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2019 NSK Neustadt Prize for Children's Literature  
Lesson plans to study the work of the  
2019 NSK Laureate  
Margarita Engle



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***Background information on the wars for Cuban independence to help supplement lesson plans for the 2019 NSK Prize for Children's Literature laureate, Margarita Engle:***

The lesson plans in this guide focus on two pieces of Margarita Engle's work: *Firefly Letters* and *The Surrender Tree*. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the balance of power around the globe was shifting. Ancient and strong empires that promoted colonial rule were being pushed out by nascent democratic movements. In order to understand the revolutionary state of Cuba in the latter part of the 19th century, there is a brief summary focusing on the voice and abolition of slaves in the first and third wars of independence. More information can be found in the articles at the end of this packet written by the historian Ada Ferrer. This summary taken from Ferrer's work may help provide helpful content for students so they can understand the characters in these books better.

On October 10, 1868, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, a lawyer, sugar planter, and slaveholder in eastern Cuba, gathered the slaves on his sugar mill, La Demajagua, and granted them their freedom. "You are as free," he told them, "as I am." Then, addressing them as "citizens," he invited them to help "conquer liberty and independence" for Cuba. Thus began the [first] war for Cuban independence. In the case of Cuba, the preservation of colonial rule had long been linked to the institution of slavery. During the Age of Revolution, when almost every other Spanish territory freed itself from imperial rule, Cuba survived as Spain's "ever-faithful isle." The preservation of sugar, slavery, and the prosperous plantation economy they engendered depended, elites agreed, on the continuation of the colonial bond. To opt for independence was to risk social upheaval and economic annihilation. This association between slavery and colonial order remained strong for much of the nineteenth century. Thus when in 1868 creole elites decided to challenge the colonial regime, slavery became a major issue in their efforts, as nationalist insurgency and the institution of slavery each threatened to disrupt the other in significant ways.

When the principal conspirators of October 10, 1868, declared Cuban sovereignty, they began by freeing and mobilizing their own slaves for war. Prominent leaders liberated their slaves immediately, but the movement as a movement advocated only a very gradual abolition. This abolition, moreover, would indemnify owners, and it would occur only after the successful conclusion of the war. Slaves, however, did not necessarily require prodding in order to abandon the farms of their masters; they could, on their own or in small groups, flee their farms and volunteer their services to the rebellion. The mobilization of slaves proceeded on two fronts. In armed rebellion against Spain, slaves actively engaged themselves, answering and in many ways surpassing the cautious call to arms issued by creole patriots. But their very presence called into being a whole set of arguments about the racial character of rebellion and the racial character of the nation that the rebellion sought to found. Thus alongside the arming of slaves for war came a mobilization of a different sort: the figure of the armed slave fighting for independence.

Fast-forward to 1896, in Cuba's third War of Independence from Spain, the first modern, systematic use of (re)concentration camps as a way of controlling rural civilian populations was ordered by Imperial Spain's Captain-General Valeriano Weyler. Some estimates range from 10%-30% of Cuba's population died in these camps, and 96% of farms were destroyed, thus sustaining life was near impossible. Moreover, after Spain ceded Cuba to the US, Weyler was

promoted to Minister of War, and within a few years the military use of concentration camps was repeated in South Africa's Boer Wars and in Nazi Germany, for example. This war is known in the US as the Spanish-American War, and in Spain as *El Desastre* (The Disaster). It is also known as the "journalist's war" because American newspapers wrote stories promoting US intervention.

**Sources:**

Ferrer, Ada. "Armed Slaves and Anticolonial Insurgency in Late Nineteenth-Century Cuba." *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age*, edited by Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan. Yale University Press, 2006.

Ferrer, Ada. "Cuba, 1898: Rethinking Race, Nation, and Empire." *Radical History Review*. Vol 73 (1999): 22-46.

### *A note about this guide*

The lesson plans in this guide celebrate the work of Margarita Engle by having students complete pre- and post-reading activities [primarily thinking prompts] followed by discussion, analyzing the poems, and then writing their own piece(s). Students are guided through a technical process of understanding form and function in an effort to help them enjoy reading Engle's work and to put them on the path toward writing. These lessons are teacher friendly and organized in a consistent structure:

- Context, Warm-Up, or Pre-Reading exercise - guiding questions and historical points that help guide the reader through a specific piece(s) by Engle.
- Read the poetry.
- Practice - Literary analysis and writing reminders that help prepare the student to write an original poem(s).

The excerpts from Engle's work are intended to be used as a model.

The **objectives** for these lessons are as follows: (1) to be able to gain insight into life and the history of daily life in Cuba; (2) to be able to identify and celebrate the role that the form of poetry plays in Engle's work; (3) to be able to appreciate the Cuban-American voice and experience; (4) to recognize the value of culturally responsive teaching and writing while celebrating one's own unique, cultural voice.

### *All lessons are aligned to meet the following Common Core Standards*

Anchor Standards for Reading (RL.9-10, RL.11-12):

- Key Ideas and Details:
  1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
  2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
  3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
- Craft and Structure:
  4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
  5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
  6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
- Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:
  7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
  8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

- Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity:

10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Anchor Standards for Language (L.9-10.1 & 10.2, L.11-12):

- Knowledge of Language:

3. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

- Vocabulary Acquisition and Use:

4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

Conventions of Standard English:

1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

1.a. Use parallel structure.

1.b. Use various types of phrases and clauses to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing or presentations.

2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

2.a. Use a semicolon (and perhaps a conjunctive adverb) to link two or more closely related independent clauses.

2.b. Use a colon to introduce a list or quotation.

2.c. Spell correctly.

Grade level: 6-9

**Lesson #1: *The Surrender Tree*, by Margarita Engle** - Healing: who can heal? who needs to be healed?

Pre-reading strategies: Willa Cather, a 20th Century American Novelist, once wrote that, “The basic material a writer works with was acquired before the age of thirteen.” Within this idea is that good writing comes out of an experience(s) that you know personally maybe even intimately.

- ✓ Warm-up | To do - make a list of times when you either provided or received healing. Think broadly about what healing might mean.
- ✓ Literature | History - read the historical note and timeline from *The Surrender Tree* by Margarita Engle (pp. 161 - 166); or, you read the historical note/summary or one of the articles found in the appendix by Dr. Ada Ferrer.

Read the following poems:

- Jose, *The Surrender Tree*, p. 55
- Rosa, *The Surrender Tree*, p. 58
- Rosa, *The Surrender Tree*, p. 109
- Rosa, *The Surrender Tree*, p. 115
- Jose, *The Surrender Tree*, p. 126

Practice:

- ✓ Literature | Analysis -
  1. p. 55: What is Rosa’s gift? Does she give or receive “mercy that floats down...”?
  2. p. 58: Engle uses repetition in this poem for emphasis. What does she emphasize? What does it tell the reader about Rosa?
  3. p. 109: As a healer, Rosa makes the girl do what? What role do stories play in the healing? Why does Rosa require the girl to practice self-healing?
  4. p. 115: The caged birds are a metaphor for what? How do they illuminate the limitations that Rosa recognizes in herself.
  5. p. 126: In this poem, Jose offers a reinterpretation of how to solve or heal hunger. What is it? The waves and ocean are figurative language used to express what?
- ✓ Writing | prompt - Why do you think Margarita Engle chooses to write in poetry as opposed to prose? In this assignment, you need to take Willa Cather’s advice of drawing on your personal experience and write a free-verse poem (without rhyme scheme or other limitations) about a time when you acted either as a healer or you received healing. Follow the model that Engle provides of communicating big, powerful ideas in few words with imagery and figurative language. Note: try to think about the idea of healing in a broad and multi-faceted manner.

**Jose** (*The Surrender Tree*, p. 55)

The most famous of our *mambí* generals  
are called the Fox and the Lion.  
Máximo Gómez is the Fox, slender and pale,  
a foreigner from the island of Hispaniola.  
First he was a Spanish soldier,  
then a rebel,  
and now we think of him as Cuban.

The Lion is Antonia Maceo, our friend since birth,  
a local man of mixed race.  
Some Call him the Bronze Titan,  
because he is powerfully and calm.

The Fox loves to quote philosophers, poets,  
and the Proverbs of King Solomon.  
He tells Rosa that those who save lives are wise,  
like trees that bear life-giving fruit.

The Lion adds that kindness to animals  
and children  
is a part of Rosa's natural gift,  
but healing the wounds of enemy soldiers  
is a strange mercy that floats down  
from heaven.

**Rosa** (*The Surrender Tree*, p. 58)

A man is carried into the hospital, wounded -  
he fell from a tree.

I know his face, and I can tell that he  
recognizes me.  
We were children, we were enemies...  
Now he is my patient,  
but why should I cure him,  
wasting precious medicines  
on a spy who must have been sent to kill me?

Each choice leads to another.  
I am a nurse.  
I must heal the wounded.  
How well the Lion knows me! Didn't he say  
that curing the enemies



is not my own skill, but a mercy from God?

Each choice leads to another.  
I am a nurse.  
I must heal.

**Rosa** (*The Surrender Tree* p. 109)

The new girl is so thin and pale  
that I cannot let her help me  
until she has learned  
how to heal herself

I make her eat, sleep, rest.  
She resists.

I see a story in her eyes.  
She thinks she has no right to eat  
while so many other starve.

**Rosa** (*The Surrender Tree*, p. 115)

Silvia tells me that she used to visit  
her grandparents in town.

They kept caged birds,  
and in the evenings they walked,  
carrying the cages up a hill  
to watch the sunset.  
Inside each cage, the captive birds  
sang and fluttered, wings dancing.

Silvia admits that she walks wondering  
whether the birds imagined they were flying,  
or maybe they understood the limitations  
or bamboo bars, the walls of each tiny cage.

Now I ask myself about my own limitations,  
trying to serve as mother and grandmother  
to a child who has lost  
everyone she ever loved.

**Jose** (*The Surrender Tree*, p. 126)

We no longer have enough food  
for so many patients.

Silvia and I go out to gather  
wild yams and honey.

The child tells me her grandmother  
showed her how to cure sadness  
by sucking the juice of an orange,  
while standing on a beach.

Toss the peels onto a wave.  
Watch the sadness float away.

**Lesson #2: *The Surrender Tree*, by Margarita Engle** - what are the roles and responsibilities around the legacies of slavery and colonialism in Cuba?

Pre-reading strategies:

- ✓ Warm-up | To do - At the conclusion of *The Surrender Tree*, Rosa, Jose, and Silvia have survived to see the end of the war and what Engle calls a “strange” victory. Considering what you read in the book and in the historical note, react to why Rosa considers this victory “strange.”
- ✓ Literature | History - Refresh your understanding of General Weyler (the Butcher) and his policy of reconcentration.

Read the following poems:

- Silvia, *The Surrender Tree*, p. 131
- Silvia, *The Surrender Tree*, p. 138
- Rosa, *The Surrender Tree*, p. 155

Practice:

- ✓ Literature | Analysis -
  1. p. 131: Silvia begins the poem with elation and concludes with horror. What is the horror that she references and what is significant about the newspaper readers being so far away from it?
  2. p. 138: What kind of strength do you think the survivors need? Where will they go? Will the survivors be accepted?
  3. p. 155: In this poem, who is “them/they/their”? Engle uses repetition in the first and last stanzas but ends each stanza with two different words. What is the significance when you compare the last two words of the first and last stanzas.
- ✓ Writing | Reminders - Your assignment is to consider deeply what a freed slave might feel. Write two poems: one is a poem from the point of view of a freed slave, and the other is a poem from the point of view of the freed slaves former owner. Create a scenario in which they find themselves being forced to interact with one another.

**Silvia** (*The Surrender Tree*, p. 131)

Today the most amazing thing happened!  
A man came from far away, to present the Fox  
with a jeweled ceremonial sword  
made by Tiffany,  
someone very famous in New York,  
the city where this visitor works  
for a newspaper called the *Journal*,  
a foreign name I can never  
hope to pronounce.

When I asked Rosa why a newspaper  
would care so much about our island,  
I found her answer troubling.

She said tales of suffering sell newspapers  
that make readers feel safe,  
because they are so far away  
for the horror...

**Silvia** (*The Surrender Tree*, p. 138)

Our Lion is dead,  
but Weyler the Butcher  
has been sent back to Spain,  
humiliated by his failure  
to defeat *mambí* rebels...  
How can I decide  
whether to weep for the Lin  
or celebrate an end to Cuba's  
reconcentration?

The camp where my family starved,  
and shivered with fever—  
the camp is open now—  
the guards are gone.

Survivors can leave  
if they have  
the strength.

**Rosa** (*The Surrender Tree*, p. 155)

We helped them win  
their strange victory  
against Spain.

We imagined they were here  
to help us gain the freedom  
we've craved for so long.

We were inspired by their wars  
for freedom from England  
and freedom for slaves.

We helped them win  
their strange victory  
over us.

Grade level: 6-9

**Lesson #3: *The Firefly Letters*, by Margarita Engle** - Imagery and Symbolism

Context: One of the advantages to writing historical fiction, as opposed to a traditional nonfiction book, is that Engle is able to employ literary techniques such as imagery and symbolism. These literary devices help her to relate her story in a richer, more stylistic way. She also chooses to write the narrative in poetic form, instead of prose. Where she might simply narrate and present plot in a straightforward way, she instead inserts images and symbols, which take on a more metaphorical meaning.

Discussion topics about symbolism and imagery in *The Firefly Letters*:

- ✓ What is the significance of the fireflies (*cocuyos*) in the book? Which characters interact with these insects and why?
- ✓ A literary “allusion” is an indirect reference to some other important text. In this book, Engle (through the character Frederika) often makes an allusion to Eden. Why does she do this? What contrasts and comparisons does she make between Eden and the island of Cuba?
- ✓ How does the poetic form Engle uses affect the way you read this book? To what extent does she rely on poetic devices to convey meaning?
- ✓ What does Cecilia mean when she says “as if the entire world can be found trapped inside one Cuban sugar mill and trapped inside my own voice”? (p. 90)

Writing assignment:

- ✓ Describe two separate events that have happened in your life and describe them in as factual a way as possible. Include the pertinent details but offer no information other than what is necessary to tell what happened.
- ✓ Next, convert your narratives into poems, adding literary devices such as imagery, symbolism, personification, or metaphor/simile.
- ✓ What do you notice about the changes from one form to another? What is added? What is subtracted?

Grade level: 6-9

**Lesson #4: *The Firefly Letters*, by Margarita Engle** - Historical Fiction, Different Points of View

Assignment: Write a series of poems (3 in total), in which the writer needs to pick a real event in history that would have different effects on different kinds of people.

Context: This book is taken from the thoughts of Frederika, Cecilia, and Elena, whose lives Margarita Engle imagines as intertwined during three months that Frederika spent in Cuba in 1851.

As we learn from the “Historical Note,” Frederika Bremer was a real person: “Sweden’s first woman novelist and one of the world’s earliest advocates of equal rights for women” (146). Bremer’s writings from her travels to Cuba in 1851 describe “Cecilia, her young African-born translator” (146) who “was eight years old when she was taken from Cuba to Africa” and who “said that she still missed her mother” (147). The “Author’s Note” reveals that “Elena is a fictional character” (148) and that all of the characters’ emotional responses have been invented by Engle.

Through this work of historical fiction, Bremer is able to explore important themes like freedom, while at the same time educating her readers about one slice of life in Cuba in the mid-1800s. She is also able to give us a variety of ways into the theme by offering different characters’ perspectives.

Read: Read again and discuss the poems on pgs. 41 and 43 (“Frederika” and “Cecilia”, respectively) in which Frederika and Cecilia encounter the slave ship. Given their life experiences, their understanding of this historical reality is quite different.

Post-reading questions:

- ✓ What is the tone of Frederika’s poem? What is the tone of Cecilia’s? What key words and images help reveal the tone in each?
- ✓ The boat and the moon have different meanings in the two poems. What might the boat and the moon mean to Frederika? What do they mean to Cecilia?
- ✓ Cecilia has a lung condition and running away leads to a coughing fit in her poem. How is the author using the condition of Cecilia’s body symbolically? Contrast what her body goes through to what Frederika’s body is experiencing in these two poems. How do these two characters experience their bodies in the world?

Practice:

- ✓ Literature | Analysis - Pick a moment in history that would be experienced in different ways by three different people. The event and its context may be well known to you, or you may need to do some research. It may be interesting to write from the points of view

of people with opposing value systems—for example the stories of two soldiers on opposing sides of the Vietnam War and a pacifist who is protesting the war. It might also be interesting to write from the points of view of people who mostly agree but see the world differently—for example, a mother and child who lost their home in the fires that ravaged Paradise, California in 2018, and a firefighter who helped put out the blaze.

- ✓ Writing | Reminders - Write three narrative persona poems that do the following things:
- indicate the speaker's identity
  - indicate the speaker's attitude toward the historical event
  - indicate how history has shaped or is shaping the speaker
  - educate the reader about a historical event
  - use one or two common symbols (like the boat and the moon in Engle's poems) that each speaker interprets differently

Note: You may even select a real historical figure to narrate one of them. Feel free to include a "Historical Note" as Engle does to further educate readers about the history behind your poems.

**Frederika (pp. 41-42)**

Cubans believe moonlight  
is harmful.

Cecilia covers her head  
with a blue turban. She warns me  
that I should protect myself  
from the moon,  
although she cannot say  
exactly why.

The beach is so lovely  
that I feel like a flying fish,  
as if I am soaring  
up into the starlit sky.

When Cecilia suddenly runs away  
from a few small boats  
that are bobbing on the waves,  
I am perplexed.

How can anything  
as beautiful as a moonlit night  
be dangerous?

**Cecilia (pp. 43 - 44)**

I try to warn her,  
but she will not listen.

She jumps up and down  
in the roaring waves  
like a happy child,

The boats are close now—  
I cannot stay!  
The memory of arrival  
and loss  
is too fresh.

Frederika does not see their faces yet,  
all the children from a slave ship  
riding in those small boats,  
gliding toward this lonely shore  
in chains,

I run and run  
until my lungs ache  
and I cough  
and then I collapse  
in the muddy road  
that leads away  
from the soft sand  
of the beach.

