

Imagining Antonio Maceo
Memory, Mythology and Nation in Cuba, 1896-1959

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Abstract

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This thesis explores collective memories of Antonio Maceo and changing ideals of nation and identity in the Cuban republic. Among the most important military leaders in the Wars of Independence, Maceo, as a Cuban of color, entered popular memory at the intersection of race, identity and the political origins of the nation. In the years following his 1896 death, memories of Antonio Maceo and other figures of the independence movement took shape as collective memories around which Cubans articulated and debated visions of nationhood. Maceo became a powerful tool both for those seeking to legitimate the republican social order and for those that condemned persistent inequality and corruption. What Cubans remembered and celebrated of Maceo, and which memories became dominant, can illuminate the ideals and anxieties that shaped how Cubans imagined and contested the meaning of the nation through the upheavals of independence, republic, and revolution.

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Introduction

“The deaths that structure a nation’s biography are of a special kind.”

- Benedict Anderson

“Pero ¿qué representó Maceo, cuál fué el carácter de ese hombre, que es lo que Maceo viene a demostrar en la historia cubana?”

- Fernando Freyre de Andrade, December 7, 1914¹

On the morning of December 7, 1902, Tomás Estrada Palma, President of the six month-old Cuban republic, and General Máximo Gómez boarded an express train with their respective families, destined for San Pedro, on the outskirts of Havana.² They joined throngs of Cubans in an annual pilgrimage to El Cacahual, the burial site of General Antonio Maceo, famed leader of Cuba’s independence wars. Maceo and his aide, Francisco Gómez Toro, the young son of General Gómez, had been killed during an ambush by Spanish soldiers six years earlier, on December 7, 1896.

Cubans arrived by car and carriage. Trains full of people descended on Rincón station outside of Havana, their occupants continuing on foot the rest of the way to Cacahual. The Havana daily *La Lucha* reported that “a beautiful contingent representing all classes of society and every element of the country” had come pay tribute to the hero of a newly

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Verso Books, 2006), p. 205; Fernando Freyre de Andrade, quoted in “La conmemoración patriótica de ayer,” *La Lucha*, 8 December 1914, 6.

² “En Cacahual,” *Diario de La Marina*, 8 December 1902, 2.

independent Cuba.³ Among the attendees at the commemoration were Government Secretaries, the President of the *Cámara de Representantes* and numerous senators and representatives. Estrada Palma and Gómez laid wreaths at the memorial obelisk, already covered in tributes, after which several speakers addressed the assembled crowd. They praised the memories of Maceo and Gómez, declaring them perfect examples of patriotism, valor and sacrifice, and lauding Gómez for his ‘saintly affection for the titan’ Maceo.⁴ Just over six months after the formal end of the United States occupation of the island, Cubans paid tribute to their heroes “as a people constituted in a nation, now free.”⁵

As Cuba emerged from centuries of colonial domination and three decades of intermittent warfare, the notion of a shared past was central to the formulation of a unifying identity. Benedict Anderson has famously argued that nations are imagined political communities, the meanings of which must be constructed, articulated, and disseminated.⁶ As the above quotation from *La Lucha* suggests, Cuba in 1902 was a community in the process of imagining itself as a nation.

The long struggle for independence had not only severed the political ties between Cuba and Spain; it had severed their histories. In rebelling against colonial rule, the Cuban *mambises* were not only forging a new nation; they were creating a new national past. The actions, icons and events of the wars against Spain constituted a historical narrative that was solely Cuban, one that separated the new nation from the colonial past that it shared with Spain. In the years following his death in 1896, memories of Antonio Maceo and other

³ “En el Cacahual,” *La Lucha*, 7 December 1902, 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ See: Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

figures of the independence movement began to take shape as collective memories around which Cubans articulated their nationhood.

Annual commemorations of his death helped to produce and define the memory of Maceo that became dominant in the first decades of the republic. On December 7 of every year, the Cuban press marked the anniversary of Maceo's fall in battle; starting at least as early as 1900, masses of Cubans made an annual pilgrimage to Cacahual to hear speeches by politicians, historians, and writers celebrating the hero of the independence struggle.⁷ In 1909, the Cámara de Representantes began gathering in a yearly special "Solemn Session" in honor of Maceo, inviting politicians, veterans, and other national figures to address the members of the Cuban congress.

Eric Hobsbawm has argued that such "invented traditions" are an essential component of any national project. He defined these as "practices...of a ritual or symbolic nature" which are designed to establish "continuity with the past." Hobsbawm's contention that these practices are "invented" has little to do with the "historical truth" of the past being invoked. Rather, the remembrance and memorialization of a shared past can serve to confer the appearance of timelessness and invariability upon a new nation, to suggest that the nation is, in a historical sense, legitimate and "real." Rituals of remembering, such as the December 7 commemorations of Maceo, transmit the values and ideals that bind a community and can serve to establish or symbolize social cohesion.⁸

Thus, just as a nation can be understood to be an "imagined community," that nation is defined by an imagined past. The term "memory," is used here to describe the various

⁷ "No trabajan," *Diario de la Marina*, 8 December 1900, 2.

⁸ Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction: Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition* ed. in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983): 1, 3, 9.

ways Cubans represented Antonio Maceo in the years and decades after his death, and refers “not to the past, but to *the past-present relation*.”⁹ 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 “competing constructions of the past,” which are “often at war with each other” for broad social and political acceptance. A “dominant memory,” then, “is produced in the course of these struggles and is always open to contestation.”¹⁰ As discussed above, memories of patriotic icons in particular are closely tied to changing popular and political conceptions of the nation.

This thesis traces the construction and contestation of the dominant Cuban memory of Antonio Maceo, arguing that changing memories of Maceo can reveal how Cubans imagined and reimagined the meaning of nation and identity through the political and social upheavals of the republican period. What Cubans remembered, represented and celebrated of Maceo, and which representations became dominant, can illuminate the values, ideals and anxieties that shaped the construction and reconstruction of Cuban nationhood.

In the early republic (1902-1933), Cubans built a nationalist mythology around Maceo. As a military hero of the independence struggle, he came to embody the revolutionary past that was the crucible of Cuban nationhood. Speeches, articles, editorials and poems published in popular newspapers and magazines reveal the articulation of a memory of Maceo which emphasized his military heroism, physical might and moral fortitude, but rarely acknowledged his ideological or political contributions to the

⁹ Popular Memory Group, “Popular Memory: Theory, Politics and Method,” in *Making Histories: Studies in History-Writing and Politics*, ed. Richard Johnson *et al* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 211. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 207.

independence movement or the republic. That Maceo was great was never disputed, but his *grandeza* was invariably located within his body, not in his mind.

Maceo, as a Cuban of color, entered popular memory at the intersection of race, identity and the political origins of the nation. Even as President Estrada Palma laid his wreath at Cacahual, Afro-Cuban societies around the island performed their own remembrances of Maceo, praising his patriotism and sacrifice but also presenting a memory in which his racial identity was essential. As John Nerone has observed, “memory is empowerment,” and memories that implicated the category of race were often marginalized in the Cuban republic.¹¹

Nationalized collective memories tend away from complication and controversy and toward presenting “a unified society with a unified past.” In the case of Antonio Maceo, where competing memories of different groups challenged that image, collective memory could serve as “a way of co-opting conflict.”¹² Indeed, the dominant memory of Maceo in the decades after his death not only depicted him as an exclusively physical figure, but also presented a deracialized memory, one which served as a symbol of racial fraternity and the forging of a racially inclusive Cuba. The invocation of Antonio Maceo in the service of what scholars have called the Cuban “myth of racial equality” reveals the profound racial tensions and anxieties that shaped the construction of Cuban national ideologies.¹³

In the late 1920s, Cuba descended into dictatorship under General Gerardo Machado. The apparent failure of the young republic prompted a crisis of nationality, as many Cubans

¹¹ John Narone, “Professional History and Social Memory,” *Communication* 11 (1989): 93.

¹² *Ibid.*, 93, 94.

¹³ See: Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 7; Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 7.

were left looking for answers to explain how the dream of republic had collapsed in so short a time. The fall of the Machado regime in 1933 created a political opening wherein the nation could be reimagined and remade. In this period, many Cubans looked to the national past to understand and expose the roots of the republic's failure and as a source of a new set of national ideals and values.

In particular, scholars and opposition political activists turned their attention to the origins of the nation in the late republic (1933-1958), calling into question its social and political foundations. Some Cubans instrumentalized memory as a mode of political mobilization, attacking the persistent racial and economic inequality in republican society. Since his battlefield death, Antonio Maceo had served as an icon for the emerging Cuban nation. Decades later, as Cubans questioned and redefined the meaning of that nation, many openly challenged and reimagined the dominant collective memory of Maceo. By tracing the connections between politics, scholarship, and popular memory, this thesis examines how and why Cubans confronted and challenged the dominant memory of Antonio Maceo in the years following the ouster of the Machado dictatorship.

Several historians of Cuba have explored the competing images of nation that characterized the republican period, but with the exception of Lillian Guerra's recent study, *The Myth of José Martí*, few have engaged with memory as a means of exploring national ideals and identities.¹⁴ Martí is undoubtedly the most beloved and iconic of Cuba's national heroes, and Guerra's work is a model for any attempt to study the political uses of the past. However, little attention seems to have been given to the meaning of Antonio Maceo in the republic. Maceo, as a potentially more divisive and contested figure, can perhaps be even

¹⁴ Lillian Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

more illuminating. Alejandro de la Fuente, in his book *A Nation for All*, devotes some attention to Maceo as “the most revered, quoted, and contested symbol of Cuban racial fraternity.”¹⁵ However, his project is more political than cultural, and does not attempt a unified analysis of how Cubans articulated different memories of this revered symbol.

Historian Patricia Weiss Fagen has approached the issue of changing images of Maceo, looking specifically at works of history produced in Cuba. Her study, “Antonio Maceo: Heroes, History and Historiography,” provides an excellent analysis of the changing interpretations of Maceo by professional historians. She denotes three distinct eras of Maceo historiography: the traditionalist, from independence until the mid-1930s; the revisionist, which dominated until the Revolution in 1959; and the post-revolutionary historiography. Her analysis is astute and convincing, but she tends to be dismissive of the importance of national commemorations in the Cámara and at Cacahual, regarding the discourse produced at annual remembrances as mere “patriotic rhetoric.”¹⁶

Indeed, those commemorations did revolve around patriotic themes. However, because Maceo was an icon of nationality, the content of those speeches, along with other forms of remembrance can illuminate how the dominant memory of Maceo took shape, how it was contested, and how competing representations can reflect changing images of nation and self in the Cuban republic.

¹⁵ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 38.

¹⁶ Patricia Weiss Fagen, “Antonio Maceo: Heroes, History and Historiography,” *Latin American Research Review* 11 (3) 1976: 74.

Biographical Sketch

To evaluate the meanings and debates surrounding his memory, it is essential to establish briefly the contours of Maceo's biography. Antonio Maceo y Grajales was born on June 14, 1845 to Marcos Maceo and Mariana Grajales, both free people of color living in Oriente province. His upbringing was modest, as his family operated small farms in the hills around the Sierra Maestra mountains. On October 10, 1868, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes pronounced the independence of Cuba in the *Grito de Yara*. The newly formed rebel army, which incorporated the slaves freed by the rebelling planters, arrived at the home of the Maceo family on October 12, after its first encounter with Spanish forces. Along with his younger brother, the twenty-three year old Antonio Maceo immediately joined the uprising.

Maceo quickly distinguished himself in battle and rose through the ranks of the Liberation Army. Within five years, his reputation had earned him the rank of General. Internal disputes and the refusal of the rebellion's leadership to extend the war to the prosperous west of the island eventually doomed the rebellion. Its leaders signed a peace agreement with Spain in 1878 known as the Pact of Zanjón, but Maceo refused to lay down his arms. In his famous Protest of Baraguá, Maceo rejected the treaty, vowing to fight on until independence was achieved. Eventually, he was forced to flee the island, but resolved to return and continue the struggle.

Maceo spent the next part of his life traveling around the Caribbean and United States, building support and organizing for the cause of Cuban independence. When rebellion broke out in Cuba in February 1895, Maceo returned to Cuba alongside General Máximo Gómez to join the fight. It was in this war, later known as the War of Independence, that Maceo accomplished his most famous military feat, leading an invading

army across the island to Pinar del Río, the westernmost province of the island, and bringing the war to the center of colonial wealth. It was in the west of the island, on the outskirts of Havana, that Maceo was finally killed by Spanish troops on December 7, 1896. His military career had already become legendary, and many Cubans refused to believe that Maceo had been killed in battle. His perceived invincibility, his greatness as a warrior and his unyielding commitment to the cause of independence made him a powerful symbol for the continuing struggle.

