From Cuba to Ybor City: race, revolution, nationalism and Afro-Cuban identity

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A Thesis
entitled
From Cuba to Ybor City: Race, Revolution, Nationalism and Afro-Cuban Identity
by
Elizabeth Becker
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Masters of Arts Degree in History

Diane Britton, Ph.D., Committee Chair

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The University of Toledo
May 2013
An Abstract of

From Cuba to Ybor City: Race, Revolution, Nationalism and Afro-Cuban Identity

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This research project explores race, nationalism, and Afro-Cuban identity in the small Florida ethnic enclave of Ybor City in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It also examines slavery, race, and revolution in nineteenth-century Cuba. The study reveals how Cuban ethnicity and patriotic solidarity ultimately trumped racial divisiveness in the Ybor City. Although the Jim Crow Laws deeply penetrated all levels of society in the U.S. South, black and white Cubans coexisted within the tiny bubble outside of Tampa during the last few decades of the nineteenth century. Historically, scholars have rarely focused on the voices of Afro-Cubans during this critical time period of Cuba’s nation building project, even though black Cubans contributed substantially to Cuba Libre and the Cuban Liberation army. By illuminating the Afro-Cuban immigrant story amidst the violent times of the Jim Crow South, the Spanish-American War, and their relations with the white Cuban exile community who escaped Spanish persecution leading up to the war, a complex and passionate set of characters are revealed who defined themselves as being Cuban, black, as well as immigrants.
For Mom and Adam

“A Cuban is more than white, more than mulatto, more than black.” ¹

# Table of Contents

Abstract iii

Table of Contents v

I. Introduction: A Brief History of Cuban and United States Relations 1

II. Slavery, Race and Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Cuba 23
   A. Part I: Race and Slavery in Nineteenth-Century Cuba 23
   B. Part II: Afro-Cuban Dedication to *Cuba Libre* 46

III. The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Race, Nationalism and Identity 62
    Part I: The Evolution and Background of Ybor City 67
    Part II: The Evolution of Afro-Cuban Nationalism, Blackness and Identity 81

IV. Conclusion: Race Relations in Present Day Ybor City 124

Bibliography 140
Chapter One: Introduction

A Brief History of Cuban and United States Relations

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a quilt of ethnic enclaves emerged in urban areas as the “new” immigrants poured into the United States. Most often, constant cultural interaction resulted within these communities between foreign immigrants and native-born Americans. For some of these new arrivals, facing discrimination and prejudice was a daily occurrence, while others had little trouble assimilating into mainstream American life. Depending on what country they originated from, the immigrant experience differed greatly from one individual to the next. When looking at traditional studies of ethnic communities and constructing an immigrant identity, they often tend to ignore their “old world soul,” to use Marcus Eli Ravage’s term. In the case of Cuba’s immigrant population near the end of the nineteenth century, it is near impossible to disregard their country’s political, social, racial and economic situation in relation to the United States. By examining race, nationalism, and Afro-Cuban identity in Ybor City during the decades leading up to the Spanish-American War, as well as exploring slavery, race, and revolution in nineteenth-century Cuba, a far more detailed and complete picture reveals itself. Although Jim Crow Laws deeply penetrated all levels of society in the American South, black and white Cubans coexisted within

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2 Thomas Archdeacon, Becoming American: An Ethnic History (New York: The Free Press, 1983), 112. Archdeacon states that the new immigration wave ranged from 1890-1930. These migrants created diverse ethnic neighborhoods that characterized urban America until the middle of the twentieth century.

3 Throughout the paper, “American” refers to the United States.

4 Marcus Eli Ravage, An American in the Making: The Life Story of an Immigrant (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1917), 60. Ravage concentrated on European immigrants, stating that they were not “blank sheets to be written on,” nor had they “sprung from nowhere.” According to Ravage, these immigrants brought with them “deep-rooted tradition, a system of culture and tastes and habits.”

5 The Spanish-American War is also referred to as the final Cuban War for Independence (1895-1898).
Ybor City during the last decades of the nineteenth century. Defying the laws and customs of their host country, *Cuba Libre* and the quest for freedom and equality essentially melded the two Cuban races together within this tiny bubble outside of Tampa.\(^6\) Thus, in the decades leading up to the Spanish-American War, Cuban ethnicity and patriotic solidarity briefly overshadowed racial divisiveness in the small Floridian ethnic enclave of Ybor City.\(^7\)

By illuminating the Afro-Cuban immigrant story amidst the violent times of the Jim Crow South, the Spanish-American War, and their relations with the white Cuban exile community who escaped Spanish persecution leading up to the war, one is confronted with a complex and passionate set of characters who defined themselves as being Cuban, black, as well as immigrants. Typically, accounts of the Spanish-American War reveal only part of the story: the Cuban voice, particularly the black one, is simply left out, strangely missing from its own war and history. Thus, a narrative on the perceptions and actions of Afro-Cubans, both during the Spanish-American War and before, requires a new set of questions, sources, and a new perspective. What was the relationship between the United States and Cuba during the nineteenth century? How did Afro-Cubans view the United States and Spain, and how did the United States perceive Cubans, both black and white? How were Afro-Cubans in Cuba socially and racially treated in the years leading up to and during the War for Independence? How did black

\(^6\) *Cuba Libre* is translated to “free Cuba.”
\(^7\) As discussed throughout the paper, particularly in the beginning of Chapter One, race was difficult to define in nineteenth-century Cuban society. For Cubans, race was socially constructed and a quite malleable concept. In Cuba, defining one’s color was often complex due to the historical racial mixing through the occurrence of mixed marriages and relationships and the idea of *mestizaje*. In late nineteenth-century Cuba, the use of the term “black” was a topic of public debate, centered on whether race was to be explicitly identified or not. Ybor City was an isolated, predominately Latin, ethnic community that resided on the outskirts of Tampa where residents appeared to adhere more to the social mores of their home country, Cuba.
Cubans residing in ethnic enclaves in Florida perceive the war, imperialism, and dreams of independence? How did the mutual aide societies, so prevalent and resourceful in Cuba, adapt when transplanted to the United States? Did they serve a similar function to their members? Moreover, what impact did the Jim Crow South and the Cuban War for Independence have on black and white Cuban relations and on Afro-Cuban identity?

Like a temptress drawing in her suitor, Cuba held the North American imagination throughout the nineteenth century, enticing it with her warm climate, abundant resources and simple way of life. Going back to the eighteenth century, the United States has maintained a fascination with the island “almost in sight:” From James Polk and Franklin Pierce attempting to buy the island, to William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt questioning Cuba’s sovereignty, Americans attempted to acquire the island without success. Thus, by the outbreak of the Cuban War of Independence (1895-1898), when Cuba’s freedom was transforming from a mere dream into reality, the United States intervened. In 1896, Texas senator Roger Mills summarized the history of American policy: “It has been the settled policy of our country, of all parties, at all times, that this all important key shall never pass out of the feeble hands of Spain to any other Government except that of the United States.”

Why did this “all important key” seem to captivate the United States?

Through the power of their own figurative depictions, Americans historically rendered the need to possess Cuba as essential to their own well being. Considering Cuba was so close, many Americans were fearful that social upheaval and political discourse on the island would threaten to turn their peaceful neighborhood into a source of conflict,

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jeopardizing their own economic and security interests. During the Cuban wars for
independence, Americans watched with uncertainty, trepidation and fear as their southern
smaller neighbor fought for its liberty—not for Cuba’s sake or the lives they were
undoubtedly losing, but at the prospect of Cuba becoming a nation in their own right. All
throughout the nineteenth century, Americans threatened war to prevent, in John
Calhoun’s words, Cuba from passing “into other hands but ours.”9 Throughout this period
and even before, the idea of Cuba’s freedom was rarely deemed “plausible” or “tenable.”
However, considering its own history of revolution and freedom, the United States could
hardly dismiss the idea of Cuba’s sovereignty all together. Cuban historian Louis Peréz
Jr. maintains that “The ideal of self-government, so very much at the heart of the
discourse by which the Americans celebrated the sources of their own nation, could not
easily be suppressed from the national narrative.” On the other hand, American
Presidents and politicians throughout the nineteenth century viewed Cuba as
“incompetent,” in the words of Henry Clay and John Quincy Adams.10 Simply put, the
idea of Cuba being sovereign was not a plausible option.

To further their argument against Cuba’s self-governance, many Americans noted
the high proportion of Africans, people of African descent, as well as Spaniards, on the
island. This mixture was emulative of a people, like the rest of Latin America,
“incapable” of successful self-government. South Carolina representative William Boyce
scorned the Spanish Creole race of Cuba as they were the “worst kind of materials with
which to build up republic institutions.” Essayist Edmund Wood argued that good

9 Louis Peréz Jr., Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos (Chapel
Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 44.
10 Ibid, 38.
government had “never been successfully exercised by any people of Spanish origin or training.” Many Americans were seemingly drawing their assumptions on their understanding of history as a moral system. They viewed the history of Latin America and its mixed race population as disordered, backward, uncivilized, and lacking the aptitude and tools necessary to self-govern.

Once the first war for independence broke out in 1868, known as the Ten Years War (1868-1878), as many as 12,000 Afro-Cubans joined the insurrection against Spain. The Afro-Cuban Antonio Maceo, a.k.a. the “Bronze Titan,” as well as his black comrade, Máximo Gómez, fearlessly led their fellow black and white Cubans to fight for Cuba Libre. Considering more than a third of the Cuban population was black, their assistance and contribution to the rebellion was indispensable. Although they were defeated in the Ten Years War, the Cuban rebels continued to relentlessly plan their next attack against Spain.

One consequence of the Ten Years War was the politicization of Afro-Cubans. Their views of equality and humanity were debated and called into question as they sought to elevate the status of Afro-Cubans in society and change the current racist policies of the Cuban government. At the same time, due to the large percentage of black Cubans who fought alongside, as well as led, white Cuban soldiers, many citizens of the United States were shocked and alarmed. In addition, the memory of the Haitian revolution was still fresh in the minds of many Americans, further promoting the idea of Cuba’s ineptness for sovereignty.

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11 Ibid., 39.
When analyzing the complex, tangled and even dark relationship between the United States and its southern neighbor, one has to look within Cuba’s culture, traditions, and the way its people viewed and portrayed the northern larger country to understand the nature of their bond. “The place to start is not in the United States, with its fundamentally defensive and reactive foreign policy, but in the individual Latin American countries,” Richard Collin states in “Symbiosis versus Hegemony.” Collin describes the relationship between the two countries at the turn of the nineteenth century as “symbiotic:” both countries benefited economically, as well as culturally, from their exchange. “Culture preceded diplomacy and the American cultural expansion was already well developed before diplomacy followed during and after the Spanish American War.”

Virginia Bouvier agrees, stating that both Cubans and North Americans share a unique past, that “their” history is “ours.” In Whose America: The War of 1898 and the Battles to Define the Nation, Bouvier states, “It is a history that is necessary to our future as a nation, to our knowledge of ourselves and others, and to our understanding of the complex relationship between and within America, particularly with our Latin American neighbors.” It is essential for scholars to step back and reflect on the Cuban and American historic connection, for it allows them the opportunity to move beyond themselves, encounter other viewpoints, and to respect the differences, as well as similarities, between the two nations.

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13 Ibid., 128. When referring to the broad term culture, Collin implies that it is “imaginative,” or at the center of the symbiosis paradigm.
In *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture*, Peréz transports readers back in time and allows them the opportunity to witness history from Cuban eyes. The book is centered on the Cuban encounter with the United States, and the ways that this encounter influenced the context in which Cubans formed their identity and nationality. Peréz analyzes the various parts of the whole story, from the Cuban revolutionary struggle against Spain and Cuba’s increasingly close relationship with the United States, to the ways Americans influenced their southern neighbor. The antecedents of their relationship reached deep into the nineteenth century: Cubans who searched for ways to express their nationality discovered much to choose from within the United States. Not only was it a critical time in forming a Cuban national identity, but for Americans as well. Peréz states, “They intruded on one another as the national character of each was in the process of formation, which is say that they entered each other’s national consciousness,” further adding that ultimately, “the character of each would retain permanent trace of this encounter.” As Cubans fought for their independence from Spain and entered the twentieth century, they undoubtedly paused to reflect on their complex and intricate historic connection with their American neighbor. To challenge America was, in essence, to challenge being Cuban.\(^\text{15}\) Many of the values Cubans held dear were of North American origin.

“The connections began early—almost at the beginning, in fact: first as frontiers of the same empire, later as colonies of rival empires.”\(^\text{16}\) Cubans and North Americans came to understand each other through frequent and close contact; at times while pursuing similar objectives, but others in defense of conflicting interests. Further

\(^{15}\) Peréz, *On Becoming Cuban*, 5, 6, 12.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 17.
illustrating this closeness, Peréz notes that the two peoples imitated each other and borrowed from the other’s culture and traditions; in essence, becoming “like” the other. “They populated each other’s worlds, where they presented a familiar presence and developed the type of familiarity often reserved for a people of the same nation.”\(^\text{17}\) The two cultures merged together, adapting and accommodating to one another.

Contact between the two nations was neither unilateral nor uniform and assumed many forms. In addition, these forms changed over time. The geographic placement of Cuba in relation to the United allowed for the frequent exchange of ideas, goods, and peoples throughout the centuries. After Cuba became open to world trade in 1818, Cuban-United States trade agreements began to replace the Spanish ones.\(^\text{18}\) Both of their economies adjusted to the other’s participation, and in the process, developed vital linkages that each depended on. They discovered very early that one country’s needs could be uniquely met by the other.

Access to their northern neighbor’s market made Cuba’s sugar production grow exponentially, as Cubans growers quickly developed new ways of manufacturing and producing their main export. American businesses, particular sugar, bought up large tracts of land in Cuba. By the 1870s, the United State accounted for 84% of Cuba’s total exports. By the 1890s, Americans had more than $50 million invested in Cuba and their annual trade, mostly in sugar, was worth nearly $100 million. Cubans developed a cost-effective system that allowed them to rely on food imports for internal consumption as opposed to sacrificing sugar exports for external markets. The United States acted both as a market and a merchant, providing Cubans with the necessary manufactured and

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 6.  
\(^{18}\) Ibid., 17.

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individualized supplies from a short distance, in a relatively short period of time, and a reasonably low transportation cost. Creole planters likened themselves to American businessmen, as they increasingly relied on American technology, information and wealth for their own growth. The technological advancements brought to Cuba from the United States included the railroad, steam power, and telegraph, which served “to shape all facets of Cuban economic activity.”

As the American presence grew throughout the nineteenth century, so did Spanish authorities’ wariness, criticism and animosity toward Americans and Cubans. In the late 1850s and early 1860s, Spanish generals lamented over the “foreign” presence of the “American Union” which not only spread its language, but its ideas to both sexes of all ages and classes. Spanish authorities unsuccessfully tried to restrict American acquisition of property on the island, as Americans could be seen everywhere on the shores of the tiny island. “Havana is crowded with Americanos,” American George W. Williams observed in 1855, while others commented that certain Cuban regions could “boast of more English-speaking society than many other foreign places,” and “have more character of American than Spanish settlements.”

Observing the similarities between the small island and the United States, English traveler Anthony Trollope asserted in 1862, “Havana will soon become as much American as New Orleans.”

By the mid-1860s, one American commented on the number of U.S. citizens residing in a certain province: “our language is more common there than in any other

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19 Ibid., 18.
20 Ibid., 22.
21 Ibid., 21.
22 Ibid., 16.
Cuban city, and the customs of the place are more Americanized.” In fact, learning English became almost a requirement for Cubans seeking work, and those who were trained in the States were privileged. One Cuban city, Cardenas, was commonly referred to as an “American city” because of the number of Americans walking through the streets. The New York Times reported: “Cuba is simply overrun with Americans of all ages, of all conditions of life, of all professions, and of no professions... Years ago the rush was to the west of the United States; now the tide has turned southwest to Cuba.”

Just as Americans were seductively drawn to the tropical island, Cubans of all social classes were enticed by the northerners’ commodities and way of life. Regardless if Cubans simply traveled up north or set up permanent residence in the United States, they were ultimately influenced socially, economically, and politically. Considering Cuba is a mere ninety miles off Florida’s coast, the majority of Cubans found themselves in that particular region upon their arrival to the United States. The various cities in Florida not only served as viable economic and cultural sites for residence, but they also served as an escape from the violent persecution by the Spanish. By 1867, at the beginning of what was to be later known as the Ten Years War (1868-1878), Cubans rallied together under the slogan, “A Esapna no se le convence, se le vence!” During the war, waves of Cubans fled their war-torn country and migrated to the United States, forming the first true exile communities. One result of the Ten Years War was the disruption of the

23 Ibid., 21.
24 Ibid.
26 Leslie Bethel, Cuba: A Short History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 23. Translated to “Spain should be defeated, not convinced.” Other international factors that convinced Cubans that the European powers, especially Spain’s, could be defeated was Spain’s lack of military success in the Dominican Republic, the failure of Napoleon III in Mexico, resulting in the execution of Emperor Maximilian I.
economy, particularly the sugar plantations, on account of the land desecration and the Spanish government forcing the Cubans to pay for the cost of the war. During this time, some Cuban revolutionaries were influenced by nationalistic sentiment envisioned by philosophers like Félix Varela and poets like José María Heredia who championed a sovereign Cuba while maintaining close economic ties to the United States. Other, more radical Cubans, advocated for the annexation by the northern neighbor, a nation that symbolized both economic progress and political freedom.27

Burdened by high and unfair taxation, forced to finance Spain’s military conquests in Africa and Latin America, discriminated against by the Spanish elite residing on the island, and governed unjustly by the Spanish bureaucrats, native Cubans increasingly resented and rebelled against the oppressive, Spanish presence. Cuba Libre cost Cubans dearly, for all suffered in some capacity whether economically, politically, or physically. The Ten Years War was followed by the Guerra Chiquita (Little War, 1879), and finally the War of Independence (1895-1898). Louis Peréz Jr. asserts, “In all, thirty years of intermittent revolution and repression, successive actions of reprisal and revenue, pillage and plunder of homes destroyed and lives disrupted.”28 Those seeking a better life looked to the United States, a country they were familiar with socially, culturally, and economically.

During this period of social and political unrest and economic insecurity in Cuba, some of the more wealthy Cubans who traveled up North became American citizens because it protected them from Spanish authority. Once deemed American citizens, some Cubans took jobs in the U.S. government, schools, companies, or they returned to Cuba

27 Ibid., 22.
28 Peréz, On Becoming Cuban, 97.
to serve American interests. The Havana Post reported in 1900, “Cubans who have lived in the United States have taken on many of America’s ways and are a seed whose sowing is sure to bring good to the island.”

Thousands of Cubans traveled to the United States to learn American customs and ways of life. American education and culture was a means to modernity and a better life. The colonial educational system was simply unable to meet Cuban needs. In 1891, Manuel Valdes Rodriquez lamented, “We have been left without schools, without books, without teachers, and without students.”