Gasping for breath,  
I struggle to remember  
my mother's voice,  
and I struggle  
to forget  
all the rest...



Grade level: 6-9

**Lesson #5: *The Firefly Letters*, by Margarita Engle** - Intersectionality, Different Perspectives

Context: Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, looks at the ways that systems of power interlock and overlap to affect those most marginalized by society. For example, women as a collectively earn less money than men for doing the same jobs, earning on average 78 to 82 cents compared to a man's dollar ([wikipedia](#)). African Americans earn less money than white people do for doing the same jobs, earning on average 65% of the white wage ([wikipedia](#)). This intersection affects black women doubly, such that they earn between 48 and 68 cents for every dollar earned by a white man ([Nat'l Partnership for Women & Families](#)).

Post-reading strategies: In *The Firefly Letters*, Elena, Frederika, and Cecilia have many similar experiences, but they feel them differently because of the way their race, age, social class, and genders interact.

- ✓ **Elena** is a girl of Spanish descent, wealthy, and 12 years old. She is bound by her gender and social norms to “marry / a man of my father’s choice” (10) at age 14. She is not allowed to travel outside of her house without a chaperone.
- ✓ **Frederika** is a woman of Swedish descent, formerly wealthy, and 50 years old. She has been cut off from her father’s wealth (67), but her status in society still allows her to move freely. She has managed to escape many gender roles, as she is traveling the world without a male chaperone. She has never married and has no children.
- ✓ **Cecilia** is a girl of African descent, a slave, around 15 years old, pregnant, and married. She has no rights over her own body. She was sold by her father to a slave catcher. Once in Cuba, she is forced to marry and becomes pregnant by a man she does not know (23). She only has mobility when given permission by her owner. She will have no rights over her child, who will be worth \$15 before he is born and \$30 on the day of his birth (18). She will never be able to afford to purchase her own freedom, as her knowledge of several languages makes her worth “a fortune” (18).

Practice:

- ✓ **Literature | Analysis** - In the form of a reflection or journal/free-write, consider intersectional and how each character’s power is determined by the intersection of several aspects of her identity. All three have aspects that limit their power, but Frederika and Elena also have areas of privilege. By the end of the book, do you think that Frederika and Elena both leverage some of their areas of privilege to help Cecilia, who has no areas of privilege? Does Frederika use her mobility to get Cecilia a temporary home in the countryside where the air is cleaner (81), and Elena uses her money to buy Cecilia’s child’s freedom (141).
- ✓ **Writing | Reminders** - Create three characters with some overlapping aspects of identity and some areas of difference. List out their identity markers including race, class, age, ability, gender, sexual orientation, profession, and any others that interest you. For example, the three may share a race and social class but be of different ages and genders.

Find an event or topic which they might all encounter and write narrative, point-of-view based poems from their different perspectives. Give at least one character power in the situation and one character a lack of power. How might each character experience the same event differently given the different aspects of their identities?

Discussion Points/Topics:

- ✓ Intersectionality affects just about every aspect of our lives. Watch [Kimberlé Crenshaw's Tedtalk](#) on intersectionality or [read a synopsis](#).
- 1. List some of the major aspects of your identity. (You may keep the list private.) Include things like age, class, gender, race, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, mental and physical ability, family structure, citizenship, geographic location, profession, etc. Next to each one note whether it gives you relative privilege or lack of privilege in society.
- 2. Some parts of our identity shift depending on our context. For example, your race may take away your power in one setting and give you power in another. Note that as well.
- 3. Which parts of your identity can change and increase or decrease in power? For example, your age will change with time. Which parts of your identity will stay fixed and cannot shift in power?
- 4. Does society ever evolve or shift in what kinds of identities it values? For example, has the position of the elderly shifted in American society? Do children have more or less power than they used to?
- 5. Can you think of examples in your own life of where parts of your identity intersect so that you have more or less power than someone who shares one of those identities with you but does not share all of them?
- 6. Can you think of areas in your own life where an aspect of your identity that limits your power is counteracted by another aspect where you have privilege?

Appendix:

Ferrer, Ada. "Armed Slaves and Anticolonial Insurgency in Late Nineteenth-Century Cuba." *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age*, edited by Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan. Yale University Press, 2006.

Ferrer, Ada. "Cuba, 1898: Rethinking Race, Nation, and Empire." *Radical History Review*. Vol 73 (1999): 22-46.

## *Armed Slaves and Anticolonial Insurgency in Late Nineteenth-Century Cuba*

ADA FERRER

On October 10, 1868, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, a lawyer, sugar planter, and slaveholder in eastern Cuba, gathered the slaves on his sugar mill, La Demajagua, and granted them their freedom. “You are as free,” he told them, “as I am.” Then, addressing them as “citizens,” he invited them to help “conquer liberty and independence” for Cuba. Thus began the first war for Cuban independence: with an act that highlighted the central link between the institution of slavery and the process of national liberation, between armed slaves and anticolonial struggle.

The existence and importance of this link should come as little surprise. As Robin Blackburn has shown for the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, freedom from slavery and freedom from colonial rule may have been two distinct political and social projects, but in the Age of Revolution they often became intertwined as “successive challenges to the regimes of colonial slavery [led] to the destruction either of the colonial relationship, or of the slave system, or of both, in one after another of all the major New World colonies.”<sup>1</sup> In the case of Cuba, the preservation of colonial rule had long been linked to the institution of slavery. During the Age of Revolution, when almost every other Spanish territory freed itself from imperial rule, Cuba survived as Spain’s “ever-faithful isle.” The preservation of sugar, slavery, and the prosperous plantation economy they engendered depended, elites agreed, on the

continuation of the colonial bond. To opt for independence was to risk social upheaval and economic annihilation. This association between slavery and colonial order remained strong for much of the nineteenth century. Thus when in 1868 creole elites decided to challenge the colonial regime, slavery became a major issue in their efforts, as nationalist insurgency and the institution of slavery each threatened to disrupt the other in significant ways.

The centrality and complexity of the link between slavery and insurrection assumed multiple forms. First, slaves themselves became enmeshed in the process of anticolonial struggle, as both the colonial army and the nationalist rebels mobilized them for their respective causes. But alongside the arming of slaves by contending political camps emerged the symbolic use of the figure of the armed slave in colonial and anticolonial discourse. The conflicts that arose from that unprecedented military and discursive mobilization — as slaves took up arms, fled plantations, freed their peers, or burnt sugar cane, and as they were written into emerging narratives of nationhood — profoundly shaped the course of Cuban independence and the possibilities for black political action in postemancipation Cuba. This chapter analyzes both aspects of this revolutionary arming of slaves: first, the military mobilization in support of independence and then their discursive mobilization, also in support of independence. Throughout, it highlights the limits and contradictions of this dual process, as rebel leaders and the enslaved struggled to define the boundaries, meanings, and implications of the arming of slaves.

When the principal conspirators of October 10, 1868, declared Cuban sovereignty, they began by freeing and mobilizing their own slaves for war. The initial leadership of the war against Spain came from the ranks of slaveowning whites in eastern regions such as Bayamo and Manzanillo, where slavery was becoming less central to the economy and where the slave population was a relatively small proportion of the total population (between 3 and 9 percent depending on the jurisdiction).<sup>2</sup> The declining position of slavery in these regions helps explain the leaders' willingness to risk social upheaval and their ritualized freeing and arming of their own slaves in the first public act of rebellion. Yet this revolutionary arming of slaves had obvious limits. Prominent leaders liberated their slaves immediately, but the movement as a movement advocated only a very gradual abolition. This abolition, moreover, would indemnify owners, and it would occur only after the successful conclusion of the war.<sup>3</sup> This hesitation betrayed the contradictions inherent in the position and mission of the local leadership of the early period of the war. From the start, Céspedes and his colleagues recognized that they would have to reconcile their need to attract slaves, so as to have the soldiers necessary to wage war, with their need to attract slaveholders, so as to have the resources

required to finance that war. They had to portray their movement as in the best interest of two groups whose objectives were apparently irreconcilable. The early leaders of the movement believed that the solution to this quandary lay in the exercise of restraint, and the leaders' expression of a "desire for abolition, gradual and indemnified" exemplified that moderation. If justice demanded the emancipation of slaves, argued insurgent leaders, then fairness also required that cooperative slaveholders be compensated for their loss.<sup>4</sup>

Nationalist leaders admitted that the initial hesitation regarding slavery was, in part, the result of political strategy. Thus Céspedes explained to fellow nationalists that although he was "a staunch abolitionist, the need to remove all obstacles to the early progress of the revolution forced [him] to delay the immediate emancipation of slaves and to proclaim in [his] manifesto a gradual and indemnified [abolition]."<sup>5</sup> At the same time, his explanation of the delays in enacting a more comprehensive program for emancipation reveals something of his misgivings about the exercise of full political and social freedom by men and women who had lived their lives enslaved. Thus he explained to those same colleagues: "The emancipation of slavery is not yet a *fait accompli* because I have wanted to prepare it so that as the new citizens enter into the full exercise of their rights, they do so at least modestly trained to understand the proper meaning of true liberty."<sup>6</sup> Abolition, therefore, would be gradual and cautious, and the transition from slavery to freedom would be conducted under the tutelage of rebel leadership in the battles against Spain.

The policy concerning abolition adopted on October 10, precisely because it was so modest, had obvious tactical advantages. It offered, above all, the potential to appease the groups whose support for war was most necessary. For in the promise of a gradual and indemnified emancipation, slaveholders heard that no financial loss would occur for the time being and that whatever loss might occur at some later moment would be compensated. Meanwhile, slaves, whose only promise of freedom prior to October 10 had been in manumission or in a risky attempt at flight, heard that a rebellion had started and that, should the rebels win, they would all be free.

This cautious balancing act, born of the need to make the war feasible, became one of the first casualties of that war. The limited and carefully maneuvered intentions of a handful of leaders could not determine the direction the rebellion would take once initiated. Spanish authorities immediately observed this gap between the initial designs of the conspirators and the actions of the rebels. Only two weeks after the start of the insurrection, the island's Spanish governor observed: "I have no doubt that the instigators of the uprising, conceived of something limited . . . but the fact that shortly after their uprising, they began to burn sugar mills and take the slaves as free men, in effect rais[ed]

the issue of the social question and arous[ed] . . . the spirit of people of color.”<sup>7</sup> Leaders tried to curb the dangers of social unrest that might be unleashed by their declarations and to reassure landowners whose support they courted that their property, in people and in land, would be spared by the insurrection. Days after the outbreak of rebellion, Céspedes promised that the rebel army would respect the lives and property of all and treat everyone with equal consideration.<sup>8</sup> At the end of the first month of war, he expressly forbade officers to accept any slaves into their ranks without his own permission or that of their masters.<sup>9</sup> Two weeks later he went further, decreeing that any rebel caught stealing from peaceful citizens or raiding farms to take slaves or to incite them to rebellion would be tried and, if found guilty, sentenced to death by the rebel administration.<sup>10</sup>

These measures and reassurances, however, did not entirely work. Céspedes’s decree did not prevent insurgents on the ground from taking slaves to the insurrection against the wishes of hesitant slaveholders. All over the rural outskirts of Santiago—an eastern region more invested in slavery and where landowners did not lead or heed the call to rebellion in 1868—owners who tried to maintain production on their coffee and sugar farms saw their efforts thwarted by insurgents who burnt their fields and liberated and took their slaves.<sup>11</sup> Across the regions of Santiago and Guantánamo, insurgents attacked estates and farms, and—with or without the consent of the slaves themselves—liberated slaves so that they might in some manner aid the cause of insurrection. In December 1868, a group of 153 rebels stormed the coffee farm San Fernando, outside Guantánamo, and took thirty able-bodied slaves. In January 1869, insurgents invaded the sugar estate Santísima Trinidad de Giro near Cobre, set fire to the cane fields, and took all eighty-seven slaves. Countless others were taken in the same manner.<sup>12</sup>

Slaves, however, did not necessarily require prodding in order to abandon the farms of their masters; they could, on their own or in small groups, flee their farms and volunteer their services to the rebellion. The slave Pedro de la Torre, for example, presented himself at a rebel camp near Holguín expressing “his desire to sustain the Holy Cause.”<sup>13</sup> José Manuel, a slave on the coffee farm Bello Desierto near Cobre, went further, fleeing of his own volition to join the insurrection and then appearing on neighboring farms with copies of rebel handbills and proclamations of freedom in order “to seduce” other slaves.<sup>14</sup>

The forced and voluntary induction of large numbers of slaves meant that leaders could theoretically count on a larger pool of recruits and reap the military advantages of a growing army. In practice, however, the relationship between insurgent structures and potentially politicized slaves was less clear-cut. For insurgent leaders, the emancipation of slaves and their incorporation

into armed struggle required that slaves labor, productively and quietly, in supportive roles. Labor in this fashion would materially aid the rebellion and also allay fears of social unrest. The tasks given slave men and women in the insurgency tend to reflect this desire on the part of leaders. In fact, most slaves who were freed from coffee and sugar farms by insurgents and who were later questioned by authorities testified that they had been put to work building trenches, clearing paths, and doing a variety of other menial tasks. Few mentioned actual combat experience. The sixty-year-old African-born Marcos, "one-eyed and old," was given the job of peeling plantains for the insurgents. Many others functioned as servants or *asistentes* (assistants) whose primary role was to serve the officers to whom they were assigned, cooking, washing, and attending to their needs.<sup>15</sup> Still, though many slaves were not the protagonists of armed combat, many appear to have exercised their newfound freedom by embracing the rebel cause perhaps more fervently than their recruiters imagined they would. Some new libertos were beginning to see themselves not as menial laborers but as free persons engaged in armed political struggle. A freed slave named after his owner, Francisco Vicente Aguilera, who rose through the ranks to become a lieutenant colonel, for example, clearly did more than play the part of a dutiful servant. So did the slave José Manuel, who not only joined the movement but also recruited other slaves by publicizing the rebellion's stance on antislavery. A slave identified as Magín faced disciplinary measures for attempting to take more political initiative than leaders wanted to concede. Given the straightforward task of delivering a message to an officer at another rebel camp, Magín decided to confiscate a horse in order, perhaps, to complete his mission more expeditiously. When challenged, he proclaimed unrepentantly that "he was a rebel chief and that nobody could interrupt his journey."<sup>16</sup> That he proudly declared himself to be a rebel leader with control over his time and movement, if not that of others, suggests that the insurgency was producing new forms of self-identification for the people it recruited. At the very least, the insurgency seems to have offered men such as Magín and Aguilera an arena in which they could assert a degree of mobility and independence they could not have asserted as rural slaves, even if every recruit did not have the opportunity or desire physically to take up arms.

These new recruits, however, were singularly problematic figures for the rebel leadership. Were they free men and women willing to choose the path of independence? Or were they slaves who could be taken, as rebels took other property, and forced to work and fight in battlefields, as they had earlier been coerced to labor in cane and coffee fields? In the uncertainty of 1868 and beyond there was no simple answer to this question. But one fact soon became



clear: the growing visibility of slave supporters began to make certain questions unavoidable—among them questions about the nature of slaves' incorporation into the armed struggle for sovereignty and into the nation itself. As the growing presence of slaves made these questions more and more pressing, the leaders' tenuous ideological balancing act became more and more fragile. And within months of the start of the insurgency, rebel leaders realized that the transition from slavery to freedom could not be postponed until the end of the rebellion, as they had first planned.

Thus, only three months into the war, the leadership modified its original position regarding abolition, moving beyond the vague promise of indemnified emancipation to occur after the victory of the independence struggle and outlining several ways in which enslaved men and women could gain immediate freedom. The first formal step was taken on December 27, 1868, when Céspedes decreed that all slaves belonging to enemies of their cause would be considered free and their owners not subject to compensation. Slaves who presented themselves to rebel authorities with the consent of pro-Cuban owners would be declared free and their owners compensated for their financial loss. Separatist slaveholders also reserved the power to “lend” their enslaved workers to the insurgent cause, and in so doing they preserved their rights of ownership until the rebel republic decreed full abolition at some unspecified moment. Finally, the document stated that runaway slaves presenting themselves to or captured by rebel forces would be returned to their owners, provided that the owners were supporters of the Cuban cause.<sup>17</sup>

Though the decree listed multiple paths to immediate freedom, overall, it offered only a limited emancipation, accessible only to a fraction of slaves and, in many cases, valid only with the consent of their masters. Ultimately, slaveholders who supported the Cuban cause reserved the right to decide, on a case-by-case basis, whether they would free their slaves. Though individual conspirators may have undertaken the dramatic act of freeing their own slaves and addressing them as citizens, the formal policy of the revolution in December 1868 encouraged only manumission, a regular feature of slave society, and thus, by default, condoned slavery.

The December 1868 decree concerning abolition—cautious, ambiguous, faltering—had, however, enormous power to attract enslaved men and women to the cause of national independence. And even this most hesitant of moves produced among its slave audience, who only months earlier had had little prospect of freedom, “great excitement” and “indescribable enthusiasm.” As a result, slaves joined the Cuban forces, wrote Céspedes in January 1869, by the thousands; “they marched in companies shouting cries of long live Liberty and

[long live] the whites of Cuba, who only yesterday had governed them with the harshness of the whip and who today treat them as brothers and grant them the title of free men.”<sup>18</sup>

Had Céspedes been able to, he might have chosen to stop time at that very moment, to give permanent life to that instance of mutual satisfaction and consensus. But instead with every week and month that passed the relations between slaves and insurgents became more and more complex and the connections between antislavery and anticolonialism more and more entwined. Modest promises of eventual freedom drew an ever-increasing number of slaves to the insurrection; their participation then pushed leaders to do more about abolition. But then, the closer leaders came to the emancipation of slaves, the more slaves joined; and the larger the number of slaves who joined, the more urgent and central they made the issue of abolition. The result, then, was an almost infinite and two-way circle of slave and insurgent initiatives and responses leading—gradually and fitfully—to a speedier and more thorough emancipation than leaders envisioned at the outset and to the consolidation of an army with growing numbers of slave soldiers.<sup>19</sup>

In this continual back-and-forth between slaves and insurgents and between slavery and freedom, few policies concerning slaves had limited effects and few remained in place for long. The conservative decree of December 1868, for example, was superseded only months later by the rebel constitution drafted in Guáimaro in April 1869. This constitution declared, unequivocally, that “all inhabitants of the Republic [were] entirely free.” Article 25 further specified that “all citizens of the republic [would be] considered soldiers of the Liberation Army.”<sup>20</sup> Here, then, was legal recognition for the transformation of enslaved workers into citizens and soldiers of a new republic.

