

AFRO-CUBAN INTELLECTUALS AND THE DOCTRINE OF MARTÍ: THE DISCURSIVE
BATTLE FOR CUBA LIBRE'S SOUL

By

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To my fiancée Anna

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From 1868 to 1898, Cuban separatists fought three wars against Spain amidst a protracted ideological battle over the future of the country. Critical to this long-term movement of resistance was a new nationalism that united the island's population around a shared identity. This identity hinged on the radical idea that thanks to the Revolution in Cuba, despite its history of slavery and racially heterogeneous population, race had ceased to exist. José Martí, founder of the Partido Revolucionario Cubano (PRC) and the patron saint of Cuba Libre, was this idea's most prominent champion.

Martí acted on his philosophy of racelessness through his association with black intellectuals both in Cuba and in New York. Rafael Serra, Sotero Figueroa, and Juan Gualberto Gómez occupied rarified positions within the independence movement, both as friends of Martí and as prominent activists and journalists. In Cuba, Gómez wrote for the newspapers *La Fraternidad* and *La Igualdad* while Serra and Figueroa began publishing *La Doctrina de Martí* as a gesture of protest following Martí's death and the independence movement's cooption by the elite interests.

The nationalist historiography of Cuba's struggle for independence has passed over Serra, Figueroa, and Gómez, portraying them as loyal supporters of Martí and the Cuban national

project without fully addressing the distinct perspectives and motivations with which they engaged the revolutionary discourse. In particular, their backgrounds in class- and race-based activism informed their separate visions for Cuba Libre. While Martí's mission was to appeal to as broad a base of support as possible, Serra and Figueroa staked out radical ideological positions that called for revolution and an end to class-based privilege and hierarchy in Cuba. Gómez, on the other hand, was a product of legal battles for civil rights. His experience working for state-sanctioned reforms led him to a conservative, gradualist approach. Rather than Serra and Figueroa's vision of an empowered working class and an end to authoritarian politics, Gómez advocated limited reform and a Eurocentric worldview. This made Gómez into a dangerous figure whose ideas threatened the revolutionary change sought by radicals like Serra and Figueroa.

Through discourse analysis of separatist newspapers like *La Doctrina de Martí* and *La Igualdad*, my study demonstrates that Serra, Figueroa, and Gómez, while adherents of Martí's vision for an independent, united Cuba, actively presented their own exegesis of the "Doctrine of Martí."

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In many ways, the Cuban independence movement of the late nineteenth century was on the cutting edge of contemporary thought with regard to the nation. Rather than operating under an assumption of white racial superiority, Cuban separatists united behind a new concept of nation based on a spiritual fraternity that disdained divisions of color and class. Cuban intellectuals pushed the ideal of raceless nationalism at a time when the prevailing philosophy was one of white supremacy bolstered by fashionable pseudoscience. While the creed of “racial democracy” had marked limitations, it allowed Afro-Cubans room to stake their own claims to Cuban society. To do this, they needed to be active participants in the narrative-building process, indirectly challenging the mythos constructed by their white compatriots while pledging undying devotion to the cause of Cuba Libre and its patron, José Martí, a man who was known as “*El Apóstol*” among Cuban exiles as early as 1883.

Interest in Afro-Cubans’ political role in the Cuban independence movement has been on the increase in the past 20 years thanks in large part to works by Aline Helg and Alejandro de la Fuente. The issue is particularly relevant in light of rising racial inequalities in present-day Cuba, where the Special Period of the 1990s saw economic opportunities and material wellbeing of Afro-Cubans shrink relative to their white counterparts.¹ In the 52nd year of the Cuban Revolution, a movement founded on a commitment to egalitarianism, marginalized Afro-Cubans are embracing racial subjectivity to assert their place in the nation. Their efforts echo the task of the separatist activists Rafael Serra, Sotero Figueroa, and Juan Gualberto Gómez, who also

¹ Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 317-34.

represented black and working-class aspirations amid a movement predicated on the normative ideal of racelessness.

My project is based on discourse analysis of the writings of the Afro-Cuban and Puerto Rican intellectuals Rafael Serra, Sotero Figueroa, and Juan Gualberto Gómez, who joined Martí in the cause of Cuban independence, but had their own visions of what the incipient nation would be and what it should offer to marginalized segments of society. Despite leaving behind voluminous records of their ideas in the form of newspaper articles, they are largely absent from the historiography of the Cuban independence movement, their scant biographies portraying them as dedicated *martianos* without fully addressing their disparate ideologies and motivations. This work calls these silences into question by examining the discourse of black intellectuals who audaciously claimed José Martí's legacy as their own. In so doing, they portrayed Martí in a light that helped to solidify his place as the spiritual founder of Cuba Libre.

While the three protagonists of my study deferred to *El Apóstol* throughout their lives as activists, they also deviated from him, particularly after his death in 1895, when Martí's Partido Revolucionario Cubano (PRC) came under the leadership of the elitist Tomás Estrada Palma, who guided the separatist movement away from ideologies that made conservative separatists uncomfortable. Uneasy with this change and eager to defend their interests, Serra and Figueroa launched the alternative newspapers *La Doctrina de Martí* and *La Revista de Cayo Hueso*. Despite its title, *La Doctrina de Martí* was a product of Serra and Figueroa's own ideologies and reflected a vision of nation that hinged on the leveling of the economic hierarchies. Gómez curtailed his journalistic enterprises during his exile in Spain from 1895 to 1898, but his writings from before and after that hiatus consistently reflect a gradualist, Eurocentric approach in envisioning the nation. These black intellectuals subtly altered Martí's message to suit their

interests as they established their own narrative of the independence movement and the independent Cuba to follow.

To understand the origins of the independence movement and the important role played by the labor movement and Afro-Cuban activists, one must account for conditions in Cuba during the post-war 1880s. In the aftermath of the Ten Years' War, which lasted until 1878, Spain treated organized labor with conciliation rather than the repressive tactics that helped precipitate the conflict in the first place.² Spain also reached out to Afro-Cuban societies, sponsoring groups and listening to their grievances, such as when Juan Gualberto Gómez tried a series of cases on behalf of Afro-Cuban civil rights in the Spanish courts.³ This tactic of rapprochement was intended to defuse possible sources of separatist unrest amongst the Cuban populace. Under these circumstances, Afro-Cuban and labor groups deemed cooperation with the Spanish colonial regime to be more productive than separatism.

However, Spain changed tactics in 1890 with the appointment of the hard-line Captain General Camilo Polavieja who turned to coercion in dealings with Cuban reformists of all stripes.⁴ For the labor movement and black activists, working with the Spanish colonial government had become impossible, resuscitating their desire for a break with the Spanish metropole. Thousands of Cuban labor activists found themselves forced into exile in the United States for their radical activities. There, they formed tight-knit émigré communities in Key West, Tampa, and New York. The PRC's success hinged on channeling these working-class radicals' activism and including them in the separatist cause.

² Joan Casanovas, *Bread, or bullets!: Urban Labor and Spanish Colonialism in Cuba, 1850-1898* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998), 13.

³ Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 38.

⁴ Casanovas, *Bread, or bullets!* 13.

Despite the divisions that would manifest themselves as the movement progressed, Cuban separatists in exile united under the aegis of the PRC, thanks to José Martí's inspired leadership and tireless organizational activities. As Lillian Guerra explains in *The Myth of José Martí, El Apóstol's* appeal to a common goal was couched in layers of ambiguity, resulting in persistent conflicts based on divergent readings of Martí's work. This resulted in a deceptively fractious coalition whose interests varied along the lines of the island's traditional cleavages. As Guerra observes, "Cubans in the 1895 War had not fought Spain [...] for the same, unified vision of nation. Rather, they had fought, sometimes in alliance across race and class, sometimes divided by race and class, for multiple visions of nation."⁵ Against the counsel of friends, Martí traveled to Cuba in 1895 to be among the first to invade the island only to die in a hail of Spanish bullets during an ill-advised charge at the Battle of Dos Ríos. In the absence of Martí's leadership, Tomás Estrada Palma, a member of Cuba's rising professional class and a pro-imperialist nationalist in Guerra's terminology, began stripping away the PRC's democratic auspices and governed from the perspective of the new émigré elite coalescing in New York.⁶

Though idealistic, Martí realized the tenuous nature of the alliance and finessed the fine line between the movement's radical and reactionary wings. He recognized that racial conflict was the most important hurdle to overcome in the path to a new Cuba, and so he sought to make the issue disappear with the novel assertion that race did not exist, a claim that ran counter to the scientific racism that prevailed at the time in elite circles. Martí asserted that, in Cuba, the racial divisions that erupted in violence in neighboring Haiti and Jamaica could not be found. In Martí's seminal essay, "Nuestra América," he declared that

⁵ Lillian Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 5.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

No hay odio de razas, porque no hay razas. Los pensadores canijos, los pensadores de lámparas, enhebran y recalientan las razas de librería, que el viajero justo y el observador cordial buscan en vano en la justicia de la Naturaleza, donde resalta en el amor victorioso y el apetito turbulento, la identidad universal del hombre.⁷

What is more, Martí reasoned that what cultural differences existed between Cuban whites and blacks were nullified by their shared, single-minded devotion to the cause of Cuba Libre, a cause for which all Cuban patriots were willing to die. In Martí's essay, "Mi raza," he wrote that, "En los campos de batalla, muriendo por Cuba, han subido juntas por los aires las almas de los blancos y de los negros."⁸ This statement summarizes a common theme in white Creole, pro-independence writers' dealings with race, namely that mutual participation in armed conflict simultaneously proved Afro-Cubans' worth as citizens and expiated the white guilt associated with slavery. The notion of the transcendent "Cuban race" developed by Martí and his compatriots was so effective as to become commonplace in Cuban patriotic discourse through the present day.

This attitude is notably different from that of other Afro-Caribbean populations, such as those of the English-speaking islands, whose mobilization centered around race, eventually evolving into pan-African nationalism. An examination of the divergent concepts of race in the Caribbean is necessary to explain why this is. Dutch scholar Harry Hoetink attempts to explain this phenomenon in *The Two Variants in Caribbean Race Relations*, wherein he argues that racial dynamics in Iberian colonies were fundamentally different from those of Northern European colonies due to what he termed "somatic distance." He argues that Northern Europeans, insulated as they were from darker-skinned peoples, found Africans and Amerindians

⁷ José Martí, "Nuestra América," 1891, in *Literatura hispanoamericana*, ed. David William Foster (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 460.

⁸ José Martí, "Mi raza," in *Ensayos y crónicas*, ed. José Olivio Jiménez (Madrid, Spain: Ediciones Cátedra, 2004), 173.

too strange and foreign to fully accept in society. Conversely, Iberians were well used to contact with a variety of darker-skinned peoples, and did not see Africans as alien.⁹ While still influential, Hoetink's ideas have been undermined by newer research that employs economic and political explanations.

The Spanish colonies in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and Santo Domingo were chronically underdeveloped and sparsely populated compared their Northern European counterparts. Land holdings were small, producing little more than what was needed for subsistence and, as a consequence, planters could neither afford nor efficiently use a large slave labor force.¹⁰ It was not until the 1800s, in the wake of the Haitian Revolution and the corresponding destruction of the Saint Domingue sugar plantations, that Cuba developed as a major sugar exporter and experienced a large influx of African slaves. Even so, Cuba, along with Puerto Rico, maintained roughly equal ratios of white to colored inhabitants, as opposed to the English and French Caribbean colonies, whose white populations never exceeded 10 percent of the whole.¹¹ The extreme demographic disparity in the latter colonies resulted in Anglo- and Francophone elites with little identification with the islands they exploited. This made these societies' internal political development radically different from that of Cuba and Puerto Rico. Franklin W. Knight observes that "in most exploitation colonies, the whites never considered the place as a proper substitute for home. They behaved as exiles in the tropics, longing to get back to the societies

⁹ Harry Hoetink, *The Two Variants in Caribbean Race Relations*, trans. Eva M. Hooykaas (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 170-1.

¹⁰ Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1998), 102.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 106.

from which they had come.”¹² Class structures were also different in the Hispanic Caribbean, which developed large peasantries made up of both whites and free persons of color. Thus, racial cleavages in those colonies were not inherent to the entire system of production, as was the case in Northern European colonies in the Caribbean.

In Cuba, race relations were radically transformed by the Ten Years’ War of 1868 and the radicalization of its principles that came from the surge of black participation. This was the case in the East where the war shook the foundations of colonialism and in the West where slaves, inspired by the war, staged strikes, slowdowns and even received cash wages as planter struggled to keep plantations running.¹³

The full abolition of slavery in 1886 saw further transformations. As planters and mill operators looked to migrant labor to augment their supply of cheap labor, they unwittingly introduced legions of politically radical Spanish workers into a volatile political climate. Spanish anarchists like Roig San Martín, editor of the labor periodical *El Productor*, publicly argued that workers of all races in Cuba shared a common struggle for labor reform. Kirwin Shaffer writes that, “to reinforce this dedication, delegates to the Workers Congress of 1892 attempted to ‘de-racialize’ slavery” by declaring that all workers, regardless of color, were slaves to the owners of capital.¹⁴ Figueroa and Serra would use this metaphor in their own writings while decrying the influence of the old bosses on the Cuban independence struggle.

¹² Franklin W. Knight, *The Caribbean: The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism*, 2nd ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 179.

¹³ Rebecca J. Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860-1899* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985), 45-62.

¹⁴ Kirwin R. Shaffer, *Anarchism and Countercultural Politics in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), 91.

This apparent racial harmony found its most prominent and explicit expression in Martí's philosophical denial of race. However, as progressive as this stance was, it was also strategic: Ada Ferrer points out that it tended toward oversimplifying the issue of race in Cuba while precluding black political organization. For Martí, "to speak and act on the basis of racial identification was [...] to engage in racism, to erect barriers to national well-being, and to divide humanity. [...] There was little room here not only for black political activism but perhaps also for black subjectivity in general."¹⁵ This opened the door for white elites to criticize black activists for "dividing humanity" in asserting Afro-Cubans' rights and calling for an end to the colonial order. Despite its limitations, contemporary black thinkers of the independence wars like Antonio Maceo and their civilian counterparts such as Serra embraced Martí's philosophy wholeheartedly, declaring that to be Cuban transcended skin color.

Alejandro de la Fuente has often emphasized the agency of Afro-Cubans in forming their own narratives that diverged from elites' representation of Cuban character and history. In his article "Mitos de 'Democracia Racial,'" de la Fuente argues that, despite the elite provenance of the culture of "racial democracy," it allowed black Cubans the opportunity to take part in civil society, if not actually take up their rightful share of it. De la Fuente writes, "En sistemas en los que la subordinación racial no está rígidamente codificada es al menos posible el ascenso social."¹⁶ According to de la Fuente, it was a logical step for black activists to step into the fray with their own efforts at philosophical nation-building, "given the centrality of race in the construction and representation of the Cuban nation ... It is during periods of crisis and

¹⁵ Ada Ferrer, "The Silence of the Patriots," in *José Martí's "Our America,"* eds. Jeffrey Grant Belnap and Raul A. Fernandez (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 229.

¹⁶ Alejandro de la Fuente, "Mitos de 'Democracia Racial:' Cuba, 1900-1912," in *Espacios, silencios y los sentidos de la libertad: Cuba entre 1878 y 1912,* eds. Fernando Martínez Heredia, Rebecca J. Scott, and Orlando F. García Martínez (Havana, Cuba: Ediciones Unión, 2001), 241.

transformation, when competing visions of the nation and its people openly clash for legitimacy and consolidation, that the place of Afro-Cubans in society has been more vividly contested.”¹⁷

Without the context of a race-blind movement, however far short it fell of true egalitarianism, de la Fuente argues that such participation on the part of black intellectuals may not have been possible.

Indeed, Rafael Serra and Juan Gualberto Gómez are products of a period in Cuban history when Afro-Cubans sought to take advantage of the promise of racial democracy by solidifying their status as full and equal citizens. Black mutual aid societies and periodicals devoted to this purpose flourished in the 1880s.¹⁸ As Rebecca Scott observes, these new institutions focused primarily on the social rehabilitation of the colored population, though they occasionally delved into national and international politics, as was the case with Gómez’s publication, *La Fraternidad*.¹⁹

For a counter-point, one could look to black intellectuals from the West Indies, whose radicalism eschewed any national grounding in favor of black rule, at least as proposed by Jamaica’s 1868 Morant Bay Rebellion, and then subsequently, the Pan-African Movement of Marcus Garvey. While Afro-Cuban and Puerto Rican immigrants in the United States, with some notable exceptions, identified principally with Latin culture, black intellectuals from the British and French Caribbean experienced an awakening of race-specific awareness and pride. As Winston James observes, the overt tensions and violent struggles of Jim Crow society catalyzed racial self-awareness for many Afro-Antillean émigrés of the British and French

¹⁷ de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 1.

¹⁸ Philip A. Howard, *Changing History: Afro-Cuban Cabildos and Societies of Color in the Nineteenth Century* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1998).