Many American educated Cubans not only attained status, but also, and more important, they were prepared for change. Peréz asserts, “Perhaps no other single connection so challenged the premises on which Spanish colonialism rested.”

In 1887, a native of Key West remarked, “These immigrants will take back to their homeland the habits acquired in this great school of democracy.” Many Cubans viewed Americans as living the “good life,” and attempted to replicate it by importing American goods such as sewing machines, hotels, and Yacht clubs. From advertisements on billboards promoting Yankee beer, to American-themed restaurants, the northern giant’s presence was undeniable. One American observed Cuban boys with “their amateur photographic apparatus, with which they take pictures of everything in the heavens above and the earth beneath.”

As they consumed more and more American goods, they acquired American tastes.

29 Ibid., 96.
30 Ibid., 33. Although the public schools were desegregated, they were in such poor condition and suffered from a lack of resources that both races benefitted very little.
31 Ibid., 35.
32 Ibid., 96.
33 Ibid., 62.
34 Ibid., 72.
As an expression of change and resistance to Spain, Cubans frequented the “barbaric” Spanish bull fights less, and attended in droves American themed baseball games in Cuba. In fact, by the year 1878, every Cuban town had a baseball team and used English words when referring to plays.\textsuperscript{35} The American game offered access to modernity, while giving a sense of collective action and instilled a sense of national pride. Cubans of all social classes, ages and sex cheered together for their favorite team or player. “The game of baseball,” one Cuban observed in 1889, “has the means…of bringing into close and harmonious commingling the most humble classes with the highest ones, and out of the solidarity created by the supporters of each team emerges a rehearsal for democracy.”\textsuperscript{36}

Another visible sign of Americanization was revealed in the Cuban departure from Catholicism and their allure to other religions, such as Protestantism. Many associated Spain and colonization with the Catholic Church, while Protestantism was viewed as empowering and a gateway toward a more secular and liberal state. Spanish authorities actually imprisoned or exiled Protestant clergymen in effort to suppress the religion’s influence. Peréz claims that Protestantism actually contributed to the dissolution of the Spanish claim and further ignited flames of Cuban resentment toward the Mother Country.\textsuperscript{37}

Convinced that Spain was unwilling and unfit to support Cuba’s progress toward modernity, Cubans of all sectors of the population turned their backs on the European country. The degree that Spain lagged behind in sciences, industry and technology

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 62.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 60.
represented a major obstacle for Cuba. The fact that Spain lacked the material resources and the technical means for development revealed that it was incapable of modernizing. Thus, in the eyes of many Cubans, to remain tied to Spain was to remain in the past, on the outskirts of civilization. One Cuban author lamented in the late nineteenth century, “If we are to be Spaniards only to represent the Motherland as one of the most backward people in the world…we must insist with devotion and resolution: at that cost we do not wish to be Spaniards.”

Before long, Cubans of all social classes and races frequently traveled to the United States to conduct business, integrating themselves directly into the North American economy by buying, selling, investing, and borrowing. By the 1880s, Cubans introduced their own industry and innovation into the United States, assembling the material and human resources to promote economic and technological development. Cigar production transformed local economies across Florida, employing thousands of Cubans and other immigrants, as well as developing commercial and residential property. Those who had previously worked in the cigar factories in Cuba already had the expertise and tools necessary to prosper in the newly relocated northern neighbor’s cigar factories.

While working in the cigar factories both in Cuba and in the United States, black and white Cubans worked side by side. Afro-Cuban cigar workers composed 20-25% of the labor force, and their standard of living was comparable to their white Cuban comrades because they earned the same pay and had the same amount of power and

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38 Ibid., 86.
39 Ibid., 31. By the 1890s, an estimated $25 million from Cuba were on deposit in US banks.
influence in the labor unions. While working, cigar workers listened to la lectura.\textsuperscript{40} This individual, or lecturer, was hired to read selections chosen by the cigar factory workers. If they paid a certain amount of money, workers were allowed to vote on a particular reading. Often, these readings ranged from poems, novels, Cuban newspapers or revolutionary rhetoric. The lector ultimately provided a form of unity for the cigar workers, bonding them together through the words of Victor Hugo and Cuban nationalists such as José Martí. The chosen orator recalled various wars of independence, ranging from the French Revolution and Simón Bolívar’s campaign, and educated the workers on politics and culture, reading works such as \textit{Don Quixote}. Not only was it a form of entertainment during the mundane task of rolling and stuffing cigars, but the read aloud also served as an educational resource for the workers.

For many of these Cuban cigar workers, vital elements of their identity were forged in the United States. They viewed the United States as the best example of what history had to offer, because they could assemble freely, vote, and speak openly. One Cuban lamented when comparing the United States with his own country, “I think of Cuba with tears and pain.”\textsuperscript{41} The United States was viewed as an open field of exchange ideas, as Cubans could read and discuss what was “forbidden” by the Spanish. The northern country became a perfect base to form and organize independence movements. Cuban revolutionary leaders José Martí and Tómas Estrada Palma both spent time in the United States, actually forming the Cuban Revolutionary Party on American soil.

\textsuperscript{40} William Durbin, \textit{El Lector} (New York: Yearling, 2006), 3. El lectura originated in Cuba in nineteenth-century Cuba and spread to the United States. In 1865, Havana granted its workers the right to listen to readings aloud, a “radical change” in the work environment. Originally, workers would take turns reading pieces aloud and would be compensated for the work hours lost during their readings. Years later, the factories hired permanent lectores to read to their workers.

\textsuperscript{41} Peréz, \textit{On Becoming Cuban}, 62.
Cuba Libre was an extremely powerful unifying agent for the Cuban exile population in the United States. When both black and white Cubans first landed in Tampa, they were forged together by the idea of revolutionary nation building. Historian Susan Greenbaum asserts, “In their exiled quest for nationhood, racial boundaries between Cubans were deliberately obscured, although never forgotten.” During the early 1880s, Tampa had a mere 720 residents, a third of which were Cuban. Ybor City’s founder, Vincent Martinez Ybor, decided to build his cigar factory on the outskirts of the city, forming a true “satellite” of Cuba itself. Although a refined Spanish gentleman, the cigar factory owner espoused the idea of Cuban independence. His city and factory were desegregated, wages were based on merit as opposed to color, and race discrimination was reportedly “subtle.” When Martí visited the Cuban enclave of Ybor City, he declared to his audience, “This will be a new revolution in which all Cubans, regardless of color, have participated.” According to Martí and his followers, because blacks fought so bravely in battle during the Ten Years War, and whites officially “ended” slavery in 1886, the two races were now able to live in “harmony.” The looming war with Spain and the distant hope for racial equality was becoming more of a reality by the end of the nineteenth century as both black and white Cubans rallied together under the flag of sovereignty. In effort to unite the races under the banner of Cuba Libre, Martí condemned racism while urging whites to forsake racial pride and blacks to expunge their anger.

43 Ibid., 43.
44 Ibid., 66.
An example of the racial unity Martí referred to was the short-lived *El Club Nacional Cubano*, developed in Tampa in 1899 to assist both Afro-Cuban and white Cubans in their revolutionary quest. The mutual aide society was a crucial element in the transnational strategy of both Afro-Cuban and white Cuban cigar makers. It proved to be a haven for the wearied birds of passage and served as a framework for constructing and sustaining a community into which they could become integrated easily. Like the earlier Cuban groups set up in the United States, *El Club Nacional* was racially integrated, although after only a few months, the white majority ousted the black members.45

Subsequently, in 1900, the Afro-Cubans organized their own club, Martí-Maceo, named after the martyred white hero José Martí, and the black General Antonio Maceo, the “Bronze Titan,” who led the armed struggle for Cuban liberty. The blatant tribute to the two revolutionary heroes, one black and the other white, revealed the contradictory nature of the mutual aide society itself, its inception, and the betrayal by their white Cuban comrades. Martí-Maceo soon became a haven for black Cubans, a refuge from the encroaching racism and bigotry in the predominantly white Tampa society, and a material basis for collection.

As descendents of Africans like their African-American counterparts residing in the Jim Crow South, Afro-Cubans were deemed legally “black” in the United States. During this time, Reconstruction in Florida had just been overturned by Redemption as the former slaveholding elite had regained power. As a result of this label, blacks were soon denied voting rights and lacked the opportunities to attend school. They were also

45 An important question I tackled in my research is why *El Club Nacional* originally chose to include both races? Moreover, what were the founder’s goals or motivations in doing so and did they hope the integration would last?
restricted from entering public spaces deemed as “white,” forbidden to marry white individuals, and were assigned a certain second-class role in society.

Audrey Smedley states, “Race is a cultural invention…. [that] emerged as the dominant form of identity in those societies where it functions to stratify the social system.” ⁴⁶ This role in American society was largely, although not entirely, based on color. Greenbaum asserts that race is defined externally marked by appearance, whereas ethnicity has to do with the organization of individuals and families into specific groups based on a common identity and ancestral origin: “Race is a uniform you wear, and ethnicity is a team on which you play.” ⁴⁷ As they did back in Cuba, black Cubans who were light skinned or deemed “mulatto” could choose to pass and claim themselves as part of the white “team.” For them, race was not necessarily biological, but a social construct. Thus, ethnicity, or the act of organizing individuals or groups around a common national or ethnic identity or ancestral origin, overshadowed racial identity.

While Afro-Cubans were negotiating their place in society within the United States, their black and white countrymen actively sought to change the future for all Cubans during the final War of Independence on the island. For some Cubans, their close relationship with the United States was becoming uncertain and potentially dangerous. As the prospects of sovereignty loomed in the near future, many Cubans had mixed feelings toward their northern neighbor. Among the elite, there was a degree of consensus over the effects of the American link, as many became convinced that “Cuba had no future outside the sugar economy” and accepted the close relationship either “reluctantly” or

⁴⁶ Audrey Smedley, “‘Race’ and the Construction of Human Identity,” American Anthropologist 100.3 (Sept. 1998): 690.
⁴⁷ Greenbaum, 9.
“welcomed it positively.”**48** Others viewed their relationship as dangerous and threatening, claiming that Cuba was merely falling into the hands of yet another empire. Even the celebrated José Martí has historians pondering whether or not he truly wished for sovereignty or annexation. Latin American scholar John Kirk states, “Martí’s observations of North American society have also led to much controversy: for some historians they have been used as examples of a profound Cuban-U.S. friendship, while others have underlined his bitter denunciations of North America.”**49**

Regardless of how Martí viewed the United States, after his death, the Cuban Revolutionary Party responded by attempting to bring the United States into war. Lillian Guerra asserts, “By fanning the flames of U.S. expansionism and endorsing the values of individual expansionists, Cuban Revolutionary leaders encouraged the public and U.S. officials to identify with the cause of Cuban rebels by identifying these rebels as cultural and political extensions of themselves.”**50** The rebels viewed their economic, political and social relationship with the United States as close and intimate because for so long, they had lived beneath its shadow. They looked to the United States as a liberating force, one that could propel them out of the darkness created by Spain and could lead them as a future “nation.” Guerra concludes, “Thus, the nationalism the Cubans expressed was from the beginning dependent on the United States for its ideological legitimatizing….Cuban Revolutionary leaders were rooted in an idealized, illusory

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interpretation of U.S. society and what they imagined would be a gratefully compliant, future Cuban republic.”

One could even argue that the rebel’s passion for linking Cuba’s destiny with its northern neighbor was, in fact, operating out of “genuine” nationalism.

Cuban acts of resistance throughout the War of Independence were met with brute, cruel force from the Spanish. The crime was “treason, rebellion…communication with the enemy…or in any other way attack the integrity of Nation.” The punishment was confiscation of property and seizure of liquid assets, foreshadowing the demise of the Creole bourgeoisie. Many Cubans never recovered. Spanish General Valeriano Weyler further crippled morale and hope by exterminating tens of thousands of Cubans suspected of complicity, real or imagined, in the 1890s. In order to defeat the Cuban Revolutionary Party, the general waged war against hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians, and in the process, destroyed farms, homes, and Cuban resources. In short, the War of Independence had been a total war, involving everyone from children to the elderly. American Treasury Department agent Robert Porter described Cubans “left enfeebled by deprivation and too weak to take up their occupation,” inhabitants “huddled half starved in miserable huts,” a “hungry discouraged native population.” Cuban Ramiro Guerra y Sanchez recalled, “We are a people in ruin; a little country in misery starving. Our only source of strength was our hope…energetic determination to endure and live on.”

51 Ibid., 63.
52 Pérez, On Becoming Cuban, 97.
53 Ibid., 99.
54 Ibid., 101.
Although the war ended in 1898, it did not end the way Cubans envisioned their autonomy. Cubans had become free from the bondage of Spain, but that freedom had also been wrested from Cubans. After the war, the American government assumed a sweeping undertaking that reached virtually all aspects of Cuban life by developing the island’s infrastructure and public works. The scope of the American reconstruction efforts was incalculable: “new forms were injected directly into Cuban institutional representations, virtually unchallenged.”

The rebuilding process ultimately reinforced the structural links of the Cuban value systems to American ones.

Peréz notes, “These were difficult times, when the Cuban people were especially susceptible to North American ways.” To pursue alternative routes other than American would have meant inviting armed conflict. In any case, many Cubans knew and had already adapted to American ways of life. The northern value system was already ingrained and accepted by many Cubans. Much of what became Cuban, in essence, was a product of North American summonings. By the late 1890s and early twentieth century, Americans were facing an economic crisis of their own, and thousands, of all ages and social economic backgrounds, traveled south to the war-ravaged Cuba in search of opportunity and fortune. Right, wrong, or indifferent, Cuba and United States were flirting with one another long before 1898. Throughout the nineteenth century, Cubans and Americans drew toward each other, partaking in seasonal visits to the other’s shores, investing in each other’s country, and exchanging the material goods and services of modernity and progress. Cuban identity undeniably had American characteristics by

55 Ibid., 116.
56 Ibid., 108.
57 Ibid., 108.
1898. Thus, as Peréz asserts, a central tension of Cuban nationalism formed: “emulation of North American ways, especially as those ways could materially improve life for Cubans, and resistance to the United States because it posed a threat to a separate nationality.”

The story of Cuban American relations has revealed a multifaceted, complex and entangled relationship between two countries vying for the other’s attention. It is not just an account of conquest and imperialism. The Cuban encounter with the United States shaped how they came to understand their northern neighbor, as well as themselves. However, the story is only partially complete: the actors who contributed greatly to the outcome of the war, who championed Cuban Libre, who traveled up north forging new and complex relations with other immigrants, as well as with their Cuban brothers and sisters, are still playing a minor part. The Afro-Cubans who resided both in Cuba and within the immigrant enclave of Ybor City have yet to play the starring role of their own historical narrative.

58 Ibid., 95.
Chapter Two

Slavery, Race and Revolution in Nineteenth-Century Cuba

Part I: Race and Slavery in Nineteenth-Century Cuba

Traveling to Cuba to report on the labor conditions in 1902, Victor Clark made the following observation: “Cuba is one of the most democratic countries in the world. Nowhere else does the least-considered member of a community aspire with more serene confidence to social equality with its most exalted personage.” Although Clark’s statement may be exaggerated, his remarks do suggest that four centuries of colonial domination and hierarchical authority in Cuba had not created the legacy one might expect. “Slave and master and black and white fought side by side in the wars for independence,” Clark remarked within his study, which ultimately resulted in the “gradual fusion of the two races.” Clark’s observations raise important questions regarding not only race relations in Cuba at the turn of the century, but also the War for Independence itself. How were Afro-Cubans treated before and during the war? What was their contribution to Cuba Libre? How did they perceive their position in society after the abolition of slavery and during the revolutionary wars? Moreover, did national identity and Cuba Libre ultimately eclipse race and the color of one’s skin during Cuba’s quest for nationhood? Well before the final War for Independence, Cubans of all colors...
pushed and led their compatriots towards the image of an island unified in experience and ideology. Afro-Cubans consistently participated in this struggle: they had been soldiers and commanders, poets as well as senators for the cause of *Cuba Libre*. However, were Afro-Cubans ever politically and socially accepted by their Latin brethren?

Before attempting to examine the various experiences and identity of Afro-Cubans, one must consider the ideologies of race, ethnicity and nationalism in Cuba in the nineteenth century. Peter Wade’s, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America*, discusses the ways in which racial and ethnic systems of classification developed throughout Latin America. He states that race and ethnicity are typically seen at opposite ends of a spectrum, where race is articulated in terms of phenotype while ethnicity is articulated in terms of place. The fluidity and multiple interpretations of both terms suggest that there are many overlapping characteristics of the two. Wade asserts that both of these labels are malleable, open to challenge and historically constituted, as opposed to being “fixed.”

Race and ethnicity are not separate entities; they influence each other. Wade states, “The dismantling of the biological concept of race and its general acceptance, at least in social sciences, as a social construction brought about recognition of the mutability of race.” As a result, “Racial identities are now seen in somewhat the same way as ethnic identities: they are contextual, situational, and multi-vocal. This view is an inevitable result of seeing races as social constructions, which by their nature must depend on shifting social relations.”

Throughout nineteenth-century Cuba, being labeled “black” was more of a topic of public debate, in the sense that there was a struggle over whether race was to be

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4 Ibid., 19.
explicitly identified or not. The liberal elite insisted on racial democracy and a “raceless” society, while conservative elites adhered to a “hispanophile image” of the nation in a way that implicitly recognized race and valued white over black. Afro-Cubans and those who fought in the wars for independence in general demanded a raceless society as well, although in their minds, race had not “place,” that is, “racial identity should have no influence on life chances, rather than being an absent presence.” ⁵ Although both the white liberals and black Cubans championed a raceless society, the black Cuban experience after the abolition of slavery illustrated that a society that did not mention race did not equal a racist-free environment. In addition, defining one’s specific color in Cuba’s society was often difficult and complicated due to the idea of mestizaje, which refers to the historical racial mixing in Cuba, and the occurrence of mixed marriages and relationships.

In order to promote and maintain unity across racial lines, the dominant powers have often ignored differentiation between the races, claiming “racelessness.” Cuban national and cultural identity is jointly tied to the idea of mestizaje. Thus, to be “Cuban” is to have a dynamic racial equilibrium balanced between the white Spaniard and the black African. ⁶ From the end of the nineteenth century through the beginning of the twenty-first, this idea has played a central role in “official” and dominant imaginations of Latin American identities. These ideologies of national identities have often downplayed

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the importance of racism by proclaiming the myth of “racial democracy.” Historian Jean Muteba Rahier states that a long tradition of scholarship on nationalism has emphasized the “homogenizing processes” of the ideologies of national identity from the end of the eighteenth century through the first half of the twentieth. According to Benedict Anderson, these “national cultures” helped to accommodate and resolve differences by ideologically constructing a singular “national identity.” Anderson asserts this community is imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that particular group, regardless if they share borders. Throughout the revolutionary period and by the end of the War of Independence, Cuba was a community in the process of imagining itself as a nation. Whether or not they knew each other, these members shared general attitudes, beliefs, and a common bond that promoted patriotism and allegiance. The nation was essentially constructed from popular processes through which its members shared nationality. Anderson asserts that the concept of nation or “nation-ness” developed in the late eighteenth century as a new way of conceptualizing state sovereignty and rule. He argues that to understand the significance and history of nations, scholars need to analyze a nation’s cultural artifacts and how their meanings have changed through time.