But the path to absolute emancipation in rebel territory was slow and indirect, and just as the presence of slave soldiers could hasten the formal progress of abolition, so, too, could it produce the opposite reaction, as leaders saw their carefully laid plans for a gradual and tightly supervised abolition unraveled by the actions and desires of a growing population of slave-insurgents. Thus in July 1869 the leadership backtracked, curtailing the potential effects of the constitutional proclamation of freedom approved only three months earlier. First, the rebel legislature amended Article 25. Rather than recognize all citizens as soldiers, the constitution now required that “all citizens of the republic” lend their “services *according to their aptitudes*.”<sup>21</sup> No longer would officers be formally required to accept slaves as combatants; now they could, with the legal sanction of the rebel republic, require them to work in agriculture in camps set up in support of the insurgency or as servants for rebel leaders or their families.

Later that same month the rebel legislature drafted the *Reglamento de Libertos*, which further circumscribed the freedom granted to slaves in the constitution of Guáimaro by requiring all libertos in the insurrection to work without compensation. The *reglamento* conceded to libertos the right to abandon the homes of their (former) masters. But it went on to state that it was the responsibility, indeed, the obligation, of such slaves immediately to report to the Office of Libertos so that they might be assigned to “other masters” whose side they were not to leave “without powerful reasons previously brought to the attention” of authorities. In this way, the leadership preserved its access to the time, labor, and bodies of enslaved men and women. Pro-Cuban owners or newly assigned masters meanwhile retained the right to slaves’ labor and, with it, the right to “reprimand” them when necessary, so long as they did so “fraternally.”<sup>22</sup> Elite rebel leaders, exhibiting their desire to placate more of their class, thus aggressively attempted to manage the status and mobility of slaves and slave recruits in rebel-controlled territory. The multifarious regulations on the labor and movement of slaves persisted until Christmas Day 1870, when Céspedes formally ended the forced labor of libertos, arguing that although they had been unprepared for liberty in 1868, “two years of contact with the pageantry of our liberties have been sufficient to consider them already regenerated and to grant them independence.” Even on paper, however, this freedom emerged as conditional, for Céspedes added that under no circumstances would freed slaves be allowed to “remain idle.”<sup>23</sup> Activity and movement remained subject to insurgents’ control.

The rebel leadership’s early vacillation regarding abolition and slave participation in armed rebellion manifested itself clearly in formal rebel policy. But the lapses and bursts in abolitionist initiatives from the rebel leadership resulted not only from ideological conviction or political calculation. They also emerged from the interaction of slaves and insurgents, and between commanders and subalterns, in the camps and battlefields of rebel territory. This interaction could be strained and volatile, for at issue was not only the meaning of the freedom promised by insurgents and sought by slaves but also the question of who would define its boundaries.

When Céspedes originally deferred the abolition of slavery, he confided in private that he believed that Cuban slaves were not yet trained for freedom. The war, he implied, would have to serve as a classroom where newly freed slaves would be “trained to understand the proper meaning of true liberty.”<sup>24</sup> Céspedes’s choice of words should not be surprising, for white emancipators—whether British policymakers in Jamaica or northern soldiers in the U.S. South—nearly always spoke of the transition from slavery to freedom with meta-

phors of learning; hence the name “apprenticeship” to denote the transitional period between slave and free labor in the British colonies. The emancipators’ tutelage focused customarily on teaching slaves to sell their labor to others for a wage.<sup>25</sup> But in Cuba, in the midst of armed rebellion for national sovereignty and surrounded everywhere by their own declarations of freedom and equality, nationalist leaders attempted to modify the customary sphere of that tutelage. They were not primarily training free laborers. Leaders saw themselves as training free (and industrious) soldiers and citizens. In their efforts, however, insurgent and republican leaders revealed the extent to which they sought to distinguish the freedom of former slaves from their own. They revealed it, as we have seen, in assigning *libertos* to masters, in establishing offices to supervise their movements, and in writing laws requiring them to work. They also revealed it in their daily contact with slave-insurgents.

Direct contact between slaves and insurgents often began at the moment of recruitment. In inducting slaves into the movement, military leaders regularly found themselves in the position of explaining the objectives of the rebellion to the new recruits. For example, when insurgents entered estates to mobilize slaves, they assembled the slave forces and gave speeches about the meaning of the insurrection and its relation to the abolition of slavery. Military leaders, initially anxious for the support of landholders, attempted to exert a moderating influence during these talks. Given the opportunity, then, many represented the revolution and emancipation in ways that would appeal to slaves’ desire for emancipation yet also temper the freedom they promised. Thus, early in the rebellion, two leaders whose forces included many liberated slaves, Máximo Gómez and Donato Mármol, in return for the cooperation of slaveholders, promised slaves eventual freedom but also explained to them the “insurmountable problems that sudden abolition would create for them and the immense benefits that would come with gradual, but prompt, abolition — an abolition ennobled by and ennobling of work, honesty, and well-being.”<sup>26</sup> In recruiting slaves with this sort of preamble, leaders asked them for patience in their desire for freedom. They also provided something of a partial definition of freedom: freedom from slavery and participation in armed insurgency did not imply the freedom not to work.

The insurgent colonel Juan Cancino, who owned one slave, was somewhat more subtle in the way he proposed to address potential slave recruits. He explained to fellow insurgents that he planned to “attract some slaves from Manzanillo to [their] ranks by promising them that if they take up arms against Spain they will be free, given that it was that very government which had enslaved them.”<sup>27</sup> Cancino’s plan had the advantage of attracting slaves by identifying a common enemy in Spain. More important, however, the plan

had the advantage of portraying the rebels as benevolent liberators who would end the rule of the enslavers and grant freedom to all the slaves. Implicitly, then, mobilized slaves owed gratitude to their liberators.

This strategy — like Gómez and Marmol's speeches — represented more than insurgent abolitionism. It also represented a means of enlarging the rebel army and a potential avenue for managing newly freed slaves by encouraging gratitude and subservience to rebel leaders and structures. To represent themselves as liberators and to encourage the indebtedness and patience of slaves-turned-soldiers was to attempt to control and mediate the transition from slavery to freedom.

Insurgents' messages of gratitude, restraint, and forbearance, however, were less discernible to slaves than was the message of emancipation. And when slaves later described these talks by insurgent leaders, what appeared to impress them most was the promise of freedom. Public authorities recognized as much when they reported that slaves were being "forcibly extracted" from their farms not with guns and threats but with "deceit and promises."<sup>28</sup> When Zacarías Priol, a suspected insurgent and a former slave on a coffee farm near Santiago, was captured by the Spanish, he offered his captors routine testimony: he and other slaves on the farm had been taken by force by Cuban insurgents.<sup>29</sup> Priol implied, as had many other captured slaves, that he had merely obeyed the insurgents' order to leave as promptly as he had earlier obeyed his master's order to stay and work. Slaves were not alone in making such claims. Almost all individuals caught and tried by Spanish authorities for participating in the rebellion attempted to avoid punishment by testifying that they were taken against their will and under threats of death by bands of insurgents.<sup>30</sup>

The details Priol provided his interrogator about that seemingly forcible extraction demonstrated, however, that a much more complex and ambiguous process was unfolding. Priol explained to his Spanish audience that the rebel general Donato Mármol arrived on his farm, gathered about forty of the male slaves, and made them take a vow to the Caridad del Cobre (later the patron saint of Cuba), presumably to show that they understood that "if the insurrection triumphed all the slaves would be free." After taking their vow, "they all followed [the general] to Sabanilla," where the insurgents had assembled about nine thousand people. In giving his testimony, Priol chose to say that the slaves "went with" rather than "were taken by" the rebels and that it was the rebel promise of freedom that precipitated their flight. Though Mármol specified to them that freedom would come only with the triumphant end of the insurrection, this could be little consolation to the slaveholders whose slaves had just become insurgents. Thus even Mármol, one of the officers who had promised to encourage forbearance among slaves, was unable to mute the

essence of the rebel message: that anticolonial rebellion had suddenly made freedom from slavery a palpable prospect.

Much to the dismay of unconverted owners, other rebel leaders were significantly less discreet in the way they represented imminent freedom to enslaved workers. At the *ingenio* (sugar mill) San Luis, near Santiago, a small group of insurgents arrived and, with the help of the *mayoral* (overseer), took some of the estate's slaves (including women and children) to the insurrection. One of these slaves, Eduardo, was later caught with "weapons in his hands." Not surprisingly, he testified—much as Zacarías Priol had—that the insurgents had taken him and the others by force. The insurgents, he added, had forced them all to carry weapons: "They had no choice but to take them," he insisted. He explained that the insurgents gave each slave one machete, which they were "to sharpen every day, as much for working as for killing the *patones*." (Patones, literally "big-feet," was a pejorative label used by Cubans to describe Spaniards.) This insurgent leader defined slaves' freedom as the obligation to labor but also as the privilege to make war. Eduardo also testified that the rebels told them to "kill all the *patones* in Cuba, so that they would all be free and then they would no longer have to say *mi amo* or *mi Señor*" (my master or my lord).<sup>31</sup> Rebels promised slaves their freedom and then produced examples of its day-to-day exercise. The slave who described this speech did not dwell on any appeals for patience and moderation. Rather, his interpretation of the rebels' public statements led him to believe that his actions now, in labor and in combat, would produce new conditions—conditions under which he would no longer have to be subservient to the men who had formerly ruled over him. His recollection of the rebel sermon captured perfectly the multiple and often contradictory messages contained in rebels' call to arms for slaves: the promise of a freedom that would entail the right to fight and the opportunity to shed some of the habits of deference and submission central to slave society, but a freedom defined as well by unremunerated labor.

Insurgent leaders and slave recruits clearly disagreed about the boundaries of the new freedom, and these differences of opinion made the question of discipline a major concern of rebel practice. The Liberation Army established a disciplinary apparatus that mirrored the Spanish system of military tribunals. Insurgents caught stealing, deserting, or showing disrespect to their officers were tried in *consejos de guerra*.<sup>32</sup> Slaves, though technically subject to this system of discipline, were also likely to receive punishment outside this formal legal network. Slaves questioned by colonial authorities made frequent references to being put in stocks in insurgent camps, and rebel officers, anxious to control slaves' behavior, often referred to the need to punish wayward *libertos* publicly, even suggesting giving them "a good beating as an example"

to the others.<sup>33</sup> Insurgent leaders thus punished new behaviors encouraged by novel conditions with old and familiar methods of slave discipline.

These methods, which epitomized leaders' attempts to limit slave autonomy and to regulate the transition from slavery, in fact, produced the contrary effect. Disciplinary measures encouraged the very behavior insurgent leaders sought to suppress. For as slaves saw that insurgents who had promised them freedom now sought to delay its practice, they were moved to flee from rebel camps. Individual and small groups of slaves moved through the countryside, anxious to avoid capture by insurgents, only to be seized by the Spanish. For example, in only four days Spanish troops picked up 108 slaves who were identified as having fled from eastern coffee farms.<sup>34</sup> Not only did the insurgents lose these potential soldiers and workers, they often lost them to Spanish troops, who used them in "services appropriate to the condition of slaves."<sup>35</sup> In mid-1870 the captain general of the island reported to the colonial minister that, in one case, 32 slaves had surrendered to Spanish authorities, allegedly "saying unanimously that they preferred by far to be *Spanish slaves than to be free mambís*."<sup>36</sup>

Although this alleged statement certainly would have served the slaves' interests at the moment of surrendering to the Spanish, some slaves did, in fact, serve in the Spanish army. Many served in roles not unlike those they had had in the Cuban rebel army: stretcher-bearers, cooks, or trench diggers. Slaves who served in the Spanish army were potentially eligible for their freedom after lengthy interrogations by authorities. In fact, it appears that many of those serving the colonial army had first been drafted into the war by the rebels and then ended up — by choice, circumstance, or force — switching sides and serving in the Spanish army.<sup>37</sup>

Most slaves who fled from the insurrection, however, struggled just as energetically to avoid the Spanish military camps. Some formed small communities of ex-slaves or joined *palenques*, preexisting communities of fugitive slaves living in mountainous regions outside the control of both the plantations and the rebel state. The relations between these groups of fugitive slaves and the Cuban insurgent movement highlights the contradictions that emerged in the relations between slaves and insurgents more generally. Céspedes's decree of December 1868 had accorded freedom to palenque slaves, giving them the right to join and live with the insurgents or, if they preferred, to remain in their own communities, "recognizing and respecting the Government of the Revolution."<sup>38</sup> In practice, however, relations between these fugitives and insurgent military officers were very strained.

Rebel leaders, knowing of the existence of the palenques, preferred that the services of these groups aid them rather than their Spanish enemies. They also

hoped that by initiating the *apalencados* (palenque members) into the struggle for independence, they would also inculcate in them the habits of a republican polity. Thus insurgents became increasingly intolerant of what they perceived as the palenques' continued lack of discipline, their refusal of civilization. According to one rebel officer, the maroons "were more given to chanting than to fighting and became such a dangerous and fatal plague" that insurgent leaders were soon forced to capture their leaders and publicly and summarily try them in military tribunals. The officer added that these maroons "were hunted energetically to force them to lend services to the republic, since from miserable slaves they had come to be free citizens."<sup>39</sup> This Cuban officer captured perfectly the nature of the relationship between the white separatist and the black slave. The separatist saw himself proudly as a liberator who had taken "brute" slaves and converted them to "citizens, patriots, and soldiers of liberty."<sup>40</sup> Yet the separatist clearly saw the slave as a special sort of citizen — one who, in some instances, was still subject to being hunted and, in all, was still subject to the appropriation of his or her labor and time in the service of nationhood.

The process of arming slaves in the context of anticolonial insurgency in Cuba shares certain features with other cases examined in this book. As in the French Antilles during the Age of Revolution or the U.S. South during the Civil War, the "armers" of slaves (of various political persuasions) sought to manage and control the process of arming them, to use the power of armed slaves for their own interests in defense, war-making, or state formation. Consistently, they sought to delimit the power that slaves acquired from their mobilization. Whether slaves were armed by the state to defend a colony or by rebels to wage war against a colonist, they were to serve loyally, in a way that preserved or secured the power of those who armed them but that did not allow them to overstep the cautious freedoms granted them in the process. Consistently, however, armed slaves sought to push against the limits set by their armers, using their service to argue for greater rewards, taking initiatives to secure or expand newfound privileges, and redefining on the ground and in daily practice the boundaries of the freedom suggested in the very process of arming them.<sup>41</sup>

Yet the story of the arming of slaves in revolutionary Cuba cannot end there. For the arming of slaves, already a complex and contentious process in and of itself, unfolded within a broader colonial context. Contention and conflict over this arming affected the very course of insurgency. But the arming of slaves produced contention and uncertainty not only in the daily practice of war. It also produced a broader argument about the consequences of that



mobilization for the construction of nationhood itself. Spanish authorities, faced with the widespread and unprecedented mobilization of enslaved black men for anticolonial ends, responded by constantly invoking the charge of racial warfare and resurrecting the image of a Haitian-style apocalypse. And white insurgents were capable of being swayed by such arguments. Indeed, over the course of ten years of warfare, and in the peace and subsequent armed attempts that followed, a good number of white Cubans rejected independence on the basis of its alleged links to racial warfare. Cuban opponents of independence, as well as former insurgents turned loyalists, when placed in the position of explaining their own political choices, tended to characterize the independence movement as black. And it was precisely in that blackness that some white insurgents located the rebellion's threat to the future of Cuban society. Thus if the arming of slaves served key strategic and ideological purposes, it also raised issues and anxieties that threatened the cohesiveness and clarity of the bid for independence.

This pattern crystallized at several key moments in the history of anti-colonial insurgency. For example, in 1870–71 in Puerto Príncipe, a key theater of the war and immediately west of where the war began, a crisis ensued as more and more rebels abandoned the rebellion and a good number offered their services to the colonial state. In purporting to explain the reasons for their surrender to Spanish authorities, repentant insurgents gave center stage to the question of race. According to one declaration made by surrendering insurgents, the powerful local rebel movement, which had counted on three or four thousand armed men and thirty to thirty-five thousand sympathizers in the countryside, had been reduced to three or four hundred men, “blacks in their majority.”<sup>42</sup> And it was this state of affairs—the literal blackening of insurgency—that many surrendering insurgents in the region highlighted when explaining their decision to retreat from insurgency. Colonial appeals to racial fear and white anxiety about political power were perhaps now more resonant than ever, given that they were made in the context of a rebellion that mobilized slaves and free people of color.

Though this pattern was particularly dramatic and noticeable in Puerto Príncipe in the early 1870s, the insurgency's crisis in that region cannot be seen as a singular aberration, for controversy and division over issues of slave mobilization and multiracial insurgency manifested themselves, to different degrees and in different forms, even in areas and among leaders unwilling to renounce the cause of independence. Céspedes, for example, who began the rebellion and who fought until his death in 1874, was not immune to doubts and not unwilling to act on his misgivings. In this case, however, acting on those misgivings entailed not surrender but the search for protection from the

United States. Thus in 1869 Céspedes wrote to nationalist colleagues in the United States: “[I]n the minds of a majority of Cubans . . . is always the idea of annexation as a last resort, in order to avoid the abyss of evils which they say would lead to a war of the races.” And a week later he described the state of the rebellion in these words: “The blacks in large numbers are fighting in our ranks; [and] those of us with weapons in our hands are convinced that [it] is becoming necessary to ask for annexation to those important States.”<sup>43</sup> The scourge of surrenders may have been particular to Puerto Príncipe, but the doubts and worries that motivated them seemed to be present in the very center of the revolution.