Chapter 1

Embodying the Nation: Memory and Mythmaking in the Early Republic

The first two decades following the death of Maceo saw the construction of a mythical image centered on his status as an epic warrior. The commemorations that took place each December 7 revealed a rapid elevation of Maceo from a hero of the independence movement to a mythical warrior of tremendous, even superhuman prowess. Such representations of Maceo served to celebrate a revered national figure, but also to forge a distinct history and mythology around which Cubans could begin to locate their identity as a nation. 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. Imagery in the earliest posthumous tributes to Maceo, written as the war against the Spanish continued, presented him as a warrior of spectacular power and strength. In the years immediately following his death, hagiographic articles in *Patria*, the official newspaper of the Cuban Revolutionary Party, laid the foundation of what became a constant in Cuban representations of Maceo throughout the Republican era: Maceo as a god-like warrior.

This mythology focused almost entirely on Maceo as a purely physical being. Language in tributes revolved around representation of the size, strength and invulnerability of his body, which was said to be made stone, metal and even mountains. If non-physical attributes were lauded, they were limited to aspects of Maceo's personal virtue, not his intellect or political vision. Such celebrations of his character were put in the same language

of power and strength that defined his body, articulating them within the same discourse of physicality and not as a distinct or important intellectual component of his being.

Word of Maceo's death prompted tributes that laid out the basic features of Maceo as mythical warrior. *Patria* reported: "our news confirms... the death of the generous paladin of Cuban liberty, the legendary hero of our wars of independence, the bravest among the brave." Having joined the liberation army just days after the *Grito de Yara* of 1868, Maceo had already achieved legendary status and was credited as "the victorious warrior of a hundred battles."¹ This praise suggested not only that Maceo was a great military leader, but that his life formed a narrative of a distinctly Cuban historical past upon which to construct the identity of a new nation.

With a war against the Spanish raging, *Patria* remembered Maceo as a warrior of unequaled strength and military prowess. He thus served not only as a hero and inspiration, but a powerful symbol of the Cuban armies still fighting for independence. Popular tributes granted Maceo superhuman status in both character and body, using vivid imagery to convey his physical enormity, strength and invulnerability. Tributes and poems published in *Patria* mourned "a man of iron" and the "last of a race of titans."² "¡Oh, Maceo gigante!" cried one poet, "victim of your own superhuman courage."³ Maceo was said to be 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."⁴ One tribute memorably celebrated his physical invulnerability by representing Maceo the carrier and embodiment of the national

¹ "Antonio Maceo," *Patria*, 16 December 1896, 1.

² "Nota biográfica," *Patria*, 19 December 1896, 1; N.A. González, "Antonio Maceo," *Patria*, 19 December 1896, 2.

³ Francisco Sellén, "A la memoria de Antonio Maceo" *Patria*, 15 December 15, Suplemento, 1.

⁴ Nicolás Heredia, "Una pincelada," *Patria*, 19 December 1896, 2.

past: “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.”⁵

Writing in the weekly magazine *El Fígaro* in 1899, Enrique José Varona 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.”⁶ Nevertheless, that Maceo fell at the hands of the Spanish did little to discourage suggestions of invincibility. If anything, his death solidified this image. An homage in *La Lucha* on the tenth anniversary of his death describes Maceo as an “invincible gladiator.”⁷ Two years later, the same newspaper appealed to Cubans to “do more to remember the invincible soldier.”⁸

The same imagery used to describe Maceo’s body was employed to extol his personal virtues. Tributes to Maceo presented a man whose character was as invulnerable to defeat or corruption his body was to weaponry. In one article, he was said to possess “a granite will.”⁹ *Patria* wondered, “What can we say of this man, already poeticized by legend? [Maceo was] solid of spirit and body like the inaccessible mountains where he first opened his eyes.”¹⁰ Although depicting all aspects of Maceo’s image in physiological terms was particularly useful to symbolize the continuing power of the Cuban armies fighting the Spanish, such imagery persisted decades into the foundation of the Cuban Republic.

⁵ “Editorial: duelo nacional,” *La Discusión*, 7 December 1903, 2.

⁶ Enrique José Varona, “Lo que significó Maceo,” *El Fígaro* 46 (10 December 1899): 474.

⁷ “El titán,” *La Lucha*, 7 December 1906, 1.

⁸ “La peregrinación patriótica,” *La Lucha*, 7 December 1908, 1.

⁹ “Nota biográfica,” *Patria*, 19 December 1896, 2.

¹⁰ “Maceo,” *Patria*, 7 December 1898, 1.

In 1919, *La Lucha* declared that Maceo had a “soul [as] solid as the bronze in which his body seemed to be cast.”¹¹ An orator at Cacahual several years later declared that the “heart and soul” of the Cuban people were “incarnated in [Maceo’s] body of steel,”¹² while according to another writer, he had a “body of bronze and a soul of steel.”¹³ Still another declared Maceo a “steel avenger.”¹⁴ The Havana daily *La Discusión* remembered him both for his “bronze body” and as a “man of iron.”¹⁵ Whatever the particulars of the description, the language constructed an image of Maceo as superhuman in stature and incorruptible in spirit. The persistent use of the same stone and metal metaphors to describe his character and body reinforced the notion that Maceo was a primarily physical being. His personal strengths were inherent to his physical strength; his body and mind were colossal, immutable, made of stone.

Although imagery of his physical size had been abundant from the moment of his death, it was not until the first years of the Republic that Maceo became widely known simply as “el Titán.”¹⁶ The title preceded Cuban independence, but does not seem to have achieved widespread popular use until nearly a decade following Maceo’s death. That name, sometimes used in place of his proper name in commemorative speeches and articles, conveyed the size and strength that were integral to his warrior image and placed him firmly

¹¹ “El aniversario de hoy,” *La Lucha*, 7 December 1919, 2.

¹² Miguel Angel Céspedes, quoted in “El recuerdo del Titán puso ayer,” *La Lucha*, 8 December 1923, 8.

¹³ Editorial, *La Lucha*, 7 December 1920, 1.

¹⁴ M.A. Díaz, “General Antonio Maceo, ‘Titan de Bronce,’” *La Lucha*, 7 December 1919, 3.

¹⁵ “La sombra del Titán,” *La Discusión*, 7 December 1924, 1.

¹⁶ Maceo is referred to as “el titán” in an article from *La Lucha*, 8 December 1902, 2; as “el Titán de la contienda” in the poem, “El día de hoy,” published in *La Lucha*, 7 December 1904, 1. The capitalization of Titan suggests that by this moment, Titan is being used as a proper name. In 1906, *La Lucha* published its yearly tribute to Maceo under the title “El Titán.”

in the language of mythology. Variations on the same imagery were widespread in this period, even as “the Titan” became most common. One poem in *La Discusión* remembered him both as “the titan” and as “a colossus.”¹⁷ Maceo was alternately “the titan of Oriente,”¹⁸ “the bronze colossus,”¹⁹ or “the bronze titan,” an appellation that by the middle of the next decade had achieved synonymy with the name Maceo.²⁰ The ubiquity of that title did not preclude writers from indulging a desire to laud his power, size and incorruptibility in greater detail.

Tributes to Maceo often overtly attempted to elevate him beyond the realm of history and into the pantheon of ancient mythology and legend. To do so required not only extolling his superhuman physical and personal characteristics, but establishing him within a lineage of mythical figures and legendary heroes. In his commemorative speech before the Cuban parliament in 1914, representative José María Collantes declared that “History cannot contain [Maceo’s] feats. It is not Tacitus, but Homer who must tell them.”²¹

In addition to titles such as “colossus” or “titan,” Maceo was often likened to the mythical Cyclops, perhaps to reconcile his falling in battle with his aura of invincibility. Direct comparisons or even fusion with heroes of classical history and mythology were common. One poem, published in the Havana newspaper *La Discusión* declared:

He was a colossus or titan, never a pygmy;

¹⁷ F. de la Cruz Muñoz, “Maceo y Gómez,” *La Discusión*, December 8, 1902, 3.

¹⁸ Sotero Figueroa, “Antonio Maceo,” *La Lucha*, 7 December 1912, 1.

¹⁹ “La peregrinación patriótica” *La Lucha*, 7 December 1908, 1.

²⁰ “La peregrinación al Cacaua,” *La Lucha*, 8 December 1906, 1. In the materials reviewed for this study, this 1906 article is the earliest usage found of “Bronze Titan.” Although it is likely that this term originated earlier, it appears only sporadically until the middle of the 1910s when it became the dominant representation of Maceo.

²¹ José María Collantes, quoted in “La conmemoración patriótica de ayer,” *La Lucha*, 8 December 1914, 2.

Invincible in the mountains or on the plain.
His triumphant fight against tyranny was
Like the fight of Hercules and Antaeus.

A prodigy of valor, such was Maceo,
Brandishing his machete in his skillful hand,
He appeared like a superhuman warrior,
Sublime, victorious and gigantic.²²

Another poem published a decade later compared him, in only eight lines, to Achilles, Caesar, a Spartan and a Lion, with the “muscles of the statuesque Cyclops.”²³

Although they have been discussed separately here, the various metaphors of stone and steel, declarations of immortality and comparisons to mythical warriors were components of a broader image, and were often used together to represent Maceo as a hero of unimaginable greatness, transcending time and space. Writer Alberto Anillo, for example, in a lengthy poem addressed to Maceo, wrote:

Your name repeated from lips to lips,
absorbed in your great epic
as though a new Homer
will sing your warrior deeds
in the verses of another Iliad!

Your worshiped remains
the Pantheon will readily guard!
And the sculpture
of stone, bronze or granite
will become your athletic figure.
You have not died, no! because in living souls
as you were yesterday, you will be forever,
a constellation, a sparkle
that does more than live, and so survives
among a free people, a people of brothers...²⁴

²² Primitivo Ramírez Ros, “Antonio Maceo,” *La Discusión*, 8 December 1904, 3.

²³ Abelardo Lugo, “Antonio Maceo,” *La Lucha*, 7 December 1914, 2.

²⁴ Alberto Anillo, “Maceo,” *La Discusión*, 7 December 1909, 14.

Comparisons of Maceo to classical mythology were inescapable, particularly in the first decades of the republic. In 1915, Conde Kostia declared that death bestowed upon Maceo “the unfading glory of myth.” Maceo, he continued, was a “Cuban Heracles” and “Alcides *oriental*.”²⁵ Another referred to him as “the Cuban Ajax.”²⁶ This imagery established Antonio Maceo as the modern and, most importantly, *Cuban* incarnation of the legendary heroes of the past. As Eric Hobsbawm has argued, rituals and symbols can serve to establish a nation’s “continuity with the past,” even if that continuity is a chronological fiction.²⁷ The construction of continuity between Maceo and the heroic pantheon of antiquity served to confer a historic and timeless greatness upon both Maceo and the young nation that he represented.

This timelessness of both man and nation was often represented through claims of Maceo’s immortality, which became an essential precursor to and component of his myth. Enrique José Varona declared that although he had died, “in reality, Maceo in life had become more than a person, than a *caudillo*, those who, in the end, are men. He had become a symbol. The symbol of Cuban rebellion.”²⁸ On the eleventh anniversary of his death, *La Lucha* proclaimed that by “disappearing,” Maceo “awoke for eternity in the pantheon of immortality.”²⁹ The following year, Conde Kostia marked the evolution of Cuban memory of Maceo, noting that “twelve years have passed [since his death], and in these twelve years,

²⁵ Conde Kostia, “Décimo noveno aniversario,” *La Lucha*, 7 December 1915, 1.

²⁶ Ramiro Guerra, quoted in “La cámara en sesión solemne...,” *La Lucha*, 8 December 1919, 8.

²⁷ Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” 1.

²⁸ Enrique José Varona, “Lo que significó Maceo,” *El Fígaro* 46 (10 December 1899): 474.

²⁹ “El aniversario de hoy,” *La Lucha*, 7 December 1907, 1.

the name of Maceo... has been growing progressively, taking on the gigantic proportions of a national hero, consecrated by poetry, myth and legend.”³⁰

On the front page of the edition containing Anillo’s poem, *La Discusión* printed a full-page rendering of Maceo’s death in battle. The picture depicted a dying Maceo, clutching his chest and dropping his unsheathed machete as he falls from his horse (see figure 1, page 61). As he falls backward, he is caught by an angel who cradles his head. The picture is accompanied by the headline “en brazos de la gloria” (in the arms of glory).³¹ This title suggested, as Alberto Anillo’s elegy proclaimed, that Maceo’s “fearless daring elevated [him] to the summit of immortality and glory.”³²

The imagery of an angel catching a dying Maceo clearly suggests resurrection and a Christ-like immortality. As a martyr to the revolution and a revered hero, Maceo was often remembered through religious metaphor and symbolism. The gathering at Cacahual was usually referred to as a national pilgrimage in which Cubans “with religious concentration went up the steep hill that leads to the mausoleum to deposit wreaths and flowers.”³³ One speaker at Cacahual took the idea of Maceo’s immortality further, declaring “[f]or Maceo, as it is for all gods, death does not exist; only immortality. Maceo does not exist as a man among the living, Maceo is a symbol, Maceo is the flag, Maceo is life, the banner that our arms wave.”³⁴

³⁰ Conde Kostia, “Esplendores de gloria: Antonio Maceo,” *La Lucha*, 7 December 1908, 6.

