mobilize the population behind the priorities of the movement. As during the campaign against the Batista regime, the invocation of figures like Antonio Maceo affirmed the revolutionary government's claim to be carrying out a frustrated nationalist project. In the winter of 1959, nearly a year after the rebels seized power, revolutionary commander Raúl Castro addressed a gathering at the *Cámara de*

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<sup>53</sup> Louis A. Pérez, Jr. "In the Service of the Revolution: Two Decades of Cuban Historiography, 1959-1979," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 60 (1980): 82.

*Representantes* in Havana. He echoed revisionist historians like Emilio Roig in maligning the image of Maceo that had dominated the early republic as “useless for the current political process,” declaring that: In the days of the triumph [of the Revolution], we focused our attention above all on Maceo as a political leader. We cannot limit ourselves to that written by his machete in the field of battle, but rather we must look for what came from his pen which... accurately expresses his revolutionary thought.”<sup>54</sup> Castro argued that the Revolution had completed Maceo’s work, calling out, “General Antonio, the followers of your work, which remained unfinished for a half a century, have come back to retrieve the flag of ‘95!”<sup>55</sup>

During the insurgency, the 26 of July Movement had devoted little attention in its public statements to issues of racial inequality and discrimination. Once in power, however, Castro and other leaders faced questions from black and mulatto activists about how the revolutionary government would address their concerns. As Devyn Benson has argued, Castro readily deployed the figure of Antonio Maceo to indicate that the revolution would honor the contributions of Cubans of color as it enacted the vision of the nation’s founders. “Here, everyone feels pride in the history of Cuba,” he offered in a roundtable discussion in 1959. “Everyone is honored that Maceo is considered one of the greatest generals of all time. And Maceo was black.”<sup>56</sup>

Still, the revolutionary government was more focused on economic than racial equality, and its leaders often argued that addressing the former could resolve the latter. For the revolutionary government, Antonio Maceo was an especially potent representation of the

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<sup>54</sup> Raúl Castro, quoted in “Discurso del presidente en el Cacahual,” *Revolución*, 9 December 1959, 2, 4, 10.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>56</sup> “El espíritu renovador va a supercar al tradicionalista,” *Revolución*, March 26, 1959, 1. See also Devyn Spence Benson, “Not Blacks, but Citizens! Racial Politics in Revolutionary Cuba, 1958-1961” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009), 31.

popular classes, rather than of his racial category. In 1959, Raúl Castro proclaimed that “Maceo lives in the Revolutionary Laws... Especially worth of the memory of the simple peasant who became the leader of Cuba in arms... is the Law of Agrarian Reform.”<sup>57</sup> Maceo as a representation of the national peasantry became a powerful rhetorical tool during the push for Agrarian Reform in 1960, and the government cultivated a connection between the seizure of foreign landholdings with the insurrection against Spain. The government enlisted Raúl Corrales to be the head of photography at the National Institute for Agrarian Reform (INRA). In his photograph, “Cavalry,” published in the magazine created by INRA, Corrales depicted the ‘arrival of guerrillas on the former lands of the United Fruit Company.’<sup>58</sup> The photograph shows men on horseback, carrying Cuban flags, symbolically reconquering territory from a U.S. corporation, clearly evoking *mambí* imagery and reveals the fusion of economic nationalism with the recovery of national history.

The consolidation of the revolutionary history demanded the establishment of a new nationalist iconography joined with the demolition of the symbols of the former past. The reconquering of Cuba from U.S. imperialism served as a proxy for the defeat of Spain in the fusion of the independence and revolutionary narratives. In an effort that recalled the replacement of Spanish royal monuments around the island at the end of the nineteenth century, the vestiges of the republic were converted into new revolutionary symbols.

In February 1961, Cubans marked the anniversary of the explosion of the U.S.S. *Maine*, the U.S. ship that exploded in Havana harbor in 1898, providing a partial pretext for the North American intervention in Cuba that spring. During the republic, veterans of the

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<sup>57</sup>“Discurso del presidente en el Cacahual,” *Revolución*, 8 December 1959, 2.

<sup>58</sup> Iliana Cepero Amador, “Myths and Realities: Cuban Photography of the 1960s and 1970s,” in Timothy Bernard, Nathalie Bondil, ed. *Cuba: Art and History from 1868 to Today* (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2008), 233.