The revolution, however, survived the crisis and lasted until 1878. The treaty that ended the war, which was accepted by rebel leaders, mainly white, in Puerto Príncipe and rejected by many black and mulatto leaders from farther east, granted neither abolition nor independence. It granted freedom only to the slaves who had served either in the insurrection or in support of the Spanish colonial army.

Although the rebellion had failed to achieve abolition, by freeing and mobilizing slaves it had altered forever the social relations of slavery. Spanish authorities recognized that slave-insurgents, if forced to return to their farms, were likely to “demoralize the slave forces and become fugitives.”<sup>44</sup> They sought to diminish the problem by freeing slaves who had served in the Cuban army. But this policy created profound contradictions. As one prominent sugar planter had asked earlier: “What logic, what justice can there be in having those [slaves] who were loyal to their owners remain in slavery, while their malicious companions, instead of receiving the severe punishment that their wicked conduct deserves, get instead the valuable prize of liberty?”<sup>45</sup> Despite these objections, the freedom of rebel slaves was enacted by Spain; the policy freed about sixteen thousand slaves.<sup>46</sup> The process set in motion by the insurgency and the peace treaty had committed Spain to abolish slavery sooner rather than later—a fact which meant that slaves could associate emancipation as much with nationalist insurgency as with any abolitionist policy of the colonial state. And, in fact, after final emancipation came by law in 1886, former slaves were said to proclaim proudly that they were freed not by the government’s decree of emancipation but by their own participation in the war and by the *convenio* of 1878, which recognized their liberty as a reward for that participation.<sup>47</sup> Decades later two former slaves named Genaro Lucumí and Irene would gather neighborhood children in the small town of Chirigota in Pinar del Río to tell them stories about the end of slavery and about Antonio Maceo, the famous mulatto general who began the war in 1868 as a private, rose through the ranks almost immediately, and died in

battle in 1896 during Cuba's third war of independence against Spain. Still others heard stories about another former slave who, having acquired his freedom, changed his name to Cuba.<sup>48</sup> Insurgency and nationalism had become central to former slaves' efforts to give meaning to their freedom; the link between antislavery and anticolonialism was inviolably established.

The war transformed Cuban society in other ways as well. The insurrection had emerged from and erupted into a colonial slave society in which race and nation had been negatively associated. The Cuban "race question" had been used to provide an automatic and negative answer to the Cuban "national question": the numerical significance of the nonwhite population and the economic significance of slavery necessitated the continuation of a colonial bond with Spain. With the outbreak of the insurrection in 1868, the link between race and nation was thrust to the foreground, demanding fresh resolution. The initiators of the rebellion attempted to resolve it by introducing cautious measures toward achieving abolition. These partial measures were soon superseded by the day-to-day practice of insurgency, as slaves joined rebel forces of their own volition and as local leaders emancipated them without the consent of central rebel authority. The movement seemed to suggest that slaves could become soldiers and citizens and that a slave colony could become a free nation.

As the rebellion progressed, however, it became clear that the relation between race and nation could not be transformed without struggle and dissent. The response to widespread black participation (and to the emergence of powerful black and mulatto leadership) was, for many white insurgents, withdrawal from and condemnation of the rebellion as destructive of Cuba's best interests. Although insurgents who surrendered were still partial to the idea of Cuban independence, they rejected the early movement's implications for racial politics in post-independence Cuba.

When a new anticolonial insurgency erupted a year later in August 1879, this tension between black mobilization and white fear again assumed a central role. The new war, known as the Guerra Chiquita or Little War because it lasted less than a year, again mobilized massive numbers of slaves. In this insurrection, slave mobilization and black leadership assumed an even more important role than they had in the earlier war. First, black slaves who remained on plantations and farms saw their fellow slaves who had rebelled in 1868–78 freed for their participation in armed insurgency. With that precedent set, the payoffs of rebellion seemed larger and surer than ever before. In 1879, then, eastern slaves were said to profess that they wanted "their freedom like the *convenidos*," the slaves freed in the treaty ending the first war. In the first two months of the new war, almost 800 slaves escaped their workplaces

to join the insurrection. Rebels, meanwhile, put the total number of fugitive slaves at five thousand. From the outset, then, slaves played a more prominent role in this insurrection than in the first. Likewise, the principal military leaders on the island were men of color. As the war went on, Spanish opponents increasingly used the issue of racial warfare to detract from the movement and to alienate potential white support. Published lists of captured insurgents strategically omitted the names of white rebels so that, according to the local Spanish governor, white Cubans would see race and not independence as the crux of the armed movement. They used such tactics to elicit white surrenders and then went further, making pardon on surrender contingent on the whites' public denunciation of the "racist" motives of their comrades of color. This tactic, which responded in part to the perceived "blackness" of the rebellion, then helped make the rebellion that much blacker, which led to more surrenders, and then to stronger evidence of its blackness, in turn.

The failures of these two insurrections, though complex and multifaceted, revealed the effective power of the label of racial warfare. Spanish officials and their Cuban allies used the allegation that the independence movement was a black movement—a real threat of another Haiti. They used the allegation because it worked; that is, it served to qualify support for insurrection. In the aftermath of two failed insurgencies, rebels came to realize that in order to succeed at anticolonial insurgency they had to invalidate traditional claims about the racial risks of rebellion; they had to construct an effective counterclaim to arguments that for almost a century had maintained that Cuba was unsuited to nationhood. "The power to represent oneself," they had come to realize, was "nothing other than political power itself."<sup>49</sup> The struggle for that power of representation required that nationalist leaders reconceptualize nationality, blackness, and the place of people of color in the would-be nation. In the process, black, mulatto, and white patriot-intellectuals constructed powerful and eloquent expressions of a new and antiracist nationality. In this reconstruction the figure of the armed slave played a preeminent role.

As part of a response to the Spanish portrait of the Cuban rebellions as race wars, separatist writers in the interlude between the second and third insurrections and in the years following final emancipation in 1886 conducted a sweeping reevaluation of the role of the black insurgent in the process of making the nation. This act of reexamination involved, on one hand, telling stories about the everyday activities of unknown slave insurgents in the Ten Years' War. On the other hand, it involved the formulation of an ideal black insurgent who rose above others in acts of selfless (and, as we shall see, "raceless") patriotism. In the process, the figure of the slave insurgent, dreaded emblem of race war

and black republic, was neutralized and made an acceptable — indeed, central — component in the struggle for Cuban nationhood.

One apparent beneficiary of this process of neutralization was an elderly slave named Ramón, who went from being the cause of the death of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, the leader of the first insurrection, to being a faithful and trustworthy slave with no connection to the “father of the patria.” In the 1870s and 1880s, the conventional account of Céspedes’s death maintained that his whereabouts had been revealed to Spanish troops by an aging former slave named Ramón, who betrayed the liberator of slaves in exchange for his personal freedom. (One variant of the story held that a slave named Robert had denounced Céspedes in exchange for his life when captured by Spanish forces). In the 1890s, as independence activists prepared the ideological and political groundwork for a new rebellion, several new accounts appeared to disavow these theories. The new accounts maintained that the elderly Ramón, known to everyone in the area as “Papá Ramón,” did not know Céspedes and played no role whatsoever in his death. The Spanish soldiers who killed Céspedes were, in fact, surprised to learn that they had killed the president of the Cuban Republic. And this surprise, the new theories maintained, revealed that Céspedes’s whereabouts could not have been disclosed by a slave or by anyone else.

The reformulation of the story is significant within the context of the 1890s. Céspedes, though censured by some of the independence movement for favoring the military rather than the civilian elements of the revolution, was still recognized as the heroic father of the incipient nation. His most compelling act had been the granting of freedom to his slaves, who then joined the new Cuban army. That he might have been murdered as a result of betrayal by an ungrateful slave could only help sustain those who invoked the dangers of insurrection and independence. In the retelling of the story in the nineties, the elderly soldier “wept desperately” over his role in Céspedes’s death, but everyone around him consoled him, certain of “the honor” and “total innocence” of the “poor and valiant old man.”<sup>50</sup> Thus Ramón — suspected Judas — was reappropriated and transformed into the benign Papá Ramón.

The slave insurgent portrayed in proindependence writings of the 1890s was, however, more than merely safe or unthreatening; he was also a Cuban hero and patriot. Examples of depictions of slave insurgents as benign heroes abounded at this time.<sup>51</sup> Among the most eloquent perhaps was the 1892 portrayal of a black insurgent named José Antonio Legón by rebel-turned-author Ramon Roa. Roa described a childlike and submissive slave-turned-insurgent. He represented the pre-war Legón thus: “This, our José Antonio Legón, [was] of average stature, astounding agility, imponderable sagacity,

and an audacity, of which he himself was unaware, just as a child is unaware of his mischief. When the revolution began in Sancti Spíritus he was a *'negrito,'* the slave of a Cuban who supported ideas of independence for his native land." Roa explained that Legón fought with valor and enthusiasm for the Cuban cause until his master was killed by Spanish forces. Then he became "taciturn and preoccupied, concerned only with destroying his enemy, as if he wanted to avenge a personal offense." Still, he fought fearlessly, and soon scars everywhere "interrupted the blackness of his skin." He was eventually captured by the Spanish and, given the option of deserting and saving his life, he responded: "Well, when my master—who raised me and who was good—passed away, he told me: 'José Antonio, never stop being Cuban,' and the poor man left this world for another. Now I comply by being Cuban until the end. . . . You can kill me if you want."<sup>52</sup> And kill him they did. But the soldier they murdered was not the same slave who had joined the rebellion months earlier. For in the course of fighting the war, Legón had gone from being "*un negrito*" and a slave to being simply Cuban. Even his black body had been lightened by the numerous scars of Cuba Libre. He had not, however, demanded this transformation from black slave to Cuban soldier and citizen for himself. Rather, he was freed by a benevolent master who, on his death, expressed his wish that Legón be and remain Cuban. By resisting the authority of Spain, he was thus consecrating the wishes of his master. In this manner, the rebellion of the armed slaves was rendered unthreatening because their military action was represented as an outcome of their masters' will and not of personal initiative or political conviction.<sup>53</sup>

Opponents of independence, and even some of its proponents, had long characterized the black insurgent as a threat. In the 1890s, independence propagandists painted a different insurgent of color: one who felt himself to be, and who was recognized by his fellow soldiers as, Cuban. And as a Cuban, who naturally loved his country, he fought valiantly. Furthermore, when the slave's master was a Cuban insurgent, his love of country could be portrayed as an extension of his love for his former master. Like Legón, the armed slaves that populated nationalist writings of the period were all characters who obediently complied with their duties as soldiers—and as servants—of the Cuban nation. Politically, they would be incapable of imagining a black republic.

Moreover, they posed no threat of social disorder. Even with weapons in his hands, the black insurgent of the pro-independence writings respected the norms that relegated him to an inferior social status. Thus Manuel Sanguily, a prominent Havana journalist and a white veteran of the Ten Years' War, painted a vivid portrait of deferential black insurgents. Writing of the daily interactions between white and nonwhite insurgents in the war, he argued that

“boundaries were never confused, nor were natural differences erased, nor was equilibrium lost for a single instant. Each one occupied always his proper place. Different spheres remained independent from one another, without anyone having to demand it or even comment on it.”<sup>54</sup> Thus Sanguily and others constructed a world in which the enslaved man could violate enough prescriptions of colonial society to threaten the colonial order, but not enough to overturn traditional norms of social interaction. Such representations were predicated, in part, on a division between political and social spheres. In the political sphere the slave was allowed enough agency to become a submissive insurgent. But in daily social contact between those identified as white and those identified as black, the norms of racial etiquette were always maintained. Thus the “regime of equality” that Sanguily said was produced in the fields of the insurrection could coexist with the “most profound order.”<sup>55</sup> They could coexist without contradiction because that “regime of equality” was seen as something the black slave neither demanded nor constructed for himself. Equality was cast as a gift of the white leadership, and the black slave, knowing it was a gift, enjoyed it respectfully and obediently. The transgression of boundaries that allowed him to challenge colonialism and slavery was, in these writings, less a transgression than an extension of his subservience to a white insurgent master.<sup>56</sup> And his heroism was one grounded in gratitude and unrelated to black political desire.

In fact, the black insurgent’s desirability within the national project was predicated on the erasure of any hint of his own desire. Thus the black insurgent in the prose of independence appeared to lack not only political will but also any trace of sexual desire. Indeed, the absence of sexuality was essential to the portrayal of his political passivity and deference. Spanish representations of dangerous black insurgents often included allusions to black men seducing white women, so figures such as Guillermo Moncada and Rustán, both black officers in the Ten Years’ War, were discredited with stories about defiled white womanhood. In the late 1880s and early 1890s, however, pro-independence writers explicitly countered such images, painting a black insurgent incapable of posing any sexual threat. Sanguily wrote: “[N]ever did the black man [el negro] even dream of taking possession of the white woman [la blanca]; and there [in the war] living in the midst of wilderness, never did we hear of any crime of rape, or of any attempt against the woman, forsaken in the loneliness of the mountains.”<sup>57</sup> Even with clear opportunity, Sanguily suggested, the black insurgent showed no inclination to subvert racial and gender hierarchies. Nowhere was white recognition of the absence of that desire more visible than in José Martí’s 1894 description of Salvador Cisneros Betancourt, the aging insurgent-aristocrat who during the Ten Years’ War decided to bury

his white daughter in the same grave as his own black male slave. In this moment, which Martí exalts as emblematic of the revolution, unity between black and white, between slave and master, was given literal and permanent form in the union of the bodies of a white woman and a black man.<sup>58</sup> Yet that union posed no threat—not only because it occurred in death, but also because it represented not black will but white benevolence and generosity.

In the years before the final war, writers, officers, and readers looked back on the armed slave of the 1870s and conferred on him the traits of loyalty and submissiveness to the cause of Cuba Libre. It was impossible for any of these figures to betray the cause of Cuba, to threaten white women, to harbor hatred for their former white masters, or to support the idea of a black nation. Compare this image with that prevalent in the 1870s and early 1880s of the black insurgent leader Guillermo Moncada. One correspondent from the United States recounted some of the rumors that prevailed about the black general in the 1870s: he was “a man . . . as ferocious in disposition as terrible in aspect,” who was said to kill every white man who fell into his hands and to keep women (white and otherwise) in “harems.”<sup>59</sup> Yet by 1888 a popular compilation of insurgents’ biographies described the general as “good and trustworthy” and as proof of what “strong allies” men of color could be if nurtured and educated “only in virtues” from an early age.<sup>60</sup> By the early 1890s the black insurgent had been reconfigured: the terrible Guillermon had given way to the loyal Legón and the innocent Papá Ramón.<sup>61</sup>

But though the figure of the armed slave was rendered “safe” in the prose of insurgency, that figure was also made central to the very process of nation making. He appears as the central figure in poems such as “1868” by Enrique Hernández Miyares, in which the protagonist, a heroic and self-sacrificing black soldier on horseback, is defined as the very essence of the rebel effort, or in stories such as “Fidel Céspedes,” in which the armed slave hero sacrifices his life to save the lives of fellow Cubans. And in numerous political essays published by white and nonwhite authors, the arming and liberating of slaves is identified as a principal achievement of the independence movement, which is distinguished by its commitment to antislavery and, in many cases, antiracism.<sup>62</sup>

Clearly, then, the mobilization of slaves proceeded on two fronts. In armed rebellion against Spain, slaves actively engaged themselves, answering and in many ways surpassing the cautious call to arms issued by creole patriots. But their very presence called into being a whole set of arguments about the racial character of rebellion and the racial character of the nation that the rebellion sought to found. Thus alongside the arming of slaves for war came a mobilization of a different sort: the invocation of the figure of the armed slave in a new



prose of independence, a new set of writings that made the armed slave welcome and central in the national project. Though both the military and the discursive mobilization of slaves may have been at times tactical and calculated, once the mobilization had begun slaves and former slaves could call on their participation in the military to make bold claims for political rights in the postemancipation republic erected at the end of the century.

### Notes

1. Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776–1848* (London, 1988), 3.
2. For a discussion of the regional and class dimensions of the leadership of the rebel movement, see Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868–1898* (Chapel Hill, 1999), 17–23, 54–58.
3. “Manifiesto de la Junta Revolucionaria,” October 10, 1868, in Hortensia Pichardo, ed., *Documentos para la historia de Cuba* (Havana, 1968), 1:358–62. See also Cepero Bonilla, “Azúcar y abolición,” in *Escritos Historicas* (Havana, 1989), 92–95.
4. “Manifiesto de la Junta Revolucionaria,” 1:361; “La situación de Cuba,” *Boletín de la Revolución*, December 16, 1868, in Biblioteca Nacional (Madrid), Manuscritos (hereafter BNM), MSS/20283/1 (10).
5. Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, “Comunicación diplomática encargando explorar la opinión norteamericana sobre la anexión,” January 3, 1869, in Céspedes, *Escritos* (Havana, 1982), 1:142–46.
6. Ibid.
7. Captain General Lersundi, October 24, 1868, in Archivo Histórico Nacional, Spain (hereafter AHN), Sección Ultramar (hereafter SU), leg. 4933, 1a parte, book 1, doc. no. 55.
8. Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, October 17, 1868, in “Criminal contra Don Manuel Villa,” in Archivo Nacional de Cuba (hereafter ANC), Fondo Comisión Militar (hereafter CM), leg. 125, exp. 6, 136–37.
9. “Orden del día,” Bayamo, October 29, 1868, in Céspedes, *Escritos*, 1:117.
10. Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, “Bando de 12 de Noviembre de 1868,” in Justo Zaragoza, *Las insurrecciones en Cuba* (Madrid, 1872–73), 2:732. See also Cepero Bonilla, “Azúcar y abolición,” 94.
11. “Informe referente a que sería injusto fijar cuota de contribución . . . a las fincas rústicas del Departamento Oriental,” in ANC, Fondo Asuntos Políticas (hereafter AP), leg. 59, exp. 7.
12. “Diligencias formadas para averiguar si es cierto que una partida de insurrectos se llevaron junto con los esclavos de la Hacienda San Fernando del Dr. Fernando Pons el negro emancipado nombrado Martín,” in ANC, AP, leg. 57, exp. 18; petition of E. G. Schmidt in U.S. National Archives, Record Group 76, Entry 341, U.S. and Spanish Claims Commission, Claim no. 81. Though historians and rebels often describe these assaults on farms as the liberation of slave forces, it is very important to note that insurgents sometimes freed or took only partial slave forces, and sometimes only the men.