¹⁹ Rebecca J. Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860-1899* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), 269.

colonies. For instance, Marcus Garvey, who developed his Pan-African philosophy while abroad in the 1910s and '20s, was a product of Jamaica's long-standing tradition of black consciousness and mobilization. Unlike in the Cuban case, whites in Jamaica were collectively responsible for the systematic repression of such mobilization in the 1860s and '70s and, until the 1930s and '40s, its criminalization in colonial policy and law.²⁰

The black press in the United States had a similar outlook, born out of the reality of rampant discrimination and horrific racist violence aimed at preventing African-Americans from claiming their share of American society. This survivalist bent is expressed in articles like one published in New York's *The Freeman* which detailed how the judicial system fails to punish the perpetrators of brutal lynchings and how white politicians in general, even those who appear sympathetic to black uplift, cannot be trusted. The article exhorted, "Black men of the U.S., rely upon yourselves in the future; place no more confidence in demagogues, white or black ... self-preservation is the first law of nature and the black man in official position is more likely to stand up for his own and your rights than a white man who owes his elevation to your votes."²¹ *The Freeman's* reaction to oppression was to urge blacks to withdraw from the general civil society into an insular African-America that had little faith in the promise of the white-controlled nation.

Similarly, the black-focused discourse of the Anglo-Caribbean and, later, the pan-African scope of Garvey's philosophy stands in contrast to the patriotic fervor of exiled Afro-Cubans in the 1880s and '90s who, despite their low economic and social status, joined white grandees like

²⁰ Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 265-312.

²¹ *The Freeman*, December 6, 1884, quoted in Martin E. Dann, ed. *The Black Press 1827-1890: The Quest for National Identity* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1971), 112.

Tomás Estrada Palma, a man who would go on to abandon the ideals of racial and economic justice, in demanding independence from Spain. For intellectuals like Serra, Sotero Figueroa, and Juan Gualberto Gómez, working-class partisanship and struggles for racial equality evolved into fierce advocacy of Cuba Libre, which was to be a raceless, classless, New-World utopia.

While it was commonplace for Afro-Hispanic immigrants in the United States to avoid connections with African-American society or culture, one great exception to the divide was Arturo Alfonso Schomburg. Schomburg, an Afro-Puerto Rican cigar worker, straddled the two models of Afro-Caribbean activism by maintaining a dual identity. “Arturo” Schomburg served as secretary of Club Las Dos Antillas, a group which put forward the idea of unity between Cuba and Puerto Rico in the cause of independence from Spain and an embrace of the ideology of racial transcendence. “Arthur” Schomburg, however, fully integrated with the African-American community and became a prominent figure in the Harlem Renaissance as a scholar of African culture and history. Winston James notes that from a young age in San Juan, Puerto Rico, Schomburg began to struggle against the dominant notion that Africans had no history and sought to disprove it through his collection of African cultural artifacts which today resides in the Harlem branch of the New York Public Library.²²

While living as an Afro-American in the United States after the war ended in 1898, Schomburg repudiated the entire Cuban national project in which his Afro-Cuban friends had invested so much by declaring that the “alliance” of white and black Cubans had been a farce. Writing in *The Crisis*, a black publication, Schomburg lamented, “Negroes were welcomed in the time of hardship, during the days of the revolution, but in the days of peace and white immigration they are deprived of positions, ostracized and made political outcasts. The Negro

²² James, *Banner of Ethiopia*, 199.

has done much for Cuba. Cuba has done nothing for the Negro.”²³ Ironically, while Schomburg’s view would be subsequently echoed by Afro-Cuban veterans in the first decade of the Cuban Republic, especially the founders of the Partido Independiente de Color, his position contrasted sharply with the three black activists on whom this study focuses. Although their radicalism differed by degree, Serra, Gómez, and Figueroa never rescinded their belief in the capacity – or the need – of Cuban whites to overcome the historically accumulated prejudices of the past and identify the cause of black equality as the nation’s own.

²³ Arturo Schomburg, “General Everisto Estenoz,” *The Crisis*, October 1910, 144, quoted in Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, “The Migrations of Arturo Schomburg: On Being Antillano, Negro, and Puerto Rican in New York 1891-1938,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 21, no. 1 (Fall 2001): 20.

CHAPTER 2
RAFAEL SERRA, SOTERO FIGUEROA, AND JUAN GUALBERTO GÓMEZ: DIVERGENT
VISIONARIES

Though often remembered as acolytes of José Martí's all-consuming passion for uniting Cubans in the separatist struggle against Spanish rule, the three protagonists of my study represent three distinct perspectives on the problems that faced Cuba at the turn of the twentieth century. Each took strong positions on issues of class, race, and political philosophies that underpinned their discourse on the war for Cuba Libre. Informed by their own personal histories and involvements with broader movements and political struggles of the day, each expressed their own theories on how best to make Cuba into a modern society, free of Spain's retrograde influence.

A cigar-maker by trade, Rafael Serra, unlike Arturo Schomburg, discussed above, fully embraced radical labor politics and Cuban nationalism – both ideologies that attempted to transcend racial boundaries rather than advocate for the rights of specific racial groups. Serra was born into the growing ranks of Cuba's free people of color in March of 1858. As a young man, he became an active participant in Cuba's *Sociedades de Color* and an ardent activist for the rights of laborers and Afro-Cubans, founding the radical newspaper, *La Armonía*.¹ Serra was also involved in Cuba's anarchist movement, which, as Kirwin Shaffer observes, “shap[ed] the Cuban Left by agitating for not only labor reforms but also socialist internationalism, worker-initiated health reforms, radical education, revolutionary motherhood, and gender equity while rejecting the political system, capitalism, and religion.”² This activity attracted the ire of the

¹ Pedro Deschamps Chapeaux, *Rafael Serra y Montalvo: Obrero Incansable de Nuestra Independencia* (Havana, Cuba: Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba, 1975), 37.

² Kirwin R. Shaffer, *Anarchism and Countercultural Politics in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), 2.

Spanish colonial authorities, however, who pressured Serra into silence and exile to Key West in 1880.³ Shortly thereafter, Serra made his way to New York, where, inspired by the words of José Martí, he became heavily involved in the Cuban separatist movement. Serra joined the Partido Revolucionario Cubano and befriended Martí while making the acquaintance of Tomás Estrada Palma.⁴ The year after Martí's martyrdom in 1895, Serra and his friend Sotero Figueroa sought to honor and propagate El Apóstol's more radical messages through a new periodical entitled *La Doctrina de Martí*. The new paper was also a rebuke to the PRC and its official organ, *Patria*, which had begun to lean toward the views of the émigré elite after the aristocratic Tomás Estrada Palma took the reins.⁵ The front page of each issue bore the subtitle, "La República Con Todos y Para Todos" in large, flamboyant letters. The paraphrase of Martí reminded readers of the dream of a Cuba Libre built on shared sacrifice and imbued with a collective zeal that transcended hierarchies of color and class.

Serra made his beliefs explicit in his editorial, "Nuestra Labor," which opened the first edition of *La Doctrina*:

Nos enseñó el ilustre Martí, que un pueblo compuesto de distintos elementos vivos y maniatados por un mismo yugo, deben estar sinceramente unidos, y representados por igual en todas las capacidades contributivas á la creación del País: Porque los que como cubanos servimos para entrar en la compartición del sacrificio, como cubanos, hemos de entrar también en la compartición del beneficio.⁶

Serra levels a clear challenge to the conservative trajectory of the PRC by evoking the name of Martí, its original leader, while asserting that Afro-Cubans, through their hardship and sacrifice

³ Deschamps Chapeaux, *Rafael Serra y Montalvo*, 37.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 46-7.

⁵ Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, "The Migrations of Arturo Schomburg: On Being Antillano, Negro, and Puerto Rican in New York 1891-1938," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 21, no. 1 (Fall 2001): 16.

⁶ Rafael Serra, "Nuestra Labor," *La Doctrina de Martí*, 25 June 1896, 1.

on behalf of the insipient nation, had earned their place alongside the white elites as equal citizens rather than merely repaying the kindness of the masters who had freed them.

In the same maiden issue of their newspaper, Sotero Figueroa also delivers a statement of purpose for the enterprise. Aligning his efforts with Cuba's popular classes, he wrote,

Rechazemos toda intransigencia que pueda desvirtuar nuestra obra; auscultemos [sic] el corazón del pueblo para ser fieles intérpretes de ese Prometeo hermano nuestro atado á la roca de todos los despotismos, y habremos cumplido la misión de la prensa digna, que corrige y enseña, á la vez que es válvula de seguridad por donde se escapan las quejas populares, que han de atender nuestros mandatarios si no quieren caer envueltos en el general anatema que alcanzan los que no saben ó no quieren dar satisfacción á la opinión pública.⁷

With characteristically grandiose imagery, Figueroa signaled his intention to serve the interests of the oppressed while speaking truth to power. A close collaborator with Serra, Figueroa moved from his native Puerto Rico to New York City in 1889 and became an instrumental part of the Cuban independence movement as a journalist, historian, and proprietor of the print shop, Imprenta América. Figueroa, a mulatto typesetter-cum-editor, became a tireless defender of the Cuban cause, working as an editor for Martí's newspaper, *Patria*, as well as Rafael Serra's *La Doctrina de Martí* and, later, the Florida-based *Revista de Cayo Hueso*. Though Puerto Rican by birth, Figueroa joined many of his countrymen with revolutionary sympathies in casting his lot with the Cubans, for whom independence was a popular cause since the traumatically unsuccessful struggle of the Ten Years' War.⁸ In much of Figueroa's work, he seeks to establish Cuba and Puerto Rico as partners in the same anti-colonial struggle. In a somewhat fatalistic verse appearing in an 1891 issue of *La Revista Ilustrada de Nueva York*, Figueroa wrote, "Cuba y Puerto Rico, en Guerra, con tutelas / fomentadas, que si están en dos partidas / son una en

⁷ Sotero Figueroa, "Por la Revolución," in *La Doctrina de Martí*, 25 June 1896, 2.

⁸ Hoffnung-Garskof, 11.

aspiraciones, / y van en sus aflicciones / a un mismo dogal unidas.”⁹ Figueroa befriended José Martí in New York, becoming a close collaborator and secretary of the Partido Revolucionario Cubano, the independence activist group and de facto Cuban government-in-exile of which Martí was president. While engaged in the struggle for Cuban independence, Figueroa did not forget his Puerto Rican roots. Eager to maintain his homeland’s revolutionary bona fides, Figueroa founded the Club Borinquen, a sub-group within the PRC that militated for Puerto Rican independence.¹⁰

After Martí’s ill-fated homecoming to Cuba led to his demise in 1895, Figueroa wrote an impassioned remembrance, declaring that

En sus relaciones sociales José Martí era irresistible. Unía a un bello corazón afabilidad tan extremada, que contaba a los amigos por el número de personas que llegaban a tratarlo. Los pobres, los desgraciados, los humildes, hallaron siempre en él apoyo, cordialidad, afecto. Al lado suyo no había rangos ni categorías; los hombres tenían el valer que supiesen conquistarse con su laboriosidad o con su suficiencia.¹¹

Figueroa remembered Martí as a friend and *compañero* for his compassion for the less fortunate and his willingness to befriend people based on their worth as human beings, irrespective of other characteristics. With this paean to El Apóstol’s inclusiveness and magnanimity, Figueroa also implicitly lauded Martí’s embrace of the black and mulatto communities, though he avoided any explicit references to race, a common facet of Figueroa’s writing. In broader terms, Figueroa praised Martí as an enemy of hierarchies, a person who disregards castes and rank.

⁹ Sotero Figueroa, “Cuba y Puerto Rico,” *La Revista Ilustrada de Nueva York*, 1 June 1891, quoted in Sotero Figueroa, *La verdad de la historia*, ed. Carlos Ripoll (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1977), 6.

¹⁰ Edna Acosta Belén, *Sotero Figueroa*, <http://www.encyclopediapr.org/ing/article.cfm?ref=06082925>.

¹¹ Sotero Figueroa, “¡Inmortal!” 1895, in *Yo conocí a Martí*, ed. Carmen Suárez León (Santa Clara, Cuba: Ediciones Capiro, 1998), 65.

Unlike the other subjects of this study, Juan Gualberto Gómez was born into slavery. While one may expect this would leave him with an even greater impetus to overturn colonial society, Gómez's struggle took a different path. He was born in 1854 to enslaved parents who worked on the *ingenio* of the wealthy Creole, doña Catalina Gómez. While still an infant, Gómez's parents bought his freedom at the price of 25 pesos.¹² Later, with doña Catalina's assistance, the young Juan Gualberto took refuge in Paris to avoid the violence of the Ten Years' War. Biographer Leopoldo Horrego Estuch credits this sojourn with instilling Gómez with the values of equality and community, resulting in his return to Cuba at the age of 23 while a lesser man would have remained in the safety of France. Horrego Estuch writes, "Su natural abnegación le arrastraba a las demandas reivindicadoras, disponiéndose a trabajar no solo por sus ideas separatistas, sino por library a sus hermanos de raza de la tragedia en que vivían, excluidos de derechos por la piel oscura."¹³ Gómez met and befriended José Martí as the two were drawn together "[por] el común denominador del sacrificio y la probidad."¹⁴ During the peripatetic revolutionary's brief homecoming in 1878, Martí worked with Gómez at the same law firm in Centro Habana. They also belonged to secret separatist clubs and came to know each other as the clubs coalesced in order to pool their resources in the wake of the Pact of Zanjón, the peace treaty which ended the Ten Years' War. Unlike Serra and Figueroa, Gómez met Martí much earlier in the future PRC *delegado*'s development as a revolutionary, before Martí was indelibly influenced by the radicalism of the émigré tobacco workers in Florida. By 1880, Spain had driven both into exile: Martí to New York and Gómez to Spain, where he remained for 10 years

12 Leopoldo Horrego Estuch, *Juan Gualberto Gómez: Un gran inconforme* (Havana, Cuba: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2004), 3.

13 *Ibid.*, 19.

14 *Ibid.*

before returning to Cuba.¹⁵ After spending two years in prison, Gómez lived in Madrid, where he befriended prominent abolitionists and maintained his social and political activism. One of his accomplishments was a successful suit before the Spanish Supreme Court that legalized separatist literature in Cuba.¹⁶ He also won landmark cases that, on paper, desegregated Cuban public schools and ended legal discrimination in public places.¹⁷ That these triumphs went unheeded by Cuban authorities was profoundly frustrating for Gómez and led to his late shift to the separatist cause.

In Cuba, Gómez was an outspoken critic of racism and racial inequality. He argued that it was not racial inferiority, but rather a deficit of education and culture that accounted for Afro-Cubans' faults, a view he expressed as a frequent contributor to the Afro-Cuban paper *La Igualdad* and founder of *La Fraternidad*, both of which served a readership comprised of the Afro-Cuban petit bourgeoisie. This audience, inculcated with traditional notions of civilization and barbarism, sought to distance themselves from lower-class Afro-Cubans while asserting their own rights as Cuban citizens. Gómez reflected this perspective with paternalistic writings about the importance of education for people of color while also advocating organization in the face of persistent white racism. In 1892, after the Payret Theater refused service to a prominent black family, he railed against businesses who remained indifferent to Afro-Cubans' hard-won legal right to equal treatment in public settings and exhorted,

Vayan [al Teatro] Payret los hombres de color que quieran reivindicar los derechos de su raza. Pero vayan resueltos a mostrarse tan prudentes y comedidos, como enérgicos en sostener después sus reclamaciones en las esferas gubernaleras y

¹⁵ Juan Gualberto Gómez, "Martí y yo," 1933, in *Yo conocí a Martí*, ed. Carmen Suárez León (Santa Clara, Cuba: Ediciones Capiro, 1998), 80.

¹⁶ Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 113.

¹⁷ Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 38.

judiciales. [...] Unámonos, pues, todos los hombres de color, para dar la batalla a una preocupación trasnochada, y para obligar a las empresas preocupadas a guardar a los elementos negros de este país los miramientos y las consideraciones a que tienen derecho, por su laboriosidad, por su cultura y por su honradez.¹⁸

Though Gómez championed the radical notion that blacks and mulattos shared the same struggle for equality in Cuba, his experiences in Europe and Cuba led him to a much more cautious brand of activism. Rather than calling for violent upheaval and radical change in Cuba, Gómez advocated gradual reform, falling squarely within the Cuban political mainstream. This eventually enabled him to become a member of the Cuban Republic's legislature as one of two token Afro-Cuban politicians (along with Martín Morúa Delgado) allowed into the political elite while Serra and Figueroa remained on the periphery, continuing to write, but effecting little real change.

Gómez's writings taper off from 1893 through 1898 due to his involvement in the War for Independence. In 1895, he rode out to join the rebel forces only to be captured by the Spanish *Guardia Civil* and locked in the Morro Castle, where he soon received news of Martí's death. After months in prison, Gómez was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment in Ceuta, the Spanish enclave in Morocco. In the fall of 1897, the Spanish General Ramón Blanco issued an edict to free all political prisoners in an attempt to quell hostilities in Cuba. This resulted in Gómez's release from prison in March 1898, whereupon he embarked for New York to join the PRC.¹⁹

The following chapters examine the discourse of Serra, Figueroa, and Gómez in the context of Martí's discourse and his enduring influence as a philosophical guide and political

¹⁸ Juan Gualberto Gómez, "Lo de Payret," *La Igualdad*, 9 November 1892.

¹⁹ Octavio R. Costa, *Juan Gualberto Gómez: Una vida sin sombra* (Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic: Editora Corripio, 1950), 160-75.

symbol. My analysis follows a series of themes that factored heavily in the separatist discourse. These themes progress from efforts to shape the historical narrative of the Ten Years' War, the struggle to define the subsequent separatist movement, the clash between order and anarchism, the influence of working-class politics, the role of spirituality and Positivism, and the issue of the looming United States. Each of the protagonists of my study had different modes of looking at the world and, as a consequence, some are more heavily represented on certain topics than others. Serra, for instance, had little to say on matters of spirituality, while Figueroa, an amateur historian, declined to write on the subject of the future of Cuba's government.