Spanish-American war or their descendants might gather around the memorial to the *Maine*'s sailors. In 1961, after months of acrimony and increasing confrontation between the Cuban and U.S. governments, the revolutionary regime replaced the old plaque honoring the sacrifices of North Americans in helping Cuba gain independence from Spain. The plaque now read, "to the victims of the Maine, who were sacrificed to imperialist greed in its fervor to seize control of the island of Cuba." Two months later at Playa Girón, the regime battled an invading force of Cuban émigrés sponsored by the United States. After the defeat and capture of the attackers, a wrecking crew toppled the stone eagle that stood atop the column on the monument, marking the symbolic end of U.S. power on the island.<sup>59</sup>

The new government deepened its connection to the national past as it forged an increasingly revolutionary path. Isolation from the country's traditional, if maligned sponsor in the United States required, as Castro explained in his speech on May Day of 1961, a "new concept of the motherland" to lend support to the revolution's efforts. In the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs invasion and the revolutionary government's growing economic ties to the Soviet Union, Castro proclaimed in 1961 that the revolutionary regime would move forward with a new constitution that would set the nation on a path to socialism. Emphasizing the government's commitment to economic equality, Castro declared that the new Cuba would be "a motherland which will be, now and forever--as Marti wanted it--for the well-being of everyone and not a motherland for the few!"<sup>60</sup>

The declaration of socialism provided the revolution with a new governing logic, but also deepened the need to provide continuity in a moment of dramatic social, political, and

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<sup>59</sup> See: Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

<sup>60</sup> Fidel Castro, "Castro Proclaims Socialist Cuba," *LANIC Castro Speech Database* (<http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1961/19610502.html>).

economic change. Speaking on the anniversary of Cuban independence, Castro proclaimed that the “present moment in the history of our country is nothing but the climax of the effort of our people for more than a century.” The revolution, he insisted, was the culmination of “more than a century of struggle for complete independence, incessant battle, struggle, falls, and incessant uprisings, reverses, and new efforts to achieve the goal; more than a century of sacrifice, pain, and tears to achieve what we are today, what we have today.” But Castro’s dramatic retelling of the nation’s fraught history was itself integral to the departure from that past. He gave his speech at a ceremony in Havana, in which he was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize by the Soviet Union. The stirring conclusion to his address signaled the enduring power of nation memory as the revolutionary government embarked upon and embraced its socialist national project. “Glory to Martí!” Castro declared. “Glory to Lenin! Glory to peoples who fight against exploitation! ¡Patria o muerte!”<sup>61</sup> This connection of Martí to Lenin may have been the first occasion on which Castro would publicly link the two; it would not be the last.

## Conclusions

As 1961 drew to a close, the magazine *Bohemia* reflected on the year’s events: the declaration of socialism, the growing number of Cubans leaving the island, and the many reforms initiated by the revolutionary regime. Its cover, however, seemed to subsume nearly a century’s worth of history into a single image. The magazine depicted a gigantic Antonio Maceo, machete drawn, his face contorted in a battle cry. He was carried inside the *Granma*, his body so large as to take up the entire space of the yacht. Underneath him were the

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<sup>61</sup> Fidel Castro, “Ceremony Honoring Him for Receiving the Lenin Prize: 05/20/1961,” LANIC Castro Speech Database (<http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1961/19610520.html>).

*guerrilla* soldiers of the 26 of July Movement, carrying the yacht and the nineteenth century hero on their backs as they made landfall in Cub (see figure 10 below). The implication was quite clear: upon returning to Cuban shores to begin the insurrection against Batista in December 1956, the Cuban revolutionaries had returned Maceo to Cuba with them to continue his fight.<sup>62</sup>