In the case of Santísima Trinidad de Giro, rebels took men, women, and children alike, but in many other instances women and children were left behind on the estates. See, e.g., “Expediente en averiguación de los servicios prestados por el negro esclavo Zacarías Priol,” ANC, AP, leg. 62, exp. 34.

13. Comandante Andrés Brisuelos to Gen. Julio Grave de Peralta, December 3, 1868, in AHN, SU, leg. 5837. For other examples of individual slaves freely offering their services to the rebellion, see the documents relating to captured insurgents in AHN, SU, leg. 4457.

14. “Sumaria instruida contra el negro esclavo José Manuel por el delito de insurrección,” February 1869, in ANC, AP, leg. 58, exp. 44. For an example of a rebel handbill directed at slaves, see the proclamation in AHN, SU, leg. 4933, 2a parte, book 4, doc. no. 96. For a discussion of the ways in which slaves who remained on plantations used the uncertainty created by war to exercise more autonomy and agency, see Rebecca Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860–1899* (Princeton, 1985), ch. 2.

15. For slaves taken from farms by insurgents and made to do menial work in support of the rebellion, see the documents relating to captured insurgents in AHN, SU, legs. 4439, 4457, 5837, 5844. Many of these slaves went on to serve the Spanish army in similar roles. See the individual files in ANC, AP, legs. 61–70.

16. On Francisco Vicente Aguilera, see Ramiro Guerra y Sanchez, *La Guerra de los Diez Años* (Havana, 1950–52), 1:108n. On José Manuel, see ANC, AP, leg. 58, exp. 44. On Magín, see AHN, SU, leg. 4439.

17. Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, Decreto, December 27, 1868, in Pichardo, *Documentos para la historia de Cuba*, 1:370–73.

18. Céspedes, “Comunicación diplomática.”

19. Numbers of slave participants were not recorded or preserved systematically. There would have been significant variation by region and period over the course of the ten years of war. There is no single roster of soldiers for the rebel army in this war.

20. “Constitución de Guáimaro,” in Pichardo, *Documentos para la historia de Cuba*, 1:376–79.

21. Quoted in Cepero Bonilla, “Azúcar y abolición,” 107. Emphasis mine.

22. “Reglamento de libertos,” in Pichardo, *Documentos para la historia de Cuba*, 1:380–82.

23. Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, December 25, 1870, in Pichardo, *Documentos para la historia de Cuba*, 1:388.

24. Céspedes, “Comunicación diplomática.”

25. See especially Thomas Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832–1938* (Baltimore, 1992), ch. 2; Julie Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction: From Slave to Wage Laborer in South Carolina* (Cambridge, UK, 1994).

26. Donato Mármol and Máximo Gómez, “Alocución a los hacendados de Cuba,” December 31, 1868, reprinted in Emilio Bacardí y Moreau, *Crónicas de Santiago de Cuba* (Madrid, 1973), 4:79–81. Many of the slaves taken from coffee and sugar farms were later captured by or presented themselves to Spanish authorities. See their case files, scattered throughout ANC, AP, legs. 61–70.

27. Colonel Juan M. Cancino to Campamento provisional de Palmas Altas, December

30, 1868, in AHN, SU, leg. 4457; "Esclavos embargados, Bayamo, 1874," in ANC, BE, leg. 200, exp. 6.

28. "Expediente instruido sobre la averiguación y conducta del negro esclavo agregado a este Batallón, Juan de la Cruz (a) Bolívar," in ANC, Fondo Bienes Embargados (hereafter BE), AP, leg. 62, exp. 32.

29. See his testimony in ANC, AP, leg. 62, exp. 34.

30. The incorporation of slaves into rebel forces was even referred to as "forced recruitment." See Francisco de Arredondo y Miranda, *Recuerdos de las guerras de Cuba* (Havana, 1962), 97. For testimony given by slaves other than Priol regarding their forced extraction by insurgents, see ANC, CM, leg. 129, exp. 27, and the following files in ANC, AP: 62/23, 62/32, 62/36, 62/77-79. For testimony of free people making similar claims about their forced induction into rebel forces, see the following files in ANC, CM: 125/6, 126/1, 126/13, 126/17, 126/30, 127/7, 127/17, 129/12, 129/27, 129/30.

31. See his testimony in ANC, CM, leg. 129, exp. 27.

32. See, e.g., the files on *consejos de guerra* during the final years of the war in ANC, Fondo Donativos y Remisiones, 463/18, 469/15, 577/28, 577/51.

33. See, e.g., "Criminal contra D. Emilio Rivera, et al." in ANC, CM, leg. 129, exp. 27; Gen. P. Rebastillo to [name crossed out], Los Cocos [Santiago], July 28, 1869, and Com. José Ruiz to Cor. José C. Sánchez, Camp San Nicolás, March 30, 1870, both in AHN, SU, leg. 4439.

34. "Diario de Operaciones, Regimiento de la Habana No. 6 de Infantería, 1er Batallón," in Servicio Histórico Militar, Sección Ultramar, Colección Microfilmada Cuba, reel 1, leg. 5.

35. See "Expediente del moreno Andrés Aguilera," in ANC, AP, leg. 62, exp. 19. For other cases of slaves' requesting their freedom for having served Spain, see the petitions in ANC, AP, legs. 61-70.

36. Captain Gen. Caballero de Rodas to Min. de Ultramar, May 16, 1870, in AHN, SU, leg. 4933, 2nd part, book 5, doc. no. 99. Emphasis in original. The term *mambí* was a common name for the insurgents. Some have defined it as literally the offspring of a monkey and a vulture, others as the Indian term for rebels against the first Spanish conquerors. Though the term may have originated as a pejorative label for the rebels, sources agree that insurgents came to use the name proudly to refer to themselves. See esp. Miguel Barnet, *Biografía de un cimarrón* (Havana, 1986), 169; Antonio Rosal y Vázquez, *En la manigua: Diario de mi cantiverio* (Madrid, 1876), 248; Fernando Ortiz, "Un afrocubanismo: El vocablo mambí," in *Etnia y sociedad* (Havana, 1993), 102-3.

37. For individual cases of slaves' requesting their freedom for having served Spain, see the petitions in ANC, AP, legs. 61-70.

38. Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, Decreto, December 28, 1868, in Pichardo, *Documentos para la historia de Cuba*, 1:370-73.

39. Ramón Roa, quoted in Pichardo, *Documentos para la historia de Cuba*, 318-19.

40. "10 de Octubre," *La Revolución* (New York), October 13, 1869, clipping in AHN, SU, leg. 4933, 2a parte, book 4, doc. no. 88.

41. See Dubois, Reidy, and Morgan and O'Shaughnessy in this volume.

42. AHN, SU, leg. 4935, 1a parte, book 11, doc. no. 11. For more on the Puerto Príncipe crisis, see Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, ch. 2.

43. Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, “Comunicación diplomática” and “Comunicación sobre el estado crítico de la revolución,” both in Céspedes, *Escritos*, 1:144, 147.

44. Martínez Campos letter, February 18, 1878, AHN, SU, leg. 4936, 2a parte, book 17, doc. no. 202.

45. Francisco Ibañez, Junta Central Protectora de Libertos, to Gobernador General, September 22, 1874, AHN, SU, leg. 4882, tomo 3, exp. 49.

46. Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba*, 115; Carlos M. Trelles y Govin, *Biblioteca histórica cubana* (Matanzas, 1922–26), 3:553; “Convenio del Zanjón,” in Pichardo, *Documentos para la historia de Cuba*, 1:403–4.

47. Manuel Moreno Fragonals, *Cuba/España, España/Cuba* (Barcelona, 1995), 255.

48. George Vecsey, “Cuba Wins; Therefore, Cuba Wins,” *Washington Post*, August 4, 1991, sec. 8, p. 2. Stories about Genaro Lucumí and Irene were told to me by my mother, who was among the children to whom they told their stories.

49. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton, 1993), 76.

50. Bibliófilo [pseud.], *El negro Ramón y la muerte de Céspedes* (San Antonio de los Baños, 1894), 20–22; Fernando Figueredo Socorrás, *La toma de Bayamo* (San Antonio de los Baños, 1893), 30–31; Socorrás, *Revolución de Yara, 1868–1878, Conferencias* (1902; reprint, Miami, 1990), 43n. All refute the claim of the slave’s betrayal of Céspedes. The latter, though published in 1902, is composed of lectures given by Figueredo in the 1880s and was originally scheduled for publication in 1894.

51. For additional examples and discussion, see Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, ch. 5.

52. The clipping appears in ANC, DR, leg. 287, exp. 28. The article, and another with the same title about a black insurgent named Joaquín Júa, were published in *La Igualdad* on September 21, 1892, and October 1, 1892, respectively, and reprinted later in Ramón Roa, *Con la pluma y el machete* (Havana, 1950), 1:248–51. Roa also published a short article about the patriotic services of a black woman, Rosa la Bayamesa, in the same newspaper in 1892. The article was reprinted as a chapter titled “Rosa la Bayamesa” in his *Calzado y montado* in *Con la pluma y el machete*, 1:189–92. Roa was also the author of a vivid description of insurgent *matibos*—the African maroon communities that lent services to the Cuban leaders of 1868. Although that description, in which the black insurgent is painted as foreign and dangerous, was written in the 1890s as part of the same collection as the portrait of Rosa la Bayamesa, it did not appear until the publication of his collected works in 1950.

53. Note that Roa’s description of Legón first appeared in the black newspaper *La Igualdad*, suggesting that the audience for these writings was made up of not only white Cubans whose fears they sought to allay but also black Cubans whose support was also courted by the colonial state and the autonomist party. Legón’s story demonstrates that point particularly well, for it appeared in numerous publications accessible to white and nonwhite audiences. For example, Manuel de la Cruz told Legón’s story in his *Episodios de la revolución cubana* (Havana, 1911) and Serafín Sánchez, veteran of the Ten Years’ War and the Guerra Chiquita, authored a short biography of Legón in his book *Heroes humildes y poetas de la guerra*, published in New York in 1894. Sánchez’s account chronicled the same transformation, explicitly identifying Legón as African-born. Thus he was transformed from a black African slave (not merely a black slave) to a Cuban

patriot. See Cruz, *Episodios de la revolución cubana*, 126–27; and Serafín Sánchez, *Heroes humildes y los poetas de la guerra* (Havana, 1981), 41–50.

54. Manuel Sanguily, “Negros y blancos,” *Hojas Literarias*, January 31, 1894, reprinted in Manuel Sanguily, *Obras de Manuel Sanguily* (Havana, 1925), vol. 8, bk. 2, 137–38.

55. Sanguily, *Obras*, vol. 8, bk. 2, 137.

56. Although the introduction and the maintenance of the institution of slavery on the island are attributed to the Spanish, individual slaveowners are often portrayed as benevolent, pro-independence Cubans.

57. Sanguily, “Negros y blancos.”

58. José Martí, “Los cubanos de Jamaica,” in Martí, *Obras completas* (Havana, 1946), 1:494–95.

59. James O’Kelly, *The Mambi-Land, or Adventures of a Herald Correspondent in Cuba* (Philadelphia, 1874), 124. See also Manuel Suarez’s letter of October 1, 1879, in Archivo Nacional de Cuba, *Documentos para servir a la historia de la Guerra Chiquita* (Havana, 1949–50), 2:252.

60. *Album de El Criollo* (Havana, 1888), 200–204.

61. In this process of reconfiguration, the most prominent black insurgents in the war are relatively absent from the public prose of independence. Few black insurgents appear in Martí’s biographical portraits of independence leaders, and he seems to have published no biographical sketches of men such as Quintín Bandera or Guillermo Moncada. His profile of Antonio Maceo is interesting precisely because Maceo remains surprisingly absent. Purportedly a profile of Maceo, it devotes significantly more attention to Maceo’s mother. Maceo appears in the beginning of the portrait as an intelligent and industrious farmer waiting for orders from others before taking part in a revolution. See “Antonio Maceo,” “Mariana Grajales,” and “La Madre de los Maceo,” which were all published in *Patria* in 1893 and 1894 and reprinted in Martí, *Obras completas*, 1:586–89, 617–18.

62. Enrique Hernández Miyares, “1868,” in *Obras completas* (Havana, 1915–16), 1:33; Cruz, *Episodios de la revolución cubana*, 29–31. See also the discussion of essays by José Martí, Manuel Sanguily, Juan Gualberto Gomez, and Rafael Serra in Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba*, ch. 5.

# Cuba, 1898: Rethinking Race, Nation, and Empire

Ada Ferrer

Nineteen ninety-eight marks the centennial of a war between Cuba and Spain in which the United States emerged victorious. The war was a short one, starting officially in April 1898 and ending in August of the same year. When it was over, Cuban soldiers laid down their arms in compliance with a peace treaty no Cuban leader had ever signed; and they watched as Spanish officers lowered the Spanish flag and American soldiers raised in its place the thirteen stripes and forty-five stars of the United States. That American victory has meant, among other things, that the world knows the war as the Spanish-American War, a 113-day skirmish that sealed Spain's centuries-long decline and marked the beginning of the American Century. The war's new name lacks any trace of its principal protagonist and any hint of the struggles that preceded the formal entry of the United States in April 1898. That name notwithstanding, the struggle between Cuba and Spain comprised significantly more than the few months in which the United States participated—more indeed than the rebellion that erupted on the first Sunday of carnival in February 1895. The struggle began, in fact, thirty years before Teddy Roosevelt ever laid eyes on San Juan Hill, when on 10 October 1868, Cuban rebels first declared their intention of transforming Spain's most profitable colony into a sovereign republic.

Over the course of the three decades of conspiracy and insurrection that followed, tens of thousands of people fought to defeat a four hundred year old empire. In the process, they came to challenge, as well, the principal ideological and political currents of the late nineteenth-century world. As Europe scrambled for colonies in Africa and Asia, the revolution attacked Europe's oldest colonial power. As white mobs in the U.S. South lynched blacks, and as scientists weighed skulls, Cuba's rebel leaders defiantly denied the existence of races. This paper tells the story of that revolution—of how it emerged from a colonial slave society, how it transformed that society in the course of its thirty-year unfolding, and how, in the end, this revolution—anticolonial, antislav-

ery, antiracist—produced the intervention of a country at that moment inventing Jim Crow segregation and acquiring its own far-flung empire.

## REVOLUTION AND HISTORY

Cuba's nineteenth-century revolution began belatedly in a society that seemed highly unrevolutionary—a society that in the political ferment of the Age of Revolution earned the designation "the ever-faithful isle." Between 1776 and 1825, as most of the colonies of North and South America acquired their independence, Cuba remained a loyalist stronghold. The story of Cuba's deviance from the hemispheric norm is, by now, a familiar one: in the face of potential social revolution, creole (Cuban-born) elites opted to maintain the colonial bond with Spain. With that bond, they preserved as well a prosperous and expanding sugar industry built on the labor of enslaved Africans. After the Haitian Revolution of 1791, Cuba replaced colonial St. Domingue as the world's largest producer of sugar. Content with their new position in the world market, Cuban planters did not want to emulate Haiti again by becoming the hemisphere's second black republic. Thus colonialism survived in Cuba even as it was defeated to the north and south; and peace and slavery prevailed over insurrection and emancipation.

The colony that outlived those Atlantic revolutions was, however, a fractured and fearful one. In 1846, 36 percent of the population was enslaved. Even well into the nineteenth century, a thriving (and illegal) slave trade continued to replenish the supply of enslaved Africans; almost 450,000 arrived on the island's shores between 1820 and 1864—about as many as ever arrived in the United States in almost two centuries. About half those slaves labored on prosperous sugar plantations. Under brutal work regimes, they continued to speak African languages and, in most cases, had only minimal contact with the creole world outside the plantation. Free persons of color constituted another 17 percent of the population. Although legally free, they faced numerous constraints on the exercise of that freedom: prohibitions on the consumption of alcohol, bans against marriage to white men and women, and restrictions on the use of public space, to name but a few.<sup>1</sup>

At mid-century, then, enslaved and free people of color together constituted a majority of the population, outnumbering those identified as white. The white population, educated in the fear of black and slave rebellion, looked to Haiti and clung to Spain in fear. Haiti's slave revolution served as a perpetual example of what might happen to whites in the midst of armed rebellion. But there were smaller, local examples as well. The most famous perhaps was the alleged conspiracy of the early 1840s, said to comprise a massive number of slaves, free people of color, and abolitionist statesmen from England. Even as late as 1864, only

four years before the outbreak of nationalist insurgency, authorities uncovered a conspiracy in El Cobre in which slaves from seven area farms were allegedly to join forces to "kill all the whites and make war in order to be free." When the would-be rebels were captured and tried in a Spanish military court, translators had to be hired, for the enslaved suspects spoke no Spanish.<sup>2</sup> In this context of slavery and division, the colonial state and many influential white creoles asserted that to risk expelling Spain was to invite a more horrible fate. Cuba, they said, would either be Spanish or it would be African; it would be Spanish or it would be "another Haiti." For those with the power to decide, the answer came without hesitation: Cuba would remain a Spanish colony. There did exist a handful of prominent intellectuals willing to consider, if only hypothetically, the founding of a Cuban nation independent from Spain. But, always, they were careful to specify that the Cuban nationality they desired—"the only one that any sensible man would concern himself with [was] a nationality formed by the white race."<sup>3</sup>

It was into this world that revolution erupted on 10 October 1868; and when it did, it seemed to defy the fear and division that formed the society from which it emerged. Led initially by a handful of prosperous white men, the revolution placed free men of color in local positions of authority. It also freed slaves, made them soldiers, and called them citizens. And that was just the beginning. The movement formally inaugurated on that day went on to produce three full-fledged anticolonial rebellions over the thirty years that followed: the Ten Years' War (1868–1878), the Guerra Chiquita or Little War (1879–1880), and the final War of Independence (1895–1898), which ended with the Spanish-American War. All three rebellions were waged by an army unique in the history of the Atlantic world—the Army of Liberation, a multiracial fighting force that was integrated at all ranks. Historians estimate that at least 60 percent of that army was composed of men of color. But this was not just an army where masses of black soldiers served under a much smaller number of white officers, for many black soldiers ascended through the ranks to hold positions as captains, colonels, and generals and to exercise authority over men identified as white. By the end of the thirty year period, estimates one historian, about 40 percent of the commissioned officers were men of color.<sup>4</sup>

If this integrated army was one pillar of the revolution, the other was significantly less tangible. It was a powerful rhetoric of antiracism that began emerging during the first rebellion and that became much more dominant in the years between the legal end of slavery in 1886 and the outbreak of the third and final war in 1895. This new rhetoric made racial equality a foundation of the Cuban nation. Espoused by both white and nonwhite members of the movement's civilian and



military branches, it asserted that the very struggle against Spain had transformed Cuba into a land where there were "no whites and no blacks, but only Cubans."<sup>5</sup> It thus condemned racism not as an infraction against individual citizens but as a sin against the life of the would-be nation. Revolutionary rhetoric made racial slavery and racial division concomitant with Spanish colonialism, just as it made the revolution a mythic project that armed black, white, and mulatto men together to form the world's first raceless nation.