Furthermore, there are important differences in chronology. While Serra and Figueroa were contributing to the revolutionary war effort by reporting on the conflict as it happened, Gómez's pre-war writings deal with the grievances with the Spanish colonial government and his opinions on what constituted an ideal society. Taken as a whole, the activist intellectuals' treatment of the issues surrounding the struggle for a free Cuba reveals their willingness to explore new intellectual territory and stray from the doctrine of Martí as they envisioned a new Cuban society that would embody their ideal modern society.

CHAPTER 3 THE TEN YEARS' WAR

A recurring theme in the writings of Cuban separatist intellectuals during the period between wars (1880-1895) is an emphasis on the independence movement's history, with periodicals like *Patria* and *La Doctrina de Martí* frequently publishing hagiographic articles praising a canon of war heroes like the wealthy planter-cum-revolutionary leader Carlos Manuel de Céspedes. For Martí and black activist writers, rehabilitating black war heroes like the famed general Antonio Maceo in the minds of whites was a particular priority. The collapse in 1878 of independence forces' racial alliance has been partially attributed to Spain's successful campaign to defame and malign black military leaders as bent on following independence with a "race war" and establishing a "black republic."¹

In addition to providing the movement with inspiring heroes and martyrs, this focus on the past was necessary to buttress the idea that Cuban independence had always gone hand in hand with an end to the Spanish colonial order and the adoption of the racial democracy envisioned by Martí. To achieve this, Martí engaged in a deliberate effort to recreate the past in order to rally support for renewed rebellion. The Ten Years' War of 1868 held a fundamental place in the mythology of the independence struggle as it provided an example of a united front of Cuban patriots that, superficially, transcended the racial and class divisions that were thought to be insurmountable obstacles to independence.

In Martí's narrative, the Ten Years' War, beyond being an expression of the Cuban will to independence, was a triumph of racial egalitarianism wherein white planters, represented by the iconic Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, had cleansed themselves of the sin of slavery by

¹ Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 89.

selflessly freeing their slaves. The freed men, in turn, expressed their gratitude and loyalty to their former masters by fighting for them against Spanish tyranny. Martí expresses this view in his 1894 essay, “El plato de lentejas,” in which he declared,

La abolición de la esclavitud medida que ha ahorrado a Cuba la sangre y el odio de que aún no ha salido, por no abolirla en su raíz, la república del Norte, es el hecho más puro y trascendental de la revolución cubana. La revolución, hecha por los dueños de los esclavos, declaró libres a los esclavos. Todo esclavo de entonces, libre hoy, y sus hijos todos, son hijos de la revolución cubana.²

The essay, published in *Patria*, provided a place for Afro-Cubans within the revolution, but it also ascribed to them a debt of gratitude to the very “dueños de esclavos” who initiated the revolution and therefore, founded the nation.

Inevitably, adherence to Martí’s vision of racial democracy required a selective view of history as complicated events had to be molded in the image of his ideals. For instance, Martí praised the heroes of the Ten Years’ War for their magnanimity and tolerance while eliding the reality of their tepid commitment to the advancement of their Afro-Cuban comrades. In “Mi raza,” Martí lauds the insurgents’ drafting of a constitution that supposedly enshrined the equality of all Cubans, writing that “no se puede volver atrás, y la República, desde el día único de redención del negro en Cuba, desde la primera Constitución de la independencia, el 10 de abril en Guáimaro, no habló nunca de blancos ni de negros.”³ In fact, as Ada Ferrer observes, the rebel leadership, including the vaunted Céspedes himself, became wary of too much freedom too quickly for their freedmen allies and conceded them only the right to leave their current

² José Martí, “El plato de lentejas,” 1894, in *José Martí: Obras escogidas en tres tomos*, vol. 3 (Havana, Cuba: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2007), 317.

³ José Martí, “Mi raza,” in *Ensayos y crónicas*, ed. José Olivio Jiménez (Madrid, Spain: Ediciones Cátedra, 2004), 174.

masters for new ones to be assigned by the Office of Libertos.⁴ The freedmen remained in this state of quasi-slavery for two years, at which point they were deemed to have had sufficient “contact with the pageantry of our liberties,” as Céspedes put it in 1870, to be granted full liberation. Nonetheless, “idleness” amongst the Libertos would be strictly forbidden.⁵ Thus, a pattern began in which the Cuban independence movement’s lofty goals with regard to racial equality were continually undercut by conservative tendencies that drove its leadership to maintain elements of the colonial hierarchy.

Many rank-and-file white rebels also resisted the social change they saw around them by maintaining a deep suspicion that Afro-Cuban insurgents were using the conflict as an opportunity to prosecute a race war against the island’s whites. Even the mulatto general Antonio Maceo, widely revered for his military acumen, courage, and commitment to the revolution, contended with white subordinates who refused to accept orders from a black man. Many believed that Maceo, or any other Afro-Cuban in a position of authority, sought to recreate the Haitian Revolution in Cuba, creating a black nation-state.⁶ Both positions echoed the anti-Maceo campaign waged simultaneously in Cuba’s loyalist Spanish press.

After ten years of brutal warfare that left each side depleted and dispirited, the conflict ended in stalemate in 1878 with the Treaty of Zanjón. Angered by the treaty’s failure to put an end to slavery or to grant Cuba its independence, a group of insurgents led by black officers such as Antonio Maceo and his brother José kept up the fight. The renewed war effort would be known as La Guerra Chiquita. While some radical whites supported the effort, the exhaustion

⁴ Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 24.

⁵ Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 28.

⁶ Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 48.

inherent in ten years of bloody, total war engendered an understandable fatigue on the part of most Cuban elites, who disavowed Maceo and the remaining insurgents.

The fact of the 1868 insurgents' failure to end slavery was not lost on Sotero Figueroa, who emphasized precisely this point in an 1895 meeting of Las Dos Antillas, a discussion society for black Cubans and Puerto Ricans, while making the assertion that Puerto Rico's much smaller uprising, the Grito de Lares, had succeeded in the task.⁷ This demonstrates Figueroa's keenness to defend Puerto Rico's revolutionary zeal before his Cuban compatriots, but it is also part of the Afro-Antillean intellectuals' efforts to create a historical framework for the egalitarian nation they envisaged. As Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof asserts, Figueroa "provided his own history ... to frame the independence movement as an international struggle for racial justice."⁸ Beyond that, Figueroa's words repudiate Martí's depiction of the Ten Year's War as a virtuous struggle for Afro-Cubans' rights. Figueroa refuses to simply repeat Martí's narrative, opting instead to emphasize Cuban separatists' historic failure to live up to the promises made to Afro-Cuban supporters.

Juan Gualberto Gómez wrote in a similar vein in his 1885 article, "La cuestión cubana," in which he bitterly recounted, "En cuanto a la Revolución, lejos de amenazar, se gastaba entre las desconfianzas naturales que sus directores se inspiraban mutuamente."⁹ With a subtle reference to "desconfianzas naturales," Gómez alluded to white separatists' fear of their black allies and their potential for violent social upheaval once Spain was defeated. This frank assessment of the separatist movement's underlying tensions also set up a racial dichotomy

⁷ Hoffnung-Garskof, "The Migrations of Arturo Schomburg," 16.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Juan Gualberto Gómez, "La cuestión cubana," *El Progreso*, 15 January 1885.

within the rebellion's "directores." This sentiment flew in the face of Martí's interpretation of the Ten Years' War as the apotheosis of Cuba's racial transcendence. Gómez continued, "Los pocos que protestaron contra lo convenido en el Zanjón, abandonaban la Isla sacudiendo, es cierto, llenos de indignación, sus sandalias contra la que consideraban torpe Babilonia."¹⁰ By specifically citing disgust with the Treaty of Zanjón as the reason for their departure, Gómez recognized that this group of exiles was primarily Afro-Cuban. Perhaps coincidentally, the biblical imagery in the preceding quotation anticipates Arturo Schomburg and Marcus Garvey's comparison of the African diaspora with Jewish communities, a similarity that further distinguishes Gómez's early emphasis on black subjectivity over Creole solidarity.

Gómez's avowal of Cuba's racial divide left him vulnerable to charges of stoking conflict with racist ideology, a constant danger that contributed to his transition into more and more cautious political stands. Spanish officials and reactionary Cuban Autonomists responded to his call for black solidarity by accusing him of establishing the Directorio as a precursor to a black ruling class that would take over the island and turn it into a black republic.¹¹ As a response to this brand of racial fear-mongering, Gómez tempered his racially-based activism with frequent avowals of gratitude toward white Cubans who had advocated Afro-Cuban causes. In an 1892 issue of *La Igualdad*, Gómez praised the white abolitionist Antonio González Mendoza:

"Gracias a las instancias del Sr. Mendoza, a poco se supo que los trescientos esclavos habían sido declarados libres por los dos herederos del Sr. Pedroso, hermoso ejemplo de conveniencia y humanidad, que todo corazón negro lata de admiración y agradecimiento, al escuchar el nombre

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 51.

ilustre del respetable jurisconsulto habanero.”¹² This sentiment resembles Martí’s own assertion that Afro-Cubans were too grateful to the whites who freed them to harbor any lingering animosity over their enslavement or, worse yet, ambitions of creating “another Haiti.” While Mendoza did deserve credit as a legitimate force for abolition, Gómez’s goal was to quiet the inevitable suspicions that his ulterior motive was to incite race war and ruin for Cuba’s white elite.

The towering figure of Antonio Maceo, a hero to Cuban patriots and the subject of numerous hagiographic articles penned by émigrés of all stripes, held special significance for Afro-Cuban partisans. As Aline Helg shows, Maceo was known during the Ten Years’ War for being a courageous leader who gave his black soldiers a sense of self-worth and even pride in their heritage. He was also known for awarding prestigious positions within his unit to those most worthy of them, irrespective of color or class.¹³ That a mulatto soldier rose to such prominence provided greater credibility to the movement’s official embrace of Cuba’s racelessness as a national, unifying ideal as well as a concrete figure who simultaneously could represent blacks’ active role in the struggle for independence and in the pantheon of heroes it produced. Martí balanced Maceo’s power as a symbol by presenting him in an unthreatening, politically inert fashion.

As Helg articulates in her article “La Mejorana Revisited,” Martí’s relationship with Maceo was not entirely harmonious, as the two had a fundamental disagreement with regard to the role of the military in the leadership of the independence movement. Maceo believed that the military should have ultimate authority over the war, while Martí believed that there should

¹² Juan Gualberto Gómez, “Antonio González Mendoza,” *La Igualdad*, 21 May 1892.

¹³ Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 60.

always be civilian oversight. Furthermore, Martí harbored concerns about the possibility of a race war.¹⁴ He likely worried that Maceo, as a black authority figure, would incite uncomfortable parallels in white Cubans' minds with Haitian generals like Toussaint L'Ouverture, a military genius who had conquered Santo Domingo in 1801. This underlying unease is apparent in his essay on Maceo, written in 1893. Within the article, Martí paints a pastoral, unthreatening image of Maceo passing his days in Costa Rica as a farmer: "Allá del lado del Atlántico, por el río Matina, los plátanos son tan altos como la palma real, y es un cubano, que dio su sangre a Cuba, quien cría en la tierra amiga el platanal mejor."¹⁵ Martí makes no mention of the Treaty of Zanjón or Maceo's opposition to it that resulted in his Central American exile. While Martí goes on to praise Maceo for his intellect ("tiene en la mente tanta fuerza como en el brazo"), he falls short of the enthusiasm he had previously conveyed in biographies of other Cuban heroes.¹⁶

Moreover, Martí's depiction of Maceo pales in comparison with that of Serra and Figuero, who appreciated Maceo for his independent initiative and personal sense of right and wrong – the very reason that Martí distrusted him. Rather than conforming to the elite's image of an emancipated slave who fought out of gratitude toward a benevolent master, Maceo was a warrior with his own motivations and investment in the fight against Spain. Indeed, as Serra recalled after Maceo's unexpected death in 1896, Maceo had been born free and owed nothing to white leaders per se; on the contrary, much of the military success of the cause of *Cuba Libre* could have been attributed to Maceo instead. Emphasizing Maceo's independence from the

¹⁴ Aline Helg, "La Mejorana Revisited: The Unresolved Debate Between Antonio Maceo and José Martí," *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 10, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 83-4

¹⁵ José Martí, "Antonio Maceo," in *José Martí: Obras escogidas en tres tomos*, vol. 3 (Havana, Cuba: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2007), 269.

¹⁶ Martí, "Antonio Maceo," 271.

white elite in an essay published in a December 1896 issue of *La Doctrina de Martí*, Serra claimed Maceo's willingness to fight to the end an authenticator of his unique embodiment of *cubanidad*, especially when contested with the sudden surrender of white leaders to the Spanish in 1878:

En los momentos en que el incansable jefe cubano se preparaba á lanzar sus tropas sobre Holguín, tiene noticia de que el Congreso cubano había pactado con España la paz. Después de las penalidades, de los sacrificios y de las victorias alcanzadas á costa de verdaderas proezas y de actos incontables de abnegación y de heroismo, no quiso aceptar las condiciones que dictaba el tratado, y entonces lanzó la conocida <<Protesta de Baraguá,>> prometiendo continuar él solo la lucha y atacando duramente la conducta del Congreso.¹⁷

In praising Maceo's defiance of the Treaty of Zanjón at the famous Protest of Baraguá, Serra claimed him as a hero not just for Afro-Cubans but all Cubans of truly uncompromising national convictions.¹⁸ Serra also leveled an implicit critique toward the separatist leaders who dishonored Maceo's heroism by calling off the war without achieving an end to slavery, one of its stated goals. Serra's depiction of history is also notable for his departure from Martí's unqualified praise of the Ten Years' War and the elites who participated in it.

Like Martí whose biographical essay on Maceo in *Patria* depicted him as an unassuming coffee farmer, Serra also diverges from the standard portrayal of Maceo as a ferocious, machete-wielding gladiator by remarking that he spent his post-Zanjón sojourn in Costa Rica. However, Serra's Maceo is as much a man of the soil as he is a man of letters who divided his time between "las ocupaciones campestres y los libros, llegando á adquirir una ilustración poco común y robusteciendo su cuerpo y su inteligencia hoy al servicio de la patria."¹⁹ For Serra,

¹⁷ Rafael Serra, "Antonio Maceo," *La Doctrina de Martí*, 15 December 1896, 2.

¹⁸ Despite his desire for continued conflict against Spain, the insurgent leadership prevented Maceo from participating in La Guerra Chiquita for fear of stoking racial fears. Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 83.

¹⁹ Serra, "Antonio Maceo," 2.

Maceo was an intellectual who rightfully occupied a place in the classical model of the Renaissance man normally reserved for white heroes like Máximo Gómez and Carlos Manuel de Céspedes. Furthermore, combining the characteristics of a gentleman and a soldier in Maceo's heroic figure was a crucial step for black intellectuals who sought to counter the idea of blacks as loyal, but simple-minded allies of the white will to freedom. As Ada Ferrer argues, this idea lay at the heart of white revolutionary writers' construction of the devoted and grateful "black insurgent."²⁰

Sotero Figueroa's publication *La Revista de Cayo Hueso* also devoted sizable space to praising Antonio Maceo. The general's death inspired Figueroa to name him "el primero de nuestros paladines" and bestow on him nearly god-like power while spinning his person and exploits into the ultimate expression of what *cubanidad* ought to be:

[Maceo] vivirá en esas páginas, más que por sus extraordinarias proezas, que oscurecen las de la leyenda fabulosa de la antigüedad – porque entonces peleaban dioses y hombres animados por pasiones sensuales y con armas pobres y ridículas por sus virtudes cívicas, por su culto ferviente al ideal grandioso que transforma a un pueblo de esclavos en una república de ciudadanos conscientes, defensores de su propio derecho, celosos de su propia dignidad, irreductibles porque no van a la conquista del vellocino de oro, sino a la de abrir amplios horizontes a la actividad humana y llamarse feliz interviniendo en la marcha ascendente de la patria redimida por sus nobles y desinteresados esfuerzos.²¹

Figueroa's soaring rhetoric, which is so bold as to favorably compare Maceo to Jason and the Argonauts, makes the war hero into the personification of the revolution and all it set out to achieve. Beyond a paean to Maceo's martial prowess, Figueroa's article emphasizes his incorruptible moral fabric and zeal for a new order in Cuba whose creation would defeat the

²⁰ Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, 117-38.

²¹ Sotero Figueroa, "La quincena," *La Revista de Cayo Hueso*, 12 December 1896, 2.

legacy of slavery. As in Serra's piece, Maceo's actions and very existence are seen as a triumph over the old colonial order rather than as a product of the planter elites' initiative and sacrifice.