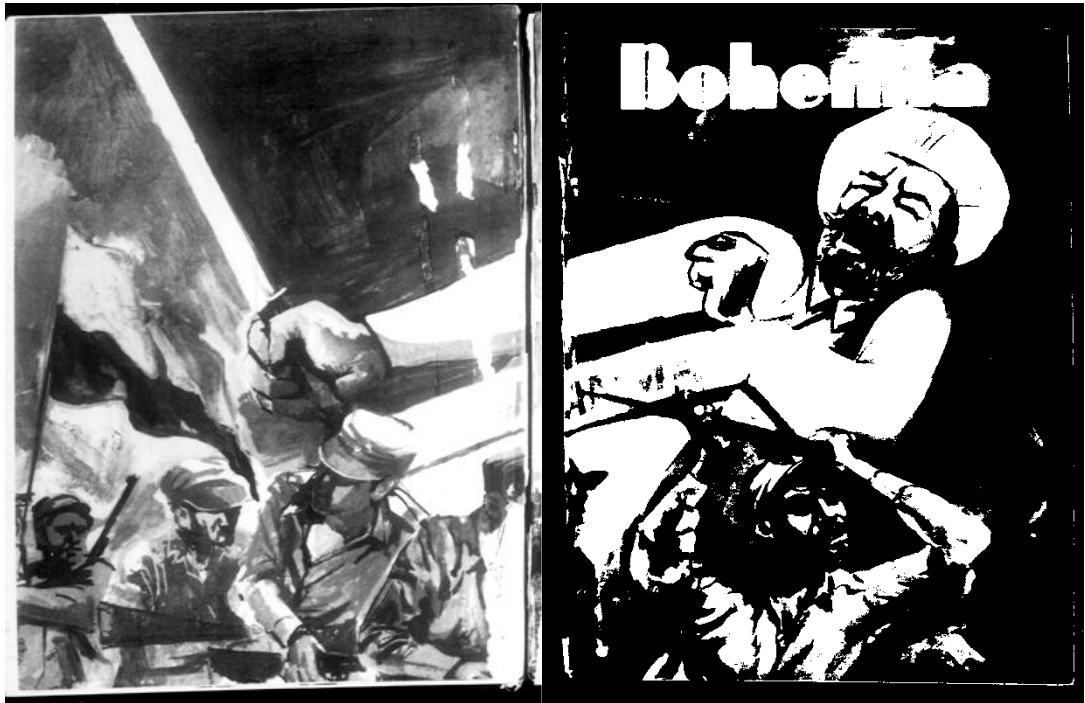


Figure 10: Maceo carried in the Granma

The image of Maceo carried on the backs of the 26 of July might serve as the zenith of revolutionary memory politics, were it not for the rapid proliferation of a new iconography of nationalist fusion in the 1960s and after. The 26 of July Movement's leaders depicted their movement as the end of history, the necessary culmination of events leading inexorably to a Cuban revolution. But the triumph of the revolution and its consolidation nearly a century

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<sup>62</sup> *Bohemia* 53 (3 December 1961), front and back covers.

after the *Grito de Yara* also marked the start of a new stage in the enduring struggle to define and lay claim to the glories of the Cuban past.

The effort to galvanize support behind a revolutionary national project echoed that which Cubans initiated six decades earlier, in the aftermath of the Spanish withdrawal from the island. Even before the Cuban republic was officially inaugurated, nationalist writers and activists took steps to establish and disseminate a collection of national heroes and stories that would affirm Cuban unity and structure the norms of a new society. National heroes became superhuman, assuming positions of religious reverence through the formulation and repetition of heroic narratives. Depictions of iconic figures like Antonio Maceo, José Martí, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, and others reflected a desire for a unifying memory, a shared past through which to structure the values of their nationality.

As we have seen throughout, the push to formulate a historical narrative that would assure social cohesion and stability both produced and obscured enduring dissent. From the fascination with the skeletal measurements of Antonio Maceo to the fury that erupted over the alternative memory advanced by the *Partido Independiente de Color*, the place of race and, more pointedly, blackness in the national story continued to be the subject of furious debate and even violence. While the ideology of racial fraternity has been discussed extensively in the historiography of the Cuban republic, the reliance of this belief on narratives and sacred icons of the independence struggle unveils its constant contestation and reinforcement. What historians like Alejandro de la Fuente have called the “Myth of Racial Democracy” in Cuba was, as a mythology and an ideology, as much about memory as about race. That is, because the dominant memory of the independence struggle permitted the

denial of race and of racial inequality, these enduring issues were confronted by challenging the narratives that sustained the claim of racial fraternity.

Few Cubans questioned the belief that the equality of black, white, and mulatto Cubans was a sacred ideal of the independence struggle. Still, circulation of a memory of Antonio Maceo that depicted the revered mulatto general as embodying the achievement of racial equality reveals that the creation of that belief was a process, not a conclusion, and one that demanded constant reinforcement. On the other hand, challenges to that narrative, or to the belief that racial categories had been overcome through shared sacrifice, were met with accusations of blasphemy and sacrilege against the sacred memory of the Liberation Army.

Blackness appeared in the national narrative only to affirm its irrelevance. The silence that characterized the issue of race in Cuban history only confirmed its salience. Within a few years of the republic's inauguration, its public school classrooms were initiating a new generation of Cubans into the history and iconography of the independence wars. Cuba's educational authorities were deeply committed to forging and exciting nationalist sentiment through historical education, equipping the first cohort of Cuban students to come of age in an independent republic with ideals and stories to emulate. Like the monuments and public commemorations that conveyed the meaning of the nation's heroes to the population at large, historical education and schoolhouse rituals conferred continuity with a glorious past to Cuban children who had not seen it for themselves.