³¹ “En brazos de la gloria,” *La Discusión*, 7 December 1909, 1.

³² Anillo, “Maceo,” *La Discusión*, 7 December 1909, 14.

³³ “La perigrinación al Cacahual,” *La Lucha*, 8 December 1906, 2.

³⁴ Mario García Kohly, quoted in “En Cacahual,” *Diario de la Marina*, 8 December 1912, 7.

The December 7, 1910 issue of *La Lucha* devoted its entire front page to an image of a fallen Maceo being tended to by an angelic female figure bearing the single star of the Cuban flag on her head, which represented the Republic. The caption read, “La inmortalidad recoge el nombre de Maceo.”³⁵ The image is a striking illustration of the construction of a Cuban national mythology, as Maceo’s body is retrieved not only by “immortality,” but by a personified, immortal Cuban Republic (see figure 2, page 62). The religious imagery, alongside continued references to Maceo’s immortality, served to construct an image of a deified Maceo at the center of a religious nationalism. A 1929 article makes this clear: “Maceo must always be a religion for us. We venerate his memory, but at the same time we must become worthy of his glorious sacrifice.”³⁶

Popular memory thus located Maceo both in the realm of religion and mythology and within a specific narrative of Cuban history, the shared past that bound the nation together. Maceo and the nation he embodied therefore ceased to be limited or bound to a particular or recent past, but were endowed with a timeless legitimacy.

As Cubans constructed an image of Maceo as a god-like warrior in the aftermath of his death, virtues of character entered the lore of his physical greatness. As discussed above, the language used to represent qualities of his character often served to reinforce the image of Maceo as a physical, not intellectual, being; a man of action, not words. However, Maceo’s personal qualities quickly became as central to his memory as his feats in battle. Maceo’s greatness was presented in the context of the dominant image of the nation in the early republic.

³⁵ *La Lucha*, 7 December 1910, 1.

³⁶ “Maceo,” *La Lucha*, 6 December 1929, 1.

In the first decades of independence, Cuban politicians and journalists celebrated Maceo's patriotism, his sense of duty and his commitment to the cause of independence. Among his most prized virtues was his apparent lack of ambition, presented as a natural part of his sense of patriotic duty. These qualities, as Patricia Weiss Fagen has argued, are "portrayed as inborn, rather than as the product of political and intellectual growth."³⁷ After his death, *Patria* stressed that Maceo's greatness was not solely as a legendary warrior, but as the "a man of a noble idea, a champion of a noble cause...for which he strengthened and shaped his character... Neither this idea nor this cause was personal. It was the idea of freedom for Cuba, the cause of Independence for our homeland."³⁸

When Cubans marked the anniversary of Maceo's death in the first year of independence, *La Lucha* reported that a speaker at Cacahual had devoted his speech to analyzing "the life of Maceo, his patriotism and his abnegation."³⁹ These were his defining characteristics. Maceo appeared as a man of one-dimensional virtues, a man of simple, clear ideas that required no deeper exploration: "Maceo was a hero and martyr. As a warrior, a fighter, as a patriot, as a man of bravery and nobility, as a human, he had no superior."⁴⁰

A 1908 tribute noted that in "times of trial that the country has been through," many have said "'Ah! If Maceo were alive!' This exclamation... reveals not only the superior opinion we have of the patriotism of the hero of a hundred battles, but also must serve to strengthen in our hearts the will to emulate his abnegation and spirit of sacrifice." Year after year, Maceo was lauded for his patriotism and his self-denial. This language, however

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 78.

³⁸ "José Antonio Maceo," *Patria*, 8 December 1897, 1.

³⁹ "En el Cacahual," *La Lucha*, 8 December 1902, 2.

⁴⁰ "Por Maceo," *La Lucha*, 9 December 1907, 1.

laudatory, reinforced the limits on Maceo's meaning in contemporary Cuban society. Praise most often centered on Maceo's love of country, but not on how he might have envisioned the country he fought for.

His greatness was often located in his body or in his spirit, but never in his ideas. "Maceo was the heart of the Revolution," as Representative José Maria Collantes declared in 1914, but he was never the mind. Martí, he argued, was "the word and thought of the Revolution."⁴¹ A December 7, 1905 article credited Maceo and José Martí as dual founders of the republic: "one dedicated the effort of his sword, the other his intelligence to create in Cuba a republic for all Cubans."⁴² Years later, the same imagery persisted: "The idealism of one [was] completed with the military genius of the other...and both, in thought and in action, founded the *Patria*."⁴³ These tributes gave little or no consideration to how Maceo would have conceived of the nation he was credited with creating, and indeed suggest that Maceo himself gave such matters no thought.

Indeed, representations of Maceo's contribution to the independence struggle seemed to mirror dominant representations of the Afro-Cuban role in freeing Cuba from Spanish rule. Maceo was celebrated for his selfless patriotism, but his political vision for the nation was obscured or even denied in the dominant memory. He was praised for strength and prowess in battle, but denied any role in defining the nation.

⁴¹ "1914: Discurso de Collantes" in Rafael Estenger, ed. *Homenaje a Maceo: los discursos de la Cámara de Representantes* (Havana: Editorial Selecta, 1945), 51-52.

⁴² "Muertos y vivos," *La Lucha*, 7 December 1905, 2.

⁴³ Editorial, *La Lucha*, 7 December 1920, 1.

Mythologies of Race and Nation

In the first decades of the republic in particular, national memory of Maceo tended to present a simple and uncontroversial figure, an icon around which Cubans could unite and with which they could identify themselves and their nation. As John Nerone has argued, “public historical accounts have... a tendency to project a unified society with a unified past,” denying that “cultural, racial, class or gender differences are meaningful, that they have been or could be sources of conflict.”⁴⁴ The image of Maceo constructed early in the Republic was not only a symbol of physical might and moral fortitude, but a symbol of social unity and a bastion against conflict.

Annual commemorations at Cacahual and in the Cámara de Representantes served as symbols of and forums for national unity. Year after year, the same imagery persisted in reports from Cacahual: the entire nation, regardless of social class, political affiliation or age, paid tribute to Antonio Maceo: “From the wealthy bourgeois to the modest laborer, the distinguished celebrity to the simple worker, the old woman, the young woman and the girl, all approached... the mausoleum... to place flowers and wreaths” in honor of Maceo.⁴⁵ The act of remembering Maceo, as much as the memory itself, forged an image of shared national identity. The annual commemoration of Maceo’s death brought Cubans together around a collective national memory, one which represented patriotism, citizenship and, perhaps most important, national unity itself.

Collective memory of Antonio Maceo, a patriotic icon and a Cuban of color, took on particular significance in defining the meaning of race in Cuban identity and politics. A

⁴⁴ Narone, “Professional History and Social Memory,” 94.

⁴⁵ “La peregrinación al Cacahual,” *La Lucha*, 8 December 1906, 2.

discourse of unity pervaded representations of Maceo during the first three decades of the Republic. That unity was often challenged by competing visions of the nation in the republican period.

The nationalist ideals that many Cubans articulated in the first years of the republic had their roots in the discourses and ideologies of the independence struggle. The 1868 uprising that opened the first of Cuba's wars against Spain had begun when Carlos Manuel de Céspedes issued the *Grito de Yara*, freed his slaves, and invited them as citizens to join the fight for Cuban independence.⁴⁶ From that moment, "race was... central to the process of national construction." The broad "cross-racial coalition" that fought in the thirty-year struggle for independence "forged a nationalist revolutionary ideology that claimed all Cubans were equal members of the nation, regardless of race or social status... a republic "with all and for all," as [José] Martí had called it."⁴⁷

However, the US intervention in 1898 forestalled that effort. As Alejandro de la Fuente has argued, the colonial elite, a "group that might have been displaced by the victory of the revolutionary coalition was, as a result of intervention, guaranteed continued access to power."⁴⁸ These wealthy, white Cubans feared the social goals of the revolutionary forces, and imagined a nation built upon their continued social and economic power and the marginalization of the Afro-Cuban population. From these competing images of nation emerged what scholars have called the Cuban "myth of racial equality."⁴⁹

⁴⁶ See: Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 15.

⁴⁷ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 23.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁹ See: Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 6.

The dominant political parties of the Republic shared and espoused the view that racial inequality had been a feature of the colonial system, and one that the revolution had erased. Through revolutionary struggle, which had united black and white Cubans, equality had been achieved, and race had ceased to be meaningful. “The result,” de la Fuente contends, “was an interpretation of Cuban nationalism that denied or minimized the existence of a ‘race problem,’ avoided or condemned its public discussion as an affront to the nation, and contributed to maintaining the status quo.”⁵⁰ Indeed, the notion of a raceless society became a pillar of the dominant image of both the nation and of Antonio Maceo.

In the first decade after his death, race was rarely a part of Maceo remembrances. The tributes that appeared in *Patria* and *La Lucha* made no mention of his race at all. Although his racial identity was likely common knowledge for most Cubans, that it remained largely unspoken in the dominant memory suggests either that either it was truly irrelevant to his image or that it was too potentially complicating to be included. The latter is the more likely explanation, as those that did raise the issue of his race in mainstream public forums did so in order to declare Maceo a symbol of racial unity. Maceo’s race, then, was invoked only to prove its irrelevance and to accuse those who wanted to address racial inequality of sewing national disunity.

Racial harmony was sometimes located within Maceo’s own body and blood. In the words of one Representative, 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

⁵⁰ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 25.

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.”⁵¹

The specter of racial organization, strife, and violence to which the above quotation seems to allude was a persistent fear for the Cuban government in the first decades of the republic, and seems to have underpinned many invocations of Maceo in this period. In 1912, these tensions erupted in violence as the government of President José Miguel Gómez brutally suppressed the Partido Independiente de Color (Independent Party of Color, or PIC), an Afro-Cuban political movement which had protested a legal ban on its existence. Afro-Cuban activists frustrated by continued marginalization in republican politics formed the PIC in 1908. However, a racially defined political movement threatened the control of dominant political parties, and many political figures, both white and black, attacked its formation as anti-national. A 1910 law declared political organization based on race to be illegal, and the PIC was banned. In 1912, the PIC rose up in an armed protest of the law, and the government responded with force. Many PIC members were killed and countless Afro-Cubans that were not connected to the party were arrested and massacred by government forces and white Cubans terrified of an island-wide racial rebellion on the scale of the Haitian Revolution.⁵²

Afro-Cuban political mobilization and the so-called “Race War” of 1912 clearly influenced, and were influenced by memory of Antonio Maceo. As historian Aline Helg has argued, when members of the PIC were arrested in 1910 and charged with conspiring to revolt against the government, “the most incriminating evidence was... a piece of paper” found on the person of detained PIC member Tomás Landa, “which contained these words

⁵¹ José Manuel Cortina y García, “1909 Discurso de Cortina,” in *Homenaje a Maceo*, ed. Estenger, 16.

⁵² See: Helg, *Our Rightful Share*.

allegedly written by Landa himself: 'No doubt, it is necessary to secede, to divide the Republic, that everything sinks. I will help to destroy you, evil whites, but sad is the future awaiting you. Maceo's pantheon is asking for revenge.'"⁵³

This use of Maceo is particularly compelling. If the document was authentic, it would suggest that PIC members invoked Maceo as a call for violence against whites and racial separatism. If the paper were a forgery of some kind, then its use suggests that some Cubans feared and manipulated the potential divisiveness of Maceo's memory. Although it is unclear whether the authenticity of the document was ever fully established, Helg contends that the PIC "conspiracy... had been a well-thought-out frame-up" by the government "to justify the repression" against the party. Regardless of its veracity, the paper's use against PIC members is dramatic evidence of the force and depth of the racial anxieties that shaped how Cubans remembered Antonio Maceo.

The uprising and massacre of the PIC continued to influence the meaning of Maceo in the years that followed, as calls for and declarations of racial unity became more pointed. In 1914, 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!"⁵⁴

On the same night that Collantes spoke to the Cámara, Havana Mayor Fernando Freyre de Andrade addressed the Havana town hall. Prior to his election as Mayor, he had served as an attorney, defending the alleged PIC conspirators in 1910. A prominent member of the Conservative party, he provided the accused with a strong defense, attacking the

⁵³ Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 177.

⁵⁴ José María Collantes, quoted in "La conmemoración patriótica de ayer," *La Lucha*, 8 December 1914, 2.

actions of Liberal President José Miguel Gómez and securing their acquittal. As Helg points out, however, he did so only with the provision that “he could withdraw if he found evidence of a conspiracy against whites.”⁵⁵ In his 1914 oration, Freyre de Andrade 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.⁵⁶

The Havana mayor thus 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.