By contrast, Martí's depiction of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes took on a much more grandiose tone. Rather than a humble soldier of the cause, Céspedes was "como el volcán, que viene, tremendo e imperfecto, de las entrañas de la tierra."²² Thus, while Céspedes was a primal force of nature, Maceo was a tiller of the land, subject to the power of nature, ostensibly unleashed but still controlled by white men like Céspedes. Knowing that white separatists' fear of Maceo had undermined the movement during the Ten Years' War, Martí declined to portray Maceo as the politically motivated juggernaut described by Serra and Figueroa. Still, one is tempted to ask how differently Martí might have depicted Maceo if he, like Serra and Figueroa, had been writing about Maceo in death, when Maceo was clearly less of a threat to the established racial order than he was in life. While this question can ultimately never be answered, Martí's earlier depictions of blacks and nonwhites in general as people in need of "civilized" leadership, guidance, and political containment in essays like "Nuestra América" suggest that any radical revision to Martí's portrayal of "Maceo the farmer" would have been unlikely at best.²³

La Doctrina de Martí actively and vigorously defended Afro-Cubans' position within the revolution and in Cuban society as a whole. When the conservative Havana paper *Diario de la Marina*, for instance, wrote that the infamous Spanish general Valeriano "The Butcher" Weyler had willing guides who belonged to the "clase de color," Serra fired back with an article called "¡Qué Farsa!" In it, he extensively quoted a white general who praises black soldiers for their

²² José Martí, "Céspedes y Agramonte," 1888, in *José Martí: Obras escogidas en tres tomos*, vol. 2 (Havana, Cuba: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2007), 246.

²³ Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí*, 31-3.

loyalty and valor, stating that black soldiers could not be tempted to defect: “La clase de color comprendió que se le halagaba para atraerla, y desdeñó el halago.”²⁴ Serra’s article was a reaction against an insidious racism that lurked within the independence movement and, despite the best efforts of Martí, sought to discount the contributions of black patriots as Cuba Libre came closer to fruition.

The importance of the Ten Years’ War to the Cuban national project is underlined by the very fact that so much of the activist literature of the 1880s and ‘90s focuses on the war’s mythos. Black activist journalists sought to contest accepted notions about the war and its implications for race in Cuba by telling their own version of the events that provide a foundation for the redoubled separatist effort of the 1890s. As the revolution progressed and the PRC’s tent expanded, the organization took on a more conservative character fueled by an influx of wealthy exiles who were perfectly content with Cuba’s traditional social and racial order, if not always with the nature of Spanish colonial rule and its effects on their own interests.

²⁴ Rafael Serra, “¡Qué Farsa!” *La Doctrina de Martí*, 16 September 1896, 1.

CHAPTER 4 DEFINING THE REVOLUTION

Though Martí, and thus the PRC, emphasized indiscriminate inclusion as the path to victory for Cuba Libre, a battle over the identity of the movement and its constituents simmered beneath the surface. On a grand scale, the essential goals of the revolution were contested: would Cuba be an independent nation with a modern, progressive ethos of egalitarianism, or would it maintain the structures that allowed the existing elite to retain its power and privilege? The *Manifiesto de Montecristi*, the revolution's only official statement of purpose, was vague on issues related to the economy and government. In the absence of any clear blueprint and without the revolution's vaunted architect, this debate emerged in public discourse. José Martí's demise at Dos Ríos left the revolutionary wing of the independence movement without a sufficiently powerful representative in New York to keep the reactionary inclinations of the émigré elite at bay. While Martí had preached cooperation above all in his quest to secure a broad coalition for the independence movement, *La Doctrina de Martí* leveled many firm critiques against the forces that subverted the revolution's more radical ends.

The first page of the first issue of *La Doctrina de Martí* exemplified this clash between the radical and reactionary, as Rafael Serra's opening editorial "Nuestra labor" was immediately followed by a letter from Tomás Estrada Palma. Serra's piece was a bold statement of purpose that paid homage to Martí's call for unity, but emphasized its implications for the ascendance of Afro-Cubans. "Nos enseñó el ilustre Martí," Serra wrote, "que un pueblo compuesto distintos elementos vivos y maniatados por un mismo yugo, deben estar sinceramente unidos, y representados por igual en todas las capacidades contributivas á la creación del País: Porque los que como cubanos servimos para entrar en la compartición del sacrificio, como cubanos hemos

de entrar también en la compartición del beneficio.”¹ By declaring that all Cuban Creoles suffered a form of slavery with “hands bound to the same yoke,” Serra minimized white Cubans’ culpability in the institution of slavery in the same manner that Martí often did. The message of this call for unity, however, is a demand for equality in Cuban society that is more direct than Martí’s declarations of Afro-Cubans’ worthiness of that equality. Serra proceeds to up the ante with a soaring enumeration of the revolution’s goals to “purificar las costumbres; darle derechos y completa garantía á la mujer; abolir los privilegios, no tan solo en la ley escrita sino también en la ley moral; consagrarse á toda obra de provecho común; aplicar los progresos de la inteligencia á las necesidades de la vida; establecer la igualdad; difundir la instrucción, y preservar con toda su grandeza la justicia.”² While this declaration of what Serra expected of a truly revolutionary Cuba is, in some ways, as vague as Martí’s writings on the revolution’s ends, Serra exceeds El Apóstol in his uncompromisingly broad scope. The inclusion of women’s rights in the list is also notable, as Martí took a conservative line with regard to the place of women in modern society and was prone to casual sexism in his writings.³ Perhaps the most notable, however, is Serra’s call for a “purification of customs,” a line which corresponds with his assertion that “la esclavitud ... corrompe las costumbres.”⁴ Despite his qualification of slavery as a Spanish imposition, the charge that Cubans’ morals were corrupt serves as an implicit attack on the Creole elites who profited from slavery. Serra’s charge was also an inversion of the bromide that the experience of slavery had left Afro-Cubans morally bankrupt

¹ Rafael Serra, “Nuestra labor,” *La Doctrina de Martí*, 25 July 1896, 1.

² Serra, “Nuestra labor,” 1.

³ See Jorge Camacho, “El medico de almas: La mujer en *La amistad funesta*,” in *José Martí: Las máscaras del escritor* (Boulder, CO: Society of Spanish and Spanish-American Studies, 2006) for a discussion of Martí’s portrayal of women.

⁴ Serra, “Nuestra labor,” 1.

and unfit for modern society.⁵ The image of purification is also important in the context of Serra's insurgency against the PRC, whose vision of the revolution had become circumscribed in the wake of Estrada Palma's ascendance to power. Serra ends the editorial with an explicitly divisive coda: "Desde la extrema izquierda del Partido Separatista, y en conformidad con los preceptos aceptados por todos, hemos de dirigir nuestros esfuerzos para el triunfo de la Independencia de la patria, y para que sean reales y no vaga ficción los derechos del pueblo."⁶ In an editorial that defines the purpose of *La Doctrina de Martí*, Serra ironically eschewed Martí's own inclusive methods by asserting that the only way forward to a true expression of Cuba's identity comes from the working-class radical wing of the Cuban emigración.

Serving as both an appeal to solidarity and a warning against straying too far from the party line, Estrada Palma's letter to the editor uses Martí's message in a way that opposes Serra's interpretation. He wrote,

Siguiendo las enseñanzas del noble apóstol i mártir sublime, entremos en la nueva sociedad francamente por la ancha puerta de la justicia, con derechos por igual para todos i sin privilegios para nadie; pero seamos á la vez tolerantes i benévolos, fiando más, para llegar á la perfección á que aspiramos, en la influencia de la razón ejercida con moderación discreta, que en fogosa impaciencia cargada siempre de peligros para la comunidad á que pertenecemos.⁷

Thus, while the letter is civil and some of the language with regard to doing away with privilege (a promise Estrada Palma would do little to keep in his tenure as president of the republic) remained consistent with the baseline of Martí's vision for Cuba, Estrada Palma's call for "discrete moderation" and warnings against "impatience" were a clear rebuke to the sweeping

⁵ This argument had previously surfaced at the end of La Guerra Chiquita, when the rebel General Guillermo Moncada accused those who did not support the war of being debased by "three centuries of oppression and degradation." Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 87.

⁶ Serra, "Nuestra labor," 1.

⁷ Tomás Estrada Palma, "Carta de Tomás Estrada Palma," *La Doctrina de Martí*, 25 July 1896, 1.

plan for change advocated by *La Doctrina de Martí*. The future president of the Cuban Republic was serving notice that the elite had taken the reins of the movement's destiny.

Enrique Trujillo, a conservative émigré printer who attacked the labor movement and promulgated racist ideas, exemplifies the rush of ruling-class reactionaries who sought to co-opt the revolutionary message of Martí while in fact blunting many of the movement's revolutionary goals.⁸ Initially an opponent of Cuban independence, Trujillo's position evolved as Martí and the PRC gained momentum, beginning a pro-separatist paper called *El Porvenir*. Sotero Figueroa did not welcome Trujillo's change of heart. In a series of articles entitled "Calle la pasión y hable la sinceridad," Figueroa blasted Trujillo for his opportunistic about-face and his dubious ties to North American business interests. "Es decir, que no era revolucionario, sino oportunista," wrote Figueroa,

y sabido es que con esa levadura nunca se ha hecho el pan eucarístico con que comulgan los pueblos dignos y celosos de su derecho. Mantener el fuego sagrado de la idea independiente: ser el vocero de las Justas aspiraciones populares; despertar la conciencia dormida al sentimiento del deber; tremolar la bandera de la rebelión desde el baluarte más alto de la tierra extranjera (...), eso no entraba en los fines del Director de *El Avisador Cubano*, y quedó huérfana de representación en la ciudad neoyorkina la idea independiente por la cual tanta sangre se ha derramado y tanto heroísmo insuperable se ha prodigado.⁹

Figueroa went on in the next article in the series to suggest that Trujillo's real goals were mercenary, pointing out his association with a group of capitalists that "adquirió – suponemos que por compra al señor Trujillo – *El Avisador Cubano*; lo transformó, para sus fines, en *Avisador Hispano-Americano*, y la Dirección del flamante periódico quedó encomendada al que

⁸ Lillian Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 38.

⁹ Sotero Figueroa, "Calle la pasión y hable la sinceridad V," *La Doctrina de Martí*, 30 December 1896, 2.

fué propietario del otro *Avisador* oportunista, ó sea al mismo señor Trujillo...”¹⁰ The class warfare represented by Figueroa’s fusillade would remain a contentious battleground within the independence movement. For Figueroa, whose working-class sympathies were well known, Trujillo represented a moneyed elite that sought only personal gain from the revolution and was eager to sell out the *patria* whose freedom was being bought with the blood of thousands of working-class foot soldiers.

The preceding passages are also notable for the open hostility Figueroa expresses toward a supposed ally to the cause, departing from Martí’s turn-the-other-cheek doctrine of conciliation and inclusiveness. Indeed, Martí had his own fraught history with Trujillo. When Martí’s wife, Carmen Zayas Bazan, became fed up with his obsession with Cuba’s struggle and sought to leave New York with sole custody of their child, she approached Trujillo for help in obtaining permission from the Spanish consulate. As Lillian Guerra observes, Martí kept up personal correspondence with Trujillo despite this public affront to his honor.¹¹ In calling out Trujillo so vehemently, Figueroa not only demonstrated a fiery devotion to the radical, labor-oriented wing of the movement, but he also broke with *El Apóstol* in dramatic fashion. With Martí’s death, one-time Spanish loyalists like Trujillo saw the movement as safer and less radical. Recognizing the danger that their inclusion posed, Figueroa clearly realized that Martí’s strategy of courting and coopting former enemies of the revolution like Trujillo could no longer apply.

Serra and Figueroa maintained, along with Martí, that Cuba, by its nature, was a land of the free, where slavery and colonial hierarchy were foreign concepts transplanted into hostile soil. This became a rhetorical tool to invalidate claims that the revolution had to moderate its

¹⁰ Sotero Figueroa, “Calle la pasión y hable la sinceridad VI,” *La Doctrina de Martí*, 15 February 1897, 2.

¹¹ Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí*, 42-3.

demands for social change. To do so was to betray the true Cuba and forget the sacrifice of its champion, Martí.

For Serra, the battle had morphed into a fight for the soul of the revolution: a clash between Martí's true disciples and those who equivocated in the pursuit of unprecedented social justice. In response to charges of dividing Cubans with his radical view of the revolution, Serra argued that to reject the fully formed republic that he sought was to deny the egalitarian society that was Cuba's birthright and return to the Spanish yoke. In an 1897 editorial entitled "Nuestro periódico," Serra wrote, "Enemigos de los equívocos y de las componendas, combatimos sin tregua contra todas las libertades á media; contra las tradiciones inícuas; contra los privilegios ilegales; contra todo lo que directa é indirectamente viniese á herir el corazón de la dignidad humana."¹² A leader in a working-class movement that emphasized social reform above all, Serra makes it clear that compromise and half-measures had no place within the movement.

Serra's rhetoric establishes a binary of Cubans against the Spanish. Those Cubans who did not embrace the national project envisioned within *La Doctrina de Martí* had been hopelessly corrupted by the unnatural Spanish influence. This message lay under the surface of another theme that resounded in Serra's writing: that of Cuban solidarity which transcended race and class, but not ideology. In the third issue of *La Doctrina de Martí*, Serra wrote that the Spanish

han podido á despecho de las sanas inclinaciones de aquel pueblo infeliz [Cuba], y porque no tienen ellos, los dominadores, prendas que perder, dividirnos en vergonzosas jerarquías de esclavos, consignados desde España, á corromper nuestras costumbres y á ensanchar la ignorancia entre los naturales, para mejor ejercer la explotación sin encontrar barreras.¹³

¹² Rafael Serra, "Nuestro periódico," *La Doctrina de Martí*, 2 March 1897, 1.

¹³ Rafael Serra, "Hay que pensar," *La doctrina de Martí*, 22 August 1896, 1.

Serra asserts that the Spanish forced slavery upon the unwilling Creole population in order to suppress the natural Cuban tendency toward unity and cooperation, thus maintaining a subservient colony from which to extract wealth. In making this claim, Serra draws a stark distinction between the interests of Spaniard and Creole without acknowledging the class and racial cleavages within the Cuban-born population itself. Beyond that, the term “jerarquías de esclavos” signified an even more intimate bond of solidarity as it implied that all Cuban Creoles suffered a form of slavery to the Spanish and not merely those who were literally enslaved.

Serra revisits this theme in an article called “Filantropía,” wherein he exalted Martí as a “revolucionario radical” and fiercely attacked pretenders to his throne. He wrote, “Los que no saben disponerse, luchar y vencer contra los hábitos odiosos, adquiridos en las impuras enseñanzas del gobierno español, no son, no pueden ser revolucionarios; no son, ni pueden compararse con Martí.”¹⁴ Again, Serra made the assertion that enemies of his brand of revolution were brainwashed by the Spanish and, as such, were unworthy of membership in the movement founded by the irreproachable Martí.

Even before the death of Martí or the start of the 1895 war, Sotero Figueroa’s patriotic literature bears a similar mixture of Creole solidarity and stern rebukes of any back-peddling on issues of social transformation that linked Spanish rule to race. For instance, in “La verdad de la historia,” his long-form essay on Puerto Rico’s fight for independence published in 1892, he wrote that “los pueblos conquistados jamás aceptan pasivamente el yugo de sus conquistadores, y pugnan siempre por romper la cadena de la esclavitud hasta que al cabo lo logran.” In effect, he asserts that Creole society was equally the victim of the Spanish conquistador as the

¹⁴ Rafael Serra, “Filantropía,” *La Doctrina de Martí*, 2 September 1896, 1.

Amerindians who had previously been “*dueños*” of the islands.¹⁵ It is also a significant expression of racial solidarity that Figueroa, a descendant of actual slaves, freely used the idea of slavery as a metaphor for political bondage to the Spanish Empire. By associating subjugation to the Spanish Crown with slavery, Figueroa and Serra took a word loaded with the history of exploitation and misery for blacks in the Caribbean and broadened its meaning to include the whole of the Cuban population, not just those who actually were slaves.

For Juan Gualberto Gómez, the realities of life in Cuba required a more conciliatory tone with regard to the goals of the revolution. In his moderation, Gómez actually represented an unexpected threat to the type of activism represented by Serra and Figueroa. As a staunch advocate of civil liberties for blacks, Gómez had the outward appearance of a serious activist, yet his socially conservative ideology established him as a conduit through which Estrada Palma could coopt the radical element of the movement. In place of Serra’s sweeping demands for equality and the end of domination by Cuba’s propertied class, Gómez makes vague assertions about Cuba and Spain’s essential incompatibility. “Hemos declarado lealmente que a nuestro juicio la solución racional, provechosa para todos, y definitiva, del problema cubano está en la separación de la colonia de la Metrópoli,” Gómez wrote in “Separatistas, Sí; Revolucionarios, No.”¹⁶ The idea that the “problema cubana” can be solved simply through an amicable separation from Spain is a sanguine notion that was not shared by Gómez’s émigré counterparts. Even the term “revolution” was an uncomfortable one for Gómez, as demonstrated by the title of his tract, which appeared in 1890 in *La Fraternidad*. Gómez went on to assert, “No somos revolucionarios sistemáticos,” and that his brand of separatism lay “dentro de la actual

¹⁵ Sotero Figueroa, *La verdad de la historia*, ed. Carlos Ripoll (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1977), 11.

¹⁶ Juan Gualberto Gómez, “Separatistas, Sí; Revolucionarios, No,” *La Fraternidad*, 15 September 1890.

legislación del país y se mueve perfectamente dentro de la órbita constitucional. No pedimos a nadie que empuñe las armas, que procure derrocar por la fuerza el orden legal establecido. Nada de eso, que es lo que la Constitución proscribe y el Código penal castiga, lo hacemos ni intentamos.”¹⁷ Gómez’s aversion to full-blown revolution of the sort that Serra espoused was a reflection of many factors. That he was writing before the outbreak of war in 1895 is clearly an explanation. However, Gómez also reflected a different philosophy for achieving social justice informed by his success arguing for equal rights for Afro-Cubans in the Spanish courts. Gómez believed that Cuban society’s ills could be solved by working within existing protocols while Serra’s working-class radicalism called for a revolutionary leveling of the island’s social hierarchies.