In *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba*, Alejandro De La Fuente analyzes the impact of racial ideologies on the framing of race relations in Cuba. He states that mestizaje has contributed to the ignoring or the “invisiblizing” of specific Afro-Cuban claims for social justice and opened up

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7 Jean Muteba Rahier, “The Study of Latin American ‘Racial Formations’: Different Approaches and Different Contexts,” *Latin American Research Review* 39, no. 3 (October 2004): 282-293, 282. “End nuestro pais no hay racismo porque todos nostros tenemos un poco de cada sangre en nuestras venas” (In our country there is no racism because we all have a mixture of different bloods running in our veins).
8 Ibid., 283.
9 Ibid., 6.
10 Ibid., 4.
possibilities for Afro-Cuban participation in the nation.\textsuperscript{11} This idea of race was ingrained into the Cuban national consciousness, particularly following the Ten Years War (1868-1878) and into the final War of Independence (1895-1898). During the first half of the twentieth century, newspapers such as the influential \textit{Diario de la Marina} affirmed that racial problems did “not exist” in Cuba.\textsuperscript{12} “Racial brotherhood” and José Martí’s proposition of “Cuban, more than black, more than white” was socially accepted. It was the crucial involvement and support of Cubans from all skin colors to base the claim of racial equality of the island. Cuban nationalism supposedly silenced the issues of race and eliminated the need for other identities, as well as allowing for the survival and reproduction of racial ideologies.\textsuperscript{13} Unlike their northern neighbor’s concept of black and white regarding race, for many Cubans, there was no such thing as “racially pure;” there was “only one race…the Cuban race.”\textsuperscript{14}

Ideally, and according to the marriage legislation, nineteenth-century Cuban society was divided into two basic groups by physical appearance: those of European descent and those of African descent. However, differentiating the two often proved to be complex, considering a high degree of racial mixture had taken place which had significantly blurred the visible boundaries between the two groups. According to Verena Martinez-Alier, the frequency of racial mixing was a result of the black woman’s sexual exploitation by the white man, as well as the Afro-Cuban desire to shed their black

\textsuperscript{11} Alejandro de la Fuente, \textit{A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 15-16.

\textsuperscript{12} Elvira Anton Carrillo, “Ideas of Race, Ethnicity and National Identity in the Discourse of the Press During the Cuban Revolution,” \textit{Bulletin of Latin American Research} 31, issue s1 (March 2012): 5.

\textsuperscript{13} Alejandro de la Fuente, “Race, National Discourse, and Politics in Cuba,” \textit{Latin American Perspectives} 25, no. 3 (May 1998): 43.

“inferior label.”\textsuperscript{15} In nineteenth-century Cuba, being “held to be white” and being “truly white” was not one of physical color; physical appearance had become equally misleading with regard to a person’s racial origin. Differentiating a Spaniard from one with African ancestry was often difficult if “not impossible.”\textsuperscript{16} In 1836, Esteban Picardo gave the following definition of the word \textit{trigueno} in his published \textit{Diccionario Provincial Casi Razonado de Voces y Frases Cubanas}:

The person of slightly darker colour or similar to that of wheat (\textit{trigo}) in the same way as the person of lighter colour, milky with a pink hue is called white…In a racial context the word white is used even if the person is \textit{trigueno}, in order to differentiate him from negro or mulatto; although there are some of the latter who are whiter than many of the white race.\textsuperscript{17}

In one recorded case of interracial marriage, a man reported on his neighbors’ lack of physical differences: “She is a \textit{parda criolla} from Santiago de Cuba who can well pass as white outside this country and who is even of better colour than her suitor [who is of Spanish origin].”\textsuperscript{18} Martinez-Alier notes that this is certainly not an isolated case. Along with his or her physical appearance, one’s racial status was derived from ancestral origin. Color, as well as one’s history of slavery, marked them white or black.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 71.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 71. Originally printed in Esteban Pichardo’s \textit{Novisimo o Diccionario Provincial Casi Razonado de Voces y Frases Cubanas} (Havana, 1953).
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 72. This report was found in the \textit{Archivo Nacional de Cuba} (ANC) and the \textit{Archivo general de Indias de Seville} (GSC), Leg. 922/32149. Another young woman was said that “although she says she is mulatta she is of light colour” (Leg. 893/30306), and of still another that “although his bride is held to belong to the class of parda her appearance contradicts this” (Leg. 805/30522). Another young woman is described as being “of those parda who can in this village and even in other places pass for white” (Leg. 924/32259).
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 74.
The first African slaves arrived in Cuba in 1510 or 1511 with Diego Valezquez. At first, Africans were used as a supplemental labor force of the captured Indians native to Cuba. However, Spanish diseases and massacres quickly exterminated the native population, and the Cuban colony was forced to rely entirely upon African slaves.\textsuperscript{20} The Africans who arrived to the island represented a myriad of cultural identities, although they formed “culture clusters” based on common cultural traits (religion, family structure).\textsuperscript{21} The continuous infusion of Africans, particularly from the \textit{Yoruba} peoples of West Africa, invigorated the memory of sacred traditional African practices and teachings into the existing population of enslaved and freed Afro-Cubans.\textsuperscript{22} Over several generations, these various African groups merged and realigned themselves into a distinct Afro-Cuban culture. In \textit{The Ethnic Origins of Nations}, Anthony Smith notes that a perceived common history and sense of place (in this case, Africa) facilitated the unification of the “ethnie.” Smith states, “An ethnie need not be in physical possession of ‘its’ territory; what matters is that it has a symbolic geographical center, a sacred habitat, a ‘homeland,’ to which it may symbolically return.”\textsuperscript{23} However, contrary to Smith’s assertion of an ethnie seeking a return to an idealized past, Afro-Cuban cultures have adopted and transformed knowledge of other groups (i.e., Christian saints) in order to construct a web of greater influences. Fusing their old world traditions with those of the new became essential in protecting Afro-Cuban individuals and groups against

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\textsuperscript{20} Hubert H.S. Aimes, \textit{A History of Slavery in Cuba, 1511 to 1868} (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1907), 1-13.
\textsuperscript{22} Marta Moreno Vega, “Interlocking African Diaspora Cultures in the Work of Fernando Ortiz,” \textit{Journal of Black Studies} 31, no. 1 (Sept 2000): 39. Vega states that although the enslavers attempted to diversify their captives onboard their ships in order to avoid rebellions, generally the Africans represented ethnic groups from similar national groupings which assisted in maintaining cultural bonds in Cuba.
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exploitation. Afro-Cuban myths, symbols, and values were extremely important to Afro-Cubans as they joined *cabildos* and mutual aid societies.

Formed in the sixteenth century by freed slaves and their descendents to pursue justice and deal with specific incidents of maltreatment, cabildos were societies of mutual aid and essential for perpetuating African culture in Cuba. These groups were extensions of a similar institution widespread in Africa which was later successfully transplanted in the Americas.\(^{24}\) Utilized as centers of religion and worship, cabildos and other secret societies combined African spirituality and Spanish Catholicism. As an example, *Santería* includes the worship of Christian saints as well as African deities such as *Olofin*, a Yoruba god, and infuses each with African conceptions of mystism, power, and earthly influence. In addition, this fusion acted as a way to protect African spirituality and tradition; Afro-Cubans would attend Christian churches, and return home to praise their own god and spirits. These societies were successful, in part, due to an established African pattern of adopting the religious aspects of neighboring populations.\(^{25}\)

In addition to serving as temples of worship, as early as 1812, cabildos also functioned as venues for colonial resistance. The black mutual aid societies’ primary goal was to originally provide the everyday necessities to their members prior to the Ten Years War; however, after the official emancipation of slavery in 1886 they shifted their focus from strictly preserving and maintaining their African heritage to providing social


\(^{25}\) Ibid., 63. Howard states that many African societies view alternative religions as complimentary to their own, as opposed to competing with it. To many whites, Afro-Cuban religion appeared to be Christianity, perhaps only slightly influenced by African “inherent savagery.”
equality for Afro-Cubans. By the middle of the nineteenth century, cabildos supported a growing network of diverse Afro-Cubans, from free black artisans to black militia men. They organized medical help for members and dances on national holidays as well as funerals and other rituals for Afro-Cubans across the island.

After 1886, the Pan-African societies recognized the need for black Cubans, including the former slaves, to assimilate into mainstream society. One of their main platforms was the universal education for black Cubans, viewed as essential to promoting and elevating their race socially, politically, and economically. The leaders of these societies championed working with Cubans across the color spectrum in order to achieve individual rights and privileges for Afro-Cubans. At the same time, some of these organizations and their leaders, such as Juan Gualberto Gomez and Delgado Morua, abhorred the “backward” and “perverted” African traditions and customs of the cabildos and called for their demise. Also attempting to hinder and cripple the influence of African traditions was the Spanish government. During the 1880s, particularly during the Patronato period, while the cabildos continued to rely on their African customs, religion, and rituals in order to foster a better, more egalitarian future for their members, the Spanish government placed more restrictive measures on them. In 1887, the governor general Rodriguez Batista declared the formation of new cabildos of the “old type,” or those practicing the African traditions, illegal. He also declared that the present cabildos take on new names representing the Catholic Saints, as well as pay dues to the Church. By examining these particular groups, one is confronted not with passive victims who

26 Ibid., 73.
27 Ibid., 167
28 Ibid., 159. The Patronato period referred to the transitional period from slavery to abolition.
were forced to forgo their previous lives and sense of self, but with active characters
determined to rectify their current dire situation. The festivities and dances held by these
black mutual aide societies provided a sense of their old world self and promoted group
solidarity. As Afro-Cubans used the Catholic saints as masks to cover their true beliefs
and practices, and as they secretly superimposed their African deities onto Catholic
saints, they eventually created what was known as Santeria.29

Also by the late 1880s, due to the individual efforts of black Cubans, desegregation
of public places across the island took place. By the 1890s, the Pan-African societies
were calling for the completion of the abolitionist goal: for blacks to be treated as equals
not only socially, but politically. In July 1892, 3,000 representatives from 70 mutual aide
societies, both cabildos and Pan-African societies, met in Havana to discuss the current
situation of black Cubans with the government. Their universal code of conduct called for
the government to enforce the current anti-discriminatory laws already set in place. By
November 1893, the new governor general, Emilio Calleja, removed all racial terms from
Cuban public documents, officially prohibiting discrimination in the public arena, and
pledged to do everything in his power to observe and enforce the law.30 He also granted
Afro-Cubans the right to place Don and Doña before their names, resulting in a token of
social acceptance and an undeniable positive psychological impact for black Cubans.

29 Ibid., 66. Even the white Cubans participated in the Abakua’s religious ceremonies, either by
joining their black Cubans in their organizations, or by creating their own. This blending of the two
cultures, African and European, is known as “creolization.” By becoming familiar with African traditions
and heritage, and with forming relations with black Cubans themselves, white Cubans were later
encouraged to assist Afro-Cubans in their struggle to abolish slavery as early as the late 1860s. In fact,
many Spanish authorities viewed creolization as jeopardizing colonization itself and attempted to ban the
cabildos on the island. The authorities attempted to suppress the membership, the activities themselves, and
forced the organization to register and pay dues, and even spied on the organizations.
30 Ibid., 202.
Prior to the 1895 War for Independence, Afro-Cubans were active in politics and society, from the early slave revolts and the fight for emancipation, to joining the Liberation army. The system of slavery bonded many Afro-Cubans together that would later “help to provide the basis for an active involvement by many in the process of emancipation.”

Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier states that it was the runaway slaves who showed Cubans a path toward a love for freedom, which in those days meant independence. Carpentier states, “Thus it was that the black man, who arrived in America fettered and chained, crowded into the folds of squalid ships, who was sold like chattel, who was subjected to the lowest conditions that any human being can be exposed to, turned out to be precisely the germ of the idea of independence.”

Although the formation of a distinct Afro-Cuban identity and culture had taken place, by the mid nineteenth century, the call for revolution and freedom from Spain unified white and black Cubans. Roberto Nodal asserts the wars for Cuba’s independence from Spain were the “catalyst” that combined all Cubans, regardless of their race. He states, “There was a moment in Cuba’s history, during the early half of the nineteenth century, when the historical possibility of two Cuban cultures existed, as the white creole culture and the black culture of resistance were developing in separate ways. But the second half of the century and the black role in achieving Cuban independence changed the historical

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course.”\textsuperscript{34} The quest for \textit{Cuba Libre} washed away the supposed “inferiorities or superiorities” by forcing all Cubans into universal hardship.\textsuperscript{35}

If colonial rule was responsible for slavery and racism, “national independence was associated just as clearly with the transcending of the racial divide: abolition of slavery would turn slaves into citizens. There would be no more black and white, no more exploiter and exploited.”\textsuperscript{36} During the Ten Years War, Afro-Cubans’ expectations regarding their position in the future increased considerably. Those who served in the Liberation Army viewed their participation as justification for equality and more rights. Helg states: “According to them, there was a tacit social contract between themselves and the rulers of tomorrow.”\textsuperscript{37} Juan Gualberto Gomez, a prominent Afro-Cuban leader and close friend of Martí’s, championed the coming together of blacks and whites “without any mean desire for retaliation, in a sincere and warm embrace.”\textsuperscript{38} Gomez proclaimed that “The black man demands no privileges: his sole desire is to make the principles of political and social equality prevails, and not to be an outcast from society, or to be deprived of the honor and respect he so rightly deserves.”\textsuperscript{39} Preaching equal rights in the public sector and the end of slavery, Gomez asserted that Afro-Cubans “respect the prejudices that our [white] neighbors might encourage in their homes, which we will

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 265.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 252.
\textsuperscript{36} Aviva Chomsky, “‘Barbados or Canada?’ Race, Immigration, and Nation in early-Twentieth-Century Cuba,” \textit{Hispanic American Historical Review} no. 80.3 (August 2000): 418.
\textsuperscript{38} Nodal, 253.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 254.
never enter…But in the common sphere we want the end of differences based solely on skin color.”

Many white Cubans fought for the abolition of slavery and for black justice. They saw the black contribution during the revolutionary struggle of the Ten Years War and declared it was time to reward their efforts. However, the eighteen-year period of gradual emancipation was prolonged, ambiguous, and complex. Rebecca Scott notes there are several explanations to the ending of slavery in Cuba. One theory is to analyze abolition as a political process, largely carried out by Spain in response to the domestic and international pressures that arose from slavery’s persistence in Cuba long after its extinction in most of the New World. However, Scott argues that one should emphasize the “links” among the various kinds of pressures—social, economic, political, military—and on the interactions among masters, slaves, rebels, and officials. By 1880, although the immediate threat posed by the Ten Years’ War and the Guerra Chiquita (Little War, 1879) had been militarily suppressed, the breakdown of social relations that underlay slavery was undeniable. Scott states that one of the main reasons for the Spanish government’s decision to “abolish slavery had been a desire to avoid the further development of support by Afro-Cubans for revolutionary movements.”

The actual dismantling of slavery unfolded in a series of steps: young children and the elderly were legally freed in 1870 and the whip was banned the same year; meager wages for patrocinados, or black apprentices were introduced in 1880; chains

40 Helg, Our Rightful Share, 39.
41 Scott, Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transistion to Free Labor, 1860-1899, 4.
42 Ibid., 6.
43 Ibid., 277.
stocks were outlawed by 1883. The Spanish government attempted to accommodate the needs of planters by designing a gradual abolition, which produced a phase of “apprenticeship,” known as the patronato period. This was designed to ensure a slow, smooth transition over the course of six years during which former slaves were to work for their former masters for token wages. After the first year of the establishment of the patronato in 1880, over 6,000 patrocinados had obtained full legal freedom. By the second year, 10,000 received their freedom, and 17,000 during the third year. In 1877, there was almost 200,000 slaves in Cuba, but by 1883, there were just 99,956 patrocinados remaining, and by 1885 just 53,381. Afro-Cubans who had joined the 1868-1878 insurrection demanded their own freedom in courts, sought to free their children, ran away, or raised crops to purchase their freedom. By the time slavery was officially outlawed in 1886, the majority of slaves were already free, and neither former masters nor former slaves were unfamiliar with wage labor.

Scott argues that the abolition of slavery ultimately transformed the social and political environment of the island. Emancipation altered the Afro-Cuban community in ways that affected Afro-Cuban attitudes toward political activity and toward Spanish colonial rule. By examining the laws, voices and actions of individuals and groups of this time period, it is tempting to assume Afro-Cubans fared better than their black American counterparts. Several American businessmen and tourists, including Charles

44 Ibid., xi.
45 Ibid., 140.
46 Ibid., 140.
47 Ibid., xii.
48 Ibid., 255.
Pepper, asserted this very fact in their travels across the island. Particularly regarding the Afro-Cuban cigar workers, composing 20-25% of the labor force, their standard of living was comparable to their white Cuban comrades because they earned the same pay and had the same amount of power and influence in the labor unions. Although some blacks were pleased with the colonial government’s pledge to uphold and enforce the civil rights laws, it never granted Afro-Cubans suffrage. To many, the colonial government was just doing “enough” to appease and quell the anti-discriminatory voices of the Cuban population. In order to achieve full citizenship, one must have a voice in government. Not only were black Cubans denied the right to vote, but the prohibitory poll tax instituted by the colonial government disfranchised white Cubans as well. Suffrage was granted on an economic, as opposed to a racial basis. In addition, although the public schools were desegregated, they were in such poor condition and suffered from a lack of resources that both races benefitted very little. The looming war with Spain and the distant hope for racial equality was becoming more of a reality by the end of the nineteenth century as both black and white Cubans rallied together under the flag of Cuban Libre. Once severed from Spain, the small island could at long last construct a racially democratic, free and just society for all Cubans.