Other speeches posited a raceless Maceo and a raceless nation: “In the war for independence, Maceo was not black or white, but a symbol of Cuban dignity, the soul of liberty, the sacrosanct fight for our emancipation.”⁵⁷ Maceo thus represented a deracialized, inclusive national identity, a racial *cubanidad* that rendered divisions meaningless. If Maceo was the incarnation of this identity, the memory of his death was its genesis.

When Maceo died at Punta Brava in 1896, his aide, Francisco Gómez, fell by his side. Gómez was the son of General Máximo Gómez, a white leader of the independence struggle. 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 the Cámara declared this moment to represent not only racial unity but the forging of an inclusive national identity.

⁵⁵ Helg, 164, 183. Helg argues that Freyre de Andrade’s passionate defense of the PIC was part of an opportunistic effort by the Conservative party to attract PIC members to their own party (Helg, 182).

⁵⁶ Fernando Freyre de Andrade, quoted in “La conmemoración patriótica de ayer,” *La Lucha*, 8 December 1914, 6.

⁵⁷ “El Dr. Cuevas Zequeira,” *La Lucha*, 8 December 1919, 1.

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.”⁵⁸ The same interpretation of the Maceo-Gómez death persisted in annual commemorations of the event.

The symbolism of the moment was sometimes represented as a literal combination, as in a 1925 *La Lucha* editorial: “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.”⁵⁹ José María Collantes, in his 1914 speech, called to “Maceo *mestizo*, Maceo dying in the young arms of his white assistant, united among blood two races.”⁶⁰ 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.”⁶¹

These speeches not only invoked Maceo and the image of his death with Panchito Gómez to espouse the ideal of racial fraternity but to declare the issue of racial inequality

⁵⁸ “La peregrinación al Cacahual,” *La Lucha*, 8 December 1908, 2.

⁵⁹ “Antonio Maceo,” *La Lucha*, 6 December 1925, 7. *La Lucha* re-ran this editorial again in 1926.

⁶⁰ José María Collantes, quoted in “La conmemoración patriótica de ayer,” *La Lucha*, 8 December 1914, 2.

⁶¹ Horacio Díaz Pardo, quoted in “La Cámara en Sesión Solemne , Rememró Anoche a los Heroes y los Mártires de la Independencia,” *La Lucha*, 8 December 1919, 9.

moot and incompatible with patriotism and Cuban identity. Maceo served as proof that race was irrelevant in Cuba, and that, as Díaz Pardo warned, “he who tries to tear that symbol... will be damned.” These speeches suggest that the dominant national self-image was de-racialized, even as racism and racial inequality persisted. The act of demanding equality, of identifying or organizing on the basis of racial identity was anti-national, anti-Cuban.

That these speeches were given in the forum of the official commemorations at Cacahual and the Cámara de Representantes suggests that their representations of Maceo and the significance of his racial identity constituted a kind of “official memory,” a depiction of the past that would be uncontroversial and recognizable to the mainstream of the Cuban population. However, the continued invocation of Maceo as a symbol of racial unity and a de-racialized national identity makes clear that this was also a contested memory. Although the speeches did not directly acknowledge an alternate memory of Maceo or a different interpretation of the significance of race to that memory, the persistence of this imagery suggests that it was meant not only to extol harmony but also to contest an alternative. This was political speech, intended as an endorsement of a particular, if dominant, memory and a precise version of national identity. It is essential to note as well that although many speakers identified Maceo as proof of racial unity, Maceo’s own views on the significance of race in the Republic for which he died were not a part of the discussion.

Toward a New Maceo: Memory from the Margins

There were, however, alternate images of Maceo in the early Republic that found their way into the public sphere, if not immediately into the dominant national memory.

As early as 1902, *La Lucha* reported on commemorations of Maceo taking place in Afro-Cuban societies such as the Centro de Cocheros in Havana. The newspaper reported that this event was attended by “representatives of various recreational centers of the colored class,” along with representatives of national political parties, among them Alfredo Zayas.⁶² Racial identity was an essential part of the memory of Maceo celebrated at the Centro de Cocheros. The shrine to Maceo and Gómez erected there was surrounded by an “honor guard of youth of the colored race.” As members of Afro-Cuban societies, attendees clearly identified Maceo as representative not only of Cuba as a whole but of their particular collective identity.

The next day’s edition of *La Lucha* reported another commemoration hosted by the society ‘La Igualdad’ and the Centro de Cocheros in Cárdenas. Speakers at this celebration included prominent Afro-Cubans Generoso Campos Marquetti and Juan Gualberto Gómez, who had supported Bartolomé Masó and his platform of racial equality and universal suffrage in the Presidential election of 1901.⁶³ *La Lucha* reported that Campos Marquetti “analyzed...the problem of races as the problem of the country,” to an “enthusiastic ovation.”⁶⁴ The newspaper did not report the specific content of the speech, but the mere fact that these celebrations were taking place suggests the presence of a competing memory and a different interpretation of the meaning of Maceo. Such commemorations surely continued, much as alternative memories of Maceo persisted throughout the Republic.

These different images of Maceo were no less celebratory than the mainstream memory; rather, they incorporated different attributes into the existing heroic narrative,

⁶² “En el Centro de Cocheros,” *La Lucha*, 8 December 1902, 2.

⁶³ See: Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*.

⁶⁴ “Los radicales en Cárdenas,” *La Lucha*, 8 December 1902, 2.

including his overcoming economic and racial adversity and his political and social vision for the nation. However, as John Nerone has argued, collective national memories tend away from controversy and conflict, toward projecting a simple but unifying representation of the past.⁶⁵ Alternative memories of Maceo continued to have meaning for many Cubans, but were largely marginalized by a dominant memory which seemed to validate the social and political status-quo of the early Republic.

As noted above, historian Patricia Weiss Fagen has argued that in the mid-1930s, the revisionist school of Cuban historians “eclipsed” the traditional school, which resulted thereafter in a change in Maceo’s representation in the historiography. Indeed, the rise of revisionist historiography and the view of the national past that its proponents espoused did influence popular memory in the 1930s and 1940s as Cubans reevaluated the national past in the wake of the Machado dictatorship and the political upheavals of 1933. However, the memory of Maceo articulated by those historians did not suddenly appear after the fall of Gerardo Machado. The roots of the revisionist narratives can be found much earlier, in the alternative memories of Maceo that had been circulating since the foundation of the republic.

On December 7, 1915, Juan Gualberto Gómez delivered the annual speech in honor of Maceo to the Cámara. To the assembled politicians, he announced that he would speak of Maceo “as a soldier, as a patriot, and as a politician... in these three aspects, I will briefly examine before you what he meant and what he represented.”⁶⁶ The image of Maceo’s life, thoughts and meaning for the Cuban Republic that Gómez presented was far different from any heard before in the *Cámara*. He placed Maceo’s socio-economic background at the

⁶⁵ Nerone, “Professional History and Social Memory,” 95.

⁶⁶ Juan Gualberto Gómez, “El Presidente de la República en la sesión solemne de la Cámara de Representantes,” *La Lucha*, 8 December 1915, 11. See also: *Homenaje a Maceo*, ed. Estenger, p. 56.

center of his presentation. Gómez depicted his patriotism as particularly heroic because he “was born in the lowest rung of our social ladder,” an Afro-Cuban *campesino*, who “rose to be come one of the greatest figures of our Liberation Army.”⁶⁷ His patriotism and respect for the rule of law contrasted with those “educated men” who “rose up against the established government [and] revolutionary institutions.” Gómez again stressed Maceo’s lack of formal education in illuminating his political thought, distancing him from conventional politics, “that boxing match of ambitions and aspirations... that usually set some elements of society against others.” Maceo, he continued, “had not studied Aristotle... but as it always is with genius, he had intuition of the principles that others only come to through study.”⁶⁸

On the issue of race, Gómez pointed to Maceo’s declaration to his white comrades to recognize the patriotism and contribution of black Cubans in the independence struggle as signifying that they were “worthy to share... in the benefits of democracy.”⁶⁹ Gómez presented a distinct memory of Maceo, one in which his overcoming the racial and economic realities of colonial Cuba defined his character and accentuated his greatness. He spoke out directly against the idea of Maceo as a solely military figure, arguing that he had an enormous role in politically guiding the Revolution, not only in fighting it. The image that Gómez presented was not a part of the mainstream understanding of Maceo. Nevertheless, over the two decades that followed, alternate images of Maceo began to permeate the dominant memory.

Representations of Maceo that contradicted the dominant view often found expression in Afro-Cuban clubs. Although the Maceo commemorations put on by these organizations

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

appear only sporadically in the mainstream press, it is clear that they represented a community with a different collective memory of Maceo, one that depicted him as a major political and intellectual figure. Miguel Angel Céspedes, speaking at a 1923 Maceo commemoration at the Afro-Cuban society *Club Atenas* stressed Maceo's political role in the independence movement, particularly in resisting internal divisions within the struggle and his resistance to the potential intervention of the United States. Céspedes noted that Maceo feared that Cuba would "incur dangerous debts of gratitude" if it allowed U.S. involvement in its independence campaign.⁷⁰ The image of Maceo presented in this speech suggests not only a different view of Maceo himself, but a reevaluation of the Cuban past as a whole and the meaning of its entanglement with the United States.

The Afro-Cuban press also contributed to the articulation of alternative memories of Maceo, memories that directly countered the official mythology. One 1916 article in the short-lived Afro-Cuban magazine *Labor Nueva* declared, "it is upon us, the Cuban youth, to finish peacefully what was not accomplished militarily because of Maceo's death."⁷¹

Another article in the same issue imagined "a 'conversation' with the bronze statue of the general inaugurated in Havana in 1916," wherein "an Afro-Cuban activist explained to the hero: 'Yes, General, the Constitution says that... all Cubans are equal before the law, but... in the republic that... was created with your effort, all Cubans are not treated as equals.'"⁷²

Representation of Maceo's intellectual and political contributions to the independence movement began to insinuate themselves into mainstream representations in the 1920s. *La*

⁷⁰ "El recuerdo del Titán puso ayer," *La Lucha*, 8 December 1923, 8.

⁷¹ José Enrique Morúa, "Antonio Maceo y la revolución cubana," *Labor Nueva* I, no. 15 (21-28 May 1916): 13-14; quoted in de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 39. Translation is by Alejandro de la Fuente.

⁷² De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 39, quoting George Duroy, "Lo que me dijo la estatua," *Labor Nueva* I, no. 15 (21-28 May 1916), 16-17.

Lucha declared in 1924 that despite all that had been written and spoken about Maceo, not enough was understood of his “moral, physical and intellectual value.”⁷³ The image of Maceo as an influential thinker as well as warrior remained somewhat peripheral, but as the 1920s drew to a close, alternate views of the past began to problematize the national mythology. In 1926, an essay on the cover of *La Lucha* by José Miró Argenter dealt directly with Maceo’s thoughts on race in the independence struggle and in Cuban society. He condemned those who accused Maceo of racism as racist themselves, arguing that Maceo saw only “pride, bravery and commitment to the national cause.” Miró argued that Maceo possessed “a powerful mind and a solid body,” even if he had no formal education or military training.⁷⁴

The “*Página infantil*” (Children’s Page) in the popular weekly magazine *Carteles* echoed those sentiments the following December: “Racist? He did not know the meaning of the word. For him, there was nothing other than Cubans in Cuba. Others spoke of black and white, but not Maceo.”⁷⁵ Although the representation of Maceo as seeing no race at all coincides with the dominant symbolism of a de-racialized Maceo, the inclusion of this point in a page designed for children suggests that the question of racial identity and racism had begun to enter the essential Maceo narrative.

Two years later, the news and culture magazine *Bohemia*, which until that point had devoted little attention to commemorating Maceo, printed as its title page a collection of Maceo quotations under the banner “*Pensamientos*.”⁷⁶ While the quotations selected by the

⁷³ Julián del Rey Lanes, “La grandeza de la fecha de hoy,” *La Lucha*, 7 December 1924, segunda sección, 7.

⁷⁴ José Miró Argenter, “El heroe,” *La Lucha*, 7 December 1926, 2.

⁷⁵ Néstor Carbonell, “Página infantil,” *Carteles* 10, no. 50 (11 December 1927): 32.

⁷⁶ “Pensamientos,” *Bohemia* 20, no. 50 (9 December 1928): 1.

magazine generally conform to the prevailing image of Maceo as a symbol of patriotism and unity, the editors of *Bohemia* also included his warning against U.S. intervention: “It is better to rise or fall without help than contract dangerous debts of gratitude.”⁷⁷ The use of Maceo’s own words as a memorial, and the inclusion of that quotation in particular, suggest that his thoughts and writings were slowly being incorporated into the dominant memory. Although Maceo largely remained a physical, military figure, his role within the revolution was growing: “As Martí, the Apostle and Martyr, was the flag of our epic, Maceo was its executing arm and its supreme guide.”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Antonio Maceo, quoted in *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ “La fecha de mañana: 7 de Diciembre,” *La Lucha*, 6 December 1930, 1.