Gómez brought this staid approach to his role as leader of Cuba’s Directorio Central de las Sociedades de la Raza de Color. After laying out goals that include racially desegregated, co-educational schools in a manifesto entitled “Lo que es el Directorio,” he asserted that the organization “es un Cuerpo ajeno a la política militante. En él caben hombres pertenecientes a todas las opiniones, así por lo que respeta a los problemas políticos y generales de Cuba como a los particulares y privativos de la raza de color.”¹⁸ This inclusive approach, which invited Afro-Cubans of all political persuasions differed markedly from Serra and Figueroa’s zeal as working-class partisans, but was also divergent in that Gómez explicitly called for solidarity amongst Cuba’s black population.

Gómez also strayed from Serra and Figueroa’s race-neutral code in his newspaper, *La Igualdad*, which was the organ of the Directorio. As Aline Helg avers, “[Gómez] subscribed to

¹⁷ Gómez, “Separatistas, Sí; Revolucionarios, No.”

¹⁸ Juan Gualberto Gómez, “Lo que es el directorio,” *La Igualdad*, 15 June 1892.

the Spanish-imposed concept of a *raza de color* or *clase de color* uniting blacks and mulattoes, Cuban-born and African-born alike. According to him, the end of slavery had not eliminated racial divisions in Cuban society.”¹⁹ Writing in a context of pervasive racial discrimination and indifference amongst the elite toward reform, Gómez channeled his energies toward asserting Afro-Cuban solidarity and equality with white Cubans.

Despite Gómez’s legitimately progressive work on behalf of the *raza de color*, he would prove to be an unreliable ally in Serra and Figueroa’s struggle against hierarchy and privilege, as his pre-war writings demonstrated his fundamental opposition to radicalism and his willingness to pursue more modest reforms through the old systems of authority. Rather than calling for the destruction of existing power structures and denouncing the Cuban elite, Gómez took on the role of a mediator who negotiated for the concession of civil rights. This would prove to be the case after the war as well, as Gómez would come to work for Estrada Palma’s PRC and, as a part of the Republican government, serve as a symbol of Cuban equality of opportunity used to refute claims that the island had not truly done away with the injustices of the past.

¹⁹ Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 39.

CHAPTER 5 ORDER AND ANARCHISM

Though Martí was careful to maintain a semblance of moderation in his plans for the governance of Cuba Libre, his actions as leader of the PRC, including the recruitment of black, working-class activists in his inner circle, indicate a commitment to broad participation in the party and opposition to traditional hierarchies. Martí's symbolic choices as the leader of the PRC were also significant. He shunned the title of "*presidente*" in favor of "*delegado*" in his role as the group's elected executive, a position he took up in 1892. Martí expressed this belief in egalitarian government in "Bases del Partido Revolucionario Cubano," which appeared in an 1892 issue of *Patria*. Article 4 read,

El Partido Revolucionario Cubano no se propone perpetuar en la República Cubana, con formas nuevas o con alteraciones más aparentes que esenciales, el espíritu autoritario y la composición burocrática de la colonia, sino fundar en el ejercicio franco y cordial de las capacidades legítimas del hombre, un pueblo nuevo y de sincera democracia, capaz de vencer, por el orden del trabajo real y el equilibrio de las fuerzas sociales, los peligros de la libertad repentina en una sociedad compuesta para la esclavitud.¹

Martí's language evokes the working-class radicalism of the Florida cigar workers in its call for an end to authoritarianism and capricious, self-serving government. Likewise, he refers to a regime that would not impede the natural capacity of the human spirit, a principal goal of the anarchist philosophy favored by Cuban working-class radicals.² Rafael Serra went much further than Martí in promoting this philosophy, outlining truly revolutionary goals for the new nation. As suggested previously, Juan Gualberto Gómez had a socially conservative perspective on how

¹ José Martí, "Bases del Partido Revolucionario Cubano," 1892, in *Obras escogidas en tres tomos*, ed. Ela López Ugarte, vol. 3 (Havana, Cuba: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2007), 26.

² Kirwin Shaffer, *Anarchism and Countercultural Politics in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), 2. Shaffer details the Cuban anarchist movement's penchant for personal liberation, including sects that championed nudism in the early twentieth century.

the society to come should be shaped, falling well short of Martí in the scope of his proposed reforms.

Following Martí's death in 1895, Tomás Estrada Palma and his cohort of elite supporters transformed the PRC into an oligarchic, authoritarian government-in-waiting. As if to leave no doubt that Martí was no longer in charge, Estrada Palma drew up new rules for the organization that allowed him to simultaneously hold the office of President of the PRC as well as Supreme Delegate of all the member clubs.³ As we have seen, Rafael Serra and Sotero Figueroa used their influence within the separatist movement's radical wing to decry the cooption of the PRC while never explicitly naming Estrada Palma as the principal enemy to workers and Afro-Cubans' aspirations of inclusion in the process of building Cuba's future. Though Serra and company declined to make direct attacks against the post-Martí PRC, they did not shy away from opining on the subject of how Cubans should be governed in an independent society. Though Martí left no blueprint as to how this would be accomplished, activists in the Afro-Antillean press evoked the slain Apóstol in order to bolster their own more precise visions of a just, equitable society free of the hierarchy that defined colonial Cuba.

The contentious issue of Cuba Libre's government came up often in the years leading up to the 1895 war as activists in Cuba plotted in separatist clubs and in the pages of separatist newspapers. In 1885, while still exiled to Spain, Gómez wrote voluminously on the subject of Cuban society for the Madrid newspaper *El Progreso*. Though Gómez inveighed passionately against the institution of slavery and those who enabled it, he also compartmentalized it.

³ Lillian Guerra, "Crucibles of Liberation in Cuba: José Martí, Conflicting Nationalisms and the Search for Social Unity, 1895-1933" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 2000), 111.

Painting traditional Cuban society as an idyllic land of honest, simple folk, Gómez venerated the colonial hierarchy. “Puede decirse que hasta cierto punto,” he wrote,

y descartado el hecho criminal de la esclavitud, abundaban las virtudes privadas. Proverbial era la honradez de sus habitantes. El dinero se prestaba sin más garantías que la palabra. Las transacciones a plazos se llevaban a cabo sin contrato escrito. La probidad era completa. La familia vivía unida. Ya hemos dicho de qué suerte existía algo como el patriciado antiguo. En toda familia bastaba que uno solo de sus individuos fuera rico, para que todos estuviesen al abrigo de la necesidad. En los campos la vida era patriarcal.⁴

In this pastoral vision of Cuba, slavery was the only blemish on a folkloric culture where personal responsibility was the law of the land and the family, led by a patriarch, was the basic unit of society. The passage illustrates the persistent strain of social conservatism in Gómez’s worldview, a perspective that underlay all of his writings on the subject of Cuban independence. Whereas Figueroa and Serra viewed slavery as but one aspect of an abjectly corrupt culture, Gómez took pains to exclude it from what he saw as an otherwise just, wholesome society. Gómez’s idealization of patriarchy also stands sharply in contrast with Serra, in particular, who called for gender equity as part of his plan for a more equitable Cuba. More broadly, Gómez’s paean to the rural lifestyle was an idealized portrayal of colonial Cuba and an old order that harkens to the traditional European emphasis on land and patriarchy.

On his return to Cuba in 1890, Juan Gualberto Gómez resumed his role as an independence activist and wrote voluminously on his vision, expressing his belief in gradualist, socially cautious change informed by his particular notions of what constituted a modern nation. Gómez envisaged Cuba as a cosmopolitan nation that took its cues from foreign examples within the Western world. This Eurocentric worldview, influenced by his formative sojourn in Paris, is clear in his essay “Por que somos separatistas,” an explanation likely directed at white Cubans

⁴ Juan Gualberto Gómez, “La cuestión de Cuba,” *El Progreso*, 15 January 1885.

who desired reform and a break with Spain, but nothing so radical as to threaten their nineteenth-century conception of orderly civilization. According to Gómez, Cuba

[no] tuvo que luchar contra hábitos industriales fuertemente arraigados, ni que vencer desesperadoras arideces de la tierra, ni que allanar obstáculos nacidos de opuestas necesidades con-provinciales, es lo cierto que fue antes que su Metrópoli asequible a los adelantos agrícolas y a los progresos industriales. Antes que Cataluña, tuvimos vías férreas; como antes que Madrid tuvo La Habana el alumbrado eléctrico. El yankee, nuestro vecino; el inglés, nuestro antiguo gran consumidor; el francés, nuestro simpático inspirador de ideas cultas y nuestro elegante maestro en buenas maneras nos trajeron todo lo que la Metrópoli no podía o no pensaba traernos.⁵

Gómez portrayed Cuba as a blank slate on which the modern world had left a strong impression that took precedence over the influence of the retrograde Spanish Empire. Though Gómez described this state of affairs as a quintessentially American phenomenon, his Eurocentric deference to established, “civilized” models is clear. Rather than acknowledging Cuba’s cultural melange, Gómez fails to mention the influence of African culture on the island, an omission that was likely made in order to avoid repelling white middle-class liberals who were still wary of signs that independence would lead to chaos and black rule.

On the subject of government and hierarchy, Gómez mused, “Tal vez no seamos muy demócratas; pero somos republicanos. El aura popular sonreía a nuestras antiguas ambiciones de gloria; y todos queremos llegar a la cúspide, levantados por el voto popular que con ansia solicitamos. Luego, ocurre que no tenemos verdadera aristocracia, porque la que posee algún abolengo, carece de fortuna y la que es opulenta no tiene tradición.”⁶ Again, Gómez’s cautious approach to social change reveals itself in his endorsement of republicanism. Equally revealing is his attack on the idea of aristocracy in Cuba, which stemmed from the traditional animus

⁵ Juan Gualberto Gómez, “Por qué somos separatistas,” *La Fraternidad*, 23 September 1890.

⁶ Gómez, “Por qué somos separatistas.”

between Spanish-born *peninsulares* and Creoles. Real Cubans, Gómez wrote, applaud “la ascension de la democracia, representada por el modesto hijo del pueblo que saltaba del mostrador de su tienda a las poltronas de los alcázares.”⁷ Gómez’s veneration of the Spanish-Caribbean equivalent of the “pulled up by the bootstraps” myth places Gómez in the Cuban political mainstream, far removed from the activist labor movement represented by Serra and Figueroa, both of whom called for a leveling of the Cuban playing field rather than praising it as a land of opportunity.

Rafael Serra’s worldview is starkly different – a product of modern radicalism that sought new ways of organizing society and uplifting those who had been relegated to working for the glory of their social superiors. Serra’s pronouncements on the shape of the independent Cuban nation always included provisions for rectifying structural inequality in the island’s economy and society. In late 1896, Serra wrote “Patria Libre,” a manifesto that laid out his plan for a just, equitable civilization. He asserted, “Patria libre, donde quepamos todos, laboriosos, activos, sin temor á choque lamentable entre los elementos vivos de nuestro país, y bastantes para crear, con sus virtudes ostensibles, con sus defectos corregidos por el amor y la previsión, una República de espíritu moderno, ajustada en los principios de equidad, de descentralización, de incesante labor en beneficio de la cultura de sus hijos, y del desenvolvimiento de los veneros de riquezas.”⁸ Serra’s description of society as a series of interlocking parts evokes the class-based political ideology of the tobacco worker community from whence he came. Also noteworthy is his call for decentralization, a concept that sparked great conflicts in vast countries like Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina, but which would seem out of place in the context of an

⁷ Gómez, “Por qué somos separatistas.”

⁸ Rafael Serra, “Patria Libre,” *La Doctrina de Martí*, 2 October 1896, 1.

island, even a relatively large one. The inclusion of the idea reveals, however, a distrust of centralized power and authority that is in keeping with the original spirit of the PRC, which was composed of a coalition of clubs dispersed around the United States and the Caribbean. These clubs did not owe deference and allegiance to the PRC's leadership, but merely delegated their authority in a manner similar to U.S.-style federalism.

The PRC's structure reflected an ideal vision of government that was not shared by all in the Cuban émigré community. By contrast, Enrique Trujillo, the conservative newspaper printer aligned with Estrada Palma's wing of the PRC, opposed the party's framework from its inception. In Trujillo's worldview, a rigid hierarchy is necessary to maintain order. He distrusted Martí and the far-flung nature of the organization he led. "Lo más importante de un Partido es su dirección," he wrote, "y la relación que exista entre los encargados de ella. [...] En [el PRC] no hay Junta Directiva, sino un Delegado que asume los poderes, y que constituye, por tanto, una dictadura civil."⁹ Trujillo complains that, unlike a monarchy or a republic like the United States, the PRC had no clear line of succession if the worst should befall the Delegado. He warned,

Si el Delegado ó Director general muere ó se incapacita, queda acéfalo por completo la representación ejecutiva del Partido. Los tales Estatutos no prevén quien sea su sucesor. Para llenar la vacante que reunirse los Clubs y Cuerpos de Consejo que están en la gran ciudad de Nueva York, en la isla inglesa de Jamaica, en el histórico Cayo Hueso y en otros lugares, y mientras tanto, no hay quien funcione, y un mes, una semana, un día que se pierda, y en que el Partido no tenga representante, se viene abajo cualquiera combinación; y carece aquel, por otra parte, de legalidad y prestigio, y está abocado á la anarquía, que en este caso, implicaría la disolución, ó lo mismo que eso, la falta de método, orden y unidad, para llenar la difícil y complicada misión que se ha impuesto.¹⁰

⁹ Enrique Trujillo, "Una dictadura civil," *El Porvenir*, 4 May 1892, 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

Trujillo lays out an idea for party organization that contradicts Martí and Serra's mission to stamp out the imperious hierarchy of existing power structures in Cuba and the rest of the world. His emphasis on maintaining order at all cost is also anathema to Serra's anarchism and desire for decentralized power structure.

Decentralization also meant paying attention to the Cuban hinterland, which traditionally endured privations and neglect from the power elite while the capital city of Havana flourished. To alleviate this historic disparity, Serra advances a plan of state intervention decades ahead of its time. In Serra's schematic for an egalitarian society, the state would enact infrastructure improvements in rural areas to make up for centuries of neglect: "Extendiendo á todas las extremidades del país las vías férreas, y las fluviales canalizando nuestros ríos; todas estas atenciones descuidadas por cuatro siglos, y con detrimento á nuestro desarrollo agrícola é industrial, por el latrocinio y estupidez de ese gobierno sanguinario é inicuo á quien hemos de echar en el océano, aunque para ello tengamos luego que construir sobre trescientos setentiseis leguas de ceniza."¹¹ This call for infrastructure improvements reflects Serra's practical worldview while also stemming from his mission to lift the ignorant, underprivileged Cuban pueblo into an active, self-aware ally of the working class. Such an alliance would be necessary in the forcible overthrow of the established order envisioned by Serra. The article continued with violent imagery of the obliteration of the Autonomist government along with the Spanish. This is consistent with his recurring theme involving the aggressive purification of the irredeemably corrupt Cuban system wherein the powerful elite exploited the under-classes and ignored their sufferings.

¹¹ Serra, "Patria Libre," 1.

Serra was painfully aware that he could not look to the PRC as a reliable ally in this crusade, as Estrada Palma and his allies expressed a desire to purge the movement of its “hardline” anarchist element, which they denounced for its Spanish origins.¹² Defying Estrada Palma and his efforts at neutralizing the Florida labor activists’ revolutionary zeal, Serra attacked the idea of moderation in the pursuit of liberty. “Porque si el cubanismo adinerado y desafecto,” Serra continues, “ciego ante la realidad que no puede desmentir, insiste, faltar de provisión, en negar su concurso, para que el triunfo de la causa cubana sea más breve y menos destructora, será triste, envejeceremos en la reconstrucción que la muerte ha de privarnos de concluir.”¹³ True to his *modus operandi*, Serra rejects half-measures in the process of changing the country, arguing that anything short of total revolution would result in the return of the island’s subjugation. Spain would “esclavizarnos nuevamente con sus inmensas exacciones; a prostituir lo que nos queda de virtud y á corromper lo que tenemos de virilidad; antes que pueda la insolente España satisfacer con nuestra sangre criolla esa sed insaciable de venganza; antes de presenciar el servilismo y el rebajamiento de carácter del cubanismo afeminado y ruin.”¹⁴ Frustrated by the separatist leadership’s lack of commitment to real, revolutionary change, Serra launched a full-throated condemnation of the gradualist, reactionary approach of the post-1895 PRC.

Serra’s preoccupation with the violent overthrow of Spain’s hobbling control and his rejection of any effort to work for reform within the existing system was informed by the

¹² Guerra, “Crucibles of Liberation,” 113.