It was this quest for freedom from Spain and nation building which produced Cuba’s sense of “oneness.” Cubaness, or Cubanidad, became an unchallenged identity, supported and validated by the Cuba Libre movement. It ultimately swept the concept of

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49 Ibid., 203.
50 Helg, Our Rightful Share, 27. Since 1878, men who paid an annual property tax of 25 pesos could vote in parliamentary elections, and those paying 5 pesos could vote in municipal and provincial elections. By 1890, the tax requirement for voting in any election was reduced to 5 pesos. Although whites faced discrimination in the voting booth, these laws especially affected Afro-Cubans who were, for historical reasons, less likely to be property owners than their white counterparts.
blackness away, relegating it to a distant past in Cuba’s history. Today, it is almost a “truism” that Cuban nationalism has historically been based on an anti-racist ideology, tracing its roots back to the words of José Martí.\(^5\)\(^1\) Martí, one of the most respected and admired Cubans, preached unity and anti-colonialism. National unity and national sovereignty became mutually dependent, and independence from Spain required black and white collaboration on the battlefield, as well as in the political arena. During a speech delivered on the anniversary of the 1868 war, Martí stated, “We should not continue to enslave the black man, who so valiantly died at our side with so much glory and merit in the struggle for independence. We must tell the black man that it is not the intention of those who maintain the spirit of the revolution to permit that, with new hatred and disdain unbecoming to black sprits, the benefits derived from that glorious and necessary upheaval be lost.”\(^5\)\(^2\) Martí knew that Cubans of color would have to be accepted as equal partners in the nationalist movement before they would embrace it unconditionally. Apart from the great black war hero Antonio Maceo, Martí’s closest friends were the black Cubans Rafael Serra and Juan Gualberto Gomez, who assisted Martí in organizing and mobilizing the Cuban Revolutionary Party. In 1880, José Martí stated, “there is in Cuba a considerable mass of black people who are as high minded and intellectually able as whites….the black race is noble of spirit and soul.”\(^5\)\(^3\) After the abolition of slavery, Martí explicitly appealed to blacks and blamed slavery—and racism—on colonialism.

\(^5\)\(^1\) Chomsky, 417. This phrase is the most quoted of José Martí. Ada Ferrer and Rebecca Scott both illustrate that this interpretation of Cuba’s independence struggle actually developed later in the war. After the abolition of slavery, José Martí explicitly appealed to blacks and blamed slavery—and racism—on colonialism. National unity and national sovereignty became mutually dependent. Independence from Spain required black and white collaboration on the battlefield, as well as in the political sector.

\(^5\)\(^2\) Nodal, 254.

\(^5\)\(^3\) Ibid., 254.
Martí gave speeches throughout Cuba and the United States garnering support for a “raceless” and free Cuba during the late nineteenth century. Martí’s anti-colonial ideology attempted to create a nation free from racism and provided an opening for political mobilization by blacks in concert with whites to overthrow Spanish colonialism, but at the same time, limited the degree to which organization by race alone could be used to challenge existing social inequalities. As a “keen observer of racial confrontations,” Martí based his principles on his observations: “The soul, equal and eternal, emanates from bodies diverse in form and color. He who promotes and spreads opposition and hatred between the races, sins against humanity.” In essence, Martí’s Cuba embraced the ethnic factor of African origin, as evidenced by his essays “Our America” (1891) and “My Race” (1893).

In 1880, he boldly addressed the bitterness surrounding color in New York to a packed house composed of white and blacks, “to the discomfort of the wealthy aristocratic émigrés, but to the delight of the black and white tobacco workers.” Two years later, Martí wrote Maceo and acknowledged the deep-seated racist thought in the independence movement. The same year, Martí wrote a eulogy in the New York Times commemorating the life of the Rev. Henry Highland Garnet, one of the most well-respected abolitionists and Black nationalists of nineteenth century North America.

Part of Martí’s appeal lay in the discourse of social unity that he forged in order to mitigate the conflicting ideas of what Cuban society should be like after independence. In

56 Ibid., 115.
fact, social unity was Martí’s mantra, making him a “fiercely seductive symbol” in a republic for “all.” Cuban historian Lillian Guerra states, “Indeed, the creation myth of social unity in which all Cubans nationalists staked their future in the Revolution of 1895 was predicated, at the time, on the idea of radical and transformative change that embraced everyone.” Martí emphasized the power of the “collective political will” and “individual self-sacrifice” as a means for resolving disputes and differences. Guerra states that “Martí came to embody the requirement of social unity behind the cause of the 1895 War—Independence—that lay at the heart of these ideal ‘nations.’”

Speaking before the grave of Antonio Maceo in 1951, Cuban President Carlos Prio stated that “Just as Martí is white and Maceo is black, our culture is white with Spain and black with Africa.” Almost fifty years after Prio’s speech, Fidel Castro gave a similar nod to Cuba’s legacy of mestizaje and racial fraternity when welcoming Pope John Paul II: “they [the Africans] made a remarkable contribution to the ethnic composition and the origins of our country’s present population in which the cultures, the beliefs, and the blood of all participants…have been mixed.” Alejandro de la Fuente notes that although these two characters could not be more different politically, they agreed on at least one thing: “Cuba is a mixed nation in which there is little room for racial differences, much less discrimination.” Although Martí’s raceless dream proved to be a powerful unifying social force, who did it benefit most?

58 Ibid., 260.
59 Ibid., 6.
60 Ibid., 4.
61 De la Fuente, A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba, 335.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
Aline Helg states that Cuba’s “white elites cleverly resorted to a myth of the existence of racial equality in the nation so as to justify the current social order.” As in other Latin American countries, myths of lenient slavery, mulatto (not black) upward mobility, absence of legal segregation, and racial promiscuity all contributed to the idea of racial equality. If Afro-Cubans identified themselves as black, as opposed to simply “Cuban,” it was but a “short step to their challenging racial inequalities in Cuba, and rupturing the fragile national consensus.” Historian Lisa Brock asserts that openly constructed challenges to the racial status quo ultimately diminished as slavery and colonialism ended. “There had been less white violence after slavery and more social and cultural fluidity between the races than in North America.” Prior to the 1912 Race War, Afro-Cubans did not openly organize based on their skin color.

The official ideology defined equality as “equality based on merits,” which conveniently overlooked the fact that all individuals did not originate from equal conditions, for historical reasons depending on their race. Thus, the ultimate function of the racial myth was to “place the blame for blacks’ continuing lower social position entirely on blacks themselves: if most blacks were still marginalized despite the existence of legal equality, it was because they were ‘racially inferior.’” Fernando Ortiz, one of Cuba’s foremost twentieth-century intellectuals and commentators on race and national identity, argued that “Race is perhaps the most fundamental aspect that should be

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64 Helg, Our Rightful Share, 6.
65 Chomsky, 424.
67 Helg, Our Rightful Share, 7.
considered in the immigrant.” According to Ortiz, black immigration should be “avoided” at all cost, considering they proved themselves to be “more delinquent.” White immigration would be able to “inject in the blood of our people the red blood cells which tropic anemia robs from us, and sow among us the seeds of energy, or progress, of life.”

Ortiz ultimately argues that white immigrants would not only physically add their presence on the island, but also “inject” blood and “sow” seeds among the existing population. The Spanish government supported white supremacy through the importation of European immigrants aimed at progressively “whitening” the population. The concept of whitening aimed at making the raza de color proportionally insignificant due to the massive importation of European immigrants. The addition of Spanish immigrants would also augment the existing Creole population’s potential for dissidence as well as neutralize the possibility for another Haitian-style revolution.

Mark Sawyer’s book, *Racial Politics in Cuba*, analyzes the racial relationship in Cuba prior to independence in 1898 up to the Castro regime’s triumphs and failures of race relations. Sawyer states that in the case of Cuba, it is an understatement to suggest

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69 Ibid.
70 Michele Reid-Vasquez, *The Year of the Leash: Free People of Color in Cuba and the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 154. Between 1838 and 1853, Spain sought to prohibit emigration to anywhere other than Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines, with 97% of Spaniards immigrating to Cuba. The Escalera rebellions prompted the government to make a series of reforms aimed at increasing the white sector while reducing the black one (152). In 1845, officials in Spain published a report entitled *The Development of the White Population in Cuba and Progressive Slave Emancipation* that noted how Cuba needed to attract families, as opposed to single white male workers. Ultimately, this would create a “stable and natural increase” in the white population as immigrant families (the majority of whom would be directed toward plantation work) would eventually replace slaves and free people of color.
71 Ibid., 171.
that racial issues there are “complex.” The history of race in Cuba prior to the revolution debunks the myth that race was somehow less salient in Cuba than elsewhere in the world. Many supporters of Cuban nationalism were more concerned with maintaining racial order than they were with securing freedom from Spain. Others recognized the need for unity across the racial spectrum in order to achieve independence and let go of their discriminatory thoughts and actions. Regardless of their thoughts of racism and justice, the white elite in Cuba cleverly invoked the myth of racial equality in the nation to justify the social order.

The island’s myth of racial equality confronted Afro-Cubans with an unsolvable dilemma: if they denied the veracity of the myth, they were labeled as racist and unpatriotic. If they did mobilize based on skin color, their “move was qualified as dangerous or ‘barbarian.’” On a political level, some blacks and mulattos—notably Martin Morua Delgado—joined the established white Creole elite political parties. On a social level, despite political pressure, some Afro-Cubans organized their own clubs and societies, although none of them threatened the Creole establishment until the emergence of the short-lived Partido Indepeniente de Color (PIC), founded in 1908.

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72 Mark Sawyer, Racial Politics in Post-Revolutionary Cuba (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), xvi.
74 Ibid.
75 Jorge Giovannetti, “The Elusive Organization of ‘Identity’: Race, Religion, and Empire among Caribbean Migrants in Cuba,” Small Axe, Number 19 19, no. 10 (March 2006): 8. PIC was founded in 1908 by Evaristo Estenoz, Gregorio Surin, and a group of followers. The organization succeeded in part because of Cuba’s adoption of Universal male suffrage in 1901, which granted Afro-Cubans the right to vote. Aline Helg states that Afro-Cubans joined because they shared a common experience of racism, slavery, and fighting in the wars of independence, and their motto was black racial pride and condemning white racism (Helg, “Race and Black Mobilization,” 63). In 1910, Afro-Cuban Martin Morua Delgado proposed a law, the Morua Amendment, which banned the PIC as a political party due to its racial orientation. Morua argued that considering African born Cubans were granted citizenship, racial privileges had disappeared and a party based on color was “unconstitutional.” The unique success of the political party was short lived;
Gomez rose to become one of the most prominent Afro-Cubans on the island by the 1890s when he presided over the Directorio Central de Sociedades de la Raza de Color (Central Directorate of Societies of the Colored Race). De La Fuente notes that the significance of the Directorio in supporting the independence movement and fighting racial discrimination is widely acknowledged. Not only did the organization include roughly 100 societies throughout Cuba by 1893, by it also waged a triumphant campaign for Afro-Cuban’s civil and legal rights. It was at these very organizations that Afro-Cubans found a place to organize themselves and learn political and social skills that would later assist them in mainstreaming into Cuban society and play a more active role in the republic. Gomez, along with Rafael Serra, published newspapers undermining the ideology of white superiority. Eventually, by the end of the nineteenth century, black Cubans could rely on deeply rooted urban and rural networks, built in the wars for independence.

If Afro-Cubans subscribed to the myth of racial equality, they were forced to conform to the negative stereotypes of blacks. Thus, “the myth made it blasphemous for Afro-Cubans to proclaim both their blackness and their patriotism.” Those who did not...
subscribe to the myth of “racial equality,” were attacked as being ungrateful and
dangerous. Helg states, “In fact, the myth transformed any attempt by people of African
descent to assert their racial pride, along with their nationalism, into a threat to the unity
of the nation.”

The Maceo brothers were often harassed and labeled as “black racists”
who sought their own power.

Some Afro-Cubans felt deeply attached to their African cultural origins, while
others opted for full integration to the dominant white world. Still, others felt closer to
their Hispanic roots. Expressing their African roots and heritage often was concealed
during Spanish rule and was barely tolerated. The Spanish government suggested that
Afro-Cuban culture was limited to magic, criminality and witchcraft. The black brujo
(male witch) and the black nanigo (member of a secret, male only society of African
origin known as Abukua societies) were exaggerated by Spanish culture to imply
something of lower class and un-godly values. Along with the Abukua society, the
Spanish culture associated Afro-Cuban religion and tradition with crime, harmful magic
and barbaric behavior. Few Afro-Cubans dared to publicly defend their ancient African
traditions of synergetic religions, much less praise their African roots’ contribution to the
Cuban nation.

Due to the demand of Cuban nationalism, few Afro-Cubans, unlike their African
American counterparts, advocated for black separatism, pan-Africanism, or a return to

80 Helg, “Race and Black Mobilization in Colonial and Early Independent Cuba: A Comparative
Perspective,” 65.
81 Sawyer, 36-48.
82 Helg, Our Rightful Share, 7. A more detailed look at Afro-Cuban religious societies, mutual aid
societies, and cabildos is found in chapter two.
Africa. According to Helg, “Integration required heavy sacrifices but did not eliminate the racial barrier.” Helg states that full participation was, in fact, impossible, despite however much black Cubans subscribed to the religious and cultural beliefs, public behavior and dress, and recreational forms of Spaniards and Spanish-Cubans. In many ways, they continued to face discrimination. Those Afro-Cubans who did attempt to assimilate into mainstream culture were forced to forgo their African heritage and practices, placing them “between two worlds.” For many Afro-Cubans, partial integration was the best choice: publicly they were mostly “mainstreamed,” although privately they resided in an Afro-Cuban subculture permitting unlimited participation.

**Part II: Afro-Cuban dedication to Cuba Libre**

Aline Helg’s, *Our Rightful Share*, utilizes Afro-Cuban contemporary sources. Throughout history, black Cubans have used this expression in an effort to stress their equal abilities and equal right to power, employment, and wealth with whites. Although many pledged their undying allegiance to Cuba while risking their lives and homes in the wars, they understood their subordinate position in society. However, they knew where to “draw the line between fair treatment and exploitation,” and their “notion of justice and equality fed the production of counter-ideologies that directed many of their actions.” Through their participation in the war effort, Afro-Cubans envisioned a more just Cuba, from attempting to abolish slavery during the Ten Years War, to achieving equality in the

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83 Ibid.
84 Ibid., 33.
85 Ibid.
86 Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 10.
87 Ibid., 11.
War of Independence. They wanted to construct a new social order that expelled the old hierarchy and granted them their “rightful share.”

Helg asserts that despite the growing scholarship of African diasporas in the Western hemisphere, studies of the unique historical experience of Afro-Cubans in their quest for equality and independence after 1886 are still scarce and fragmentary.\(^88\) In addition, race became the classic “non-topic” in Cuban scholarship. In fact, according to Louis Peréz, “the subject of race in twentieth century Cuba is an elusive theme.”\(^89\) Cuban scholarship has generally “passed over in silence the higher-than-proportionate participation by Afro-Cubans in the struggles for independence and the expectations built up in the process. Instead, they stressed that white Cubans had redeemed themselves from the stain of slaveholding and racism by freeing the slaves who had participated in the Ten Years War.”\(^90\) In addition, most current Cuban analyses of the transition from 1886 to the 1910s focus on heroes of the War for Independence, economic structures, or labor leaders rather than race, equality and society.\(^91\) Since 1959, Cuban historians have often subordinated the question of race to the promotion of national unity that was necessary to construct socialism and to resist the threat of the United States.\(^92\)

Considering Afro-Cubans played a large part in all three wars for independence, their dedication and contribution to Cuba Libre is undeniable. Rebecca Scott states that “perhaps the greatest transformation in social relations” in eastern and central areas of Cuba originated from the insurgent army. As whites took up arms with black Cubans,

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\(^{88}\) Ibid., 7.
\(^{89}\) Brock, 3.
\(^{90}\) Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 8.
\(^{91}\) Ibid.
\(^{92}\) Ibid., 9.
they were ultimately forced to turn a blind eye to skin color. In 1872 James O’Kelly, a New York *Herald* correspondent and an abolitionist, remarked on the fact that white and black Cubans fought together in “perfect equality.” He claimed that “the most perfect equality exists between the white and colored race, the officers taking precedence by rank, and although the majority of the officers are white, a very large proportion are colored.” Of course, this perception of “perfect equality” is somewhat exaggerated, but it is worth to note that this unique fighting force emerged from a slave holding society. The insurgent army was made up mainly of white and free black non-plantation Cubans, both urban and rural. O’Kelly estimated that one-third of the army was white, and the “majority of the other two thirds are of color other than black, all shades of brown predominating.” An unknown percentage of the insurgents were former slaves. Some were either recruited by other slaves as they fled their former masters or freed by rebel masters, while others were captured during raids. During the course of struggle for independence, rebel nationalists were explicitly proffering the notion of citizenship in an imagined free Cuba. As Ada Ferrer argues, the evidence suggests that “free persons of color demonstrated their awareness of the new rebel discourse of freedom and equality and their willingness to make demands on the basis of that discourse.” The yoke of Spanish rule was the powerful symbol of their slavery; removing the former would deliver them from the latter.

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93 James O’Kelly, *The Mambi-Land or, Adventures of a Herald Correspondent in Cuba* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1874), 63-64. The New York *Herald* sent journalist and Irish nationalist James O’Kelly to Cuba to cover the nationalist insurgency, later known as the Ten Years’ War in 1872. 
94 Ibid., 79.
Afro-Cuban Esteban Montejo, who fought in the War for Independence, declared that his main motivation for fighting in the war was the lack of equality and opportunity for blacks in Cuba. He states:

The war was necessary. It wasn’t fair that so many jobs and so many privileges happened to fall into the hands of the Spaniards alone. You never saw a black lawyer because they said that blacks were only good for the forest. You never saw a black teacher. It was all for white Spaniards. Even the white criollos were pushed aside. I’ve seen that myself. There was no freedom. That’s why the war was necessary.\footnote{Miguel Barnet, \textit{Biography of a Runaway Slave}, trans. W. Nick Hill (Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1994), 153.}

The association of Cuba’s independence movement with both abolition and social reform after slavery gave Afro-Cubans a rare opportunity to promote their own plans while in arms within the nationalist agenda. In fact, the fear of the island turning into another Haiti halted \textit{Cuba Libre} until 1868, when planters set their slaves free in revolt against Spain. As slaves and free persons of color joined their white comrades in battle, they were able to force the leadership to proclaim the emancipation of all slaves in the insurgent area. However, the Afro-Cuban presence in the military and the issue of abolition scared many white planters, and the insurrection failed to spread to the central and western parts of the island. The once all white planter military unit was transformed into a multi-racial army in which free men of color could rise up the ranks and even obtain leadership positions. The issue of race influenced the white leadership’s decision to negotiate with Spain the Pact of Zanjón, the “truce” Spain fabricated ending the Ten Years War. The Pact ultimately allowed for the continuation of slavery and Spain’s hold
of Cuba. Not surprising, many black Cubans refused to recognize the Pact, and swiftly took up arms once again in the short-lived Guerra Chiquita of 1879.\textsuperscript{97}

The final war for Independence in 1895 signified a turning point for the Afro-Cuban struggle for recognition in the war effort. By then, it became apparent that without black military support, Cuba’s dream of independence would never become a reality. They soon joined the Liberation Army for various reasons, ranging from the possibility of contributing to an egalitarian Cuba, improving their own lives, or by simply fleeing Spanish oppression. Few people of African descent in the hemisphere share with Afro-Cubans the opportunity to fight for their own cause during nationalist wars.\textsuperscript{98} They participated in the building of an independent Cuba, and served as agents of political and social change during the critical transition period from colonialism in the 1890s to a nation-state in the 1910s. Helg states that “although interracial relations increased and some Afro-Cubans enjoyed limited social mobility, black overrepresentation in the anti-colonial army intensified fears among the white elite.”\textsuperscript{99}

Afro-Cuban collective visibility and assertiveness in the military was matched by the prominence of black military leaders whose names were intimately tied to the independence cause. Black military officers included Antonio and José Maceo and Guillermo Moncada who, upon their death, were celebrated and elevated to the status of national war heroes. The Afro-Cubans who did survive the war, like Quintin Bandera, Pedro Diaz and Jesus Rabi, were recognized for their great contribution to \textit{Cuba Libre},

\textsuperscript{97} Helg, “Race and Black Mobilization in Colonial and Early Independent Cuba: A Comparative Perspective,” 56.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid. Haiti, Venezuela, and Colombia are examples of three countries where people of African descent fought for their own agenda.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., 66.
marked as “living symbols of the Afro-Cuban participation in the war for independence, and they represented a potential source of leadership to resist the efforts of those who wanted to minimize blacks’ role in the making of the nation.”