Chapter 2

Remembering Maceo, Reimagining Republic

In the early 1930s, the Cuban republic was in a state of chaos. Gerardo Machado, first elected president in 1924 on an anti-corruption “Platform of Regeneration,” had broken his vow not to seek reelection 1928, securing nominations from each of Cuba’s major political parties “through a combination of intimidation, coercion, and bribery.” The country’s economy had suffered tremendously for years under the effects of a worldwide depression. As historian Louis A. Pérez, Jr. has argued, “[t]hese conditions set the stage for political confrontation and social conflict on a scale unprecedented in the republic.”

Economic collapse and the apparent breakdown of the Cuban political system prompted widespread opposition, which increasingly was met with harsh repression by the Machado regime. Strikes increased, as did bombings and assassinations of government targets by opposition groups. In August 1933, a general strike paralyzed the country, taking on “the full proportions of a revolutionary offensive.”¹ After intensive and contentious negotiations between Machado and U.S. ambassador Sumner Welles, the President fled the island on August 12.

The unrest persisted in the aftermath of Machado’s departure, punctuated by the September 4 revolt of noncommissioned officers in the Cuban military, led by Sergeant Fulgencio Batista, who emerged as the major power broker in Cuban politics over the next

¹ See: Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 252-254.

quarter-century. The republic, it seemed, had failed, and would have to be remade. The popular mobilization and governmental instability of the early 1930s created an opening in which Cubans could reimagine the meaning and course of their nation. For a new generation of Cubans, to do so would require reimagining their past and reengaging with the founders of the republic and the icons of nationality.

The overthrow of Machado prompted connections with the independence struggle and the reevaluation of the republic and its founders. After the September 4 uprising within the military, Ramón Grau San Martín was named president. Only months after the ouster and flight of the dictator, the recently installed Grau addressed a “much reduced” public contingent at Cacahual. The newspaper *Ahora* reported that Grau spoke to 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 program of the revolution,” Grau declared, “reaches out to retrieve the flag of Maceo, of the heroic patriot. This is the program of the triumphant revolution.”² Although Grau would not remain in power for long, the nationalist tide of 1933 seemed to have brought Maceo’s political vision into greater prominence in Cuban memory.

Two years later, *Bohemia* paid tribute to Maceo by invoking him as a symbol for and precursor to “those who on alters of Law and Liberty sacrificed their lives during the years of the *machadista* tyranny.”³ The following December, members of the *Cámara* gathered in Havana to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of the death of Antonio Maceo. The annual

² “El programa de la revolución triunfante está identificado con los ideales de A. Maceo,” *Ahora*, 8 December 1933, 1, 4.

³ “Maceo,” *Bohemia* 27, no. 49 (8 December 1935): 11.

commemoration had been suspended since 1933, when legislative power had been interrupted by the political upheaval and instability.

The year 1936 marked its return after four years, and María Gómez Carbonell, a young representative from Havana, was chosen to address the assembly. Gómez, at thirty-three years old, was the first person of the post-independence generation to address the special session of the *Cámara*, and her speech conveyed the pain and hope of a younger generation looking for answers after years of dictatorship and political upheaval. Gómez recounted Maceo's well-known feats, listing his many military victories and his role in unifying the nation's regions and races behind freedom and democracy. She compared Cuba's struggles to crucifixion, and looked to the memory of Maceo, the "unbeaten champion of *cubanidad*" to rescue the nation from the suffering and instability of the preceding years. Gómez concluded with a resounding declaration to the *Cámara*, crying out, "General Antonio Maceo: Listen to us! The nation is calling to you again."⁴ With the collapse of the republic came calls for the republic to be officially remade in the form of a new constitution. As Cubans began to debate the future of the new Cuba, many also began to debate the meaning of its past. In this period, a visible and profound shift began in the national image of Antonio Maceo.

Between Revision and Revolution

The political realignment that followed the revolution of 1933 and the debates over the new constitution engendered new discussion racial discrimination. The *Partido Socialista Popular* (PSP), Cuba's communist party, advocated an anti-racist political agenda,

⁴ "1936: Discurso de María Gómez Carbonell" in *Homenaje a Maceo*, ed. Estenger, 304-313.

demanding that the new constitution include not only a repudiation of racial inequality, but legal punishments for racism and discrimination. In the constitutional debate, the PSP presented itself as a leading advocate for racial equality and sought to win the political support of the Afro-Cuban community.⁵ As the party confronted persistent racial discrimination, its leaders and supporters articulated a radically different memory of Antonio Maceo as a symbol of the continuing struggle against discrimination. The tributes and editorials published in the party's official newspaper, *Noticias de Hoy*, as well as the commemorations organized or sponsored by the PSP reveal the contours of this competing memory of Maceo.

In its first year of publication, the newspaper printed an editorial titled "The True Maceo," in which the writer outlined a memory of Maceo that spoke to the need to reengage with the past and directly confronted the simplicity of the traditional image of the Bronze Titan:

For us, for those who read the past as a useful lesson for the present and future, with the sound intention of linking today with the liberating Revolution, the figure of Maceo is not buried exclusively under the deeds of war, but is unfurled and enlarged as a leader of the fight to achieve for Cuba definitive national liberation, stable democracy [and] improvement of the nation.

The editorial articulated an image of Maceo as coequal with José Martí and other political founders of the republic, and identified his particular social legacy:

General Antonio Maceo did something more than fight as a soldier in the ranks of the Liberating Army. He created – helped to create – the program of objectives and the way to a national liberation without

⁵ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 212-215.

limits. He taught how to harmonize the Cuban volunteers, in true national unity, to achieve victory...He showed, with deeds and with lessons, how black and white – equals – did not have to be divided, but rather fully united in the fight for common interests and for national interests.⁶

The invocation of Maceo as a political visionary and leader was a clear break from the traditional image of Maceo.

In some ways, the alternative memory was similar to the traditional image of Maceo. Few, if any, Cubans seem to have denied that Maceo represented the ideal of racial unity and equality. Despite its otherwise different interpretation of Maceo, *Noticias de Hoy* and its writers often drew upon the same imagery as did the traditional memory. In particular, the image of Maceo and Panchito Gómez's death seems to have remained meaningful even for those espousing a radically divergent view of Maceo. On the fiftieth anniversary of his death, a front-page tribute to Maceo examined his meaning for Cuban racial fraternity, describing what the writer called "*su fiebre unitaria*."⁷ The article remembered that it was Maceo

who, in the end, in order to immortally establish the proud symbol of national unity, enter[ed] into death accompanied by Panchito Gómez Toro, a white man. Above all his qualities, above the sum of the high ranks of his life as a combatant, stands this giving over of his powerful will, putting before everything... the necessary and inevitable unity of Cubans, of blacks and whites, children of the same destiny and of one single national blood.⁸

⁶ "El Maceo verdadero," *Noticias de Hoy*, 7 December 1938, 6.

⁷ Literally, "his unitarian fever." "Antonio Maceo, 1896-1946," *Noticias de Hoy*, 7 December 1946, 1.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Much as in the traditional memory, Maceo himself was invoked as the incarnation of the Cuban racial ideal. One tribute called Maceo an “admirable case of the fusing and overcoming of the races that form our people,”⁹ In a 1945 editorial, the poet and scholar Ángel Augier argued that Maceo was “the genuine product of our people, for his social roots as much as because flowing through his veins were the various bloods that make up Cuban nationality.”

While *Noticias de Hoy* invoked the same imagery of unity and the fusion of races, its writers did so for a very different purpose: to stress these remained only unfulfilled ideals. Both memories celebrated him as a symbol of racial fraternity, but *Noticias de Hoy* made clear that this had not been achieved by the independence struggle, but rather was the task of “the present generation” to complete.¹⁰ Ángel Augier concluded his discussion of the bloods of Cuban nationality by declaring that “the profound longing of the popular heart was incarnated in Maceo.”¹¹

The Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén also invoked images of longing in his 1941 tribute to Maceo, published in the Sunday magazine of *Noticias de Hoy*. Guillén wrote that “this December seventh, we keep on fighting against the evils that Maceo fought. The longings of [18]95 continue to demand our effort.” Using Maceo’s own words, Guillén urged political action:

The hero of a just war, for the independence of our homeland, is at his feet to tell us ‘that there are still justices to repair,’ and that therefore the redemptive revolution ‘has not completed its work’...Thus, we must say that Maceo remains here, joined with us, surrounding us with his immortal spirit, the followed and beloved guide of the Cuban

⁹ “El Titán,” *Noticias de Hoy*, 7 December 1938, 6.

¹⁰ “El Maceo verdadero,” *Noticias de Hoy*, 7 December 1938, 6.

¹¹ Ángel Augier, “Maceo: vida y ejemplo,” *Noticias de Hoy*, 7 December 1945, 2.

masses. They have learned once and for all that only a republic like Maceo wanted, without discrimination against blacks, without exploitation of women, without thieving politicians at serving personal interests... only a Republic like this... will be able to live with honor and to progress in peace.¹²

The activist political program presented by the PSP thus demanded an activist memory of Maceo. In a front page article, the newspaper told its readers in 1940 that “there is only one worthy way to honor” Maceo: The people must work hard to achieve the work – which launched him into combat and into death – of achieving social justice, complete independence and true equality between all Cubans, which was the supreme and only strength in Maceo’s unrelenting life.”¹³ As an editorial in the same edition declared, “With Maceo, we believe that the liberation of Cuba is possible and necessary... with him we must be prepared to work and to fight for true democracy, for equality, for our total independence.”¹⁴

The idea of “complete independence” was frequently invoked in the tributes to Maceo that appeared in *Noticias de Hoy*. Indeed, not only did Maceo serve as a symbol of the racial inequities of the republic, but of resistance to the influence wielded by the United States since its 1898 intervention in the Cuban War of Independence. The 1940 editorial referenced above asserted that “Maceo said, with his deeds and his words, that Cuba was not lost to the oppressing power of the United States. This truth is alive today.” Another tribute to Maceo declared, “Cuba still is not completely free. The imperialist claw loots and oppresses us.”¹⁵

¹² Nicolás Guillén, “Antonio Maceo,” *Magazine de Hoy*, 7 December 1941, 11.

¹³ “7 de diciembre, 1896-1940,” *Noticias de Hoy*, 7 December 1940, 1.

¹⁴ “El ejemplo de Maceo,” *Noticias de Hoy*, 7 December 1940, 2.

¹⁵ “Antonio Maceo,” *Noticias de Hoy*, 7 December 1949, 7.

In 1949, the newspaper featured a treatise on Maceo's anti-imperialism which lauded his apparent foresight:

Antonio Maceo, - revolutionary politician of exceptional quality, saw clearly – with the deep light of his lucid way of thinking” not only the dangers of Spanish imperialism, but the “the other phenomenon already at the door: ...the enslaving actions... of incipient Yankee imperialism.¹⁶

Maceo's warnings against United States intervention in Cuba, as well as his commitment to democracy and racial equality served as evidence of his political vision, an element of his memory that writers in the PSP newspaper argued had been obscured by the traditional image of Maceo.

The themes of racial inequality and Maceo's political ideology also motivated a new generation of professional historians, many of whom emerged from or were sympathetic to the opposition politics that the PSP espoused, to challenge the traditional image of Maceo in historiography. These revisionist historians produced a flourish of works that reevaluated the conventional, triumphal narrative of the past and represented Maceo as a symbol of what could have been, of how the Republic had failed the ideals of the independence struggle. The themes upon which these revisionist historians focused reflected the political debates of the time and constituted an effort to empower those memories of Maceo that had been marginalized since the birth of the republic. As Afro-Cubans and opposition political movements like the PSP sought to influence popular memory through social and political activism, revisionist historians attempted to reimagine Maceo through scholarly analysis.

¹⁶ René Olivares Sabas, “Antimperialismo de Antonio Maceo,” *Noticias de Hoy*, 7 December 1948, 2.

The mid-1930s opened an era of increased historical writing in general, and works on Maceo grew both in number and in depth.¹⁷ As Cuba emerged from the Machado dictatorship, a new school of historians rose to prominence in the Cuban Academy of History, articulating a revisionist narrative of Cuban history as a mode of political opposition. These historians questioned not only the existing historiography but also the political and social foundations of the nation itself, reinterpreting the national past as a means of explaining the failure of the republic. As Patricia Weiss Fagen has argued, this ascendant school of revisionist historians represented Maceo as “the personification of what might have been but had gone wrong.”¹⁸

Led by young historian Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, revisionist historians largely focused on reexamining the War of Independence and the U.S. military intervention of 1898, seeing in that moment the frustration of Cuban independence and the goals of the revolution. These scholars identified a discontinuity between the republic envisioned by José Martí and Antonio Maceo and that which had been constructed in the wake of the U.S. intervention.¹⁹ Revisionist historians began to identify the frustration of the revolution in 1898 as the genesis of the republic’s failings, and they looked for a fuller understanding of the leaders of that movement and their vision for the nation that could have been.