That this revolution emerged from that slave society makes the story of Cuban independence a remarkable and compelling one. That it emerged from the late nineteenth-century world makes it seem even more so—for the Cuban revolution unfolded as European and North American thinkers linked biology to progress and divided the world into superior and inferior races. Those ideas, espoused or encouraged by the work of thinkers as diverse as Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau, had a profound influence in Latin America.<sup>6</sup> Yet in that world "under Darwin's sway," the Cuban movement's principal intellectual leader, José Martí, professed the equality of all races. Indeed he went further, boldly asserting that there was no such thing as race. Race, he and other nationalists insisted, was merely a tool used locally to divide the anticolonial effort and globally by men who invented "textbook races" in order to justify expansion and empire.<sup>7</sup>

Here then were voices raised not only in opposition to Spanish rule but also in opposition to the prevailing common sense of their time. Moreover, what nationalist leaders preached and (less perfectly) practiced stood in stark and disarmingly concrete contrast to the emerging racial politics of their neighbor to the north. Cuban rebels spoke of a raceless nation in the period that represented the nadir in American racial politics. Thus the waves of racial violence in both North and South, the spread of spatial segregation by race, and the dismantling of political gains made during Reconstruction in the South occurred in the United States precisely as black and mulatto leaders gained increasing popularity and power in Cuba. Arguably the most popular military leader of the nationalist movement was Antonio Maceo, a mulatto who had joined the movement in 1868 as a common foot soldier and rose eventually to the rank of general. By 1895, he led the insurgent army across the entire territory of the island and won the allegiance of white and nonwhite men and women—a national, multiracial following that in the United States would have been rare in local contexts and unthinkable at the national level. Thus, as the color line in the United States grew more and more rigid, and as the consequences for crossing that line became more and more brutal, a revolutionary movement in Cuba appeared willing, indeed eager, to eradicate those lines in Cuba. And

it was the victory of this movement that American intervention helped block.

To see the revolution in this light—as an ambitious anticolonial and antiracist project—forces us to reconsider certain questions. First, it allows potentially for new perspectives on American imperialism. American historians of empire invariably discuss United States intervention in Cuba, for it has traditionally been seen as the event that signalled the emergence of the United States on the world stage. But Cuba itself is largely absent from their discussions, as they search for the causes of intervention within the United States (in the frenzy for markets for expanding capitalist industry, or in the closing of the frontier, or in the need to unify the country in the wake of the Civil War and social unrest). Just as Teddy Roosevelt ignored Cuban insurgents, so too have Americanist historians generally neglected the complex history of insurgency and counterinsurgency that unfolded in the three decades preceding the United States' declaration of war on Spain. As a result, they have overlooked the extent to which conditions in Cuba—and the internal story of the revolution itself—helped shape the possibilities for U.S. intervention.<sup>8</sup> With Cuba and race at center stage of the story, there emerge new motivations, meanings and dynamics behind American intervention. Understanding the revolution in this light, intervention necessarily becomes about something more than new markets or post-Civil War national integration. For clearly, it is significant that in an age of ascendant racism, the United States opted to temper the victory of an explicitly antiracist, multiracial movement.

Second, interpreting the thirty-year movement as an ambitious anticolonial and antiracist movement makes all the more conspicuous the absence of that revolution in historical canons. Given the character of the movement just described, does it not seem strange that few people in the United States have ever heard of this revolution? The answer to this apparent paradox lies largely in the unusual transition to peace in 1898, when Cuba's anticolonial war ended not with the founding of an independent Cuban republic, but with the emergence of perhaps the modern world's most powerful empire. That fact alone has been sufficient to render Cuba's thirty-year revolutionary movement invisible in historical canons, sufficient to turn it into a "revolution that the world forgot," to borrow Michel-Rolph Trouillot's characterization of the Haitian Revolution a century earlier.<sup>9</sup> By reconceptualizing a 113-day conflagration as a powerful thirty-year movement, we can begin to rectify the absence and forgetting.

But to leave the story there, to show merely that there existed a significant, even ambitious, anticolonial and antiracist movement would

be gravely inadequate. For to understand the revolution that preceded and helped produce American intervention, another kind of challenge is required—a challenge not only to the revolution's invisibility in American historical consciousness but also to its centrality and coherence in Cuban national consciousness. Because if the exigencies of empire in the United States rendered the thirty years of anticolonial struggle that preceded American intervention largely irrelevant, then the dictates of state-sanctioned revolutionary nationalism in post-1959 Cuba made those same struggles absolutely indispensable. The revolutionary state that came to power under the leadership of Fidel Castro forty years ago embraced the independence movement as its spiritual and ideological predecessor. It extolled the anti-imperial and antiracist nationalism of nineteenth-century figures, and it excoriated the intervention of the United States. By its own account, the revolution of 1959 represented the fulfillment and embodiment of nineteenth-century patriotic ideals, thwarted by the intervention of the United States in 1898 and by the decades of direct and indirect American rule that followed. Thus if anticolonial struggle between 1868 and 1898 was reduced to roughly four months of the Spanish-American war in imperial nomenclature, in the new revolutionary lexicon it became "one hundred years of struggle"—from the first anticolonial uprising in 1868 to the revolutionary present of the 1960s. Nineteenth-century struggles were thus central components in a new historical consciousness and a central feature of the new state's attempt to win historical and national legitimacy.<sup>10</sup> This was true in the years following 1959, and it continues to be true today, as placards around the city declare transcendent links between the late nineteenth and the late twentieth centuries, and as the country's political leader continues to talk about 1868—and especially about revolution gone awry and imperialism run amok in 1898—to advance political positions for the present.

Because the post-1959 state (itself publicly unassailable) construed itself as the fulfillment of the political ideals and desires of long-dead patriots, there was little room for discussion about the character and complexities of nationalist revolution. The nineteenth-century movement appropriated by the revolutionary state was thus so abstract and instrumental that, in effect, struggles and protagonists of the late nineteenth century were almost as absent and shadowy in nationalist scholarship as they were in imperial historiography (despite their radically different political orientations). Thirty years of conspiracies organized and betrayed, of alliances made and broken, of courses altered and modified became simply an abstract—though admittedly rousing—tale of a People's struggle for a Nation. Thus the obscurity around anticolon-

ial insurgency, imposed initially by the contempt and arrogance of empire, remains in many ways unchallenged by the romance and teleology of nationalist narratives.<sup>11</sup>

To recapture and reinterpret Cuba's nineteenth-century revolution, then, requires an assault on both imperial silences and nationalist pretensions. To do this, the very nature of the original revolution to which modern revolutionaries have laid claim must be open to question. Rather than a hostile debunking of national mythology, a reexamination of revolution and intervention requires one to place the complicated nationalist trajectories, the constant pull between racism and antiracism, and the movement-defining inconsistencies and contradictions at center stage of the revolution's unfolding and undoing. Here, then, the appearance within the nationalist movement of alternative political goals (such as annexation to the United States or home rule under Spain) are not treated as aberrations in the story of the quest for nationhood. The flaring up of regional, class, and racial divisions, likewise, are not seen as deviations along an otherwise straight path, but as constitutive of the nationalist project itself.<sup>12</sup> It was conflict, not consensus, that defined Cuba's nineteenth-century revolution.

## RACE AND RACELESSNESS

Of the conflicts that helped define and shape Cuban nationalism, none seemed as pressing and complicated as those that centered around race. The nationalist movement of the nineteenth century gave rise to one of the most powerful ideas in Cuban history—the conception (dominant to this day) of a raceless nationality. In rebel camps and battlefields, as well as in newspapers, memoirs, essays and speeches, patriot-intellectuals (white and non-white) made the bold claim that the struggle against Spain had produced a new kind of individual and a new kind of collectivity. They argued that the experience of war had forever united black and white; and they imagined a new kind of nation where equality was so ingrained that there existed no need to identify or speak of races. Thus the rebel republic declined to record racial categories of identification on army rosters, and a majority of citizens repeatedly asserted (and today continue to assert) the nonexistence of discrimination and the irrelevance of race.<sup>13</sup>

As that ideology emerged, it clashed with colonial arguments about the impossibility of Cuban nationhood. Since the end of the eighteenth century, advocates of colonial rule in Cuba had argued that the preponderance of people of color and the social and economic importance of slavery meant that Cuba could not be a nation. Confronted by threats to political order, they invoked images of race war and represented the nationalists' desired republic as Haiti's successor. Such arguments

worked well in the Age of Revolution, when Cuban elites decided to forego independence and to maintain a prosperity built largely on the forced labor of Africans in sugar.

These same arguments continued to work even after the start of anticolonial insurgency in 1868, when nationalist leaders of the first rebellion (the Ten Years' War) began to challenge traditional formulations about the impossibility of Cuban nationhood by mobilizing slaves and free people of color. Spanish authorities and their allies responded to these challenges by deploying familiar arguments about the racial dangers of rebellion. As usual, the references to Haiti became ubiquitous. But they were almost always brief and nebulous—as if merely to speak the name sufficed to call up concrete images of black supremacy: of black men who raped white women and killed their husbands and fathers, of wealth and property annihilated, of political authority exercised by self-anointed black emperors, of God and civilization spurned.<sup>14</sup>

The movement's detractors deployed the same images and arguments again—to even better effect—during the second separatist uprising known as the "Little War" of 1879–1880. Colonial officials, however, did more than merely label the independence movement black. They also consciously and skillfully manipulated features of the rebellion to make it more closely correspond to their interpretation. They tampered with lists of captured insurgents, omitting the names of white rebels; they made surrendering white insurgents sign public declarations repudiating the allegedly racial goals of black co-leaders. And the blacker colonial officials made the rebellion appear, the more white insurgents surrendered, and then the blacker the rebellion became, and so on. Race, and its manipulation by colonial authorities, is therefore absolutely central to understanding the limits of multiracial insurgency in the first half of the nationalist period.<sup>15</sup>

As independence activists prepared to launch a final and, they hoped, successful rebellion against Spain, they faced not only the challenge of uniting different separatist camps and of amassing men, arms, and money for the struggle. They faced as well the imperative of combatting colonial representations of the independence movement. To succeed at anticolonial insurgency, separatists had to invalidate traditional claims about the racial risks of rebellion. They had to construct an effective counterclaim to arguments that for almost a century had held that Cuba was unsuited to nationhood. "The power to represent oneself," they had come to realize, was "nothing other than political power itself."<sup>16</sup> The struggle for that power of representation required that patriot-intellectuals reconceptualize nationality, blackness, and the place of people of color in the would-be nation. In the process, black, mulatto, and white intellectuals constructed powerful and eloquent expressions

of raceless nationality, of a nationality which had antiracism as a solid foundation. Among these intellectuals were men like José Martí, the white son of a Spaniard, who in 1892 founded the Cuban Revolutionary Party in New York; Juan Gualberto Gómez, a mulatto journalist born to slave parents, educated in Paris and Havana; and Rafael Serra, a prominent journalist who began his career as a cigar worker, later founded a school for children of color in Havana, and eventually became active in New York. All wrote of the union of black and white men in anticolonial war, and they located in that physical and spiritual embrace between black and white men in war the birth of the nation. In their vision, black and mulatto men were central to the making of the nation; they could never threaten it with aspirations to a black republic. Their portrayals explicitly countered colonialist claims about race war and the impossibility of Cuban nationhood.<sup>17</sup>

But if this complex process of reconceptualizing race and nationality occurred in dialogue with the racist claims of the colonial state, it also emerged from—and produced new—tensions within the nationalist community itself. By declaring that there were no races and by asserting that racism was an infraction against the nation as a whole, nationalist rhetoric helped defeat Spanish claims about the impossibility of Cuban nationhood. But that same rhetoric also provided a conceptual framework which black soldiers could use to condemn the racism not only of their Spanish enemies, but of their fellow insurgents and leaders as well. Thus the ideology of a raceless nationality, even as it suggested that race had been transcended, gave black insurgents and citizens a powerful language with which to speak about race and racism within the rebel polity and with which to show that that transcendence was yet to occur. And, in fact, throughout the period of insurrection, and especially in the final war, black soldiers and officers used the language of nationalism to expose and condemn what they perceived as racism within the movement. So the language of raceless nationality, a language of harmony and integration became also a language of contention.<sup>18</sup>

Just as nationalist rhetoric and insurgency shaped black political behavior, so too did black participation profoundly affect both the discourse and practice of nationalism. The mobilization of free and enslaved Cubans of color helped radicalize Cuban nationalism and made the rebellions militarily viable. Black participation was even celebrated in the nationalist prose of the period. But black mobilization—in the beginning because its only precedent lay in slave rebellion and later because it was accompanied by significant black leadership—also created anxieties among insurgents and fed the forces of counterinsurgency. From the outset in 1868, the extent of black and slave mobilization in the first rebellion prompted leaders (the very same ones who began the war by

freeing slaves) to consider the possibility of annexation to the United States, so as to “avoid falling into an abyss of evils.”<sup>19</sup> In the years that followed, black mobilization led thousands of others to reject the armed movement and ally if not with Spain then at least with the promise of peace and security. In 1879, during the second war, the same anxieties about black mobilization—and now also black leadership—again produced significant white surrenders; indeed they kept many from joining the rebellion at all. Later, in 1895, the leadership of nonwhite officers still had the power to produce hesitancy and sow the seeds of dissension. Black participation in insurgency—and representations of that participation—thus had the power, on the one hand, to compromise the success of nationalist efforts and, on the other, to strengthen the appeal of the movement.

In the movement’s inner war between racism and antiracism, the lines of contention could fall along social groups or regions, between political factions or personal rivalries. But often the struggle existed even within individuals. White officers might praise Toussaint but scorned what they identified as the arrogance of black and mulatto leaders; so the aging, aristocratic rebel leader, Salvador Cisneros Betancourt, buried his daughter with a slave but detested the power of Maceo. So José Martí declared races nonexistent and then spoke of blacks’ inherited qualities. And so leaders of color decried the racism of white patriots and then at times replicated their exclusions. That the list can be extended indefinitely attests to the pervasiveness of the struggle and to the power of both forces within the anticolonial movement. And it was this tension between revolution and counter-revolution, and between racism and antiracism, that defined Cuba’s nineteenth-century revolution.

In 1898 the outcome of that contest between racism and antiracism was not entirely decided. The landscape of racial politics had already changed dramatically in thirty years of conspiracy and mobilization. Slavery was twelve years dead; Cubans of color had won access to important civil rights; and the nationalist movement professed (if imperfectly practiced) antiracism as a foundational feature of the nation about to be born. Thousands of Cubans of color had taken part in an armed political movement; a smaller but still significant number had become army officers; and a smaller number still had reputations and followings at the national level. How much further change would have gone and what the process of negotiation and contention would have looked like in a republic unfettered in any way by the United States is, of course, impossible to know.

We do know, with certainty, what side of the struggle between racism and antiracism the American occupiers advanced. American soldiers

on their way to Cuba traveled across the United States in segregated train cars; and white mobs attacked black soldiers waiting to board Cuban-bound ships. After they arrived in Cuba, as ostensible allies of the multiracial Liberation Army, they served in segregated units, black ones under the command of white officers. However uncertain American designs on Cuba, however self-conscious in their new imperial role, about this there was no ambivalence whatsoever: officers and bureaucrats from the United States of the late 1890s were not about to champion Cuban nationalism or national antiracism. Yet even the clarity and power of American racial politics did not end or resolve the tensions over race unfolding within Cuban nationalism. American racism towards black Cubans, and American arrogance towards Cubans in general, did not change the fact that U.S. rule—even a rule indirect and unacknowledged as imperial—required negotiation and that negotiation required coming to terms with a recent past and a living history of antiracist discourse and mobilization. That fact tempered American ambitions. Their eager and explicit efforts to restrict suffrage, for example, were gradually undone. Attempts to limit access to electoral power by imposing literacy and property restrictions were mitigated first by the inclusion of a “soldier clause,” which enfranchised rebel veterans. Widespread (but not universal) Cuban opposition reversed even those limits, as veterans of multiple political persuasions argued that to exclude the poor and uneducated was an intolerable affront to an independence movement that had already written universal suffrage into its bodies of law. And so with Cuba’s Constitutional Convention of 1901, Americans saw effective universal manhood suffrage made law and put into practice on territory only recently freed from slavery and more recently brought under the ambiguous dominion of a country then dismantling electoral rights in its own southern territories.<sup>20</sup> Clearly, a history of cross-racial mobilization and antiracist discourse placed limits upon what American occupiers could reasonably do.