¹³ Serra, “Patria Libre,” 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* Serra’s gendered language (“prostituir,” “virilidad,” etc.) mimics a common trope in the writing of Martí, who reflected a typical machista attitude in his marginalization of women. “Virility” on a national level was a frequent point of discussion for Martí. See, for instance, his condemnation of cosmopolitan men with “puny arms” and “painted nails” in “Nuestra América.”

anarchist movement of which he was a part. In this worldview, the forces of “order” and traditional hierarchy restricted the natural creative capacity of the Cuban masses to build a liberated, modern nation. The remedy, according to Serra, could not be achieved through cooperation with those he considered to be the implacable enemies of the working class. As Joan Casanovas explains in *Bread, or Bullets!*, the majority of Cuban labor activists had, by the 1880s, embraced anarchism and rejected “formal participation in party politics within a regime that disenfranchised the popular classes” in favor of presenting a united front in opposition to owners of capital and other members of the ruling class. Violence was also not out of the question in this school of thought.¹⁵ In casting his lot with this strain of working-class radicalism, Serra expressed a vision for Cuba Libre that diverged from both Juan Gualberto Gómez’s hesitant reformism while exceeding Martí in both revolutionary zeal and in the scope of his proposed upheaval of Cuban society. As Chapter 6 will explore, radical labor politics had a profound impact on émigré workers’ conception of the nation and race.

¹⁵ Joan Casanovas, *Bread, or Bullets!: Urban Labor and Spanish Colonialism in Cuba, 1850-1898* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998), 147.

CHAPTER 6 LABOR POLITICS AND THE REVOLUTION

Living and working in the United States had a profound influence on black participants in the Cuban independence movement for a number of reasons. Though racial tension had existed in Cuba and Puerto Rico, the experience of overt animosity against non-whites in the U.S. was a jarring culture shock for Afro-Antillean émigrés. Within their enclaves of Cuban and Puerto Rican workers, however, whites and blacks maintained a solidarity that created islands of racial tolerance within the Jim Crow-era U.S. South. The thousands of Antillean immigrants who came to work in Florida and New York encountered a burgeoning world of labor politics that emphasized the universal solidarity of the worker across boundaries of nation and race. The U.S. at the time was a bubbling cauldron of working-class discontent, with approximately 24,000 labor strikes occurring between 1881 and 1900. Historian Walter Lafeber characterizes this period in U.S. history as a time when “the term *capitalism* had entered the American vocabulary as meaning ‘the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few; the power or influence of large or concentrated capital.’”¹ The cigar workers of Key West and Ybor City had a particularly lively culture of radicalism encouraged by public readings of newspapers and leftist literature during work hours.² Despite the internationalist teachings of the workers’ movement, Cubans who had fought or witnessed the Ten Years’ War kept the ideal of Cuba Libre close to their hearts. Their revolutionary fervor proved so influential to the Cuban independence movement that José Martí chose to announce the formation of the PRC before a crowd of cigar workers in Ybor City.

¹ Walter Lafeber, *The American Age: United States Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad* (New York: Norton & Company, 1994), 161.

² Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1998), 241.

In 1893, Martí had an opportunity to prove his loyalty to the cause of labor with actions that matched his inspiring words. After U.S. bosses attempted to thwart a strike in Key West by calling in immigrant Spanish strikebreakers, the Cuban strikers called on the PRC to come to their aid. Martí and the PRC came through, sending an attorney who successfully sued the bosses, ironically by invoking U.S. immigration codes. This stoked the working-class émigrés' devotion to Cuba Libre and to Martí into a fiery passion. As Lillian Guerra writes, "No longer could any Cuban deny the duplicity of U.S. business interests or the way the U.S. government could – if unchecked – compromise its principles in pursuit of profit. 'We have, Cubans, no country but the one we must fight for,' [Martí] declared. That country was Cuba, and for many popular nationalist émigrés, it was also a nation that they deeply identified with the figure of José Martí."³ Through his decisive support for the workers and his sympathetic words, Martí harnessed the powerful historical force of nineteenth-century working-class discontent for the Cuban national project.

Sensing the inherent power in the language of class struggle, Martí and radical elements within the PRC made the fight for workers' enfranchisement and ascent to prominence in Cuban society a hallmark of their vision for the nation. Sotero Figueroa and Rafael Serra, themselves members of the working class, spoke directly to this desire for empowerment. Serra, a product of the political hotbed of the cigar factories, was a fierce advocate of working-class aspirations and an opponent of hierarchy, writing about the revolution and Cuban society in terms that evoked anarchism as much as Martí. In a September issue of *La Doctrina*, Serra exhorts, "las clases desheredadas deben moverse, y no esperararlo todo de la Providencia y sus milagros." He goes on to inveigh against the docility of Cuba's laboring classes and the power structure that

³ Lillian Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 44.

kept them disorganized and ignorant: “Destrozadas ellas mismas entre sí por el infausto antagonismo originado de su educación defectuosa y servil, contribuyen, con su desunión lamentable, con su ignorancia poca combatida con su falta de aspiraciones elevadas.”⁴ As we have seen, Serra had no patience for members of the elite who sought to defang the revolution by promoting a gradualist approach with limited implications for social reform. The preceding passage indicates that he also had little to spare for peasants and workers who lacked the imagination to join him in militating for a better society. Serra went on to prescribe unity and reason amongst the working class, arguing that, “con la cultura de sus facultades naturales, con su organización juiciosa y ordenada, y con su espíritu colectivo, que las clases trabajadores son tan buenas y capaces, como los que les niegan incapacidad para el decoro.”⁵ Here, Serra revisited a favorite theme: the idea that the natural good latent within Cubans had been suppressed by a corrupt and decadent society. He added, however, that this cannot be accomplished on an individual basis, but rather “judicious organization” was necessary. Logically, organizers like Serra, who had the proper aspirations for society, would lead the way in this movement of the working class. One gets the impression that Serra’s plans for Cuba tracked closely to the politics of the émigré tobacco workers whose radical enthusiasm was so important for the island’s revolution-in-exile.

Serra also takes aim at those who would impede the construction of a society that treated workers equitably. “Aquellos desleales y parásitos [...],” Serra wrote, comprised a faction that

no es elemento creador, ni compañía deseable, ni nada podemos esperar de esa insolencia, personificación del cubanismo ruin, que sin más patria ni más humanidad que su propio interés, osa llamar al decoro cubano, que perdona la vida al enemigo prisionero, horda de tártaros salvajes, y luego sin rubor, sin miramiento,

⁴ Rafael Serra, “Filantropía,” *La Doctrina de Martí*, 2 September 1896, 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

dominada por la más afrentosa cobardía, comulga con el crimen de la codicia exótica, desbordada contra la producción exuberante de su propia tierra.⁶

Serra declares that real patriots should avoid the company of moneyed, reactionary elements within the independence movement and scorn their sympathy for the Spanish enemy, here portrayed as wild Tartars. The language in this passage takes a tone of class warfare, as Serra accuses wealthy Cubans of betraying the patria in favor of base materialism, or “codicia exótica,” by which he refers to the collaboration of members of the Cuban elite with North American capital, a danger Martí warned of in his reporting from the Pan-American Monetary Conference.

Serra specifically targeted the Cuban elite who entertained such pro-imperial values. By contrast, Martí had warned his readers of the disaster courted by such economic betrayal, but indicted all Latin American elites as equally vulnerable to the seduction of U.S. imperial promises. In his magnum opus, *Nuestra América*, Martí wrote, “El lujo venenoso, enemigo de la libertad, pudre al hombre liviano y abre la puerta al extranjero.”⁷ So, for Martí as for Serra, the allure of foreign riches had a corrupting influence on Cubans, making them traitors to the patria, where their true allegiance should lie. This sentiment evokes cognitive dissonance when taken with Martí’s enthusiastic courtship with exiled Cuban elites, including U.S. citizen Tomás Estrada Palma. Serra and Figueroa, however, took Martí’s philosophy to its logical conclusion by vociferously attacking such elites who flaunted their connections with U.S. moneyed interests who viewed Cuba as a ripe opportunity for investment and plunder.

⁶ Rafael Serra, “Hay que pensar,” *La Doctrina de Martí*, 22 August 1896, 1.

⁷ José Martí, “La Conferencia Monetaria de las Repúblicas de América,” 1891, in *José Martí: Obras escogidas en tres tomos*, ed. Ela López Ugarte, vol. 2 (Havana, Cuba: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2007), 503.

To counteract these well-heeled adversaries of profound social revolution, Serra and Figueroa rallied their own contingent of radicalized working-class émigrés, emphasizing the power they had to collectively change Cuba for the better. In his article, “Hay que pensar,” Serra exhorted the exile community to embrace its crucial role in realizing revolution in the homeland. “La emigración cubana,” he wrote, “á despecho de las constantes precauciones agresivas de España; de los anatemas repetidos é infamantes de los cubanos cómplices de los cínicos profanadores de su propio país; a despecho del frío abrumador del ostracismo; á despecho de todo, la emigración viril y previsor, acumuló sus recursos de guerra, y comenzó la lucha gigantesca, que no puede cesar sino con la muerte del último cubano...”⁸ Here, Serra placed the naysaying of the likes of Enrique Trujillo and other “cínicos profanadores” with the Spanish oppressors in the same category of challenges to the revolutionary Cuban exiles. This comparison drove home the message that the working class’s political enemies were also traitors to the cause and to the *patria* itself.

Figueroa, for his part, emphasized the Cuban pueblo’s capacity for bringing about a new era of modernity for the nation. “Tiene elementos capacitados,” he wrote, “que ya querían muchos pueblos independientes para su mayor desenvolvimiento; porque casi toda la presente centuria ha peleado ¡sóla! por su independencia, y no ya es la isla donde ha rayado ‘más alto el heroísmo en los presentes tiempos,’ sino la que ha dispersado por el mundo más sabia intelectual y más laboriosidad generadora de progreso.”⁹ This expression of economic nationalism, in addition to serving as a rebuke to the idea of North American intervention in Cuba’s affairs, affirmed the worth of the island’s workers. Rather than just a country of stout guerilla warriors,

⁸ Serra, “Hay que pensar,” 1.

⁹ Sotero Figueroa, “Cuba, para los cubanos,” *La Doctrina de Martí*, 24 October 1896, 1.

Figuerola points to Cuba's workers, whom he credits with elevating the island to civilization. He continued, "El genio cubano ha levantado industrias poderosas, y sus ingenieros, y sus abogados, y sus facultativos, y sus profesores, y sus artistas, y sus comerciantes, y sus obreros han demostrado el vigor de su cerebro y sus aptitudes para engrandecer la tierra propia."¹⁰ By elevating working individuals in this manner, Figuerola drew a stark distinction between a Cuban culture of work and the traditional Spanish elite's preference idly deriving wealth from hereditary land. Thus, Figuerola posited the human potential of Cuba's working- and middle class as the cornerstone of the island's modern, civilized society.

Afro-Cuban cigar workers were especially drawn to Martí for his vigorous repudiation of racism and his personal relationships with black intellectual leaders like Rafael Serra. Serra, himself a cigar maker, worked with Martí at the New York-based mutual aid society *La Liga Antillana*.¹¹ For the printing of the all-important *Patria*, the venue for many of Martí's famous political tracts, the PRC leader turned to the printing press of Sotero Figuerola. While more socially conservative members of the elite like Estrada Palma or *Patria*'s post-1895 editor, Enrique José Varona, would likely have balked at entrusting the party organ to a black Puerto Rican, Martí made good on his inclusive rhetoric by prominently including black revolutionaries in his inner circle of supporters. Indeed, Martí's choice to associate with opinionated, independent thinkers like Serra, Figuerola, and Juan Gualberto Gómez is a testament to his investment in the forward-thinking ethos of the revolution. These men repaid Martí's acknowledgement and respect with a loyalty that can only partly be explained by political expedience. The evocation of Martí was essential for any political tract related to Cuban

¹⁰ Figuerola, "Cuba, para los cubanos," 1.

¹¹ James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*, 244.

independence, but the Afro-Antillean intellectuals' cult of the slain leader extended beyond pro forma gestures.

In Chapter 7, I explore Martí's significance as a spiritual figure and the impact *modernismo*, a burgeoning philosophical and literary movement in Latin America, on the discourse of the Cuban independence movement.

CHAPTER 7 SPIRITUALITY AND PHILOSOPHY IN CUBA LIBRE

More than a mere political figure, Martí's emphasis on spirituality made him a messianic figure who prophesied a new political order based on morality and nature. The cause of Cuban independence, with Martí at the helm, became a sort of religious movement to free oppressed Cubans from a modern day Babylonian captivity. A theme throughout Martí's writings is the idea of Cuban and, more broadly, Latin American civilization as a spiritual community born out of the New World context. The idea of a new society embracing "*la naturaleza*" is an important one in the independence movement's narrative, in keeping with the modernista literary movement Martí helped to bring about. His spiritual attitudes eschewed organized religion in favor of an all-encompassing reverence for traditional spiritual leaders like Jesus Christ in addition to Romantic idealization of Nature, a creed Martí referred to as "*la religión perdida*."¹ This influenced his political beliefs in that he believed that the new Cuban nation was a place where all foreign, unnatural influence would be absent in favor of autochthonous culture and civilization. This is especially apparent in his poetry. In "*Dos patrias*," for instance, he muses that his heart belongs to two patrias: "*Cuba y la noche*." He wrote, "*Cual bandera / Que invita a batallar, la llama roja / De la vela flamea. Las ventanas / Abro, ya estrecho en mí. Muda, rompiendo / Las hojas del clavel, como una nube / Que enturbia el cielo, Cuba viuda pasa...*"² Inspired by transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Martí makes ineffable Nature into a nation whose flag is a red flame which calls him to battle while seemingly undercutting his own nationalist drive by referring to Cuba as an ephemeral widow. The poem suggests that, for him,

¹ José Martí, "El poeta Walt Whitman," 1887, in *Ensayos y crónicas*, ed. José Olivio Jiménez (Madrid, Spain: Ediciones Cátedra, 2004), 130.

² José Martí, "Dos patrias," 1891, in *Poesía completa*, vol. 1, 4th ed. (Havana, Cuba: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 2007), 128.

the concept of the nation was secondary to the embrace of Nature and the transcendentalist, Emersonian concept of Oversoul. That Martí embraces a philosophy that is anathema to his nationalist project speaks to his overriding goal of putting aside old conventions in favor of radically modern thinking. The price of this willingness to sample and synthesize opposing philosophies is occasional incoherence. Reconciling these spiritual concepts with the idea of the nation-state became an ongoing project for Martí and his disciples.

Figuerola, in particular, was attracted to the spiritual aspects of the revolution, as evidenced by the strong religious overtones and Christian symbolism that appear in his writing. Messianic depictions of Martí were especially common in Figuerola's writings. In 1895, upon receiving the news of the PRC leader's demise at Dos Ríos, Figuerola wrote an impassioned eulogy entitled "¡Inmortal!" for the May 19 issue of *Revista Cubana*. "Pudo asechanza infame, pudo bala traidora herir el cuerpo frágil y quebradizo de José Martí," he wrote, "pero su espíritu indomable, su alma grande y majestuosa, alentada por el bien de su Cuba esclavizada ... voló a la cumbre de los inmortales, para vivir en el tiempo y en la Historia."³ If Martí was a contemporary Christ figure, his followers were the apostles, as Figuerola declared, "Para nosotros, los fieles de siempre, los que participamos de sus inquietudes y esperanzas, y sufrimos con él en su calle de amargura, Martí no ha muerto; vive con vida inefable y lo tenemos más presente que nunca en nuestro hogar modesto."⁴ The biblical parallel in Figuerola's remembrance implied a special, intimate relationship between Martí and his close friends and followers that recalled that between Jesus Christ and the apostles. Just as Christ and his cohort were persecuted and misunderstood in their day, Figuerola asserted that he and his compatriots

³ Sotero Figuerola, "¡Inmortal!" 1895, in *Yo conocí a Martí*, ed. Carmen Suárez León (Santa Clara, Cuba: Ediciones Capiro, 1998), 57.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

struggled and suffered along with Martí in the fight for the vision of Cuba that they held dear. Figueroa would return to this imagery often, as with the October 1898 *Revista de Cayo Hueso*, in which he recounted the heroism and sacrifice of the Cuban Liberation Army. Though their bones lay in piles throughout the land, “sin esos Gólgotas, cruentos como ninguno, no hubiésemos llegado á la transfiguración gloriosa del 3 de julio del 98, en que queda desecha para siempre la dominación española.”⁵ The allusion to Golgotha, the purported site of Christ’s crucifixion, is significant in that it elevates the ordinary soldiers’ sacrifice to that of Martí and unites these martyrs in a battle for not only political and economic freedom, but the spiritual salvation of the Cuban and Puerto Rican people.

Figueroa was also moved by Martí’s notion of the spiritual community. In “Nuestros héroes: José Martí,” an entry in Figueroa’s recurring series on Cuba’s revolutionary pantheon, he quotes El Apóstol in a lengthy passage about Cubans’ unity of purpose that doubles as a meditation on the nature of community:

Aquellos padres de casa, servidos desde la cuna por esclavos, que decidieron servir á los esclavos con su sangre, y se trocaron en padres de pueblo; aquellos propietarios regalones, que en la casa tenían su reciennacido y su mujer, y en una hora de transfiguración sublime, se echaron selva adentro, con la estrella en la frente; aquellos letrados entumidas que al resplandor del primer rayo saltaron de la toga tentadora al caballo de pelear; aquellos jóvenes angélicos que del altar de sus bodas ó del festín de la fortuna salieron, arrebatados de júbilo celeste, á sangrar y morir, sin agua y sin almohada, por nuestro decoro de hombres; aquellos son carne nuestra, y entrañas y orgullo nuestros, y raíces de nuestra libertad y padres de nuestro corazón, y soles de nuestro cielo...⁶

This passage recalls Christ’s speech in Corinthians wherein he preached that a community is a metaphorical body, where each part relies upon the other for survival, much as Cuba relied on

⁵ Sotero Figueroa, “La Quincena,” *Revista de Cayo Hueso*, 10 October 1898, 3.