In the late republic, from the 1933 ouster of Machado to the triumph of the revolution in 1959, many scholars took aim at the traditional image of Antonio Maceo. They sought a deeper engagement with the revolutionary icon and a reevaluation of his significance in the

¹⁷ Robert Freeman Smith, “Twentieth Century Cuban Historiography,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 44, no. 1 (Feb. 1964): 50.

¹⁸ Fagen, “Antonio Maceo: Heroes, History and Historiography,” 75.

¹⁹ Smith, “Twentieth Century Cuban Historiography,” 48.

nation's past and for the republic's future. Patricia Weiss Fagen's essay provides an excellent guide to and analysis of the revisionist historiography on Maceo. However, because her study seeks to trace connections between professional scholarship and popular memory, a slightly different approach is necessary. Whereas Fagen's project is a broad summary and elucidation of the overall trends in twentieth-century Maceo historiography, this paper attempts a more direct engagement with the historians and their works, viewing these scholars as agents not only in historiographical change, but in the contestation of collective memory.²⁰

Their reevaluation focused on two central elements of the traditional memory: Maceo as *el brazo de la revolución* (the arm of the revolution), an exclusively physical figure; and Maceo as a symbol of racial fraternity and a de-racialized national identity. By confronting these two pillars of the dominant image of Maceo, these revisionist historians sought to articulate a new memory of Maceo that would point to the failures of the republic and offer a vision for its redemption.

Scholarly approaches to 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 year 1936 saw the publication of the first major scholarly study of Antonio Maceo in Leonardo Griñán Peralta's *Antonio Maceo: Análisis caracterológico*. Drawing upon a wealth of contemporary and late nineteenth century scholarship, the author attempted not "a biography, nor a eulogy, nor... a critical evaluation of the historical or social significance of Antonio Maceo, but rather an analysis of his character."²¹ Griñán set out to humanize a figure that had been made a myth, frozen in bronze. While the image of a

²⁰ Fagen, "Antonio Maceo: Heroes, History and Historiography."

²¹ Leonardo Griñán Peralta, *Antonio Maceo: Análisis caracterológico* (Havana: Editorial Trópico, 1936), 12-13.

humanized Maceo may not appear at first glance to be a dramatic change, the effort to emphasize his character and personality rather than his physical strength or his military heroism presented a clearly different Maceo that had previously appeared in historiography or in popular media.

In the years that followed, revisionist historians looked to Maceo's own writings as a means of reevaluating the dominant memory. This effort focused on presenting Maceo as a thinker in addition to a warrior. Historian Leopoldo Horrego Estuch directly confronted the traditional image of Maceo as "*el Brazo de la Revolución*," arguing not that the term was incorrect but that it was overly simplistic. He declared that the appellation had been too literally understood, as "it is not only force included in the symbol, 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.'"²²

Scholars sought to thicken the memory of Maceo, adding his greatness as a thinker to the traditional image that stressed only his greatness as a warrior. In 1936, historian Emeterio Santovenía edited a collection of Maceo's writings titled *Disciplina y dignidad*. His introduction challenged the notion of Maceo as exclusively a physical being: "Antonio Maceo was, above all things, a fighter... in peace, he fought with his mind without forgetting action. In war, he fought with his arm without forgetting to use his mind." Maceo was a tremendous warrior, he declared, "but he was also a statesman... in the middle of such a

²² Leopoldo Horrego Estuch, *Maceo: estudio político y patriótico* (Havana: Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, 1947), 17.

difficult fight, his mind was bowed by the weight of his plans and concerns for the creation of the nationhood that he fought for.”²³

Representations of the content of Maceo’s political vision varied from the general to the specific. Historians seeking to present Maceo as a political thinker often pointed to his warnings against U.S. involvement in Cuban affairs. 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 Maceo, as a “revolutionary leader and statesman [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.’”²⁴

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 declared that “in concrete, focused phrases... 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.”²⁵ Horrego argued that Maceo envisioned a socially and politically egalitarian republic, a democracy committed to the complete freedom equality of all Cubans. “For Maceo,” he concluded, “perfect governance

²³ Emeterio S. Santovenia, ed. *Antonio Maceo: disciplina y dignidad* (Havana: Publicaciones de la Secretaria de Educación, 1936), 6-11.

²⁴ Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, *Revolución y república en Maceo* (Havana: Unión Interamericana del Caribe, 1945), 49, 59, 63.

²⁵ Horrego Estuch, *Maceo: estudio político y patriótico*, 135.

is nothing more than the practice of justice.”²⁶ By engaging with his letters and writings, historians were able to articulate an image of Maceo as a political thinker, far different from the traditional “man on horseback” that had dominated Cuban popular memory since his 1896 death.

These historians also sought to reevaluate another, more controversial element of the traditional Maceo memory. Since the earliest years of independence, Maceo had served to symbolize racial fraternity in Cuba and a de-racialized national identity. Revisionist scholars emphasized the racism that Maceo faced within the revolutionary movement to argue that Maceo had envisioned a racially egalitarian society that the republic had failed to achieve.

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, a scholar whose writings frequently appeared in the pages of *Noticias de Hoy*, first 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.²⁷ According to one 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...

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 139-139.

²⁷ Juan Marinello, *Maceo: Líder y masa* (Havana: Editorial Páginas, 1942), 25.

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.”²⁸

The betrayal of Maceo’s vision was a central component of the 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 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.”²⁹

Leopoldo Horrego Estuch declared that Maceo “proclaimed equality and union to be basic principles of the Revolution. If these are broken by egoism and selfishness,” he said, “one cannot expect a prosperous or happy nation.”³⁰ Maceo’s greatness, he argued, lay in his overcoming the racial prejudice that surrounded him and in fighting for the complete liberty of all Cubans: “For Maceo, there could not be any uncompleted work in the regeneration of Cuba, as he could not imagine that freedom could be relative or fragmentary.”³¹ 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

²⁸ Leonardo Griñán Peralta, *Maceo, análisis caracterológico*. Tomo 2 (Havana: Cooperativa de cultura popular, n.d.), 145-146.

²⁹ Marinello, *Maceo: Líder y masa*, 41.

³⁰ Leopoldo Horrego Estuch, *Maceo: Heroe y carácter*, 4th ed. (Havana: La Milagrosa, 1952), 286. The first edition of *Heroe y carácter* was published in 1943.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 285.

blood spilled in 1896 by Maceo in San Pedro has still not been able to wash away racial prejudices of our nation.³²

Roig invoked the scene of Maceo's death as symbolic of the failure of racial equality in the republic, a direct contradiction of 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.

In the late republic, Cuban historians articulated a revisionist memory that challenged traditional representations of Maceo. These scholars saw in Maceo what the republic was meant to be and how it had failed. They challenged the notion of an exclusively physical Maceo, illuminating his political ideals and his anti-imperialist thought as a means of understanding his vision for the nation. That vision, they argued, was of an egalitarian nation in which all Cubans enjoyed equality. They sought to overturn the dominant image of Maceo as a symbol of racial harmony, instead depicting him as a symbol of the republic's failure to realize that goal.

While this movement affected profound changes in the Maceo historiography, it also had reverberations in popular consciousness. Some scholars, most notably Emilio Roig, served as public intellectuals, advocating increased historical awareness and attempting to reshape the national narrative. By publishing articles in popular media and giving speeches at commemorative ceremonies, historians and journalists brought scholarly debates over Maceo into the public sphere.

In December 1935, Emilio Roig published a two-part article in *Carteles* titled "Maceo: sus ideales y opiniones políticos y revolucionarios."³³ This seminal article set out

³² Roig, *Revolución y república en Maceo*, 38.

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 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 these 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.³⁴

The historian condemned the 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.” Roig looked to the letters Maceo wrote to other revolutionaries during the conflict to reveal his political views and qualities of his character, contrasting Maceo’s expressed rejection of any political office with the personal aspirations, disloyalty and disunion of the revolutionary leadership. A week later, in the second part of his article, Roig attempted a deep examination of Maceo’s decision to reject the incomplete independence offered by the 1878 Pact of Zanjón and instead to vow to continue the fight in

³³ Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, “Maceo: sus ideales y opiniones políticos y revolucionarios.” *Carteles* 24, no. 50 (15 December 1935): 26.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

his famous Protest of Baraguá. He represented this moment as confirmation of Maceo's political intelligence, his loyalty and his unselfish commitment to the cause of independence.

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."³⁵ 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 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."³⁶

Yearly commemorative gatherings offered another opportunity to challenge and recast popular memory of Maceo. Speaking at a 1938 commemorative ceremony organized by the Provincial Federation of Societies of the Colored Race in Havana's Parque Central, Emilio Roig reiterated his claim that "Maceo's glories in war had resulted in today's Cubans ignoring or imperfectly understanding those facets of his personality that most interest us today." Maceo was a political thinker, Roig insisted, committed to the ideal of democracy

³⁵ Enrique Pizzi de Porras, "Aristas de Maceo," *Bohemia* 28, no. 50 (13 December 1936), 48.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

and equality, and he contrasted Maceo's "anti-dictatorial posture" with the "noxious" attempts to impose "despotism and tyranny" upon the Republic that Maceo envisioned.³⁷

Roig articulated a memory of Maceo that was highly political, invoking the icon as a symbol of what Cuba might have been had its leaders lived up to the vision of its founders. "December 7," Roig concluded, "gives us direction in these times so full of contradictions and confusion... [Maceo's] limitless patriotism led him to put above all else his desire to serve Cuba and to conquer its true freedom, without racial discrimination, without foreign interventions or internal despotism."³⁸ An article published in *Carteles* the following week reasserted the argument Roig made at the *Parque Central*, declaring that Maceo was "not only a revolutionary and a warrior, but also a politician and statesman."³⁹

The late republic saw a proliferation of material on Maceo, both in scholarly works, edited collections and in popular media. In addition to Emilio Roig, other Cuban historians wrote articles for popular magazines and newspapers. In the 1950s, Leopoldo Horrego published numerous articles in *Bohemia* and the Havana daily *El Mundo* which articulated an image of Maceo as a political thinker who fought "to establish a community of equal men and of democratic opportunities, 'without injustices and without offenses.'"⁴⁰ In *Bohemia*, Horrego declared that "he fought and bled for a profound social change because he knew from personal experience the bloodiness of colonialism."⁴¹ Maceo offered a "clear social and

³⁷ Emilio Roig de Leuschenring, quoted in "Revelaciones de interés hacen los oradores en el homenaje a Antonio Maceo," *El Mundo*, 8 December 1938, 18.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Emilio Roig de Leuschenring, "Maceo, ciudadano perfecto," *Carteles* 32, no. 50 (11 December 1938): 39.

⁴⁰ Leopoldo Horrego, "Antonio Maceo: hombre excesivo," *El Mundo*, 7 December 1950, 6.

⁴¹ Leopoldo Horrego, "Maceo, personalidad y destino," *Bohemia* 44, no. 49 (7 December 1952), 20, 119.

political thesis” in addition to his efforts as a warrior. “This coincidence of thought and action... is truly rare.”⁴² His title, the Bronze Titan, “could not be more graphic or eloquent, as Maceo is a Titan and is of bronze, for his capacity for great actions, the immutability of his political opinion and his legendary existence.”

Although not as thorough or detailed as their scholarly works, the articles and speeches presented by historians in the late republic directly challenged the traditional image of Antonio Maceo. These historians sought to bring the revisionist memory of Maceo from historiography into popular consciousness and thus to encourage Cubans to reevaluate the foundations of their republic.

Confrontation and Contestation: Maceo *político*

The revisionist memory of Antonio Maceo that historians attempted to bring into popular consciousness confronted a traditional memory of Maceo that had served as a foundation of Cuban nationhood and identity. In presenting an image of Maceo as a political thinker and as a symbol of the unfinished project of racial equality, this alternative memory challenged paradigmatic symbols of the nation. In the period between the ouster of Gerardo Machado and the triumph of the Revolution in 1959, a revisionist memory of Antonio Maceo entered Cuban popular consciousness, confronting and challenging the traditional memory of Maceo.

In the first decades of the republic, Cubans became accustomed to understanding Maceo’s greatness as the *brazo de la revolución*, the man on horseback whose sword carried out the ideas of José Martí, the apostle of the revolution. Efforts by scholars and writers to

⁴² Leopoldo Horrego, “Maceo, ensenanza excepcional,” *Bohemia* 46, no. 49 (5 December 1954), 4.

articulate a memory of Maceo as a political thinker appeared to challenge the entrenched Maceo-Martí symbol. Indeed, representations of Maceo and Martí as *pensamiento y acción* persisted throughout the republic even as Cubans increasingly thought of Maceo as a political figure. While memory of Maceo as an exclusively physical being was not overturned during this period, representations of Maceo in public discourse reveal the image of Maceo as a politician began to insinuate itself into popular collective memory.