Eric Hobsbawm argues that these “invented traditions” of commemorating Cuban heroes are an essential component of any national project. The remembrance of a shared past can serve to confer the appearance of timelessness and invariability upon a new nation, one that it considered legitimate and “real.” These rituals of remembering transit the values and ideals that bind a community and can serve to establish or symbolize social cohesion.

The acceptance of Afro-Cubans in the military symbolically signaled an important step in national integration of blacks into mainstream Cuban society. The black veterans were given endless banquets in their honor and social and political clubs were named for them, and emerging political parities were eager to attract them. For example, in 1899, Quintin Bandera organized and presided over the Partido Nacional Cubano de Oriente (Cuban National Party of Oriente). A year later, Bandera toured the various towns in the provinces of Cuba, including Havana, Matanzas, and Oriente. While passing through, Bandera received a heroes’ welcome from local authorities and “notables.” In one part of Havana, Arroyo Naranjo, Bandera and his followers were given a royal welcome by the major of municipality as he visited the local headquarters of the Rural Guard. He was given a banquet hosted by a local prominent landowner. Bandera’s club as well as other labor clubs and even Spanish organizations organized numerous festivities in other towns.

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100 Ibid., 36.
102 De la Fuente, A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba, 36. The Cuban National Party of Oriente was later called the Liga Nacional Cubana (Cuban National League).
in Bandera’s honor. Meanwhile, a recreational club in Bandera’s name was created in Havana.

Antonio Maceo, or the “Bronze Titan,” is perhaps the most revered, controversial and often quoted symbol of Cuban racial fraternity besides José Martí. Maceo came to embody the revolutionary movement that was crucial to Cuban nationhood. Maceo is best known for his guerrilla tactics and scorched-earth policy, ordering soldiers to burn crops to disrupt commercial activity. In the Colored American Magazine (November 1900), Antonio Maceo was described as “the greatest hero of the nineteenth century.” Maceo led black officers and soldiers, as well as white officers who also “strived for the honor of accompanying such as illustrious commander.” Not only was Maceo respected and revered on the island, but his name carried great significance even in the United States. In 1904, during his speech accepting the nomination as the first black presidential candidate of the National Labor Party, George Edwin Taylor referred to Maceo as the “greatest Negro soldier and general of modern times.” Throughout Cuba’s first War for Independence (1868-1878), Maceo’s conquests and military triumphs were published in the American Press, particularly in the Negro press. Once Maceo refused to sign the Pact of Zanjón, his fame in the United States mounted. After Maceo crafted the famous Protest of Baragua in 1878, he visited New York to raise funds for the war effort where he was received by anxious reporters vying to interview the great

103 Ibid., 37. The Casino Español of Colon is one example of a Spanish organization.
104 Brock, 10.
106 Nodal, 253.
The black community in New York also organized to honor him, and later, a leading guest house in the black district was renamed “Hotel Maceo.”

Helg notes that due to Maceo’s overwhelming popularity and recognition, discrimination in public places was momentarily lifted when Maceo revisited Cuba in 1890. Staying in the prestigious Hotel de Inglaterra in Havana, Maceo held several meetings with the city’s white Cuban elite. Camilo Polvieja, the Spanish governor general of Cuba, bitterly commented, “Although Maceo belongs to the raza de color, which is generally [an] object of deep contempt from criollos, because he symbolizes the idea of hate toward Spain, he was received by Cuba’s best families.” Some white leaders openly fought racism in the army by speaking in defense of Maceo when he was accused of black racism. Such support from whites gave several Afro-Cubans hope of justice and equality in the future. They could “identify” with him and “emulate” him without having to question their own heritage. They also felt accepted in Maceo’s units where positions were awarded on the basis of courage, intelligence and merit and they could climb the ranks based on their performance, as opposed to being awarded based on one’s skin color.

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108 The Baragua Protest was Maceo’s official declaration of refusing the Pact of Zanjón. Maceo, along with the rebels he represented, did not accept the terms of the pact, and requested a four-months period of suspension of hostilities.

109 Phillip Foner, History of Cuba and its Relations with the United States vol. II (New York 1963), 267-70, 273. When Maceo was wrongfully accused of starting a race war, he wrote to Estrada Palma in 1876 in his own defense. However, elites still withdrew their economic support.

110 Helg, Our Rightful Share, 32.

111 Ibid., 60. One example is Lt. Col. Eduardo Rosell and Fermin Valdes Dominguez (delegate to Cuba Libre’s Constituent Assembly and vice secretary of foreign relations in 1895), who consistently sided with Maceo and transferred white racist military men to civil posts in order to avoid problems with the troops.

112 Ibid. Helg asserts that all soldiers, no matter their rank or skin color, faced the same predicaments and outcomes in battle. Helg states that these experiences “no doubt” affected soldiers, forcing some to believe that class and race distinctions would be banned in the newly independent Cuba for which they were fighting.
During the final War for Independence, Maceo’s stardom reached even greater heights in the United States. As Maceo battled the despised General Valeriano Weyler and continued to triumph on the battlefield, the U.S. press reported on the Maceo’s activities. In November 1896, *The Journal of Knights of Labor* published Maceo’s interview with an American reporter, J. Syme-Hastings, who traveled to Cuba specifically to meet him:

Maceo is a man of magnificent stature, with just enough of the lion about him to make him a leader. He is one of the most interesting men I have ever met. Versatile, well-read and traveled, and with a strong personality which makes trifles interesting.

After some question as to my presence there, etc., he motioned me to sit down, and for nearly an hour I was kept busy satisfying his curiosity in regard to the feeling over the war in the United States. ‘Do your people think that ours is the right cause?’ he asked. I replied that the sympathy of every American was with the Cubans. ‘You know we had to fight for liberty ourselves many years ago.’

‘Oh yes,’ he smiled, ‘but I doubt if we will have a Lafayette to aid us in this unequal struggle.’ ‘I am glad of the sympathy of the Americans,’ he added, ‘but I fear that your government may doubt the discretion of recognizing our belligerency.’

I hastened to correct this, as I thought, wrong impression, and painted in glowing colors the coming presentation of a set of resolution in Congress which would be unanimously adopted and which would voice the will of every American in granting Cuba belligerent rights.

Maceo smiled at my warmth, but I could see that he understood better than I how difficult it would be to pass such resolutions through the office of our chief executive.113

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113 *Journal of Knights of Labor* (Nov. 5 1896) in Foner, “A Tribute to Antonio Maceo,” 66. The Knights of Labor, composed of women, men, skilled and unskilled, native and foreign born, both white and black, was quite active in support of Cuba Libre. The organization consistently demanded that the United States government acknowledge the belligerency of the Cuban Revolution so that the Cuban revolutionary
Syme-Hastings, a southerner, concluded his essay with Maceo’s prediction of the war’s outcome. According to Maceo, there could, and would be, only one result for his people: a never ending fight until they achieved victory. Unfortunately, Maceo never witnessed his country’s release from the iron grips of the Spanish empire, for he was killed in battle against Spanish troops in San Pedro, Cuba on December 6, 1896. News of his death in the United States originally was believed to be false.\textsuperscript{114} The Journal of the Knights of Labor published a poem entitled “Maceo is Dead—Long Live Maceo,” composed by Syme-Hastings challenging the dreaded report. The accolade begins: “They have filled him full of bullets…And beheaded him a dozen times or more; they have blown him up with powder—but he manages to live.”\textsuperscript{115} The same issue of the Journal of the Knights of Labor included Syme-Hastings’ tribute, “Is Maceo Dead?”

Something in my inner soul tells me that all is well—that Maceo still lives…

Whether he be dead or alive---I would that I were with him. He was a grand figure, and I consider him the greatest hero of the nineteenth century---aye—even in history. Caesar crossed the Rubicon; Napoleon crushed the world; Alexander crossed the Hellespont; William III caused the Boyne to run blood; but all had armies; all had room to operate. With a handful of untrained men, armed with machetes, without any discipline save loyalty to the cause, cut off from food, water and shelter…Maceo routed the flower of the Spanish army again and again.

\textsuperscript{114} Phillip Foner, “A Tribute to Antonio Maceo,” 66.

One bias stained the eloquent tribute to the Bronze Titan: the southern reporter refused to believe that Maceo was actually black. His “bronze-black” color simply was result of the sun’s exposure. Thus, according to Foner, racial biases clouded even an astute reporter to the reality of Maceo’s heritage.
To Maceo fear was a myth…He was one of those immortal characters who cause one to forget for the time that he is but a man.

Dead or alive, his name shall be the slogan with which Cuba shall be freed.\textsuperscript{116}

Prominent black politicians and representatives of the Afro-Cuban clubs and societies attended Maceo’s funeral commemoration each year, and Congress celebrated special sessions in his memory. As a Cuban of color, Maceo entered popular memory at the intersection of race, identity and the political origin of the nation. Afro-Cubans celebrated not only his patriotism, bravery and sacrifice, but also highlighted his racial identity. De la Fuente states that while dead, black heroes of independence provided not only visibility and recognition, but also honor and prestige to Afro-Cubans. Parks were constructed, monuments erected, and streets were named in Maceo’s honor. His date of death was declared a national holiday in 1939 by Cuban President Gerardo Machado. However, due to Maceo’s overwhelming popularity and support from both white and black Cubans, the question of his own “race” became the subject of controversy in 1899 when his body was exhumed. It was stated that his skull presented an “interesting anomaly…frequent in the indigenous race.”\textsuperscript{117} Maceo’s legacy and dominant memory depicted him as a de-racialized, exclusively physical figure, one which served as a symbol of racial fraternity. The invocation of Maceo in the service of the Cuban “myth of racial equality” reveals the profound racial tensions and anxieties that shaped the construction of Cuban national ideologies.”\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 70.
\textsuperscript{117} De la Fuente, A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba, 19.
\textsuperscript{118} Helg, Our Rightful Share, 7.
The magnitude of Maceo’s military greatness and his demand for social and political equality was even celebrated in the United States. In 1931, historian and activist Arthur Schomburg stated, “I know of no man of military standing in the whole of America, white, yellow or black that can excel the exploits of Antonio Maceo in the field of battle, as a soldier, during the past hundred years.”\(^1\) Not only were certain war heroes championed by both white and black Americans, the independence movement itself captured their attention, particularly by African Americans. According to Lisa Brock, “African Americans increasingly saw Cuba through the prism of their own desire for freedom.”\(^2\) For African Americans, the numerous slave revolts on the island signified blacks rising up for equality. By the mid-nineteenth century, these slave revolts involved more planning, coordination, and collaborations among slaves who were “possessed of ideological content and political purpose.” In essence, Cuba was viewed as a “territory in revolt.”\(^3\) As an example, in response to La Escalera (the ladder to revolt), colonial officials arrested, tortured and eventually executed thousands of slaves and black free people. However, La Escalera ultimately revealed that extensive networks linked urban free mulattoes and blacks to plantation slaves.\(^4\) For African Americans, this sign of bravery on the part of Afro-Cubans was truly admired, but the brutal consequences of their actions shocked them.


\(^2\) Brock, 6.

\(^3\) Brock, 7.

\(^4\) Helg, “Race and Black Mobilization in Colonial and early Independent Cuba: A Comparative Perspective,” 55. La Escalera started in March 1843 and continued until 1844. The conspiracy involved free blacks and slaves, as well as white intellectuals and professionals. It is estimated that 300 blacks and mulattoes died from torture, 78 were executed, over 600 imprisoned and over 400 expelled from the island. It took its name from a torture method, in which blacks were tied to a ladder and whipped until they confessed or died.
By joining in the rallying cry for freedom from Spain, African American’s signaled their first act of international solidarity as free men and women. Frederick Douglas wrote, “The first gleam of the sword of freedom and independence in Cuba secured my sympathy with the revolutionary cause.”\(^{123}\) According to prominent U.S. academic and activist Johnnetta Cole, “From the very outbreak of the [war] the voice of Black America was among those of progressive peoples in the United States…proclaiming sympathy with the Cuban insurgents and demanding the recognition of Cuban belligerency.”\(^{124}\) For many African Americans, the notion of black men sharing a battlefield with white soldiers and even commanding them was enough to garner their support. Considering that 40 percent of the senior commissioned ranks of the army were black, African-Americans recognized the movement as a “black man’s war.”\(^{125}\) Antonio Maceo and Máximo Gómez captured the imagination of thousands of readers and followers in the United States, particularly African Americans. Considering African Americans’ limited involvement with the military during the Civil War, and because of their own deteriorating status during Reconstruction, Cuba Libre became a romanticized place where full inclusion based on equality was probable.\(^{126}\) Historian Willard Gatewood states that “the revolt had scarcely gotten underway” when it began receiving plaudits from the black community.”\(^{127}\)


\(^{124}\) Ibid.


\(^{126}\) Brock, 10

Not every American newspaper portrayed the independence movement in a positive light. Some Americans perceived this “thoroughly mixed people” as “lacking the vitality of the purer races” and as “inferior.” In fact, the high percentage of black Cubans deterred many Americans from wanting to annex the island. The inclusion of Cuba, it was argued, would bring with it a race problem for it would be “impossible to obliterate their Latin ancestry and mixed racial development.” However, if the United States left Cuba alone as an independent nation, their “inexperience” and the “race problem” would impede the peaceful development of the island. In order to justify to the American people why the United States should militarily control the Cuban government, the American military and newspapers often denigrated the Cubans and their contribution to the war effort.

One article by a correspondent with the American army stated, “On the way we met several groups of Cubans. I don’t know what they are called—‘insurgents,’ ‘patriots,’ ‘soldiers,’ or what. All names are alike to me…it seems strange that not one [Cuban] was ever seen to be guilty of an act which was not selfish---and often criminal.” Theodore Roosevelt remarked “The Cuban soldiers were almost all blacks and mulattoes and were clothed in rags and armed with every kind of old rifle. They were utterly unable to make a serious fight or to stand against even a very inferior number of Spanish troops…”

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129 Ibid., 308. Cuba’s “race problem” is explained in further detail within the introduction.
However, not all U.S. generals and soldiers reported discriminatory remarks about the Cuban army. William Hilary Coston, an African American who had fought in Cuba, stated:

One fact is most prominent: They [the Cubans] had practically won their own freedom when our rescuing army invaded the then territory of Spain, to secure the Cubans liberty and the right to pursue happiness. If they are the cowards that our newspapermen represent them, their accomplishments, while at war with their enemies, prove an unsolvable mystery. It is fair to say that no other nation of “cowards” with larger resources and greater aid from sympathizing nations, have ever accomplished what they did.132

Just as impressed with the Cuban army and dismayed with the bad press they were receiving in the States, Charles Johnson Post, an American private, stated, “The war correspondents sneered at these Cubans and ridiculed their rags, their riffles, and their fighting. The correspondents knew nothing of it.” Post asserted, “Barefoot, or only in rawhide sandals, they could outmarch any of the professional armies.” Noting the similarities between the Cubans and the American soldiers, Post observes that the Cubans, “perhaps, know us better than we know them. It should be mutual.”133 He continued, “For the Cubans in their series of rebellions for freedom from Spain had much in common, in the campaigns and in their aspirations, with our own soldiers of the American Revolution against the fattish autocracy of King George.”134

133 Charles Johnson Post, *The Little War of Private Post* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1960), 127. Post was born in 1873 and fought in the Santiago campaign. He survived malnutrition, dysentery, and what was later diagnosed as “Compound-enteric-Typhoid-Malaria” during his time in Cuba. Post went on to establish his reputation as a journalist, a free-lance writer, an illustrator and finally an official in the United States Department of Labor.
134 Ibid., 128.
Unlike the American revolutionaries who were granted full independence from the British throne, the Cuban rebels were ultimately denied their right to sovereignty. If the outbreak of the war is often portrayed as epic, its conclusion might be depicted as tragic. The culmination of the Cuban and Spanish fighting forces was broken by the intervention of the United States military. The Cubans who risked their homes, material possessions, land and lives were quickly constructed as the insufficiently grateful beneficiaries of the United States generosity and sacrifice. After the increase of whitening of officer ranks toward the end of the war due to the United States involvement, some Afro-Cubans expressed the view that they had been “robbed of all the spoils of the war.”\textsuperscript{135} During the U.S. occupation, white Cubans argued that because the United States worried about the possibility of Cuba’s becoming another Haiti, any separate Afro-Cuban movement or group would raise fears and delay U.S. withdrawal from the island. Thus, for Afro-Cuban’s “sake and the sake of all Cubans, blacks should resign themselves and wait for better times, when Cuba would be an independent republic.”\textsuperscript{136} Cubans were, in the eyes of American General Shafter, “no more fit for self-government than gunpowder is for hell.” Instead of Cuba Libre, the island would become occupied Cuba, puppeteered by its northern neighbor. \textsuperscript{137} Not only were the dreams of freedom crushed for the Cubans who resided on the island, but also for those Cubans who observed the war from the small town of Ybor City in the United States, their dreams of returning home were also shattered.

\textsuperscript{135} Helg, \textit{Our Rightful Share}, 118.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 123.
Chapter Three

The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Race, Nationalism and Identity

“After all whether they encourage or discourage me, I belong to this race, and when it is down I belong to a down race; when it is up I belong to a risen race.”

During the last few days of January 1895, Gonzalo de Quesada boarded a train in New York City headed for Tampa, Florida. Tucked inside his pocket was a message whose impact would be felt around the world. A few days earlier, Quesada met with several Cuban revolutionary leaders, including José Martí, at his home in the city. During the meeting, the men drafted and voted for a declaration of war against the Spanish Colonial Authority. Once completed, the document was to be taken by Quesada to deliver to Tampa, the new economic and social center of Cuba Libre. In Tampa, Quesada met with several owners of a cigar factory who championed Cuban Independence and played a large part in its cause. Inside their factory, they carefully rolled the message calling for war against Spain into a cigar destined for Key West where it was received by a Cuban Revolutionary Party operative, Miguel Duque Estrada. On February 21, 1895, De Estrada sailed from Key West to the Port of Havana to deliver the “revolutionary cigar” to Juan Gualberto Gómez, the famous Afro-Cuban military commander of the Cuban army. Three days later, the cry for Cuban Independence echoed throughout the island.