⁶ Sotero Figueroa, “Nuestros héroes: José Martí,” *La Doctrina de Martí*, 10 October 1896, 1.

volunteers from every walk of life.⁷ However, Martí's metaphor extends beyond the flesh and into celestial bodies, yet another reflection of his modernism. Figueroa went on to venerate Martí as a prophet who "enseñó á la emigración á prosternarse ante sus héroes redentores, y redentor también, dio su vida por justificar y engrandecer su sacerdocio."⁸ This furthers the idea that, for Figueroa, Martí's movement was not merely political, but profoundly spiritual, going so far as to refer to the movement as a priesthood, a community of men devoted to a higher power.

Rafael Serra, while more secular in disposition than Figueroa and Martí, evinced similar principles with regard to the nature of community. In "Patria libre," Serra, in his typical fashion, enumerated a list of his expectations for the new Cuba, writing,

Patria libre, donde quepamos todos, laboriosos, activos, sin temor á choque lamentable entre los elementos vivos de nuestro país, y bastantes para crear, con sus virtudes ostensibles, con sus defectos corregidos por el amor y la previsión, una República de espíritu moderno, ajustada en los principios de equidad, de descentralización, de incesante labor en beneficio de la cultura de sus hijos, y del desenvolvimiento de las venenos de riquezas con que plugo la Omnipotencia bienhechora bendecir y embellecer á nuestra tierra.⁹

Like Martí, Serra emphasizes the idea of the community as a system of interlocking parts, where every piece has its place within the whole. The spiritual aspect of this solidarity is muted in Serra's description, but he makes a rare appeal to a higher power with his request that "la Omnipotencia" bless the Cuban homeland. The preceding passage also touches on many of Serra's preoccupations, such as the need for the existing populace's bad habits to be corrected and "principles of equality" taught before the new society could function.

⁷ Corinthians. 12.14-25. This, of course, ignores the fact that Afro-Cuban slaves and former slaves filled the army's ranks to a disproportionate degree.

⁸ Figueroa, "José Martí," 2.

⁹ Rafael Serra, "Patria Libre," *La Doctrina de Martí*, 2 October 1896, 1.

Martí's more exotic modernist ideas, particularly his worshipful attitude toward nature, also echo in Figueroa's work. Figueroa embraced this philosophy in his own body of work. Often in his writings, he insinuates that the quality of the "*naturaleza*" of a place can influence the type of society that might spring from it. For instance, while recounting the story of the pilgrims on the *Mayflower*, he wrote, "[ellos] llegaron á la América del Norte huyendo de las persecuciones religiosas á fundar un Estado libre en una naturaleza virgen."¹⁰ Figueroa also defers often to natural law to explain political action. In his *Ensayo biográfico*, he wrote that while the U.S. acted on its material interests, if "nuestra raza [consegui] la emancipación, es porque ésta es una ley natural de la que no pueden sustraerse los pueblos ni los individuos."¹¹ While in that scenario, Figueroa declared natural law to be the basis behind separatists' actions, he wrote a strikingly similar phrase about Puerto Rico's Lares Rebellion. In *La verdad de la historia*, he framed the issue of independence in the language of science, that Lares Rebellion was the result of "leyes eternas en el orden físico y en el orden moral, a las que no pueden sustraerse ni la naturaleza ni las sociedades."¹² With the preceding passage, Figueroa appears to have established a hierarchy of the causes behind the political actions of the day. Rather than "ley natural," Figueroa deferred to the even more abstract concept of a "physical and moral order" existing even beyond nature, an assertion that recalls Aristotelian metaphysics' emphasis on the "causes" behind all physical reality.

Juan Gualberto Gómez followed a similar philosophical trajectory, subscribing to ideas that emphasized ahistorical, structural forces that dictated history. Unlike Figueroa and Martí,

¹⁰ Sotero Figueroa, "La Quincena," *Revista de Cayo Hueso*, 10 October 1898, 3.

¹¹ Sotero Figueroa, *Ensayo biográfico de los que más han contribuido al progreso de Puerto Rico* (Ponce, Puerto Rico: El Vapor, 1888), quoted in Figueroa, *La verdad de la historia*, 7.

¹² Figueroa, *La verdad de la historia*, 17.

however, Gómez eschewed the notion that nature is devoid of inequalities. Gómez emphasized the importance of nature, but does so in the form of geographic determinism. In an ongoing argument about the differences between the Old World and the New, Gómez wrote, “Los intereses de un país están en relación íntima con su posición geográfica, con su vecindad, con su climatología. Y por eso es quimérico pretender que las mismas leyes económicas y administrativas amparen y desarrollen los intereses de un antiguo Estado europeo, de tradición guerrera, de historia agitada, de constitución montañosa, de atmosfera fría – a la vez que los de una comarca americana, virgen, de índole pacífica, sin verdadera tradición, de terrario llano y temperatura tropical.”¹³ With this assertion, Gómez aligned himself with the fashionable “science” of racial essentialism, an idea that held tremendous sway in the thinking of elites and intellectuals of the late-nineteenth century.

Gómez, while not as prone to spiritual allusions as Martí or Figueroa, did subscribe to a brand of humanism similar to Martí’s appeals to the universal nature of spirituality. In an 1892 article on Columbus Day, Gómez wrote, “Colón ... por haber duplicado el mundo nuestro, no es un genovés, ni siquiera un italiano: sino un hombre en toda la extensión de la palabra, un grande hombre; algo más todavía: un hombre inmortal, a quien habríamos llamado Dios, si la Filosofía, en vez de crear Dioses nuevos, no hubiera despoblado el Olimpo.”¹⁴ In modernist fashion, Gómez denied Columbus’s nationality in favor of celebrating universal human progress. Furthermore, this apotheosis of Columbus yields the interesting prospect of a pantheon of New World gods ushered into existence by the “Discoverer.” However, rather than join in Martí’s

¹³ Juan Gualberto Gómez, “La cuestión cubana,” *El Progreso*, 15 January 1885.

¹⁴ Juan Gualberto Gómez, “Colón,” *La Igualdad*, 12 October 1892.

celebration of Cuba's autochthonous spiritual strength, Gómez's article venerated the mechanisms of colonization and empire as expressions of human progress.

Gómez's ideas also have a grounding in Positivism, a philosophy developed by Auguste Comte which asserted that the application of scientific principles by the state was essential for human progress. The philosophy found its most devoted adherents in Latin America, as heads of state ordered their governments around Comte's suggestions. Such was Positivism's influence that its ideas inflected any belief in progress through the nation.¹⁵ In "Colón," Gómez explicitly endorsed these ideas, writing,

No han abundado las almas dotadas del temple necesario para llevar al terreno de los hechos todo lo que racionalmente concibieran. El número de los que a tan alta categoría pertenecen es bastante limitado. Y con ser tan reducida la lista de los que Auguste Comte y Carlyle han llamado hombres típicos, todavía, si bien se mira, en el Catecismo positivista hay muchos nombres que en el no pudieran figurar, si habría que equipararlos, por la perseverancia en el esfuerzo, al gran nombre de Colón.¹⁶

Gómez praises Columbus as a sort of Positivist ubermensch, celebrating his feat as "la Victoria del genio sobre la superstición; del saber, modesto, pero firme, sobre la estulticia chillona y arrogante."¹⁷ This attitude breaks with Martí's emphasis on the spiritual and ineffable aspects of Nature as well as his modernist disdain for rationalism, exemplified by the "pensadores de lámparas," or adherents of scientific racism, described in "Nuestra América."

Applying these beliefs to the separatist cause, Gómez painted Spain as a backward, superstitious fiefdom unable to comprehend the modernity of the New World. "Creyeron algunos encontrar en la práctica de los principios católicos," he wrote, "el contrapeso de sus

¹⁵ Howard J. Wiarda, *The Soul of Latin America: The Cultural and Political Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 160-2.

¹⁶ Gómez, "Colón."

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

tendencias belicosas; pero esto degeneró bien pronto en causa de oscurantismo, porque interpretados en su sentido más estrecho las admirables doctrinas de Jesús, acabaron por atrofiar la inteligencia y demeñar las facultades todas de la Nación.”¹⁸ For Gómez, Old World Catholicism and perhaps Christianity in general were outmoded traditions that contributed to the backwardness of the Spanish government. He continued:

Cuba, por el contrario, es un pueblo americano. La influencia del medio ha ido operando insensible, pero seguramente, sobre las razas que lo habitan; de tal suerte, que ni el hijo del peninsular es español ni el hijo del negro es africano. Nada ha venido a favorecer aquí el instinto guerrero. Nada a entronizar el fanatismo religioso. El soldado y el fraile son casi desconocidos en el hogar cubano. Y así como la vocación militar apenas existe entre nosotros, puede también decirse que en materia religiosa nuestra característica es el indiferentismo.¹⁹

Gómez paraphrased Martí’s sentiment that “cubano es más que negro, más que blanco, más que mulato” before declaring Cuba free of the demons that plagued Spain’s faltering march toward modernity. In particular, the church, which held enormous sway in the Old World, was the object of indifference for Cubans. One also notes the influence of Positivism in the essay, as Cuba is portrayed as an enlightened society that had evolved beyond warfare and religious fanaticism.

The revolution’s disparate ideological underpinnings reflect Martí’s quest to build a philosophical blueprint for a modern nation that could withstand the vicissitudes of the material world with an inner strength predicated on egalitarianism and spiritual resolve. That this blueprint was inchoate and often contradictory is a reflection of the influence of an age in which old ideological structures gave way to a wave of new ideas and schools of thought. Followers like Serra, Figueroa, and Gómez, though ostensibly devoted to Martí’s vision, created their own

¹⁸ Juan Gualberto Gómez, “Por qué somos separatistas,” *La Fraternidad*, 23 September 1890.

¹⁹ Gómez, “Por qué somos separatistas.”

frameworks that synthesized El Apóstol with their own notions of what constituted a modern society. Chapter 8 addresses the influence of the United States, the “modern society” par excellence, in the separatist intellectuals’ discourse.

CHAPTER 8 RECKONING WITH THE UNITED STATES

The émigré elite, based in the cosmopolitan metropolis of New York, looked to the United States as a model for what a modern nation should be. For José Martí, the United States represented a form of modernity that was at once admirable and dangerous. As Julio Ramos explains, the image of American progress was seductive for many Latin American intellectuals of the era: “Perhaps more rightfully than ancient Europe, the United States stood out as the modern space par excellence – a new society where progress had succeeded in freeing itself from the heavy chains of tradition.”¹ On one hand, Cuba’s northern neighbor was a paragon of material progress and industrialization, building such wonders as the Brooklyn Bridge, a feat Martí lauded in his essay of the same name. The Cuban writer saw the bridge as a symbol of modernity’s promise of a better world brought about by human ingenuity. However, within the piece, he lamented the fate of the faceless workers who toiled to bring the mighty bridge to fruition, exclaiming, “¡Oh trabajadores desconocidos, oh mártires hermosos, entrañas de la grandeza, cimiento de la fábrica eternal, gusanos de la gloria!”²

The United States’ spiritual decay was also a frequent theme in Martí’s “Escenas norteamericanas.” Nowhere is his critique more acerbic than in “Coney Island,” Martí’s account of the famed New York carnival. After describing a hellish scene in which working-class masses gathered to consume vast quantities in a festival of orgiastic excess, Martí claims that none of those modern wonders can satisfy the Latin American sensibility:

Es fama que una melancólica tristeza se apodera de los hombres de nuestros pueblos hispanoamericanos que allá viven, que se buscan en vano y no se hallan;

¹ Julio Ramos, *Divergent Modernities: Culture and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Latin America*, trans. John D. Blanco (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 153.

² José Martí, “El puente de Brooklyn,” 1883, in *Obras completas*, 20 vols (Havana, Cuba: Editorial Nacional de Cuba, 1963-1973), 10: 430.

que por mucho que las primeras impresiones hayan halagado sus sentidos, enamorado sus ojos, deslumbrado y ofuscado su razón, la angustia de la soledad les posee al fin, la nostalgia de un mundo espiritual superior los invade y aflige ... y, salgan o no a los ojos, rompe el espíritu espantado en raudal amarguísimo de lágrimas, porque aquella gran tierra está vacía de espíritu.³

These and other “Escenas” point to Martí’s pronounced ambivalence toward the United States and his desire for Cuba to follow a different path toward modernity.

Having become intimately acquainted with the chauvinist lens through which the U.S. elite viewed the world, Martí warned against Latin Americans developing overly close ties with the “colossus.” In his capacity as consul for the Uruguayan, Argentine, and Paraguayan governments, Martí attended the Monetary Conference of the American Republics, a summit in which the U.S. sought to strengthen economic ties with Latin America through the use of a common currency. He took the opportunity to denounce the proposal as a ploy to exert greater political control over peoples whom they considered inferior. Where the U.S. representative James G. Blaine preached cooperation and mutual benefit, Martí translated, “Quien dice unión económica, dice unión política. El pueblo que compra, manda. El pueblo que vende, sirve ... El influjo excesivo de un país en el comercio de otro, se convierte en influjo político.”⁴ Martí also pointed to the belief in American exceptionalism and its racist overtones: “Creen en la necesidad, en el derecho bárbaro, como único derecho: ‘esto sera nuestro, porque los necesitamos.’ Creen en la superioridad incontrastable de ‘la raza anglosajona contra la raza latina.’ Creen en la bajeza de la raza negra, que esclavizaron ayer y vejan hoy, y de la india, que exterminan. Creen que los pueblos de Hispanoamérica están formados, principalmente, de indios y de negros.”⁵ It

³ José Martí, “Coney Island,” 1883, in *Escenas americanas*, (Barcelona, Spain: Linkgua ediciones, 2003), 106.

⁴ José Martí, “La Conferencia Monetaria de las Repúblicas de América,” 1891, in *José Martí: Obras escogidas en tres tomos*, ed. Ela López Ugarte, vol. 2 (Havana, Cuba: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2007), 518.

⁵ Martí, “La Conferencia Monetaria,” 517-8.

may have come as a revelation to Martí's elite Latin American readers that the U.S. thought of them as blacks and Indians. They themselves, after all, were quite racist and marginalized their countries' black and Indian populations.

On the issue of outright annexation by the United States, which many conservative Cubans and expansionist Americans favored, Martí was unequivocal in his opposition. In response to an insulting editorial printed in the Philadelphia newspaper, the *Manufacturer*, Martí issued a fiery rebuttal:

It is probable that no self-respecting Cuban would like to see his country annexed to a nation where the leaders of opinion share towards him the prejudices excusable only to vulgar jingoism or rampant ignorance ... We are not the people of destitute vagrants or immoral pigmies that the 'Manufacturer' is pleased to picture; nor the country of petty talkers, incapable of action, hostile to hard work, that, in a mass with the other countries of Spanish America, we are by arrogant travelers and writers represented to be.⁶

In this, Martí addresses the ignorance of American leaders with regard to the Cuban people and Latin Americans in general, classifying them as a monolithic, inferior race of homunculi. That ignorance was a source of great irritation for Cuban intellectuals, while the United States' seemingly insatiable push to extract profit from its southern neighbors prompted alarm.

Drawing on Martí's reporting from the Pan-American Congress, Sotero Figueroa warned of "una empresa de capitalistas Yankees, la cual pretendió hacer de la América latina un gran centro especulativo, é ideó el Congreso Pan-Americano, que, en realidad, no era otra cosa que una especie de Liga mercantil que tendía á la subordinación tácita del Continente del Sur por y para la política é intereses de la república del Norte."⁷ Figueroa's concern is one typical of Latin

⁶ José Martí, "A Vindication of Cuba," 1889, in *Selected Writings*, ed. trans. Esther Allen (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 263.

⁷ Sotero Figueroa, "Calle la pasión hable la sinceridad VI," *La Doctrina de Martí*, 15 Feb 1897, 2.

American nationalists throughout Central America and the Caribbean, though Cuba and his native Puerto Rico's proximity to the U.S. made them especially tempting targets for expansion.

Having lived in the United States and witnessed its culture first-hand, Figueroa used his experiences to warn his own countrymen of the colossal neighbor's rapacious nature. In his book, *Ensayo biográfico de los que más han contribuido al progreso de Puerto Rico*, which he published in 1888, Figueroa wrote, "Es preciso vivir en este país algunos años para comprender que esta raza no tiende a perfeccionar o mejorar, por el cruzamiento, a las que cree inferiores, sin otra razón que abone esta soberbia creencia que la del engrandecimiento material, como si sólo de pan viviese el hombre. Por esto extermina, en su victoriosa marcha, a los elementos que se le resisten por no querer ser absorbidos."⁸ As is his wont, Figueroa employs religious imagery to suggest that the United States lived only on the "bread" of material gain while ignoring the moral and spiritual power that made societies truly great. He describes the United States' culture as vacuously utilitarian while portraying the nation as a voracious "monstruo" (as Martí often called it) with dangerously expansionist tendencies. Also worthy of note is his use of the word "raza," which implies an essentialist argument that the North American character arises from a deeply ingrained *volksgeist*, reducing the actions of an entire nation to a set of inevitable tendencies in much the same way that Martí, and later the Nicaraguan poet Ruben Darío, critiqued the U.S.