In the 1930s, Maceo's image as a political figure was bolstered by increased attention to his warnings against U.S. involvement in Cuban affairs. References to Maceo as *político* in the public and political spheres were often tied to his anti-imperialism. Maceo's transformation into anti-imperialist figure appears to have resulted from a wave of nationalist and anti-American sentiment that began in the 1920s and culminated with the abrogation of the Platt Amendment in 1934.⁴³ The perceived vindication of his warnings seemed to grant Maceo credibility as a statesman, and the rise of an anti-imperialist consensus in Cuba allowed that aspect of his political thought to become a part of the affirming, unifying and nationalistic collective memory of Maceo.

Anti-imperialism thus became the avenue through which Maceo's political thought entered public consciousness. In 1937, Gaston Godoy, a politician who later became President of the Cámara de Representantes during the Batista regime, lauded Maceo's anti-imperialist foresight: "without education...he knew nothing of high international politics but

⁴³ The Platt Amendment, named for Senator Orville Platt, was an amendment forced into the Cuban constitution by United States occupying authorities as a precondition for Cuban independence. Under the Amendment, the U.S. government had the right to intervene in Cuba whenever it deemed necessary for the preservation of "a stable Government adequately protecting life, property, and individual liberty." Further, the Amendment limited the rights of the new government to enter into treaties with other countries and forced Cuba to cede land for a U.S. naval base. The Grau government symbolically abrogated the Platt Amendment in 1933.

was nevertheless a statesman, as he saw signs of the coming war between the United States and Spain.”⁴⁴ Another speaker at the same commemoration declared:

Maceo was a superior man, and when he considered the help of the American nation, he said that Cuba had begun alone and that alone it must finish so that it would not have to make burdensome commitments or pay its gratitude in an anti-patriotic way. He did not want a people with political independence but without economic independence.⁴⁵

Anti-imperialism seemed to serve as the basis upon which Cubans acknowledged Maceo’s political thought and intelligence. A 1946 commemorative speech in the *Cámara* argued that Maceo became “a statesman when, discussing the possible help of the United States in the Cuban war of liberation, he affirmed that ‘it is dangerous to contract debts of gratitude with such a powerful neighbor.’”⁴⁶ In *Bohemia*, journalist and historian Luís Rolando Cabrera invoked the same famous warning, adding:

The illustrious warrior was right to fear that his nation would contract dangerous debts for its liberty. After... his death, North American troops came to Cuba. The war was easy for them, as the *mambises* had cleared a path with years of deprivation and sacrifice. And they had to pay the debt: the flag of the stars and stripes flew over buildings and forts, and the Platt Amendment shackled and gagged an incomplete sovereignty.⁴⁷

El Mundo offered a different interpretation of what Maceo represented in the face of U.S. intervention, arguing that he “showed the world the capability of the Cuban revolutionaries to win their independence by their own force.”⁴⁸ This emphasis on anti-imperialism presented

⁴⁴ Gaston Godoy quoted in “Miles de personas rindieron homenaje ayer en Cacahual a la memoria de Antonio Maceo,” *El Mundo*, 8 December 1937, 14.

⁴⁵ Mario Fuentes Aguilera, quoted in *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ “Analizó García Ibáñez el Carácter de Antonio Maceo,” *El Mundo*, 8 December 1946, 18.

⁴⁷ Luís Rolando Cabrera, “La lección olvidada,” *Bohemia* 43, no. 49 (9 December 1951): 52.

⁴⁸ *El Mundo*, 7 December 1951, 1.

an image of Maceo as *político* that resonated with and affirmed an existing unifying and nationalistic memory.

Representations of Maceo's politics did not always rely on his warnings against U.S. intervention. Indeed, during the Second World War, which Cuba entered alongside the United States in 1941, democratic solidarity appears to have replaced resentment, at least in popular media. That the anniversary of Maceo's death and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor both fell on December 7 seems to have temporarily exorcized anti-Americanism from the Maceo image, and the coincidence gave the two events a shared meaning. In the context of the war and the rise of fascism, Maceo became a symbol of democracy and freedom. As *El Mundo* somewhat prophetically stated on December 7, 1941, Maceo attained even greater importance as Cubans saw "the treasured democratic ideals endangered around the world."⁴⁹ The following year, the speaker in the Cámara declared that the "present war is in defense of the same principles" for which Maceo had fought.⁵⁰ Maceo's commitment to democracy was invoked after the war but it was most salient during that conflict as a symbol of shared purpose in the fight against totalitarianism.

While representations of Maceo's politics often invoked his anti-imperialism or his democratic ideals, the content of his thoughts was often left unacknowledged or unarticulated. This allowed images of Maceo as an intelligent and political figure to be incorporated into and reinforce the broader memory of his *grandeza*. A 1939 commemorative speech, for example, lauded Maceo as a "patriot, politician, [and] warrior."⁵¹

⁴⁹ *El Mundo*, 7 December 1941, 1.

⁵⁰ "Brillante panegírico de Maceo hizo anoche el Dr. Marino López Blanco," *El Mundo*, 8 December 1942, 15.

⁵¹ Calixto Manduley Castellanos, quoted in "Brillante el discurso del Dr. Manduley," *El Mundo*, 8 December 1939, 5.

The following December, the President of the Cámara de Representantes celebrated “the indomitable energy of his character, his long-sighted vision as a statesmen and the pristine purity of his intentions.”⁵²

Even while the content of Maceo’s political thought was often unclear, the traditional, simplistic image of Maceo was increasingly contested. While the revisionist narrative did not replace the traditional narrative, the reevaluation of Maceo resonated with an increased interest in the national past and was able to reshape collective memory. The “children’s section” of *Carteles* told its young readers that Maceo was “our Bronze Titan, so called because of his indomitable energy, his incalculable strength, his spiritual beauty and his clear and noble intelligence.”⁵³ An editorial in 1949 lamented that with Maceo’s death, Cuba had lost both “his arm and his mind... His fearless heart, his correct political focus...his constant concern for the freedom of his people... have raised [him] to the greatest heights on the map of the world.”⁵⁴

Increased representation of Maceo as intelligent or politically-minded represents a clear change from the image of the mythical warrior, the *brazo de la revolución*. The intellectual component of his image, left out of the traditional popular memory of Maceo, was thus expressed within the internal logic of that memory; challenges and changes to memory of Maceo followed a pattern of sedimentation. The themes and images that defined Maceo in the first decades of the Republic were not overturned, but rather new elements were

⁵² Gustavo Gutiérrez, quoted in “Texto del discurso pronunciado anoche en la Cámara de Representantes por el Dr. Gustavo Gutiérrez, exaltando la memoria de Maceo y demás heroes de la independencia,” *Diario de la Marina*, 8 December 1940, 22.

⁵³ Diego Aréjula Agüero, “Maceo,” in “La edad de oro: sección para los niños por ‘La Madrecita,” *Carteles* 27, no. 31 (8 December 1946): 72.

⁵⁴ Carlos M. Lechuga, “A Propósito de Maceo,” *El Mundo*, 7 December 1949, 11.

added within the framework of the existing memory.⁵⁵ The political element of the revisionist narrative found success in large part because it could be represented simply and because it reinforced Maceo's overall greatness and iconic status in Cuban memory.

Maintaining Mythologies: Race and Memory

While the revisionist memory's emphasis on Maceo's political thought, anti-imperialism and intelligence resonated with and found acceptance in popular collective memory, other elements of that memory did not. Memories of national icons in particular are resistant to change, especially those changes which would complicate entrenched notions of identity and self-image. As John Nerone has argued, "public historical accounts have... a tendency to project a unified society with a unified past," denying that "cultural, racial, class or gender differences are meaningful, that they have been or could be sources of conflict."⁵⁶ Revisionist historians placed Maceo's racial identity and the racism that he faced at the center of their work, but the image of Maceo as a representation of racial oppression and division confronted a particularly powerful and deeply-held symbolism.

Since the foundation of the republic, the image of the Antonio Maceo-Panchito Gómez union served to represent national racial unity and to obscure or co-opt racial inequalities and conflict. The revisionist image of Antonio Maceo not only confronted the inertia of collective memory but challenged the foundations of Cuban identity. Even as Cubans were reevaluating the simplistic, physical image of Maceo that dominated the early

⁵⁵Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 90.

⁵⁶Nerone, "Professional History and Social Memory," 94.

republic, the notion of Maceo as representative of racial harmony remained meaningful and prominent.

The same imagery of racial fusion that characterized memory of Maceo in the early republic remained ubiquitous despite the debates taking place among intellectuals and opposition activists. An editorial in *Diario de la Marina* 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... From this angle, the death of Maceo and his aide, Panchito Gómez Toro on December 7, 1896 in the field of San Pedro must be considered a symbol. The two races merged there, in the heat of battle, in the same heroic and tragic destiny.”⁵⁷

Bohemia declared that “by uniting in death, Antonio Maceo and Panchito Gómez Toro... black and white were immortalized in fraternity.”⁵⁸ *El Mundo* pronounced that their “historic fall symbolically mixed the blood of white and black Cubans.”⁵⁹ The mayor of Havana remembered “the example that he and his aide gave to the future Republic, uniting forever the two races that populate our land.”⁶⁰ *Diario de la Marina* was more poetic in 1943, proclaiming that that in the deaths of Maceo and Gómez, “the blood of the races...of our citizenry merged in the crucible of a new nationality.”⁶¹

The belief that the revolution had created a nation in which race was irrelevant appears to have been too powerful to be overturned. The continued usefulness of the Maceo-Gómez symbol in affirming national unity and obscuring racial inequalities is evident from

⁵⁷ “Una fecha y un símbolo,” *Diario de la Marina*, 7 December 1940, 4.

⁵⁸ “Bohemia editorial,” *Bohemia* 30, no. 49 (4 December 1938): 31.

⁵⁹ “Antonio Maceo,” *El Mundo*, 7 December 1940, 1.

⁶⁰ Francisco Rivero San Román, quoted in “Actos en Honor de Nuestros Mártires,” *El Mundo*, 7 December 1939, 2.

⁶¹ “Siete de Diciembre,” *Diario de la Marina*, 7 December 1943, 1.

its constant invocation throughout the republic. The revisionist memory of Maceo, wherein his racial identity is of primary importance directly challenged this powerful symbolism. While it may have resonated with many individual Cubans, it seems to have been too controversial and complex to enter into the nation's dominant collective memory.

The revisionist memory of Maceo contended with not only the deeply-held and entrenched nature of national symbols but also with resistance to the potentially complicating or divisive nature of its content. While many Cubans seem to have been willing to accept the idea of Antonio Maceo as a political thinker in addition to a legendary warrior, an image which reinforced his overall greatness and affirmed his meaning for the nation, the notion of Maceo as a symbol of the failure of racial equality confronted powerful tenet of Cuban identity that would not be easily overturned. The result was a period of overtly contested memory, in which some elements of the revisionist memory resonated and others appear to have remained marginalized in the dominant collective memory.

Mambises de Hoy: Memory and Revolution

Even as the revisionist historical narrative struggled to find acceptance in popular memory, it did continue to find resonance within opposition politics. In March 1952, General Fulgencio Batista seized power in a pre-dawn military coup, ousting the elected government of Carlos Prío Socarrás. Although the departure of the unpopular Prío was little mourned by many Cubans, the collapse of the republic into a new dictatorship prompted despair and anger. Fidel Castro, a young lawyer seeking Congressional office from the *Ortodoxo* political party, quickly rose to prominence in the slowly emerging opposition to the Batista regime. Castro seized upon the revisionist narrative of the past as a means of attacking the legitimacy of the Batista government and calling the nation to take up arms.

Although José Martí figured most prominently in the discourse of Castro's *Movimiento Revolucionario 26 de Julio* (MR-26-7), the group invoked also Antonio Maceo as a symbol of "the true revolution that has not yet ended."⁶² Castro deployed elements of the narrative articulated by revisionist historians, representing the collapse of the republic as the result of its failure to live up to the vision of its founders. Castro adopted memory as a mode of political opposition, depicting his movement as a continuation and fulfillment of the revolution that Martí and Maceo had begun, but which had been frustrated by the intervention of the United States in 1898.

For the MR-26-7, Maceo was primarily a military figure, but his invocation in support of a revolutionary project attached a clear political component to his memory. He served as a representation of the necessity and legitimacy of armed struggle against dictatorship. The movement's public statements often appropriated Maceo's words to attack the Batista regime and rivals within the opposition. In an 1896 letter decrying any negotiation or compromise with the Spanish, Maceo had declared that "freedom is not begged for; it is conquered with the edge of a machete."⁶³ Castro invoked that statement frequently, insisting that armed insurrection could be justified because "the hour has come to take rights and not to beg for them, to fight instead of pleading for them."⁶⁴

As it entered into open warfare with the Batista government, the MR-26-7 presented its struggle as a continuation of the War of Independence, arguing, as the revisionists had,

⁶² Raúl Gómez García, "The Cuban Revolution (July 23, 1953)" in Fidel Castro, *Revolutionary Struggle: 1947-1958. Volume I of the Selected Works of Fidel Castro*, ed. Rolando E. Bonachea and Nelson P. Valdés (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1972), 155.