The linear, teleological narratives carried in Cuban textbooks emerged from the desire to instill in Cuba's children a sense of unity, cohesion, and a shared historical purpose. This would be of special importance, as one early textbook author confirmed, because the public schools would have both white and black students, and the latter may even have parents who

had been enslaved on the island. So recent was this history of slavery, argued Alejandro López, and so divisive, that its racial basis must be minimized in its telling. Indeed, most textbooks did follow suit, minimizing the endurance, brutality, or racial foundations of Cuban slavery and presenting a direct line of descent from European expansion to the Cuban republic. The stability of this narrative helped depict Cubans as a people emerging from the same point of origin, a genesis that allowed no space for racism or rupture.

Ironically, and perhaps inevitably, this static and simplified story of national history contributed to the frustrations felt by members of the first republican generation as they came of age in the 1920s and 1930s. Prominent critics of republican society inveighed against the stark contrast between the nation as imagined and the republic as constituted, and writers like Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring began to develop a challenge to the historical premises on which the republic was built. The revisionist narrative that emerged from the 1920s challenged the corruption of the republic's political class and its enduring reliance on the United States, unsettling the placid surface of popular memory and crafting a powerful alternative that diagnosed the republic's historical ills.

Even as the uprising against Gerardo Machado signaled the collapse of the republic and of its underlying historical narratives, it is the process of national reimagining that followed that most powerfully demonstrated the centrality of memory in Cuban life. After activists and intellectuals had embraced anti-imperialism to challenge republican governments' claims to the lineage of the independence struggle, a new cohort of black and mulatto writers mounted a challenge to the dominant narrative of the nation's history and the enduring racial inequalities they claimed it sustained. Where Cuban history textbooks minimized the racial foundations of slavery and dismissed anti-slavery rebellions as threats to

social order and peace, writers in the pages of *Adelante* demanded that the agency of black and mulatto Cubans be acknowledged and included in the national story.

The story told by the 26 of July Movement drew from this long debate over the meanings of the national past. When the revolutionaries declared themselves the “*Mambises de hoy*” in 1958, they evoked the memory of the independence wars while promising to carry out its purpose. The fusion of present with past became the operating logic and defining ideology of the revolutionary insurrection, providing strategic guidance, symbolic sustenance, and a compelling justification for the overthrow of the Batista government. The movement’s commemoration of their own fallen alongside consensual national martyrs like Maceo and Martí also pointed to the myth-making and memory-making that would consume the first years of revolutionary governance.

Although the revolution’s embrace of socialism in 1961 signaled a clear ideological agenda for revolutionary change, the transformation that announcement initiated demanded demonstrations of continuity with the past. That continuity would be achieved by the pervasive mobilization of historical figures and narratives, as well as by the continuing centrality of memory in Cuban political discourse. If the revolution marked, as Castro claimed, the culmination of the independence struggle, it also prompted an explosion of historical iconography and the constant presence of nineteenth century figures in addressing the political, social, and economic challenges of more than five decades of revolutionary rule. The revolution billed itself as a repetition of the independence struggle, and indeed its victory produced a new period of nation-building, where monuments, public commemorations, and revolutionary education would initiate Cubans into the historical narratives that legitimated the government and its agenda. Sticker books and cartoon characters fused the history of the

1950s insurrection with that of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and independence heroes like José Martí and Antonio Maceo now grace the pages of children's comic books in Cuban shops.

The story told in this dissertation speaks to the power, authority, and emotional resonance of historical memory in Cuban life. Memory had the power to shape individual and national self-images. The invocation of national history has the power to confer moral and social authority, while structuring beliefs about society and culture. As this dissertation has argued, the power of memory is multi-directional, serving to establish and convey stability while providing fertile ground for dissent and contestation. At various points, some Cubans deployed the memory of the independence movements to affirm support for the republic and the cohesion of its society, while others invoked counter-narratives to assert demands for inclusion.

Cuba's formative independence struggle had produced a republic, but one that endured at the discretion of the intervening power of the United States. The republic in 1902 was separated from its foundational story, a narrative gap that prompted the vigorous assertion of continuity between the government and the nation's heroes while also creating space that enabled critics to charge the Cuban state and society with betraying its history. From the inauguration of the Cuban republic, giving meaning to the past emerged as a critical strategy for shaping the present. As Cubans contemplated the prospect of dramatic change at the dawn of a new national era, revolutionary memory provided an agenda for an uncertain future.



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