Rafael Serra, in an article entitled "Los negros americanos," expressed similar concerns along with a dim assessment of North American culture, decrying the "lamentable ignorancia del organismo de este país y [...] la tendencia de absorción general de los norte-americanos, se dejan dominar por alucinaciones de belleza que en realidad no existe, comencemos por una de las

⁸ Sotero Figueroa, *Ensayo biográfico de los que más han contribuido al progreso de Puerto Rico* (Ponce, Puerto Rico: El Vapor, 1888), quoted in Sotero Figueroa, *La verdad de la historia*, ed. Carlos Ripoll (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1977), 7.

realidades que no toman en cuenta los que no van al fondo de las cosas sino á la superficie.”⁹

These words echo Martí’s disgust with U.S. mass culture in “Coney Island,” painting North Americans as shallow brutes with little sense of spirituality.

The issue of race in the United States was also a frequent point of criticism leveled at the powerful neighbor as Cuban intellectuals sought to develop a national ethos that transcended such concerns. Within “Coney Island,” for example, Martí sympathizes with the plight of “an unfortunate man of color, who, in exchange for a paltry day’s wage, stands day and night with his head poking out through a piece of cloth, dodging [...] pitches with ridiculous movements and extravagant grimaces.”¹⁰ He shares a similar anecdote in “A Town Sets a Black Man on Fire,” in which Martí describes a number of scenes in which black Americans’ human dignity is stripped from them, both in the horrific scene to which the title alludes and in the cake walk, a dispiriting scene in which black couples danced for coins. Martí scorned both the dancers who, “by their own baseness promote disdain for their own race,” and for the white onlookers, “who throw their arms around each other and trumpet with delight, finding in their young souls neither pity nor any manliness that would make them – and the man who will be born from them – suffer from this degradation of mankind.”¹¹ In both essays, Martí underlines essential differences between Cuba and the United States. Whereas the situation for black Americans was a travesty that weakened the country as a whole, Cuba Libre was to be a country that lacked such problems thanks to the rejection of race as a foundational or functional concept in the future polity of an independent republic.

⁹ Rafael Serra, “Los negros americanos,” *La Doctrina de Martí*, 15 January 1898, 2.

¹⁰ Martí, “Coney Island,” 93.

¹¹ José Martí, “A Town Sets a Black Man on Fire,” in *Selected Writings*, ed. trans. Esther Allen (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 311.

Rafael Serra also critiqued the United States from the pages of *La Doctrina de Martí*, while joining Martí in criticizing the perceived lack of true civilization in both black and white Americans. In “Los negros americanos,” he theorized that North American proponents of Cuba’s annexation intended to send black Americans to the island, “lo mismo que ha sucedido con las clases desheredadas que nos vinieran de España. Allá, eran despreciadas por la nobleza española, pero acá, para la conservación del territorio, eran investidas de excesiva autoridad contra el criollo.”¹² This was another danger associated with “la fatal idea de la anexión, lo mismo con los blancos americanos que los negros.”¹³ Serra’s warning of a possible influx of cheap, African American labor reflected his and other separatists’ concern that the U.S. would merely take the place of Spain, which had already sent its lower classes to Cuba to seek their fortunes and disenfranchise native workers. Serra went on to deliver the dire warning that those who sought annexation “tendrían la misma lastimosa condición que, para afrenta de la humanidad, [los negros] tienen en los Estados Unidos.”¹⁴ Serra did not specify that it would be only Afro-Cubans who would suffer this debasement, implying that the entirety of the Cuban population would be stripped of its humanity and become second-class citizens if the island should fall under the sway of the racist policies of the North.

In October 1898, ten years after the publication of Figueroa’s *Ensayo biográfico*, the U.S. intervention had begun. Figueroa responded to this turn of events with a column that was much more charitable toward the United States. In the *Revista de Cayo Hueso*, he compared the Cuban patriots to America’s founders, claiming that the Liberation Army was following the path of the

¹² Serra, “Los negros americanos,” 2.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

pilgrims on Plymouth Rock who, “como premio á su culto fervoroso por la libertad, á su respeto á las leyes y á su amor por el trabajo emulador, tienen hoy la ventura de vivir en la república más ponderosa del continente Americano.”¹⁵ Rather than emphasizing the differences between the two peoples, as Martí had, he reverses course by suggesting the two had a common love for freedom, and even that Cubans should imitate the North American work ethic and aspire to the country’s wealth and power. This marks a notable departure from Figueroa’s earlier rhetoric regarding the dearth of soul in the materialistic U.S. The drastic shift in tone with regard to the “Colossus” comes at a time when North American intervention in the war made its future involvement in Cuban affairs inevitable. While Martí’s warnings proved to be prescient, they were insufficient to prevent the War for Independence from becoming the Spanish-American War.

Serra and Figueroa, like Martí, lived in the United States for many years, and were conscious of the threat it posed to the revolutionary national project they were attempting to realize with an independent Cuba. Though Figueroa’s writings with regard to the U.S. dramatically shifted in 1898, his earlier work, including his accusations that Enrique Trujillo was an agent of U.S. capitalism, reveal his ideas to be fundamentally in sync with Serra and Martí’s antipathy to the United States and all it stood for. The conclusion to my project explores the reactions of Serra, Figueroa, and Gómez to a new order in Cuba dominated by the U.S. and by Tomás Estrada Palma’s government-in-waiting.

¹⁵ Sotero Figueroa, “La Quincena,” *La Revista de Cayo Hueso*, 10 October 1898, 3.

CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSION AND EPILOGUE

In 1898, Cuba traded the domination of a weakened European power for that of the burgeoning United States, which inserted itself into the island's administration and reconstruction while shunting aside the Liberation Army and the ideology of racelessness that had served as a founding principle of the revolution. Rafael Serra, Sotero Figueroa, and Juan Gualberto Gómez each relocated to Cuba after the end of hostilities to find that none of their goals for the revolution would come to pass. Under the governance of the U.S., then the Cuban Republic, formed in 1902 with Tomás Estrada Palma as president, Cubans saw a return of the old colonial hierarchies of class and race.

After a brief period of rule under the comparatively even-handed John R. Brooke, the U.S. installed General Leonard Wood as the island's military governor. Wood, a veteran Indian fighter in the American West, took a hard-line approach to the island's governance, seeking to reestablish the old colonial order at every opportunity. Among his first actions was to fill every level of government with Spanish loyalists (those who had remained neutral during the war) and others who demonstrated "sympathy with U.S. American ideals."¹ The new government was almost certain to maintain every possible vestige of Spanish rule. Under its reign, Afro-Cubans' "ciudadano" status was revoked and they were once again labeled by their African ancestry. Angered by this affront to the independence movement's supposed ideals, a group of Afro-Cubans approached Wood in 1900 with a petition insisting that "'citizen' should be employed [when referring to blacks] because Cuba's 'colored race has already proved its value and

¹ Lillian Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 93.

capability.”² Wood dismissed the entreaty outright, believing it necessary to maintain Cuban blacks’ consciousness of their “racial condition” lest they decide to rebel and establish a black republic as Haiti had done in the previous century.³ The survival of the Spanish colonial custom of racial classification repudiated Martí’s promise of a raceless Cuba.

These developments left Afro-Cuban veterans and revolutionaries shocked to find that they were no longer wanted by the nation for which they had fought and suffered. Historian Aline Helg points out that “the U.S. administration deliberately excluded Afro-Cubans from positions of power at a crucial moment of Cuban history, just when the latter could have claimed their rightful share in the nation’s government on the basis of their leading role in the War for Independence.”⁴ Serra, Figueroa, and Gómez were exceptions as prominent, well-placed intellectuals with close ties to Estrada Palma and the PRC. Each would maintain their activism in favor of reform, though Gómez would persist in subordinating revolutionary goals to ideals of order and civilization.

On October 24, 1898, the third and final Assembly of Representatives of the Cuban revolutionary government-in-arms took place in Santa Cruz, Camagüey.⁵ Juan Gualberto Gómez, recently returned from his latest forced sojourn in Spain, took his place in the assembly and expressed optimism that the United States would help ease Cuba into independence in an orderly fashion. Gómez, who likely viewed the U.S. as a progressive, modernizing influence, recommended that Cubans cooperate with the intervention and that the Liberation Army

² Guerra, *Myth of José Martí*, 129.

³ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁴ Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 97.

⁵ Leopoldo Horrego Estuch, *Juan Gualberto Gómez: Un gran inconforme* (Havana, Cuba: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2004), 92.

subordinate itself to the American occupation. To do otherwise, he warned, would be to appear “ante muchos como un obstáculo para el presente y como rémora para el natural desenvolvimiento de nuestra patria, en este período crítico de nuestra historia.”⁶ Gómez advocated the dissolution of the “empeño revolucionario” while citing Martí’s “Bases del Partido Revolucionario Cubano,” whose fifth article stated that “El Partido Revolucionario Cubano no tiene por objeto llevar a Cuba una agrupación victoriosa que considere la Isla como su presa y dominio, sino preparar, con cuantos medios le permita la libertad del extranjero, la guerra que se ha de hacer para el decoro y bien de todos los cubanos y entregar a todo el país, la patria libre.”⁷ Thus, Gómez argued that the revolution had completed its mission of defeating the Spanish and, therefore, should disband. Ironically, this meant handing the reins of the island to a foreign power whose imperial ambitions Martí had long feared. In making this argument, Gómez appealed to Cubans’ unity of purpose, another of Martí’s principles. “Todo ello sin contar con que la acción aislada de los elementos revolucionarios no tienen razón de ser,” Gómez wrote, “ni bajo el punto de vista de la conveniencia propia, ni mirado bajo el prisma del interés general, ni examinado al trasluz de nuestras tradiciones y compromisos. La inteligencia leal y sincera con nuestros vecinos es casi un postulado de la política revolucionaria de Cuba.”⁸ While Sotero Figueroa wrote favorably about the U.S. intervention at its outset in his *Revista de Cayo Hueso*, Gómez went much further by declaring that the revolutionary infrastructure should be dismantled and the island’s affairs totally surrendered to the occupying power.

⁶ Juan Gualberto Gómez, “A la asamblea de representantes: Exposición de motivos,” 1898, in *Por Cuba Libre*, 2nd ed., ed. Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring (Havana, Cuba: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1974), 447-8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 449.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 448.

Though Gómez would become a prominent politician, many of his actions reflected how far he had come from his original activism on behalf of Afro-Cubans and his subsequent cooption by the political elite. In 1902, a group of Afro-Cuban veterans asked the government to give more public jobs to blacks and desegregate the security forces, only to have Gómez repudiate their initiative by delivering a speech extolling the revolution's defeat of racism and telling the congregated veterans to curb their expectations of the republic.⁹

Serra and Figueroa moved to Havana in 1899, where they resumed their activism on behalf of their radical ideals. Both resumed writing, with Serra publishing a new version of *La Doctrina de Martí* and, later, *El Nuevo Criollo*. Figueroa contributed to *La Discusión*, a radical paper and frequent target of attacks from conservative papers like *Diario de la Marina*. Figueroa also organized a new political organization called the Asociación de Emigrados Revolucionarios Cubanos. Underlining the importance of Martí's legacy to political action in post-1898 Cuba, one of the Asociación's first initiatives was to preserve his childhood home in Habana Vieja as a national landmark.¹⁰ Serra, meanwhile, used his newspaper to call on Cubans to unite in resistance to the U.S. intervention. In July of 1899, while the U.S. military government maintained that Cubans were not ready for self-rule, Serra published "¿A dónde iremos?" wherein his usual condemnations of elite Cubans' co-option of the revolution is subsumed by the need to expel the North American intervention. "La unión honrada, que es la unión útil; la unión sincera de todos los elementos del país reflejada en la unidad de la prensa," he wrote,

daría al traste con todo ese fantasma tenebroso que constituye la obra siniestra y deplorable del irritante interventor. Pues sólo en un país debilitado más que por los estragos de la guerra, por el desconcierto suicida de sus moradores, se atreviese un

⁹ Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 126.

¹⁰ Josefina Toledo, *Sotero Figueroa, editor de Patria: Apuntes para una biografía* (Havana, Cuba: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1985), 98-9.

poder extranjero sin más títulos que la exuberancia de su fuerza ni más excusa que nuestra falta de previsión y uniformidad, no tan sólo precisarse a invadir sino a establecer, en nombre de la *humanidad* y la *justicia*, un sistema de humillantes desafueros, un sistema tan opuesto al sentido común, repugante a nuestro decoro y contrario a nuestra libertad.¹¹

Amidst his outrage that Cuba's future would be dictated by another foreign power, Serra put heavy emphasis on the idea of presenting a united front. By 1899, it would have been clear to Serra that the United States constituted the greatest threat to the revolution he had envisioned. During the hostilities, the PRC relied on an army of poor and working-class guerillas to prosecute the war against Spain. With the United States' intervention, however, Estrada Palma and his cohort had the military of a world power as the ultimate guarantor of the old colonial order and the privileged position of the traditional elite within it. Serra, recognizing this new impediment to revolutionary change, shifted his discourse to fit a new mission that required all Cubans' cooperation, much as Martí had done prior to 1895.

In 1902, the Cuban Republic came into being with Tomás Estrada Palma as its first president. Both Serra and Gómez were eventually elected to the Chamber of Representatives. While Gómez had the clout to run without a political benefactor as a Liberal, the lesser-known Serra ran with Estrada Palma's Moderates, finally compromising his ideals in exchange for a place in Cuba's government. In order to establish an independent republic, the United States required that the Cuban representatives ratify the Platt Amendment, a clause in Cuba's constitution that allowed the United States to intervene in Cuba's domestic affairs as it saw fit to preserve order. Though he had earlier supported the U.S. intervention, Gómez was a prominent opponent of the amendment.

¹¹ Rafael Serra, "¿A dónde iremos?" *La Doctrina de Martí*, 9 July 1899, in *Rafael Serra, patriota y revolucionario, fraternal amigo de Martí* (Havana, Cuba: s.n., 1959), 130.

In the second year of Estrada Palma's administration, the newly elected president appointed Sotero Figueroa to a position at an official newspaper for the government's *Negociado de Asuntos Generales*. The post was short-lived, however, as Figueroa wrote an article critical of Estrada Palma for abandoning the "Bases del Partido Revolucionario Cubano" (a document which had taken on great significance as Martí's legend grew). Figueroa was soon fired from his position, his article lost to history (likely never published).¹²

The United States intervened in Cuba's government once again in 1906, this time due to instability following a massive campaign of intimidation and electoral fraud perpetrated by Estrada Palma's Moderate party.¹³ Figueroa's *Asociación de Emigrados Revolucionarios* protested this latest incursion, for the group held the Cuban president responsible. Figueroa himself published a poem entitled "Cuba y Puerto Rico," which he dedicated to Estrada Palma. The final stanza strikes a defiant chord that calls for continuing the struggle for the islands' independence: "¡Arriba todos los buenos / Que nos convoca el deber / Es hora ya de romper / Del despotismo los frenos / Si de la patria los trenos; / Nos piden favor y ayuda, / Probemos que no está muda / El alma ante sus manecillas / Y triunfarán las Antillas / En la final prueba ruda!"¹⁴

As Figueroa kept up his life's work of fighting for Puerto Rico and his adopted Cuban *patria* through the written word, the forces of wealth and power in Cuba and abroad consistently triumphed over his vision of an independent society free of economic hierarchies. The high hopes that he and Serra had harbored for the new Cuba had been frustrated. Both were overshadowed by Gómez, who would enjoy prominence as a war hero and Liberal politician,

¹² Toledo, *Sotero Figueroa*, 101.

¹³ See Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí*, for a thorough explanation of the circumstances behind the 1906 intervention.

¹⁴ Sotero Figueroa, "Ofrenda," quoted in Toledo, *Sotero Figueroa*, 104.

though he himself had compromised his own battle against racism in order to conform to a political system dominated by reactionary interests that abhorred popular mobilization.

In some respects, the history of the early Cuban Republic illustrates the frailty of Martí's original discourse, as the anti-racist rhetoric of the independence movement gave way to the machinations of a political elite that shaped the narrative of the independence struggle to legitimize the marginalization of Afro-Cubans and workers. However, intellectuals like Serra and Figueroa were able to use the martyred leader as a powerful symbol that lent their activism a legitimacy that guaranteed it an audience. In turn, Serra and Figueroa helped to maintain Martí's legitimacy as a symbol for a just, equitable Cuba for the popular classes by imbuing his image with revolutionary substance that the man himself lacked. It was not necessarily Martí's living words and deeds that sustained his hold over the Cuban imagination, but rather it was the interpretation of his memory by the likes of Serra and Figueroa, activists who had listened to the martyred leader and heard their own revolutionary message. They then crafted their own Doctrine of Martí that contained their own visions and ambitions for Cuba Libre.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kyle Doherty was born in Meridian, Mississippi, in 1986 to parents Sarah Springer and Thomas Doherty. At age 16, he left the Lauderdale County public school system for the Mississippi School for Math and Science, a public residential school in Columbus. From there, he enrolled in Millsaps College, a small liberal arts college considered among the premier institutions in the Southeast. There, Doherty majored in history and Spanish and completed an honors thesis entitled “José Martí’s Spiritual Battle for Modernity.” In 2008, he graduated Magna cum Laude with honors in Spanish while winning top departmental honors for both majors. Doherty then spent a year working as an entertainment reporter for the *Clarion-Ledger*, Mississippi’s statewide newspaper, before enrolling in the University of Florida’s Masters in Latin American Studies program.