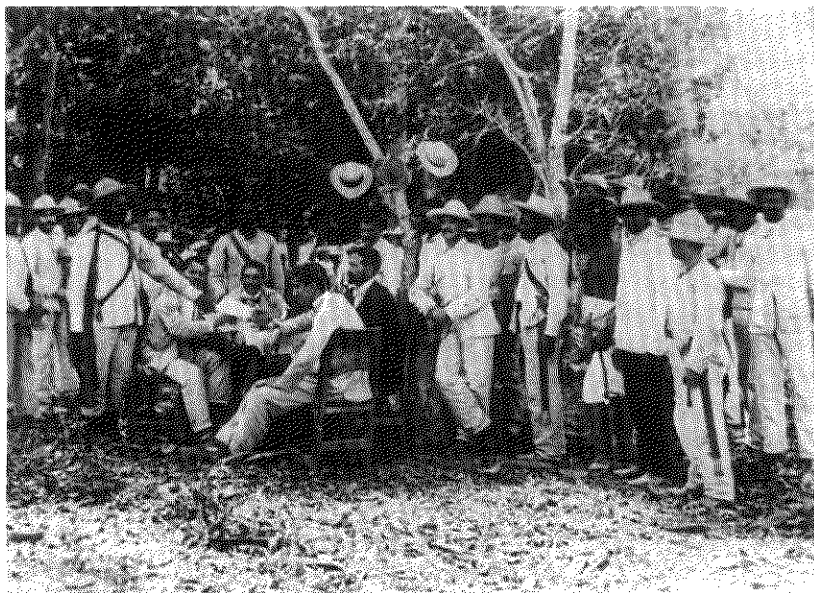
If nationalism placed limits on the exercise of American rule, however, it is equally clear that American rule placed even greater constraints on Cuban nationalists. In the first instance, American intervention produced among Cuban nationalists a troubling sense of uncertainty—an uncertainty so profound it seemed almost to overshadow the victory over Spain. Initial doubts about American motives in Cuba, expressed mutedly in February, March, and April, had been calmed by the U.S. Congress’s joint resolution, which explicitly recognized Cuba’s right to independence.<sup>21</sup> But the same doubts, more intense now, resurfaced from the moment of American victory—a victory which left the status of Cuba a public mystery. Imagine the scenes of misapprehension and total confusion in a place like Santiago de Cuba, the site



of Spain's surrender and the place known as the birthplace of Cuban nationalism. There, where society had been transformed by three decades of nationalist rebellion and conspiracy against colonial rule, Cuban soldiers saw the Spanish surrender not to them but to an American force that had arrived only weeks earlier. And although Cuban rebels saw their Spanish enemies defeated after thirty years of anticolonial mobilization, they were forbidden from entering cities and towns to celebrate their ostensible victory. Struggling to understand that prohibition, one Cuban insurgent hypothesized, "we feel as the patriots under Washington would have felt had the allied armies captured New York and the French prohibited the entry of the Americans and their flags."<sup>22</sup> To the astonishment of Cuban observers, American officers protected Spanish bureaucrats, guaranteeing them the authority and the peace to remain in positions of power despite the fact, complained Calixto García, that "those authorities had never been elected at Santiago by the residents of the City but appointed by Royal Decrees of the Queen of Spain."<sup>23</sup> And although Spain had lost the war, Cuban soldiers were forced to relinquish their weapons. None of these local events seemed to make sense. They were scenes of inconsistency and disjuncture: the victors could not celebrate their victory, nor bear arms, nor exercise authority. The vanquished (for the moment) remained in positions of power; and the strange transition was supervised by emissaries of a foreign government newly arrived.

At this juncture, in which Americans showed no signs of preparing to leave and made few explicit declarations of their intentions, Cubans watched. And as they watched, they read every action and every statement as a sign. Every act was charged with meaning and purpose: for either side to fly a Cuban flag, an American one, or both together; for an American soldier to get drunk and kiss a Cuban woman on the street; for a Cuban officer to use the seal of the "Republic of Cuba" on documents sent to American authorities, for those authorities literally to erase those words, and then for the Cuban officer to resign in protest.<sup>24</sup> But casual statements and everyday acts became so charged and portentous, in part, because the larger structure of U.S.-Cuban relations remained so indeterminate and because the fate of the thirty-year independence movement seemed like a closely guarded secret, unknown even to the most powerful of actors. "We are in a tremendous haze, with the bleakest of futures," said Calixto García, "all because of our complete lack of knowledge about the plans of the American government regarding this country."<sup>25</sup>

Amidst all the uncertainty about the future, Cuban leaders became certain of one thing: that with the future of self government in doubt, the Americans would be scrutinizing them, trying to determine whether



Under the supervision of the U.S. government of occupation, Cuba's Liberation Army was mustered out. Pictured here is the disbandment of the "Francisco Gómez" Regiment of Cuba's Fifth Army Corps. In the words of one black veteran of that corps, "we were mustered out in a ridiculous manner, given 75 pesos to return to our homes, many of which had disappeared . . ." José Isabel Herrera (Mangoché), *Impresiones de la guerra de independencia (Narrado por el soldado del Ejército Libertador)* (Havana: Nuevos Rumbos, 1948), 160. Photo courtesy of Archivo Nacional de Cuba.

they were fit for independence. "We are," said Máximo Gómez to an associate, "before a Tribunal, and the Tribunal is formed by the Americans."<sup>26</sup> So believing themselves to be watched and judged, nationalist leaders impressed upon Cubans—especially those in the military—the necessity of good behavior. Gómez prescribed that "our conduct should be worthy so that we are respected." And Calixto García, in a public circular to his forces, advised them that "the best order should reign everywhere, . . . respect for people and property . . . should become a fact and each one of us should be its most faithful guardian. Only in this way," he continued, would they "prove to the world that [they had] full right in desiring to be free and independent . . . with a right to occupy a place among the nations of the earth." Finally, he concluded, "it will exalt us in the eyes of the American people."<sup>27</sup> American officials, for their part, encouraged Cubans' sense of being watched. As Leonard Wood explained in November 1898, "I am giving the Cubans every

chance to show what is in them, in order that they either demonstrate their fitness or their unfitness for self-government." And he told the Cubans he talked to that if they failed at the duties assigned them, it would be "an advertisement to the world that [they] are unable to control and govern themselves."<sup>28</sup> The verdict regarding Cuban independence would depend, they suggested, on how they behaved and appeared before others.

Proof of their worthiness required in the first instance that they remain peaceful. So even vaguely suggestive words and the mildest hints of a threat from some nationalists produced among others calls for silence, patience, and reserve. "Every true separatist should avoid anything that might be taken as a pretext by the Americans in order to make their occupation indefinite." Conspiracy and rebellion were therefore ruled out: "To fire one shot in our fields would be to prolong indefinitely the realization of our ideals [of independence]."<sup>29</sup> Throughout the period there would be sporadic rumors: of mayors stockpiling guns, of former insurgents refusing to disband or inciting others to rebellion. There was even a very secretive meeting of prominent insurgents, where participants pledged that if the Americans would not grant them full independence, "they would continue the revolution, as a change of master is not enough to end it."<sup>30</sup> But it never came to that. Instead the consensus seemed to be on the side of reconciliation rather than rebellion. Amidst American talk about tropical and Latin propensities for revolutions and upheavals, Cubans opted instead to spotlight their distance from those stereotypes.<sup>31</sup> They would be grateful and dignified, they would respect Spaniards and Americans and private property, and they would be peaceful. As a result, the Americans would see their worthiness and bestow on them what had already been promised. At that moment, it seemed that independence depended on the Americans' willingness to leave, which in turn depended, they thought, on their patience and peacefulness; independence seemed to require a disavowal of nationalism. Few dared say the obvious in public: that to have to prove their capacity for independence denied its very possibility and that the independence to come out of such proof would be seen as a gift, as a symbol of American power and magnanimity and of Cuban dependence and deference.

To demonstrate their capacity for self-rule required more than merely the absence of upheaval. It required, as well, proof of their civility, of their claim to the right to inhabit the world of civilized and modern nations. It was this capacity that Americans had challenged almost from the moment of their arrival, as soldiers and officers, journalists and cartoonists propagated images of Cuba as a land of dark, sometimes violent, sometimes childlike savages, and of Cuban insurgents as fearful

black men unwilling to fight, looking only for handouts, uninterested in independence, and naturally tending to violent excess.<sup>32</sup> Thus General Shafter's assistant seemed to echo Spain's century-old claim: that the insurgents who would rule in the absence of American forces were "a lot of degenerates . . . no more capable of self-rule than the savages of Africa." Shafter himself agreed and used a more explosive analogy: "Self-government! Why, these people are no more fit for self-government than gunpowder is for hell."<sup>33</sup>

It was this contention that Cubans saw themselves as having to combat, although not, of course, in any way that might suggest explosiveness. And so at every opportunity Cubans informed Americans of their standing as "a free and cultured people" and of their commitment to "order, civilization, the tendency towards progress, [and] civil and political liberty."<sup>34</sup> Often the assertion of their claim to culture and civilization took the form of explicit comparisons with the United States. So, for example when Calixto García and his forces were forbidden from attending Spain's formal surrender in Santiago, García responded indignantly. But he tempered that indignance with respectful references to American heroes, which he then—brazenly some Americans might have thought—likened to Cuban ones. He wrote: "A rumor, too absurd to be believed, ascribes the reason of your measure and of the orders forbidding my army to enter Santiago, to fear of massacres and revenge against the Spaniards. Allow me, sir, to protest against even the shadow of such an idea. We are not savages ignoring the rules of civilized warfare. We are a poor ragged Army, as ragged and poor as the Army of your forefathers in their noble war for the Independence, but as the heroes of Saratoga and Yorktown, we respect too deeply our cause to disgrace it with barbarism and cowardice."<sup>35</sup> García premised his claim to the right to win, celebrate, and govern on Cuban distance from savagery and its approximation to the United States.

But despite such assertions of civilization and right, the United States seemed for the most part an inattentive audience—one with a very narrow definition of what constituted proof of civilization and the right to self-rule. In the United States, as in Europe, civilization, by the end of the nineteenth century, had come to be defined as a quality that inhered primarily to the white race. Other people could aspire to it, but they could achieve it only very gradually, over many generations and in a kind of permanent and unbreachable lag behind whites.<sup>36</sup> It would be easy to assume today that this definition of civilization as white meant that interested Americans would necessarily place Cuba and Cubans squarely in the camp of the uncivilized, of those at least provisionally unsuited to self-rule. But that conclusion simply assumes an unambiguous definition of Cubans as non-white, even though it is not

at all clear that such a definition existed in 1898. In fact, in the late nineteenth century the status of Cubans in racial terms was highly indeterminate. And as Shafter's assistants called them Africans or savages, and as countless other Americans referred to them as "mongrels," "coons," and "a collection of real tropic savages,"<sup>37</sup> still other Americans diverged significantly, stressing instead what they saw as connections and similarities between Cubans and Americans. Cubans might be "tropical," insisted General James H. Wilson, but they were certainly "far from mongrel [or] . . . 'barbarian'." A large majority were, in fact, white and "as American as many of our own people in the States." They were, agreed another, like "the average of people in the rural districts here—what we call backwoods of the United States."<sup>38</sup>

The purpose of calling attention to these contradictory American conclusions about Cuban "race" is not to celebrate either American confusion or Cuban hybridity; still less is it to pronounce Cubans white or black or anything in between. The point rather is to emphasize that the racial status of Cubans, and more generally of the new imperial territories, had to be determined and constructed. Americans did not just happen upon lands inhabited by nonwhites, minorities, and people of color, rather they landed in highly complex and already colonial societies and came to understand and to represent those societies as brown, colored, dark, nonwhite, and sometimes (as if unable to decide) "semi-savage." To understand them they marshaled racial knowledge formed in the United States, but they also daily confronted new subjects who did not always conform to premade categories and who actively attempted to affect American answers to newly posed questions about their race, their civilization, and their capacity for self-government.<sup>39</sup>

And so with these conflicting and competing visions of the character of Cuban masses and leaders, the answer to the question of whether they were civilized enough to rule themselves was in real, although heavily lopsided, dispute.<sup>40</sup> Cuban leaders, perceiving themselves to act before observant and powerful American forces, opted therefore to perform their capacity for civilization. That choice was, in many ways, appealing, for to demonstrate their capacity would be self-vindicating. It was also, clearly, instrumental: for to demonstrate it was also, they hoped, to produce a specific result: the evacuation of American forces and the establishment of an unambiguously free and independent republic.

But the demonstration, if it was to work, required two things. First, it required an audience capable of being swayed, a condition which it is not clear the Americans met. Second, and more importantly, it required a radical change in Cuban self-presentation. In the late 1880s and early 1890s, Spanish representations of the Cuban independence movement,

and of Cuba in general, had prompted a very different kind of performance from Cuban nationalists. In explicit contrast to Spanish portrayals of Cuban race war, nationalists had powerfully and persuasively constructed the nation's unity—a unity premised on the idea of racelessness and on the notion that racial union achieved in anticolonial insurgency converted black and white into simply Cuban.<sup>41</sup> But if that was a representation which had served to allay anxieties and to discredit Spanish assertions, it was also one incapable of reassuring their American audience or of guaranteeing an American withdrawal. Instead of spotlighting racial unity, nationalists opted to perform their civility, their modernity, and their closeness to Americans.

That decision was, no doubt, in part strategic: it was the only version of civilization remotely capable of persuading Americans of Cuban capacity for self-government. But it was also surely more than strategic, for in their choice they revealed a consensus with American occupiers that was forming even before the Americans arrived. Before American intervention, leaders began to define civilization as a requisite for leadership and to equate that civilization with education, manners, and comportment. Before American arrival, they had already expressed interest in promoting only particular kinds of men—educated and cultured men, men they called civilized and worthy. And before American arrival, they had already registered their disdain at the prominence of men they characterized as uncultured, ignorant, and coarse.<sup>42</sup> So one effect of American occupiers' demand (but probable unwillingness) to see proof of civilization was to encourage white Cuban leaders in a pattern that was already acquiring new and significant force.

With the war over in August, American officials began asking their Cuban allies for recommendations about personnel, about whom to appoint to positions of prominence. They warned Cubans that to suggest the wrong people was to announce to the world their incapacity for self-government.<sup>43</sup> They sought recommendations from patriot leaders, but also from landowners and businessmen, and then they made their appointments. Some Cubans were gratified with the results: "The American authorities," reported one insurgent general, "are surrounding themselves with the people of most worth." American appointments to positions in Havana led one historian later to conclude that "nobody could have objected. [The appointees] were known patriots, proven men, and not a few wealthy property owners and renowned academics. It had been a very long time, indeed if ever it had happened, that Havana was represented by so select a group."<sup>44</sup>

But that assertion notwithstanding, many people did object, insisting that preferences should rest with Cuban veterans.<sup>45</sup> José Isabel Herrera, a black sugar worker who joined the Cuban insurrection as a teenager,

recalled later how the army was disbanded, each member given seventy-five dollars to return to homes that no longer existed, and told that they were uneducated and therefore not qualified for public jobs. With resignation, he concluded, "Virtue tends always to go barefoot on stones and thorns, while those who represent infamy and degradation recline on soft cushions in golden carriages." And Ricardo Batrell, another black sugar worker who joined at age fifteen, recalled as well how "bits of prejudice present even in the fields of the revolution" became, during the transition to peace, outright betrayal.<sup>46</sup>

But the disempowerment of some and the empowerment of others in 1898, however awkward, served the purpose of the performance of civilization that leaders wanted to enact. First, it highlighted the presence and importance of white men, educated and refined, many of them trained in the United States. Second, some thought, it highlighted Cuban capacity for democracy, civil authority, and self-rule. The fact that non-combatants and even former enemies could rule in conjunction with former insurgents was proof of Cuban rationality and disposition to democracy:

The great revolution of liberation, pure and magnanimous, without vengeance and rancor . . . did not enforce a program, neither did it impose its men. . . . Armed with moral virtue, it invited everyone to collaborate for the good of the nation. In this manner, the best men, of all beliefs, came to the public arena. In executive posts alongside the liberators were men who had served Spain, men who had worn their uniforms even until the very eve of peace. In the legislature, perorated, respected and loved, old colonial members of the retrograde conservative party; and in the judiciary appointments were the great autonomist talents and the best among the functionaries who had served Spain. The Liberators served the country as well, *but according to their capacity and not according to their revolutionary merits.*<sup>47</sup>

To that particular vision of inclusion, leaders gave the name "the politics of peace, harmony, and unity." Always they insisted on leaving the war behind and entering a future where Spaniards and Cubans were brothers. "One thing is war and another is peace; in peace we are all brothers, just as in war we were before adversaries," said José Mayía Rodríguez.<sup>48</sup> And to some that ability to close ranks with their former enemies might have seemed the ultimate sign of Cuba's right to self-rule and their capacity for democracy, a sign of their ability to meet the standards set by the United States and also to make real Martí's aspirations to a "cordial republic." But to others it might have seemed rather like an unwelcome return—to an earlier time when they were not yet rebels but still lawyers and students, planters and workers, cultured and uncultured; or (for those old enough to remember) to a

moment earlier still when insurgent leaders circumscribed the freedom given to slaves by decreeing that they were all legally required to work for the republic "according to their capacities."<sup>49</sup> For leaders now to speak so exclusively about the union of Cubans and Spaniards also surely seemed like a choice, a highly selective vision of unity—one that stressed fraternity with their former colonizers at the expense of the unity between black and white that had become so central to nationalist thinking only years earlier. Although this change of emphasis had been predicted earlier by soldiers and officers of color, in mid- and late-1898 the change must have seemed sudden and foreboding. In the town of Gibara, in Oriente, for instance, where the declaration of peace prompted Cuban officers of color to host a party for everyone in town, some of the revelers might have been just recovering from their celebration when more parties were announced the next day: one party for whites in the center of town, and another for blacks and mulattos in a house on the town's outskirts.<sup>50</sup>

## CONCLUSION

United States intervention, at its most basic level, blocked an independence sought through violent and peaceful means for three decades. American presence, its politics, and its presumption imposed on Cubans a test for which they had not bargained—one ostensibly meant to assess the capacity of Cubans for self-government. After thirty years of mobilization, independence, it seemed, depended on Americans' willingness to leave; and that willingness, they said, would be determined by how Cubans performed. Many Cubans opted to do that which they thought Americans would recognize as expressions of their capacity for self-government. They eschewed confrontation, even though independence had not quite been won. They embraced civility, order, and reconciliation, and then they hoped Americans would take note and leave. But a problem plagued their decision, for it was not the promise of civility or of rapprochement with Spaniards that had driven thousands of men to anticolonial insurgency. And for those things which had—the promise of equality, for instance, or the end of colonial rule—the Americans and their test left little room. American evacuation, then, appeared to require from Cuban nationalists an evasion of principles central to the nationalist movement for thirty years.