⁶³ Antonio Maceo to Federico Pérez, July 14, 1896, in *Antonio Maceo: disciplina y dignidad* ed. Emitterio S. Santovenia (Havana: Publicaciones de la Secretaria de Educación, 1936), 86.

⁶⁴ Fidel Castro, "Letter to Prominent Political Leaders (July 7, 1955)" in *Revolutionary Struggle*, 257.

that the vision of Maceo and Martí had been frustrated by the U.S. intervention and betrayed by the republic. However, as Alejandro de la Fuente has argued, “Race barely figured in the political agenda of the 26th of July Movement,” despite their otherwise progressive program.⁶⁵ Indeed, as the MR-26-7 articulated its call to arms, Maceo served as symbol of nationalism, anti-imperialism and the fight for liberation, but never for achieving racial equality. The difference between the memory of Maceo articulated by other opposition groups, such as the PSP, and that of the MR-26-7, is striking on this point. Whereas racial equality was a pillar of the communists’ program, Castro and his movement rarely mentioned it, even as they frequently invoked Maceo to condemn the dictatorship.

Although race was not a component of the memory of Maceo instrumentalized by the rebels, his political vision was often invoked. The insurgents’ radio station, *Radio Rebelde*, claimed that the war would “fulfill that promise of the Titan when he said that ‘Revolution will continue as long as there remains an injustice unresolved’ ... there is Revolution because there is tyranny. There is revolution because there is injustice.”⁶⁶ On December 7, 1958, the MR-26-7 marked the anniversary of Maceo’s death, declaring in a radio broadcast: “We commemorate the sacrifice of all of the martyrs fallen for the freedom of the *patria*. ... The *mambises* of yesterday are joined with the *mambises* of today.”⁶⁷

Weeks later, Batista fled the country and the MR-26-7 seized power. Addressing a crowd in Santiago de Cuba on January 3, 1959, Fidel Castro proclaimed, “The Republic was not freed in [18]95 and the dream was frustrated at the last minute... This time its triumph is

⁶⁵ De la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 17.

⁶⁶ *Radio Rebelde* (19 August 1958), page 12 of transcript. Broadcast Transcripts of Radio Rebelde, July 1957-December 1958.

⁶⁷ *Radio Rebelde*, 7 December 1958.

assured.”⁶⁸ 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.”⁶⁹ 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 revolution also marked the ascendancy of the revisionist memory of Maceo. On December 7, 1959, Cubans commemorated the death of Maceo for the first time since the triumph of the Revolution nearly a year before. As María Gómez Carbonell had done in 1936, revolutionary commander Raúl Castro addressed a gathering at the *Cámara de Representantes* in Havana. He announced that “this December 7 is not a day of sadness for Cuba... Because it is free, the *Patria* lives! And this means that Antonio Maceo... has not really died.” His speech solidified the place of the revisionist image as the new official national memory of Maceo. He decried the simplified image of Maceo that had dominated Cuban memory 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... Maceo wanted not only freedom for his country. He wanted an independent Cuba that would be a Cuba on par with nations that follow the path of progress.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ 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.

⁶⁹ Louis A. Pérez, Jr. “In the Service of the Revolution: Two Decades of Cuban Historiography, 1959-1979,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 60(1) 1980: 82.

⁷⁰ Raúl Castro, quoted in “Discurso del Presidente en el Cacahual,” *Revolución*, 9 December 1959, 2, 4, 10.

Raúl Castro concluded, as María Gómez had thirty-three years before, by calling out to Antonio Maceo. While she had declared, “the nation is calling to you again,” Castro proclaimed that the Revolution had completed Maceo’s work: “General Antonio, the followers of your work, which remained unfinished for a half a century, have come back to retrieve the flag of ‘95!”⁷¹

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

Conclusion

Revolutionary Nation, Revolutionary Memories

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 won and lost.”¹ The declarations made by Raúl Castro in 1959 signaled the empowerment of a new dominant memory of Antonio Maceo and of the national past as a whole.

In its call to arms against Batista, the MR-26-7 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 Cuban 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.

In the first years of revolutionary governance, then, memory of Maceo was redefined and instrumentalized by the new regime. Each new element or struggle of the revolutionary project seems to have been accompanied by an invocation of the past. In his 1959 speech, Raúl Castro declared “Maceo lives in the Revolutionary Laws... Especially worthy of the memory of the simple peasant who became the leader of Cuba in arms... is the Law of

¹ 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.

Agrarian Reform.”² The following December, only months after the United States imposed a trade embargo on Cuba, the television network *Televisión-Revolución* hosted a roundtable discussion on the “anti-imperialist ideal” shared by Antonio Maceo and José Martí. A summary of this program was placed on the front page of the newspaper *Revolución*.³

A year later, *Bohemia* added a striking image to the imagery and memory of Antonio Maceo. The magazine depicted Antonio Maceo, machete drawn and face contorted as if shouting, being carried inside the *Granma* on the backs of MR-26-7 forces (see figure 3, page 63). The picture spanned both the front and back covers of the magazine, and Maceo is depicted as a literal giant, larger even than the boat that the guerrillas are carrying. 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.⁴ These examples are included not to offer a complete account of how the nascent revolutionary government made use of memory, but rather to suggest the continuing power of Maceo’s image as Cubans entered another period of national imagining.

This paper has traced the making and remaking of Cuban nationhood, and has attempted to demonstrate the profound connections between how Cubans viewed their nation and how they remembered their past. In imagining a Maceo as an epic hero, physically powerful and invincible, Cubans constructed a symbol that embodied the struggle to achieve independence and nationhood. By elevating Maceo to the realm of immortality and national mythology, Cubans at once celebrated his heroism and endowed him and the nation he represented with a timeless greatness and legitimacy. However, this memory of Maceo as

² Raúl Castro, quoted in “Discurso de Raúl Castro en el capitolio nacional,” *Revolución*, 9 December 1959, 10.

³ “Coincidieron Martí y Maceo en su ideal antimperialista,” *Revolución*, 7 December 1960, 1.

⁴ *Bohemia* 53, no. 49, (3 December 1961): front and back covers.

the “arm of the revolution” also obscured and sometimes overtly denied his political and social vision of the republic he fought to achieve.

As a Cuban of color and a revered icon of the nation’s history, Maceo came to represent changing values and shifting social and political ideals. Memory, it bears repeating, does not refer to the past; rather, memory is the relationship between the past and the present. In the early republic, as Cubans negotiated contradictory ideas of nationhood, memory of Maceo became a powerful discursive tool with which different groups could articulate and transmit the meaning of an independent Cuba.

The image of the nation that became dominant in the early republic was built upon a myth of racial equality, and the tensions inherent to this version of Cuban nationality were played out in the speeches and articles produced each year to commemorate Maceo. The revolutionary uprising that ousted Gerardo Machado in 1933 created a new chance for the meaning and course of the nation to be redefined, and many Cubans reengaged with the icons of the past to condemn the failings of the republic and to offer a guide for its future. For those disillusioned by the country’s decline into dictatorship, the traditional memory of Maceo was no longer adequate to address the needs of the new Cuban context.

Indeed, in the last decades of the republic, memory served as a powerful instrument for political mobilization. As scholars and opposition political activists sought a new course for the nation, they articulated memories of Maceo that differed profoundly from the traditional image that prevailed in the early republic. While these new images of Maceo seem to have found only limited resonance within the dominant memory, the challenge and contestation of Maceo’s memory presaged and shaped the political crisis and revolutionary uprising that would confront and overturn the republican system in the 1950s.

As all nations are imagined communities, they are constructed and defined by imagined pasts. As this essay has attempted to demonstrate, nation and memory are not fixed notions. Indeed, imagining the nation and imagining its past are continuous processes, subject to constant construction and reconstruction through changing social and political contexts. As its have navigated the political upheavals of the twentieth century, memory of Antonio Maceo has remained closely tied to the changing meaning and contested identity of Cuba. The triumph of the Revolution signaled the triumph of a reimagined Maceo, the ascendance of a memory which had contested, clashed with and altered the simplistic depiction of the Bronze Titan and, in so doing, called into question how Cubans understood their past, their nation, and themselves.



Figure 1: A dying Antonio Maceo is caught by “the arms of glory.”
“En brazos de la gloria,” *La Discusión*, December 7, 1909, p. 1.



Figure 2: Antonio Maceo's body is recovered by an immortal, personified Cuban Republic.
La Lucha, December 7, 1910, p. 1

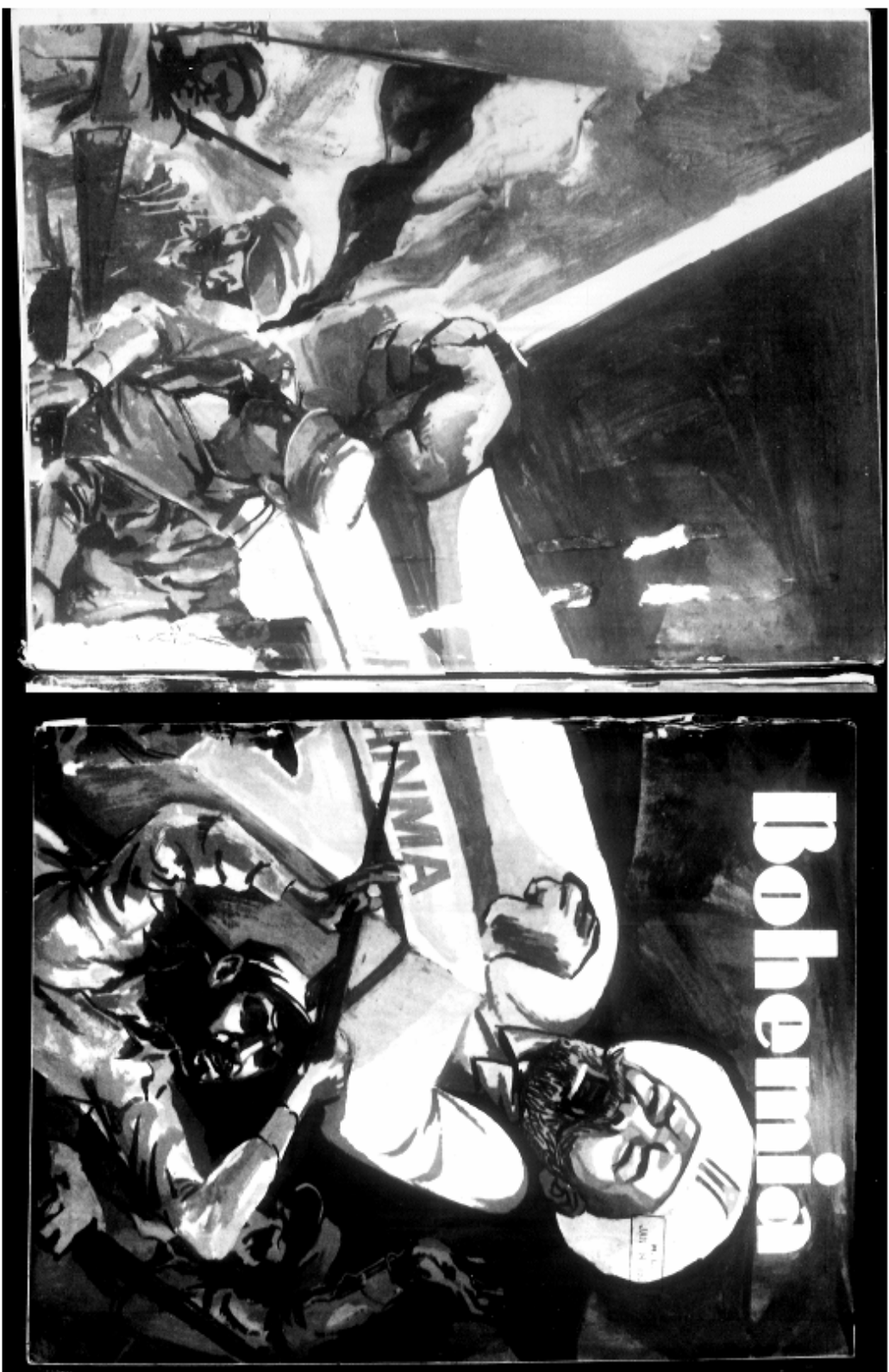


Figure 3: *Bohemia* depicts the M-R-26-7 carrying a gigantic Antonio Maceo onto Cuban shores in the *Gramma*. *Bohemia* 53, no. 49, (3 December 1961): front and back covers.

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