Considering Cubans were unable to express their nationalist desires publicly and freely in Cuba during the mid to late nineteenth century, their reflections of self-government were only infrequently documented. However, since Cuban nationalists typically found themselves in exile in places such as Tampa and Key West, the Cuban émigré communities that developed in the United States after the 1840s serve as a useful “laboratory” for studying the dynamics of Cuban nationalism. Latin American historian Gerald Poyo states, “These Cuban centers left a rich historical record and, despite the difficulty of evaluating exactly the extent to which exile nationalism reflected sentiments on the island, it is clear that the émigré played a crucial role in disseminating nationalist ideas among all Cubans.”

This exile popular nationalism of the 1890s ultimately inspired the final war against Spain and was reflected in the fiercely independent multiracial popular liberation army led by José Martí, Máximo Gómez, Antonio Maceo, and others in 1895. From its inception in 1886, Ybor City’s multiracial working class Cuban community illustrated a deep commitment to two goals: an independent republic and social justice. Ybor City, like Key West and New York City, was a site of Afro-Cuban participation in the Cuban separatist cause. Cubans of color “forcefully linked the independence movement to their own desires for true social and political equality.” While the importance of these centers of support for Cuban independence is well known, their roles as “parallel, interconnected

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3 Gerald Poyo, With All, and for the Good of All: The Emergence of Popular Nationalism in the Cuban Communities of the United States, 1848-1898 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), xv.
zones of diasporic activity by Afro-Cubans is virtually unknown.”\(^6\) However, by looking specifically at the voices and actions of Afro-Cubans, as well as their relationship to white Cubans and their other immigrant neighbors, their contribution was undeniably connected to, yet at times autonomous from, the goals of Cuba Libre. Unlike African-Americans who were excluded from the United States’ nation-building project, Afro-Cubans “both in and outside of the island, figured greatly in the Cuban revolutionary war efforts, exile nationalist movements, and the transnational reconfiguring of Cubanidad.”\(^7\) Furthermore, the high percentage of Afro-Cubans involved in the Cuban Liberation army, the failure of the Ten Years’ War (1868-1878) and La Guerra Chiquita (Little War) (1879-1880) to gain independence from Spain, “directly impacted the political organization” and “dramatically changed the racial politics” of the Cuban community in the United States.\(^8\) Poyo states, “Interestingly, the very ideology that served as the revolutionary nationalist catalyst emerged from the Cuban communities in the United States.”\(^9\) Although these Cuban communities were relatively small in number when set in the context of United States immigration history, they exerted substantial influence on Cuba’s political development and on relations between the United States, Cuba, and Spain throughout the nineteenth century.\(^10\)

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\(^6\) Ibid., 30.
\(^7\) Nancy Raquel Mirabal, “Scripting Race, Finding Place: African Americans, Afro-Cubans, and the Diasporic Imaginary in the United States,” in Anani Dzidzienyo and Suzanne Oboler, eds., *Neither Enemies nor Friends: Latinos, Blacks, Afro-Latinos* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2005), 189. Mirabal notes that during the late 1880s, Cubanidad was intended to assert an oppositional Cuban identity that challenged Spanish colonial rule, as well as providing support for a nationalistic language based on not only multi-racism, but also the belief that there was no such thing as race.

\(^8\) Ibid., 191.
\(^9\) Poyo, *With All, and the Good of All*, xvi
\(^10\) Ibid., 1.
This chapter examines the history and evolution of Ybor City’s diverse ethnic population between 1886 and the early 1900s. More significantly, it analyzes the relationship between white and black Cubans, as well as their other immigrant and native white neighbors, and their contribution to Cuba Libre. An examination of how Afro-Cubans were treated by their fellow countrymen and the white people of Tampa during the Jim Crow era, and how black Cubans perceived themselves in that society, creates a better understanding of how race related to Cuban nationalism as well as Afro-Cuban identity itself during this short time period. Key to understanding Afro-Cuban self-awareness was the redefinition of “blackness” in relation to the Cuban national project, while at the same time calling for the erasure of “blackness” in the development of a shared Cuban nationalist identity. Afro-Cuban’s peculiar and unique place in the social hierarchy was based on their belonging to the Cuban ethnic community, which opened opportunities for inter-racial cooperation that were not available to native-born African Americans. They were “black when with Cubans,” and “Cuban when with blacks.”\footnote{Susan Greenbaum, \textit{More than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa} (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 12.} The particular “sites” where contestation and negotiation of Afro-Cuban identities particularly occurred in Ybor City included the living quarters, cigar factories, nationalist movements and the various mutual aid societies, particularly the Afro-Cuban \textit{La Union Martí-Maceo}.

By looking at the history of Cuban and American interaction prior to Ybor City’s development, one can comprehend the interrelated and complex relationship between the two groups. Americans had been traveling to the island and exporting their ideals, materialism, and way of life for decades prior to the turn of the twentieth century, and
Cubans increasingly looked north for jobs, education and even a place to settle. During the first half of the nineteenth century, about one thousand Cubans moved to cities such as New Orleans, Philadelphia, and New York City in search of work, while at the same time, Americans arrived to Cuba to take advantage of the opportunities opened by the expanding economic ties between the two countries. Some Cubans stayed and settled in the United States after school, although the ones that returned to Cuba had an overall positive impression of the United States; impressions they eventually transmitted to their countrymen, peaking Cuban curiosity about the north. By the second half of the nineteenth century, as Cuba experienced economic and political changes domestically in their thirty year struggle against Spain, Cubans increasingly moved north for education, political exile, and freedom.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, thousands of Cubans traveled to the United States for business prospects, education, and a better life. The northern country also became a perfect base to form and organize independence movements, such as the Cuban Revolutionary Party. Some of the more wealthy Cubans became American citizens because it not only protected them from Spanish authority, but it granted them access to jobs in the American government, schools, or companies. More prosperous individuals even relocated their industries from Cuba to the United States, such as Vincent Martinez Ybor.

13 Poyo, *With All, and for the Good of All*, 1-51
14 The interaction between the United States and Cuba is explained in further detail in the Introduction of the paper.
Part I: The Evolution and Background of Ybor City

Although Spanish by birth, Don Vincente Ybor (1818-1896) supported the island’s separation from Spain and championed Cuban independence. Arriving to Cuba in 1832 at the age of fourteen, Ybor became one of the most prosperous factory owners on the island. Fleeing Cuba in 1869 to escape the economic and social destruction caused by the Ten Years War (1868-1878) as well as to avoid arrest, the cigar factory owner re-established himself in Key West and recruited hundreds of workers and Cuban immigrants to fashion the same cigar made famous in Havana, *El Príncipe de Gales* (Prince of Wales). Ybor understood that to become and remain successful in the tobacco business, he had to manufacture the product in a stable environment. In addition, another factor that motivated Ybor to look elsewhere was to take advantage of favorable tariff arrangements for cigars made within U.S. borders. Due to the previous high tariff on Cuban cigars (but not on tobacco leaf), the imported cigar was far too expensive for the average smoker in the United States; however, with the assistance of the skilled Cuban artisans in Key West who hand rolled the imported light-colored Cuban tobacco leaf into their famous clear Havana cigars, the smoking habits, tastes and demand for cigars by Americans drastically changed. By 1880, Key West had forty-five cigar factories of varying sizes, employed roughly fourteen hundred workers, and produced

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twenty five million cigars a year. In a short of period of time, because of the low tariffs on the imported tobacco leaf and the cheap émigré labor pool, the cigar industry in Key West flourished.

Key West provided a hot and humid climate similar to that of Havana which was great for keeping the tobacco leaves dry. Attracting not only single men, the new factories also enticed entire Cuban families to work and live. The immigrants brought in food, opened restaurants and pharmacies, and built houses near the factories. Ultimately, the distinct culture that existed in Cuban cigar factories was transplanted to the United States. By 1873, Cubans made up the majority of the population of Key West, quickly giving the town a national reputation for its anti-Spanish political agitation and high-quality cigars. By 1880, 79 percent of Cubans fourteen years of age and over worked in the cigar industry in Key West. Of these Cubans, some 18 percent were black and 9 percent were women.

By 1885, the flourishing cigar industry in Key West fell into disarray: due to a powerful labor movement in the factories, Martinez Ybor was forced to look elsewhere for a location for his booming industry. The émigré cigarworkers in Key West had long been committed to a tradition of militant trade unionism, and by the mid 1880s, strikes and work stoppages on the island were commonplace. While sitting at a table in his Key West home, Ybor began talks with Ignacio Haya, a friend in the industry from New York, and another friend from New York who had just arrived from Tampa. The friend who just

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18 Harper, 279.
19 Poyo, *With All, and for the Good of All*, 43. Typically, Cuban cigar workers were willing to work for lower-than-average wages.
20 Tinajero, 62.
21 Poyo, *With All, and for the Good of All*, 53.
came from Tampa had traveled on Henry Plant’s New York to Tampa rail line (which had just recently begun construction on a line to Port Tampa). Plant proposed to transport tourists to the Tampa Bay Hotel, buy ships, and run a ferry service to Key West and to Cuba. Tampa’s “primitive beauty, abundant wild game and potential as a port city” was described to Ybor and Haya in “glowing details.” Haya, desiring to move his factory from the cold climate of New York where he had to dry the tobacco leaf with fireplaces and potbellied stoves, immediately began talks with Ybor about relocating to the Tampa Bay area. The two entrepreneurs boarded the next available ship for Tampa and arrived the following day. The area’s tropical climate, close proximity to Cuba, and the soon-to-be completed Plant railroad made the area a strategic location for the cigar factory.22

Shortly after, Ybor and Haya obtained significant tracts of land near the Tampa Bay area, and a year later, development of Ybor City began. 23

Although the area had few local laborers available to work in the factories, Haya and Ybor did not consider this a serious threat; in time, their industry and location would undoubtedly attract workers. In March of 1886, their hopes were answered: a fire in Key West not only severely crippled the city’s cigar industry, but it “launched the Tampa cigar industry on its path toward becoming the most important cigar center in the United

22 Westfall, 10.
23 “A Ride Through West Tampa with E.J. Salcines,” Cigar City Magazine Online (March 7, 2011) http://www.cigarcitymagazine.com/people/item/west-tampa-e-j-salcines. Serving as a Judge in Tampa, Salcines is a local historian. His parents were both natives of Spain who arrived to Tampa during the long wave of settlement at the turn of the century. The 40 acres of land had been property of Civil War hero Captain John T. Lesley. Lesley demanded $9,000, although Ybor offered only $5,000. In order to subsidize the sale, Tampa’s Board of Trade (Tampa’s Chamber of Conference was founded as the Tampa Board of Trade in 1885) offered $4,000. Ignacio Haya soon followed by buying additional acres adjacent to Ybor’s land.
States. The fire in Key West ultimately destroyed eighteen cigar factories, including Ybor’s, forcing hundreds of unemployed and homeless Cuban workers further north up the coast in search of work. As opposed to rebuilding his factory in Key West, Ybor decided to relocate and transfer all of his operations from the island community to his Tampa site.

The cigar company town eventually became known as Ybor City. Ybor’s layout was based on contemporary company towns that usually consisted of a single industry—there was a factory, homes for the workers, and commercial businesses. Ybor hoped that by providing good living and working conditions in the new surroundings cigar workers would be happier, have “fewer grievances against owners,” and that perhaps labor unions would have less influence. Ybor City’s remote and isolated location would also allow Ybor and Haya to exercise greater control over the lives of their primarily Cuban and Spanish workers. The businessmen were optimistic that the cost of living, lower than that in cities such as Key West, would entice more workers to move Ybor City.

Initially, however, for the newly arrived immigrants, the “city” offered very little and certainly did not compare with Key West or Havana. Ybor City resembled a mining camp or a “wilderness frontier” for the first year, so dusty that residents were forced to

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24 Poyo, *With All, and for the Good of All*, 55. The fire in Key West forced Ybor to divert his energy and attention toward building a new factory and a town on his recently acquired land near Tampa, as opposed to rebuilding in Key West.
25 Poyo, *With All, and for the Good of All*, 55.
27 Westfall, 12.
wear goggles to keep the dust and gnats out of their eyes. Fernan
dillo Lemos, a newly arrived immigrant, remarked that in order to travel at night, he had to carry a lantern in order to avoid tripping over the stumps or alligators. Disease was a major issue during the early years, as the area became a breeding ground for tuberculosis, yellow fever, and dengue fever. The cigar factories, even as late as the early 1900s, were also plagued with dirt and illness. Dr. Charles Bartlett, an agent of the State Board of Health in Hillsborough County in 1903, remarked there was a “total lack of hygienic precautions in any of [factories]: they spat on the floor, and [the factory owners] had to pay thousands of dollars in sick benefits.”

Tampa’s first cigar factory was “more substantial” than any structure in the state of Florida at the time. The three-story wooden factory building and surrounding houses required foundations of brick pillars which raised them out of the damp, sandy earth and away from the insects and small rodents which inhabited nearby thickets and swamps.

A local newspaper reported on the progress and the “marvelous undertaking” of the city’s construction:

If a person would visit this place every day there would be something new to see, some new evidence of the substantial growth and development. And when one remembers that less than six months ago this site was a forest, the transformation furnishes a matter for interesting consideration. A person cannot fail to be impressed until the idea that the enterprise is backed by immense capital and at the same time is being directed by master minds. Apparently not a single mistake has been made, evidence

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29 Ibid., 177.
30 Ibid., 183.
31 Ibid., 66.
32 Westfall, 14. The mammoth three story brick cigar factory still stands today.
of business sagacity and worthy ambition abounds on every hand. The senior member of this great firm is Mr. V. Martinez Ybor.33

Louis Peréz states, “A distinctive Latin quality of paternalism, prevalent throughout the pre-industrial Hispanic world, established the tone of early labor-management relations in Ybor City.”34 Reminiscent of the typical Latin American patron, Ybor took personal interest in the well-being of his employees, often making emergency cash advances to needy workers, serving as godfather to workers’ children, or even contributing to the funeral expenses of his employees. “When Vicente Martinez Ybor sensed restlessness among his employees,” one contemporary observer noted, he “would invite the workers to his large home for a picnic.”35 At Christmas time, Ybor dispatched wagons filled with gifts of suckling pigs and pastries for his employees and their families. By forming these social ties, Ybor ultimately strengthened the relationship between himself, as the patron, and his workers.36

In order to further entice workers into Ybor City, Ybor constructed hundreds of small, solid worker’s cottages clustered around the factories and within walking distance of the commercial center on Seventh Avenue. By May 1886, Ybor had constructed eighty-nine houses, including thirty-three two-story family dwellings. By the end of that year, he had erected a total of 176 dwellings. Outlined by white-painted fences, each house had two to three rooms, and sold from $750 to $900, depending on the location.37 These newly constructed homes, which were unavailable in Havana, were subsidized by

33 Tampa Guardian (May 5, 1886), in Westfall, 14.
34 Louis Peréz Jr., “Cubans in Tampa: From Exiles to Immigrants, 1892-1901,” Tampa Bay History (Fall/Winter 1985), 27.
35 Ibid., 27.
36 Ibid., 27.
37 Westfall, 16.
Ybor and made available to workers in interest-free installment plans. Considering coffee houses, clubs and theaters were important to the Latin culture, Ybor also concentrated on developing the commercial district. Before long, this area was predominantly composed of immigrant-owned businesses, including saloons and gambling halls.\(^{38}\) Ybor City was transformed into an urban development that included factories, hospitals, social clubs, theaters, churches, stores, restaurants, schools, sewers, and city lighting.\(^{39}\) Before long, the city garnered such praise: “Little Havana was now all the rage now.”\(^{40}\)

Typical of new settlements, Ybor City faced a number of obstacles. A serious problem was the lack of police, leading the leaders of Tampa to call for annexation of Ybor City. Although Ybor strongly opposed the annexation of his city, arguing that the municipal laws and taxes of Tampa would hinder his growth and foresaw very few benefits for the Latin community, Ybor City became Tampa’s fourth ward on June 2, 1887.\(^{41}\) The *Tampa Tribune* noted that besides benefiting economically from annexation, the frequent appearance of Tampa policemen “calmed down the wild frontier” and made Ybor City a “more respectable place to visit on Sundays.”\(^{42}\) Although the city was now officially part of Tampa, the cultural differences between the two communities “isolated

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\(^{39}\) Maureen Patrick, “Immigration and Ybor City, 1886-1921” *Cigar City Magazine* (March 1, 2011) http://www.cigarcitymagazine.com/history/item/immigration-and-ybor-city-1886-1921. Maureen Patrick is a Tampa native, and the President of Tampa Historical Society and the editor the *Sunland Tribune* (a journal of local history).

\(^{40}\) Mormino and Pozzetti, 49. This quote came from the *Morning Tribune* (1885) referring to Ybor City.

\(^{41}\) Westfall, 19. Although a small force of guards were hired by Ybor to assure order, their size was far too small to maintain law amidst the fast-growing community.

\(^{42}\) *Tampa Tribune*, (October 13, 1887) in Westfall, 19.
them from each other for many decades.”

Thus, the annexation of the enclave only made the “Latin Quarter” a city within a city.

Ybor City was the first enclave district set up outside of Tampa and was primarily Spanish speaking and attracted predominantly immigrant groups. Due to the influx of the various ethnicities, Ybor City overnight developed a “European culture different from the ‘Anglo’ culture shared by the inhabitants of Tampa only a few miles away.”

To hear the grandchildren and the great-grandchildren of those who rolled cigars before the turn of the century, the “true roots of early Tampa lay in the open ethnic blend of Latin culture that existed in Old Ybor.”

Cuban, Afro-Cuban, Spanish and Italian cultures flourished, tolerating as well as supporting each other for the good of all. In 2004, Journalist Jennifer Barrs of the Tampa Tribune wrote, “Ybor City was one of the largest and most tolerant immigrant enclaves in the United States, rich in red brick and political passion.” Barrs continued, “Cubans, Spaniards, Italians and mixed-race Afro-Cubans, men and women, worked side-by-side in the cigar factories…that toil put Tampa on the map—one hand rolling the cigar, the other rocking this ‘Cradle of Cuban Liberty,’ a nickname Ybor City earned initial infancy.”

Ybor City became well known for its diverse population and ethnic heritage: unity, amid diversity, emerged as a “principle theme of this community’s experience, as indeed it does America generally.”