That change of emphasis implied as well another transformation in the ways Cuban nationalists represented the nation for their American audience. The independence effort had always been, in part, a battle of representation. To colonial claims about the impossibility of Cuban nationhood and the inevitability of race war, Cuban nationalists responded with a radically different picture of the nation, one where



black and white men fought together to defeat a backward and uncivilized Spain, to abolish slavery and all divisions of color and status. To images of black supremacy, nationalists had counterposed others of black and white union and the achievement of racelessness. But this particular representation of race and nationality, so important in the early 1890s, was in 1898 incapable of producing an American evacuation. And so those ideas, which were coming to dominate nationalist rhetoric, were eclipsed by other public depictions of Cuban nationhood—ones that stressed the prominence of educated white leaders, commonalities with American achievements, and the modern, civilized status of the would-be nation. That this struggle, which mirrored longstanding and central ones between racism and antiracism, would have to continue before the eyes of skeptical and anxious occupiers, helped overdetermine the outcome.

As if in a portent of sadder days to come, those first days of peace brought to the Cuban camp of Máximo Gómez a stranger, who asked politely if he could measure the skull of the venerable old general. The request and the stunned response of the audience, at once captured the tensions which defined the end of anticolonial insurgency in Cuba and suggested new tensions to emerge in a new imperial order. To the stranger's brazen question, Gómez responded with ire and incredulity: he placed his head only in the hands of barbers, he said, and then had the stranger removed from the camp. Besides, he added later indignantly, he was hardly a monkey on exhibit. From the disturbing encounter, Gómez concluded simply that the visitor had to have been insane—a plausible conclusion to so unprecedented a request and a forceful repudiation of a science that he perhaps suspected countered the revolution's message of racelessness. But days later, Gómez changed his mind; friends persuaded him that the visitor's intentions had been decent; that the study the visitor must be planning reflected the most recent trends in university scholarship (explained in great detail); and that surely the man wanted to measure his head only to prove something very favorable about the general. And so Gómez acquiesced, and the visitor returned to measure his skull.<sup>51</sup>

Gómez had sensed the misguidedness of the stranger's endeavor, but confronted with the armature of science, he backed away and allowed himself to be measured, literally, by standards he was not sure he accepted. So, too with Cuban nationalists. Having made one kind of movement for thirty years and having struggled internally to define a position on race, in 1898 nationalists greeted their own visitor equipped with its own test. Like Gómez they opted to take the test, to consent, and to leave aside for the moment convictions which, although central to their movement, would not serve the immediate purposes of proving

their worthiness by the visitor's standards. That decision was not always difficult, for many, despite antiracist convictions, also shared American beliefs about civilization and modernity. If they deplored Americans' challenge to their capacity and right to rule, they seemed often to share American judgments about the rights and capacities of their compatriots. And so we cannot know, for instance, what Máximo Gómez would have done had the stranger with the measuring string arrived to measure the skull of a black officer or soldier in his camp. But the point was that the visitor to Gómez's camp came to measure his own skull, just as American occupiers challenged, with the language of race, not only the capacity of black and mulatto Cubans but also the capacity of Cubans in general. So while white leaders on the eve of peace worried about the republican capacities of particular soldiers and officers, American disdain would be less selective. In that moment of transition in 1898 we can thus glimpse the shaping of another set of issues and problems: of how onto the terrain of local racial politics derived from colonial slavery and emancipation would be mapped another distinct map of racial precepts derived from a new imperial encounter between the United States and some islands of the sea.

In Cuba, the Americans would remain—this first time—for three and a half years. They said they would leave once the locals proved themselves capable of self-rule. But as evidence of that capacity they would accept only Cuban endorsement of the Platt Amendment, which (among other things) granted to the United States government the right to intervene in internal Cuban affairs to preserve Cuban independence and to protect (so read the text) "life, property, and individual liberty." And so, on 20 May 1902, with the Platt Amendment approved, the Americans left, but they retained the power to return at will.

About a year after U.S. evacuation, an American professor published a book of essays on topics seemingly unrelated to recent events in Cuba. The book's second essay began with the now famous and generally unchallenged line: "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line—the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea."<sup>52</sup> With that line, W.E.B. DuBois prophesied the antithesis of Martí's imagined century: "not the century of the struggle of races but of the affirmation of rights." Clearly DuBois's prediction was the more prescient. But the story told here suggests perhaps a countercurrent: that the truth and power of DuBois's statement rested in part on the disarming of the fragile anticolonial and antiracist promise of Cuba's nineteenth-century revolution.

#### Notes

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1. The population figures are from Cuba, *Cuadro estadístico de la siempre fiel isla de Cuba correspondiente al año 1846* (Havana: Imp. del Gobierno, 1847). The slave trade ones from Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba Between Reform and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 99; and Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 88. On slavery see Franklin Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba during the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970); Rebecca J. Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1865–1899* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), chap. 1; and Fernando Ortiz, *Los negros esclavos* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1987).

2. On the 1844 conspiracy, known as La Escalera, see especially Robert Paquette, *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict Between Empires over Slavery in Cuba* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988); on the 1864 conspiracy, see "Documento que trata de un conato de insurrección de esclavos en el partido de El Cobre," in Archivo Nacional de Cuba (hereafter ANC), Fondo Comisión Militar, leg. 124, exp. 5. Quote is from testimony of a 25 year old slave named Domingo.

3. José Antonio Saco, quoted in Jorge Ibarra, *Ideología mambisa* (Havana: Instituto Cubano del Libro, 1967), 25.

4. The 40 percent figure is from Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba Between Empires, 1878–1902* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), 106; the 60 percent one from Jorge Ibarra, *Cuba 1898–1921: Política y clases sociales* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1992), 187. Both figures are only estimates because army rosters from the final war of independence do not record racial identifications for soldiers. On the increasing absence of racial categories in the official records of the movement, see Ada Ferrer, "The Silence of Patriots: Race and Nationalism in Martí's Cuba" in *José Martí's Our America: From National to Hemispheric Cultural Studies*, eds. Jeffrey Belnap and Raúl Fernández (Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming, 1998).

5. Antonio Maceo, quoted in Ibarra, *Ideología*, 52.

6. On racial theory in the nineteenth century, see Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); George Mosse, *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); and Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995). On the impact of those theories in Latin America, see Ricard Graham, ed., *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870–1940* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990); and Nancy Leys Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991).

7. Both quotes are from José Martí; the comment on Darwin appears in "Un mes de vida norteamericana," and "textbook races" (razas de librería) appears in "Nuestra America," both in José Martí, *Obras Completas* (Havana: Editorial Nacional de Cuba, 1963–1965) 11: 146 and 6:15–23, respectively.

8. Walter LaFeber, and the "Wisconsin school" in general, broke from traditional interpretations that cast the country's emergence as an imperial power as a benevolent accident. Though LaFeber's work remains a critical contribution, the explanations for empire remain rooted in United States history. See, for example, LaFeber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of American Expansion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963). Among Americanists, the work of Philip Foner stands out as an exception to the rule. See his *The Spanish-Cuban-American War and the Birth of American Imperialism, 1895–1902* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 2 vols. Though Foner constructed an overly romantic portrait of Cuban insurgency, his work was pioneering in stressing the need to integrate the study of the pre-1898 Cuban revolution into the study of American intervention and expansion. Few Americanists have heeded his call since. The recent anthology edited by Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease, *Cultures*

of *United States Imperialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), for example, critiques the absence of empire in the study of United States history and literature, but the territories that came to form that empire are remarkably absent from most of the articles in the collection, or they are present only as almost interchangeable sites where American anxieties and desires unfold. Not surprisingly, Cuban (or Cubanist) historians have been much more willing to consider Cuban antecedents to American intervention. See especially Pérez, *Cuba Between Empires*.

9. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "An Unthinkable History: The Haitian Revolution as a Non-Event" in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 71.

10. Louis A. Pérez, "In the Service of the Revolution: Two Decades of Cuban Historiography, 1959–1979," *Hispanic American Historical Review* (hereafter HAHR), 60 (1980): 79–89.

11. For discussions of the ways in which nationalist (as well as Marxist) historiography reproduces some of the problems of colonial discourse, see especially Ranajit Guha, "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 45–86; Gyan Prakash, "Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Indian Historiography is Good to Think," in *Colonialism and Culture*, ed. Nicholas Dirks (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 353–88; and Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts," *Representations*, 37 (1992), 1–26.

12. For recent treatments of nationalism that focus on questions of divisions and multivocality, see especially Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); and Florencia Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

13. Ferrer, "The Silence of Patriots."

14. Ferrer, *Ambivalent Revolution*, chaps. 1–2.

15. *Ibid.*, chap. 3.

16. Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, 76.

17. Ferrer, *Ambivalent Revolution*, chap. 5.

18. Ferrer, "The Silence of Patriots."

19. "Comunicación diplomática encargando explorar la opinión oficial norteamericana sobre la anexión . . ." in Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, *Escritos* (Havana: Editorial Ciencias Sociales, 1974), 1: 143–44.

20. The rebel constitution of 1897 established the right of universal manhood suffrage, which was then also recognized in the 1901 constitution, passed during American occupation. See *Constituciones de la República de Cuba* (Havana: Academia de la Historia de Cuba, 1952), 37, 67. On debates over suffrage, see Pérez, *Cuba Between Empires*, chap. 16; and Alejandro de la Fuente, "'With All and for All': Race, Inequality, and Politics in Cuba, 1900–1930" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1996), chap. 3.

21. Manuel Arbelo, *Recuerdos de la última guerra por la independencia de Cuba, 1896 á 1898* (Havana: Impr. Tipografía Moderna, 1918), 304–305; Máximo Gómez, *Diario de Campaña, 1868–1898* (Havana: Biblioteca Nacional, 1986); Gen. Calixto García to Máximo Gómez, April 26, 1898, published in *Boletín del Archivo Nacional de Cuba*, 35 (1936):104–105.

22. George Clark Musgrave, *Under Three Flags in Cuba: A Personal Account of the Cuban Insurrection and Spanish-American War* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1899), 356.

23. Calixto García to General Shafter, July 19, 1898, in Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division (hereafter LC, MSS), William R. Shafter Papers, Reel 4. The letter appears in English.

24. On drunk American soldiers, see, for example, Musgrave, *Under Three Flags*, 356; M. Gomez, *Diario*, 363–64; and R. Ramírez to Capt. C.P. Johnson, Yaguajay, Sept. 2, 1898, in ANC, Fondo Máximo Gómez, leg. 16, exp. 2158. For controversies over

flags, see Calixto García to Tomás Estrada Palma, June 27, 1898, in *BAN* 35 (1936): 108–12; José de Armas to Gen. William R. Shafter, July 18, 1898, LC, MSS, William Shafter Papers, Reel 4. For a discussion of the incident over the words “República de Cuba,” see Carlos Muecke Bertel, *Patria y Libertad: En defensa del Ejército Libertador de Cuba como aliado a los americanos en 1898* (Camagüey: Ramentol y Boan, 1928), 230.

25. Calixto García to Tomás Estrada Palma, 23 Aug. 1898, in *BAN*, 35 (1936): 124–25.

26. Orestes Ferrara, *Mis relaciones con Máximo Gómez*, 3rd ed. (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1987), 215.

27. *Ibid.*, 175.

28. Leonard Wood to President of the United States, 27 November 1898, in LC, MSS, Leonard Wood Papers, Box 26.

29. Eusebio Hernández to Manuel Sanguily, 15 October 1898, in *Eusebio Hernández: Ciencia y patria*, ed. Rafael Cepera (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1991), 112–14; and Gonzalo de Quesada, interview with *La Discusión*, January 1899, in Rafael Martínez Ortiz, *Cuba, los primeros años de independencia* (Paris: Imprimerie Artistique Lux, 1921) 1:34–35.

30. General James H. Wilson to General John R. Brooke, 9 June and 12 June 1899, in LC, MSS, James H. Wilson Papers, Box 4; ANC, Fondo Audiencia de Santiago, “Causa por incitación a rebelión,” leg. 59, exp. 11; Ferrara, *Mis relaciones*, 223; and David F. Healy, *The United States in Cuba, 1898–1902* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963), 120.

31. Many Cubans seemed to share American stereotypes about Latin American propensities for militarism. For example, at issue in the long-standing and complicated hostility between the civilian and rebel branches of the independence movement was the conviction among the *civilistas* that the power of the military wing would result only in an unstable republic, in endemic civil wars, and in the kind of political chaos that had characterized much of post-independence Spanish America. Even among many military officers, there existed a very strong association between Latin America, military supremacy, and political instability. Calixto García’s claim—that he “preferred to see [his] country sink in the Gulf of Mexico rather than see it governed by a satrap as had occurred in the majority of South American republics”—was not entirely atypical. García to Tomás Estrada Palma, 22 March 1898, in *BAN*, 35 (1936): 102–103. For similar sentiments expressed during the Ten Years’ War, see “Comunicación diplomática encargando explorar la opinión oficial norteamericana sobre la anexión” in Céspedes, *Escritos*, 1:144.

32. See Pérez, *Cuba Between Empires*, 198–201; and Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 61–62. For more general discussions of the simultaneous representation of colonials as violent and passive, savage and childlike, see Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 27.

33. Both quoted in Foner, *The Spanish-Cuban-American War*, 2: 394–95.

34. Bartolomé Masó, Manifiesto, 1 September 1898, reprinted in Arbelo, *Recuerdos*, 326.

35. Calixto García to General Shafter, 19 July 1898, in LC, MSS, William R. Shafter Papers, Reel 4. The letter appears in English.

36. George Stocking, *Race, Culture, and Evolution: Essays in the History of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 35–38, 131–32; and Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 29.

37. All quoted in Pérez, *Cuba Between Empires*, 199–200.

38. General James H. Wilson to Professor Goldwin Smith, 19 January 1899, in LC, MSS, James H. Wilson Papers, Box 43; Statement of Mr. William D. Smith, 3 June 1897, in U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report of the Foreign Relations Committee Relative to Affairs in Cuba*, 366–67.

39. Much recent scholarship argues that racism played a central role in U.S. imperialism, either facilitating empire by providing its advocates with justifications for

stewardship over "nonwhite" people and territories, or hindering imperialism by providing its opponents with racialized arguments against any kind of bond with the territories in question. For a recent review of this literature see Eric T.L. Love, "Race Over Empire: Racism and United States Imperialism, 1865–1900," Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1997, introduction and chapter 1. Both views (of race as either facilitator or obstacle to empire), however, simply assume the nonwhite racial status of the new colonies as a given, without paying attention to the ways in which that status might have had to be constructed out of the daily life of empire. New research is now beginning to address these questions; see, for example, Virginia R. Domínguez, "Exporting U.S. Concepts of Race: Are There Limits to the U.S. Model," *Social Research* (Summer 1998): 369–99. On the quotidian construction of race in non-imperial contexts, see especially, Thomas Holt, "Marking: Race, Race-making, and the Writing of History," *American Historical Review* 100 (1995):1–20.

40. The lopsidedness of the dispute came, of course, not only from the flexibility and perniciousness of racial theory, but also from American material interests in empire. On the latter, see especially LaFeber, *The New Empire*.

41. For a general discussion of nationalisms and the performance of unity, see Prakash, "After Colonialism," 9. On performance more generally, see especially Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), especially 134–41.

42. Ferrer, *Ambivalent Revolution*, chap. 7.

43. Leonard Wood to President of the United States, 27 November 1898, in LC, MSS, Leonard Wood Papers, Box 26.

44. Demetrio Castillo, et al. to Gobierno de la República de Cuba, 12 September 1898, in ANC, Fondo Maximo Gómez, leg. 14, exp. 2033a; and Martínez Ortiz, *Cuba, los primeros años*, 1: 28–29.

45. Tasker H. Bliss, "Annual Report of the Collector of Customs for Cuba . . ." in *Civil Report of Major-General John R. Brooke* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), 374–75; "Borrador del acta de reunión de la Comisión Ejecutiva del 24 de diciembre de 1898," in ANC, Fondo Revolución de 1895, leg. 54, exp. 7505; and "Dos tendencias, *El Porvenir* (New York), 13 August 1898.

46. José Isabel Herrera, *Impresiones de la Guerra de Independencia* (Havana: Nuevos Rumbos, 1948), p. 160; and Ricardo Batrell Oviedo, *Para la historia: apuntes autobiográficos de la vida de Ricardo Batrell Oviedo* (Havana: Seoane y Alvarez, 1912), 12.

47. Ferrara, *Mis relaciones*, 264–65. Emphasis mine.

48. Enrique Barbarrosa, *Patria y Libertad: El General Máximo Gómez y su política de paz, unión y concordia* (Havana: Tip. Los Niños Huérfanos, 1899), 33–36.

49. Ferrara, *Mis relaciones*, 219; Segundo Corvisón, *En la guerra y en la paz* (Havana: Cultural, 1939), 468–69.

50. Muecke Bertel, *Patria y libertad*, 231.

51. Ferrara, *Mis relaciones*, 212–13.

52. W.E.B. DuBois, "Of the Dawn of Freedom," in *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1903), 13.