In 1886, the same year that Ybor City was founded, the Statue of Liberty was dedicated in New York Harbor. A number of immigrants

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43 de Quesdada, 7.
44 Ibid., 7.
46 “A Ride Through West Tampa with E.J. Salcines”
http://www.cigarcitymagazine.com/people/item/west-tampa-e-j-salcines
47 Mormino and Pozzetti, 319.
arriving on the shores of Ellis Island during this time were destined for Ybor City. Prior to 1880, few immigrants settled in Tampa or its surrounding areas. Those traveling to the Florida city included Italians, Spaniards, European Jews and Cubans. Many of the newly arrived foreigners shared a history of work before reaching Ybor, and eventually created ethnic “paella” unique for the South during this time.\textsuperscript{48} In fact, due to this cultural and ethnic diversity, Gary Mormino and George Pozzetta, authors of \textit{The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885-1985}, note that when compiling their extensive research on Ybor City’s immigrant population, they had to “question conventional studies of individual ethnic groups, and go beyond the black and white model of Southern studies when looking at Ybor City.”\textsuperscript{49} The largest group of immigrants who migrated to Ybor City were Cubans who followed the tobacco trade to Florida. Not only were they in search of work, but they were also escaping Spanish tyranny. Mormino and Pozzetta observe that the majority of immigrants did not encounter a typical American southern city, but a multi-ethnic setting. The authors state that “one can argue that Ybor City’s immigrants were culturally sympathetic to one another.”\textsuperscript{50}

Italians learned about Ybor City through word of mouth and the activities of labor agents. The Italians who eventually settled in Ybor City arrived almost exclusively from Sicily, where life was “unimaginatively hard” in the mid-to late 1800s.\textsuperscript{51} The culmination of the Henry Bradley Plant’s Plant System Railway to Tampa (1884) and Vincente

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 70.  
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 4.  
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 51.  
\textsuperscript{51} Patrick, “Immigration and Ybor City, 1886-1921.” Many of the Sicilians were dependent on farming, mining and had limited trade contacts in their home country. They suffered bouts of malaria, poor soil, bandits, and high land rents. The residents responded, according to historian Giampiero Carocci, by exploring three options: “resignation, socialism, and emigration.”
Ybor’s development of Ybor City (1886) made the area an attractive destination. It was reported in the *Tampa Morning Tribune* that “parties of 25 to 100 Italians” arrived in Tampa per week, and that “not one of them starved” or “not one of them” was out of work.\(^5^2\) Initially, however, the Italians were rejected by both Cuban and Spanish cigar tradesmen and were assigned menial positions in the cigar factories such as sweeping the *galleria* (workroom) or sorting materials. Some Italians sought out work in smaller, independent cigar establishments known as *chinchales* where they might work for little or no pay for as long as a year during their apprenticeship.\(^5^3\) Thousands—including those of Sicilian birth who came directly to Tampa or moved there eventually from other U.S. cities—found work in the cigar trade as well as other opportunities of employment in Ybor City.\(^5^4\)

Similar to the hardships that plagued the Sicilians in their home countries, the Spaniards who immigrated to Ybor City also faced grueling and demanding work environments and limited opportunities in Spain. The cigar trade in Florida attracted not only Spaniards directly from Spain, but from Cuba as well. In 1899, the *Tampa Daily Times* reported that about twenty Spaniards arrived from Havana weekly to Tampa. “They will make their future homes in Tampa and are welcome. This is about the average number that has been arriving here on almost every boat for the past several months.”\(^5^5\)

Considered the social and economic elite of Ybor City, Spaniards typically held the higher management and artisan positions and received a better salary in Ybor City than

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\(^5^2\) *The Tampa Daily Tribune* (December 12, 1905) in Patrick, “Immigration and Ybor City, 1886-1921.”

\(^5^3\) Patrick, “Immigration and Ybor City, 1886-1921.” By 1910, however, Italian workers made up the second largest group of rank-and-file cigar workers in Ybor City. Some of the Italians were actually the most proactive in the various labor organizations.

\(^5^4\) Ibid.

\(^5^5\) *The Tampa Daily Times* (May 9, 1899) in Patrick, “Immigration and Ybor City, 1886-1921.”
they did in Cuba. However, during the Spanish-American War, anti-Spanish sentiment prompted many loyal Spanish residents to return to Cuba.\textsuperscript{56}

Originating primarily from Germany, Russia and Rumania, Jews made up some of Ybor City’s earliest immigrant residents. Fleeing from anti-Semitism in their native lands, Jews were quick to respond to labor agents, posters, word of mouth, and handbills that advertised employment options in the cigar factories of Key West and Tampa. Other Jews found their way to Ybor City from New York in an effort to escape lung ailments caused by the city’s climate. Louis Schein immigrated to New York from Austria and heard “there are Jews in Ybor City” in the 1890s. Schein moved his family to the Floridian city and encountered another Jew who had known Schein’s family in Austria and eventually helped the newer immigrant adapt and assimilate into Ybor City.\textsuperscript{57} Schein’s story represents not only the chain migration pattern that characterized the majority of European immigration, but also the resourcefulness of Ybor City’s immigrant Jewish population.

The Florida city attracted thousands of Cuban immigrants fleeing the island in search of work as a result of the severe economic depression during the mid-1880s, labor unrest, the arrival of a million Spanish workers between 1882 and 1894, and the inclusion of two hundred former slaves into the Cuban labor force.\textsuperscript{58} By the mid-1880s, both black and white Cubans were in dire need of employment options due to the island’s economic and political instability. The Ten Years’ War (1868-1878) crippled the sugar production

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid. A popular “misconception” is that Ybor City’s Jewish population took part mainly in the merchant trades. Although a good number of Jews owned mercantile enterprises, many also took part in the rapid growth and open environment of Ybor City to become real estate speculators, cigar workers, artisans, teachers, and other professionals.

during the 1870s; the destruction of sugar plantations on the island coupled with the
growing beet sugar industry in Europe led to reduced exports and loss of markets. In
addition, these predicaments were compounded by decreasing sugar prices of the mid-
1880s. This severe economic depression ultimately caused banks to close, businesses to fail, and created a high level of unemployment. The cigar industry was significantly affected by the economic situation, forcing tobacco workers north into cities such as New York, Key West, and eventually Tampa in search of work. In addition, the working classes and peasants on the island were viewed as “sources of insurgency and anarchism,” and were targeted by General Valeriano Weyler in the 1890s.

Labor unrest also contributed to the Cuban migration north. Spanish immigrant workers enjoyed preferential treatment in the cigar factories from the late 1880s through the first decade of the twentieth century. Spaniards owned and managed many of the factories in Cuba and typically hired their own countrymen. At the same time, militant labor ideologies, including anarchism and Marxism, appeared in Cuba during the 1880s leading to frequent strikes, labor confrontations and disruptions in work. During strikes in the cigar industries, many Cuban workers migrated north to factories in the United

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61 Peréz., Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution, 125-55.

62 Patrick, “Immigration and Ybor City, 1886-1921.” During Weyler’s campaign of “re-concentration,” the campesinos (farm workers and small farm owners) were interned in camps in urban areas where they had no means of sustenance or assistance. This resulted in widespread starvation and diseases, in which at least 300,000 had died as a result of Spain’s “Reconcentration Decree.”
States. Mormino and Pozetti noted that the “pursuit of working class goals often found itself at loggerheads with the continuing struggle for independence that periodically convulsed the island.”

Another factor that played a role in the Cuban exodus to the United States was the abolition of slavery in 1886. During the 1880s, the emancipation of slaves forced two hundred thousand former slaves into an already dismal work force. In addition, due to the Spanish government’s “whitening technique,” the government recruited white Spaniards heavily between 1882 and 1894. As many as 250,000 Spaniards entered Cuba to take advantage of the government’s willingness to pay for their passage. Cities became overcrowded as an increasing number of former slaves and rural peasants entered them in search of employment. By 1888, between the influx of former slaves as well as the recent arrival of white Spanish immigrants, unemployment reached astronomical proportions. As a result, thousands of Cubans, both black and white, traveled to Ybor City and Tampa in search of jobs.

Beginning as early as 1886, Cubans were the most numerous ethnic group in the Tampa area, with as many as 1,313 of them settling in Ybor City. Considering Cuba was a mere short boat ride away from Ybor City and with the availability of the Tampa-

64 Mormino and Pozetti, 78.
65 Ibid., 74.
66 Ibid. The government paid the passage of any Spaniard willing to work on the island for one year.
67 Ibid., 172. The Spanish government even implemented an anti-vagrancy law in 1888 to remove beggars from the cities’ streets. The government also encouraged Spanish immigration by subsidizing their passage for one year’s of work during this time to curtail the rising black population. Between 1882-1886, more than 69,364 white Spaniards migrated into Cuba.
69 Mormino and Pozetti, 76.
Havana transportation system, Cubans often migrated back and forth between their homeland and the United States with relative ease. By the winter of 1885-86, Plant had also developed a luxury steamship line that serviced Havana, Key West and Tampa. This transportation service ran daily, bringing both Spaniards and Cubans to Ybor City. Many Cubans returned to their homeland during holidays, family gatherings, or during “slack times of employment.”

One Cuban historian remarked on the ease of travel between the two countries: “A world of the cigarmakers on both sides of the Floridian straight created a single Universe.”

Roman Williams, the American consul general to Cuba throughout the 1880s and 1890s stated, “The people here in Cuba look upon Florida as so much a part of their own country.” As opposed to other immigrant groups labeled as “birds of passage,” Williams asserted that Cubans “have more attachment for the United States than that sort of people.”

During the 1880s, the United States lacked immigration policies restricting Cuban entry into Florida. Port Tampa did not have an official customs or immigration clearing house even by 1899. José Rivero Muñiz, a Cuban immigrant during the time, stated, “We landed without anyone asking either me or my brother where we intended to stay in the city.” This mobility, as well as finding possible employment and being part of an established Cuban community, facilitated the creation of “in-between” spaces and strengthened them. In addition, these in-between spaces allowed Afro-Cubans to create

70 Ibid., 76.
71 Ibid.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid., 77.
an identity that preserved and reflected their Cuban cultural heritage, while allowing them to resist being defined as racially inferior in Florida.  

Part II: The Evolution of Afro-Cuban Nationalism, Blackness and Identity

Making up about fifteen percent of the migrant workers, Afro-Cubans arrived in Ybor City along with their white Cuban brothers. In 1890, 367 arrived in Ybor City; by 1900, 791 Afro-Cubans landed in the Florida city in search of work. The mechanization of the sugar industry reduced the labor demand for African freedmen in Cuba, while the American investment of land and capital further diminished the available farming opportunities for Afro-Cubans. Close to 200,000 now freedmen and freedwomen were in search of work in Cuba in the 1880s. Thus, many “undoubtedly” felt more secure under slavery than under emancipation. Some remained on their former plantations and experienced little change from before, while others migrated into cities hoping to improve their standard of living.

The majority of black Cubans who relocated to Ybor City found employment in the factories stemming tobacco leaves and rolling cigars. By 1900, fewer than a dozen worked outside of the cigar industry. The geographic mobility of cigarworkers led to

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76 Susan Greenbaum, “Urban Immigrants in the South: Recent Data and a Historical Case Study,” in Carole Hill and Patricia Beaver, Cultural Diversity in the U.S. South: Anthropological Contributions to a Region in Transition (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 156.
77 Mormino and Pozzetti, 78.
78 Philip Howard, Changing History: Afro-Cuban Cabildos and Societies of Color In the Nineteenth Century (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 177.
80 Mormino and Pozetti, 78.
rather “distinctively cosmopolitan lives” for Afro-Cubans.\textsuperscript{81} Those who had previously worked in the Cuban cigar factories already had the expertise and tools necessary to prosper in the newly relocated northern neighbor’s cigar factories. It is important to note that those who were drawn to these factories were not “immigrants,” in the conventional sense; rather, they could be defined as “transnationals,” or those who forged and sustained a multi-stranded social relationship with their host society, as well as their home one. \textsuperscript{82} Of course, this concept challenges Oscar Handlin’s well-known theory of “uprootedness,” the idea that immigrants simply forgo their old identities and supplant a new one once they land in a new country. According to Handlin, the immigrants lived in “crisis” because they were uprooted: “Emigration took these people out of traditional, accustomed environments and replanted them in strange ground, among strangers, where strange manners prevailed.” He continues, “With old ties snapped, men faced the enormous compulsion of working out new relationships, new meanings to their lives, often under harsh and hostile circumstances.” \textsuperscript{83} However, in Cuba, black and white cigar workers worked alongside one another in the factories; thus, once they arrived in the United States, they continued with this tradition of integration. Mormino and Pozetti assert, “Nothing accentuated Ybor City’s distinctiveness—perhaps its uniqueness in North America—more than the presence of Afro-Cubans who worked side-by-side with white Cubans, Spaniards and Italians and lived among them in integrated housing.”\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{82} L. Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc, Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Materialized Nation-States (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach, 1994), 7.
\textsuperscript{84} Mormino and Pozetti, 78.
Ybor City native Josephine Casetellano was asked to describe those times: “Ybor City was different in those days, everybody lived in. Just like a big family. We went in and out of everybody’s house like it was our own. We didn’t have no radio or television, so we sat out on the porch and socialized with our neighbors.”

Unlike in the United States, the legal separation of the two races did not prevail in Cuba; there, affluent black Cubans moved within the society of the affluent. “Es Negro, pero es Negro blanco” (He is a black man, but he is a white black man) was an expression often heard on the streets in Cuba. Class mobility served as one of the primary vehicles for transforming one’s racial identity in the nineteenth-century Caribbean. In Cuba, as Aline Helg notes, “race remained an important factor in defining one’s place in society,” but it did not mean it was “a fixed social construct immune to redefinition.” Although separation of the races by residence was not practiced, separation by economic class made for de facto segregation by race since discrimination kept Afro-Cubans in second-class positions economically. However, black Cubans were granted access to both governmental and commercial facilities, as well as attended, taught and served as administrators in the Cuban schools. They were allowed to enter hospitals and clinics without limitation, and served as staff members in most capacities. Afro-Cubans also served in the military without restrictions. Working as cigar makers granted Afro-Cuban an elite status; they were highly skilled and they worked in a very

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85 Schnieder, 335.
88 Grillo, “Black Cuba, Black American,” 100.
Typically, the cigarmakers lived in cities, allowing them to participate in the intellectual and political life of the island. Some of these black Cuban cigar makers became poets, artists, musicians, and writers. Unlike their rural black brothers and sisters who worked in the cane and tobacco fields, cigar workers moved “comfortably in the society” of small tradesmen, finding their place marginally between the upper-lower and lower-middle class. Thus, once transplanted to Ybor City, many of the social and economic customs practiced on the island were carried with the Cuban immigrants.

Hipolito Arenas, an Afro-Cuban of the time period recalled, “In those days, we grew up together. Your color did not matter—your family and your moral character did.” Thus, within the sheltered confines of Ybor City, race relations between black Cubans and other Latin Americans appeared remarkably tolerant and harmonious. People of all colors and ethnic backgrounds could be seen walking down the promenade socializing with one another. Noting the integration of housing, an Afro-Cuban of the time period remarked, “In Ybor City, you’d live with an Italian on one side, a Spaniard and a Cuban on the other side.” Another Afro-Cuban asserted “there was no such thing as a white section and black section. The only time you encountered discrimination was when you left Ybor City.”

Born in 1936 as a second generation Ybor City native, Richard Lobo described his grandparents’ living and working conditions in Ybor City at the turn of the century.

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89 Ibid., 105.
90 Ibid., 105.
91 Mormino and Pozzetti, 79.
92 Ibid., 245.
93 Ibid., 186.
94 Ibid., 186.
Lobo’s grandfather worked in a cigar factory, and eventually rose in the ranks to become a *capataz* (supervisor or overseer) who managed the workers for the owners of the factory. Lobo’s grandmother also worked in the factory. Lobo stated that although Tampa was mostly segregated at the time he was born, “we in the Ybor City and West Tampa communities were used to living with people of color and next to people of color.”  

Lobo recalled along with black and white Cubans, there were “a lot of mulattos” that came from Cuba because of the mix of Spaniards and Afro-Cubans who had been brought as slaves to the island. Once they were all “thrown together in Ybor City and West Tampa,” the various races further intermingled to create an even greater diverse mix of people. 

Considering Ybor City was small in size and population and the living quarters were merely “on top of each other,” avoiding a particular ethnic group “proved difficult:” there were numerous reports of individuals carrying on full conversations with their neighbors from their windows and they could “smell what was cooking next door.”  

At no time was any one group dominant in any area or block, for Ybor City was truly an integrated city, “remarkable for a city in the Deep South.” From this diverse mixture of peoples, “emerged a community held together by the commonality of a shared residences, institutions, as well as diversity.” One immigrant of the time period noted “everybody knew each other, they were all workers…The doors were kept open, and everybody was

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95 Richard Lobo, interview by Suzette Berkman, April 26, 2006, Tampa Arts and Culture Oral History Project, University of South Florida.  
96 Ibid.  
97 Mormino and Pozetti, 235.  
98 Ibid., 238.  
99 Ibid., 317.
welcome.” However, the mere grouping of houses did not in itself produce inter-group solidarity or force contact between the ethnicities. A significant integrating factor was the discriminatory nature of native white Anglo people of Tampa, who viewed the newcomers quite differently. The diverse nature of the city fueled “suspicion” on the part of the white native community because “they saw the people from Ybor City as kind of strange and foreigners and aliens—and speaking different languages.”

Considering the majority of Tampa’s population was southern and white, the city had strong Confederate sympathies and was characteristically Jacksonian in political orientation. Although Tampa’s “commercial orbit” lay in the Caribbean, its “political alignment and cultural identification were with the American South.” Both rich and poor Tampa residents practiced little tolerance for Indians, foreigners, blacks or carpetbaggers with abolitionist sympathies.

Signs posted around Tampa’s picnic and bathing spots declared, “No dogs or Latins allowed.” One person lamented, “We were at the bottom and we built Tampa.” Regarding race relations, Afro-Cubans were not perceived as threats to other Latins, however, according to many Anglo-Americans, they were perceived as socially inferior based on their skin color, as well as their Latin heritage. According to many white people of Tampa, “all Latins” were not members of the “white race;” all Cubans were labeled “Cuban niggers.” When visiting Tampa, Afro-Cubans were restricted from entering public spaces deemed as “white,” forbidden to marry white individuals, and were

100 Ibid., 319.
101 Lobo, interview.
102 Greenbaum, “Marketing Ybor City; Race, Ethnicity, and Historic Preservation in the Sunbelt,” 61.
103 Mormino and Pozetti, 239.
104 Ibid., 242.
assigned a certain second-class role in society. According to anthropologist Audrey Smedly, “Race is a cultural invention…. [that] emerged as the dominant form of identity in those societies where it functions to stratify the social system.” 105 This role in American society was largely, although not entirely, based on color. Once Afro-Cubans arrived in Florida, despite the differences in language and heritage, the local laws in Florida labeled them as black and assigned them to the same legal and social category as African Americans.106

By the late nineteenth century, a series of Jim Crow laws had been passed by the Florida legislature that further entrenched the state’s already extensive practices of racial segregation.107 In 1885 the Florida legislature replaced the 1868 constitution, which had extended certain rights and privileges to African Americans. The new constitution effectively revoked those rights and sought not only to disenfranchise African-Americans, but to dissolve the Republican Party. Four years later a series of Jim Crow laws were passed giving legal sanction to racial segregation. By 1900, racial segregation had become more widespread than it was in 1865.108 Regardless of the fact that immigrants almost outnumbered the native-born in Tampa at the turn of the century, political control remained in the hands of redemptionist whites.109

However, although most of the Jim Crow ordinances were firmly in place in the South by the late nineteenth century, the actual enforcement of the laws and conventions

105 Audrey Smedley, “‘Race’ and the Construction of Human Identity,” American Anthropologist 100.3 (Sept. 1998): 690.
106 Mirabal, “The Afro-Cuban Community in Ybor City and Tampa, 1886-1910,” 19. These laws were known as the “Black Codes,” which defined any person with one eighth black blood as “black.”
108 Ibid., 51.
109 Greenbaum, More Than Black, 156.
were blurred or even ignored in Ybor City during the 1880s and 1890s. Due to the overall separateness of Ybor City from Tampa, in which Afro-Cubans were a small minority, the isolation “conditioned both invisibility and an elevated status distinct from the rest of the black population.”110 Afro-Cubans both lived and worked in racially integrated arenas, although some white locals expected them to use separate schools, theaters, hospitals, and churches and travel in segregated streetcars. It ultimately resulted in “not only having to negotiate multiple levels of racial segregation but also of integration.”111 Afro-Cubans had to “know their place” even when “their place” was continually changing due to the fluid and yet persistent nature of racial definitions and customs. These modifications of such contested places made it clear to Afro-Cuban immigrants that if they were to have an arena to work, socialize and ultimately live, those spaces needed to be asserted and cultivated at all times.112 Cuban historian Nancy Mirabal noted that this “seemingly opposing process, that is, the multiple uses and articulations of race, was common among Afro-Cuban migrants who chose to operate within, and continually cultivate, the spaces “in-between.”113 In fact, it was these “in-between spaces” in these particular sites of contestation and convergence that definitions of race were rescripted to suit a shared Cuban diasporic imagery. Cubans who lived and worked in this immigrant community “occupied a fluid, in-between position where they were neither white nor necessarily black.”114 The nature in which they negotiated their identity and positioned themselves in Ybor City’s society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, “complicated the

110 Ibid., 158.
112 Ibid., 52.
history of race and ethnicity in the United States—especially African American
history.”

Afro-Cubans often ignored the discriminatory laws and maintained an identity
with and cultural ties to the larger Cuban community. Considering that “being both black
and Cuban (meaning white) was incompatible with the racial mores of Florida during the
Jim Crow era, Afro-Cubans created a separate community and a fluid identity which
reflected both their cultural heritage and race.”116 Originating from multiple racial
communities and muted racial differences, many Latin Americans, particularly those who
worked in the cigar industry, refused to accept the bifurcated distinctions—black vs.
white—recognized by both law and custom in the southern United States. Both radical
émigrés—advocates of Cuba Libre and of socialism or anarcho-syndicalism—and
moderate Cubans found the rigid biracialism of the Jim Crow South, with its failure to
consider color, class, or culture as a marker of race, peculiar. Typically, they organized
across this color line, even though they recognized a historical division between black
and white, and failed to abide by the South’s strictures in one way or another.117 In South
Florida, Afro-Cubans were recognized by themselves and by others as Latin first, and
African second.118

Tampa, because it was situated in the nexus of the Jim Crow South and the
Caribbean basin, could not sustain the bifurcated and fixed racial identities that
supposedly defined the region as a whole. Instead, racial identities were multiple and

116 Ibid., 19.
117 Nancy Hewitt, Southern Discomfort: Women’s Activism in Tampa, Florida, 1880s-1920s
118 Ibid., 13.
shifting. The residential separation of immigrant and native-born residents and
differences of language helped sustain these multiple sets of racial customs and
categories for an extended period of time.\textsuperscript{119} Tampa and its enclaves’ disruptions of fixed
identities, biracial categories and regional boundaries “have converged to define the city
and others like it---New Orleans, El Paso, and Miami—as in, but not of, the South.”\textsuperscript{120}
Mass immigration and rapid industrialization of the 1880s subverted the traditional order
in Tampa, as the demand for cigar workers from Cuba and immigration from Italy
challenged legal and social structures established for a biracial society.\textsuperscript{121}

Further complicating the story of race and Cuban identity in the Jim Crow South,
was the idea of all Cubans being labeled as black, or “Cuban niggers” by the Anglo
population in Tampa.\textsuperscript{122} To white Americans, Cubans of all colors could easily be
dismissed and devalued in society. Cubans rooted racial difference in “visible’ African
ancestry,” not “the ‘one drop rule’” that defined blackness for many U.S. southerners.
Even the lightest-skinned African American was still considered black in the United
States, regardless of appearance, class, or education. At the same time, Cubans thought it
possible for some light-skinned individuals to be considered white, and for there to be
gradations within the larger category of Afro-Cuban, such as \textit{pardos} (mulattoes),
\textit{mestizos} (mixed race), and \textit{morenos} (blacks). Thus, for certain black Cubans who were
deemed pardo, they could \textit{choose} to pass and claim themselves as white as they did back
in Cuba. For them, race was not necessarily biological, but a social construct. Ethnicity,
or the act of organizing individuals or groups around a common national or ethnic

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\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 11. \\
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 15. \\
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., 18. \\
\textsuperscript{122} Mirabal, “The Afro-Cuban Community in Ybor City and Tampa, 1886-1910” 19.
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identity or ancestral origin, overshadowed racial identity. “Although not fully adopting
the three-tier or multiracial systems that prevailed in other parts of Latin America and the
Caribbean,” historian Nancy Hewitt states, “Cubans challenged southern biracialism by
allowing mixed-race individuals to identify as either black or white.”123

Afro-Cubans were able to maintain a sense of their ethnic distinctness, which set
them apart from African-Americans as it became more difficult to determine one’s racial
makeup if color, as opposed to lineage, was considered. Several of the most prominent
African American women in Tampa were light-skinned, some actually lighter than Latins
claiming to be white. However, African Americans had few opportunities to cross the
color line, and they showed little interest in doing so. On the other hand, according to
Latins, whiteness and blackness continued to rest on a combination of nationality, class,
family background, politics, and color, allowing members of the same extended family to
claim different racial identities.124

Although black Cubans were able to choose their social and economic place
within their enclave community, their black American counterparts did not have that
luxury. Thus, the two groups remained fairly isolated from one another. “Despite the fact
that Florida laws officially assigned them to the same social category,” Susan Greenbaum
asserts, “Cuban and American blacks remained generally alien to each other until nearly
the end of World War II.”125 Afro-Cubans and African-Americans attained distinct
communities that were quite noticeable in the late-nineteenth century Tampa area: their
physical resemblance was superficial in comparison with the differences in religion,

123 Hewitt, 7.
124 Ibid., 13.
125 Greenbaum, “Afro-Cubans in Exile: Tampa, Florida, 1886-1984,” Tampa Bay History 7, no. 2
A Centennial History of Ybor City, (Fall/Winter 1985): 86.
culture, history, language and Cuban nationalism that split the two groups. African Americans, the majority of whom were urbanized freedmen, made up about one-fourth of Tampa’s early population. Typically, they labored at menial jobs amidst a climate of growing racial violence.\textsuperscript{126} They worked primarily as dockworkers or low-paid servants.\textsuperscript{127} Relations and contact between African-Americans and Afro-Cubans were quite limited in the early years of Ybor City’s development; for the most part, members of the two groups worked in different jobs, lived in different neighborhoods, and children attended different schools.\textsuperscript{128}

Mobility also contributed to the reduced likelihood of Afro-Cubans associating themselves with the local native black population. The close proximity of Cuba and the inexpensive steamship travel allowed Afro-Cubans to travel frequently back home to visit with their relatives or friends. Even those black Cubans who were born and raised in Tampa forged contacts with people coming directly from Cuba or other émigré establishments created a “kind of fluid cosmopolitan structure, where mobility tended to reinforce rather than diminish a sense of Cuban identity.”\textsuperscript{129}

As a result of the Jim Crow segregation laws, African-Americans organized under a “racial banner” which forced them to develop their own institutions and organizations, ranging from churches and public institutions of higher learning and civic organizations

\textsuperscript{126} Greenbaum, \textit{More Than Black}, 156. These former slaves had suffered both disenfranchisement and brutalization in the aftermath of the Compromise of 1877.
\textsuperscript{127} Greenbaum, “Marketing Ybor City: Race, Ethnicity, and Historic Preservation in the Sunbelt,” 61.
\textsuperscript{128} Greenbaum, \textit{More Than Black}, 157.
\textsuperscript{129} Greenbaum, “Afro-Cubans in Exile: Tampa, Florida, 1886-1984,” 86. Greenbaum notes that data from city directories and census schedules give some indication to the numerical dimensions of Afro-Cuban turnover in Tampa. Of the nineteen Afro-Cuban households listed in the 1893 city directory, only two reappeared in the 1899 directory. Between 1899 and 1900, virtually all (94 percent) of the Afro-Cubans departed Tampa and were replaced by other, slighter larger in number, new arrivals.
dedicated to securing full rights of participation.\textsuperscript{130} In contrast, because of their Cuban heritage, Afro-Cubans were granted access to resources and social and economic advantages not offered to black Americans. For the Afro-Cubans who worked in the cigar factories, their wages were significantly higher than other professions held by black individuals. The mutual aid societies, which will be further discussed below, granted Afro-Cubans social and economic benefits not available to black Americans. Considering social, political and economic advancements became minuscule and near obsolete for African-Americans due to the Jim Crow laws, there was little incentive for Afro-Cubans to forge ties with black Americans during this initial time of immigration. As Greenbaum notes, “Black immigrants enjoy higher status than native-born blacks and actively sought to preserve it.”\textsuperscript{131}

The most significant factor that separated black Cubans from black Americans, however, was the quest for Cuba Libre. As the rallying cry for freedom from Spain echoed in the hearts and minds of Afro-Cubans, they tended to identify themselves as “Cuban,” as opposed to “black.” As a result of their exiled quest for nationhood, “racial boundaries between Cubans were deliberately obscured, although never forgotten.”\textsuperscript{132} Carole Hill and Patricia Beaver, authors of Cultural Diversity in the U.S. South: Anthropolohical Contributions to a Region in Transition, assert that at “least in the early years, patriotic solidarity outweighed racial divisiveness.”\textsuperscript{133} Even before the emancipation of slaves in Cuba, the mutual quest of liberating the island from Spanish


\textsuperscript{131} Danilo Figueredo, “From Ybor City with Amor: The Afro-Cubans of Tampa,” Multicultural Review 12.3 (Sept., 2003), 65. This article presents an interview with Susan Greenbaum.

\textsuperscript{132} Greenbaum, More than Black, 12.

\textsuperscript{133} Hill and Beaver, 161.
rule enhanced connections between white and black Cubans and provided the impetus for interracial organizing.\textsuperscript{134} In Cuba, the racial egalitarianism of the national independence movement was fostered by the large proportion of Afro-Cubans in the liberation armies of the Ten Years’ War (1868-1878), the Little War (1879-1880) and the final War for Independence (1895-1898). Once settled in the United States, by claiming racial equality as both a basis for and an outcome of their quest for Cuba Libre, both white and black Cubans rallied together against the prevailing discriminatory winds of the South. In south Florida, Afro-Cubans made up fifteen to twenty percent—a significant minority—of the émigré population and undeniably contributed substantially to the organization efforts of the exile community on behalf of Cuban Independence.\textsuperscript{135}

In 1922, Bernardo Ruiz Suarez, an Afro-Cuban lawyer, published a pamphlet entitled \textit{The Color Question in the Two Americas}. In it he attempted to explain the differences between black American and Cuban men. Ruiz Suarez argued that considering Afro-Cubans played a large part in the independence movements in Cuba, they could rightfully declare themselves not only “black,” but also “Cuban.” By designating themselves as part of the nation-state or, more important, the nation-building project, granted Afro-Cubans the right to distinguish themselves from African-Americans and to complicate definitions of blackness, culture, nationality and self. The Cuban culture, Ruiz Suarez argued, was what caused migrants from “Spanish-American” countries to declare that they were “not American negroes.”\textsuperscript{136} At the same time, Ruiz

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\textsuperscript{134} Hewitt, 11.
\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 7.
\textsuperscript{136} Mirabal, “Scripting Race, Finding Place,” 198. Bernardo Ruiz Suarez traveled to the United States to investigate the myth that Cuban racism was more benign than North America’s. He agreed that
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Suarez’s assertion was dependent on a shared assumption that African-Americans were not seen by the white population as critical to the nation-building project: “The black American, generally and practically speaking, is not even a citizen of his country.”¹³⁷

Ruiz Suarez compared white Cubans treat Afro-Cubans with how white Americans treat African Americans:

In one case, the white [Cuban American] pretends to give him the hand of fellowship, as to a brother reared in the same cradle. The [white] American, on the other hand, regards him with haughty disdain and considers him not at all as a man, a black man, and a citizen, but simply as a negro, an indefinite and indefinable thing, at best.¹³⁸

For white Cubans, by comparing their own racism to that of the United States, particularly in the Jim Crow South, somehow humanized their bigotry. Since 1887, black Cubans could not be excluded in Cuba from public service for racial reasons, and by 1889, Cuban discrimination in theaters was disallowed and blacks could not be barred from cafes and bars. Also in that year, black children were accepted in state schools on the same basis as whites.¹³⁹ At the same time, black Americans were disenfranchised and disempowered by their white counterparts. Their rights as citizens in the United States lay on the margins of the nation, and they functioned neither as active participants nor as rebellious insurgents who fought and demanded equality as Afro-Cubans had during the wars for independence.

North American racism was more salient, for its power structures openly incorporated inequality, while Cuba hid its inequalities behind the illusion of a color-blind society.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 198.
¹³⁹ Helg, Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912, 38.
Both black and white Cuban immigrant workers were a sharp contrast with the native born of Tampa; not only did they speak another language and look different, they also practiced their own customs and religion. In addition, a large segment of the newly arrived foreigners embraced socialist and anarcho-syndicalist doctrines which they evangelized in various ways.\textsuperscript{140} Prior to 1898, Cubans were embroiled in revolutionary activities taking place on their island, and devoted much of their time, money and energy in making the revolution a success. Due to these ethnic, cultural and political differences, the cigar industry and its foreign employees and employers did not associate much with their host community. However, regardless of the native population’s indifference or avoidance of the immigrant newcomers, the Tampa Board of Trade had warmly welcomed the cigar industry. Cigars supplied abundant tax revenue for the city, generated a large payroll, and subsidies granted to the initial manufactures were seen as a good investment.\textsuperscript{141}

Tampa and its enclaves soon became an area dominated by a single industry based on the production of cigars. A town dependent on one manufactured product was not unusual in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century United States, especially in the South. However, the fact that Ybor City’s founders and virtually all of its workers were foreigners was quite uncommon and remarkable.\textsuperscript{142} The majority of the factory owners were of Spanish descent who had settled in Cuba during the colonial period, while the workers were primarily Cubans, Spaniards, and to a lesser degree, Italians.

\textsuperscript{140} Greenbaum, “Marketing Ybor City,” 62.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 62.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 61. By 1910, nearly half of Tampa’s population was foreign born.
The cigar trade was also unique in the fact that it relied on skilled labor learned over a nine month training period. The amount one was paid was dependent upon the number of cigars he or she rolled. An 1897 record book from the cigar factory reveals the amount of pay each worker, depending on his or her job in the factory, earned. Packers earned on average $27 a week, selectors earned $20 a week, and cigar rollers earned roughly $12.50, “an impressive figure for this era.” In fact, the *Tampa Tribune* referred to Ybor City as the “financial soul” of Tampa in 1895. In addition, unlike some of the other trades, the cigar workers were diverse, ranging from black and white Cuban, to Spanish and Chinese. Women were allowed to work as casers by 1866 as well. In fact, no other industry at this time permitted blacks, Latin Americans, European immigrants and women to labor side-by-side at the same workbench. The factory owners also permitted certain Cuban customs like *el cafécito* (little coffee) at the bench, a flexible work schedule, and an unlimited personal supply of cigars in order to facilitate the entry of Cuban cigar workers into the United States work force. Considering the majority of Cuban immigrants were involved in the cigar industry in one way or another, it was important for the management to foster an environment that resembled a Cuban one.

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143 Mormino and Pozetti, 69. It is important to note, that due to Tampa and Ybor City’s humid climate, the preservation of records at the cigar factories was near impossible, forcing historians to rely predominantly on oral accounts. Mormino and Pozzetti noted that not one record from the cigar factory, from voting lists to permit records, was completely preserved prior to 1935. In 1908, a fired destroyed thousands of records, wiping out most of them prior to that year (12).

144 Ibid.

145 Tinajero, 21.

146 Mormino and Pozzetti, 101.
Eventually, the customs used to make the adaptation process easier for Cuban immigrants “came to symbolize workers’ autonomy and individualism within the workplace.”\textsuperscript{147}

Evidence of Cuban worker individualism was found in the work itself: they could select the leaves, measure the tobacco, and roll the cigars on their own time and within their own space. This process was “critical to preserving the cigar factories as spaces where Cubans could define and redefine themselves as workers and as part of a changing Cuban immigrant community.” As a result of this autonomy, any attempt by the employers to alter the protocol or schedule was met with cigar workers’ refusal to work. In fact, between 1886 and 1893 alone, the “local factories suffered at least fourteen strikes.”\textsuperscript{148} By granting the cigar workers in Ybor City greater freedom of expression, it allowed them to organize more openly. The cigar workers ultimately formed the “strongest unions of any Hispanic workers in the history of the United States.”\textsuperscript{149}

Greenbaum asserts the “cigarworkers’ reputation for racial tolerance was often cited as evidence of their radicalism and offered added fuel for nativists antagonisms against all the immigrants.”\textsuperscript{150} In addition, due to the ethnic and racial diversity within the workplace, there was “little dissension among them.”\textsuperscript{151}

Workers in the cigar factories had traditionally been more politicized because of the high level of informal education obtained through the institution of \textit{el lector}: a person selected and paid by the workers to read to them throughout their boring and monotonous

\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 53. Mirabal, “Telling Silences and Making Community,” 53. By 1908, close to 90 percent of Cubans in the workforce of Tampa and Ybor City were involved in some way in the cigar industry.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 53.
\textsuperscript{150} Greenbaum, “Afro-Cubans in Exile: Tampa, Florida, 1886-1984,” 82.
\textsuperscript{151} Tinajero, 90.
work day. The tradition of using lectores dates back to nineteenth century Cuba and spread from there. Originally, the cigar workers would take turns every half hour reading aloud newspapers, magazines or pieces of fiction. Those who read were compensated for their labor time lost by their fellow employees.\textsuperscript{152} Araceli Tinajero, author of \textit{El Lector: A History of the Cigar Factory Reader}, states that the read aloud ultimately provided a sense of unity and fraternity. The craft of the lector originally was associated with the Catholic Church because of its “pulpit-like” role and eventually became incorporated into the Cuban penitentiary system so the prisoners could be entertained and educated while they rolled cigars.\textsuperscript{153} This “sacred art’s” environment was quiet, almost “monastery or convent-like” considering there were no machines humming in the background, so the voice of el lector was both engaging and soothing.\textsuperscript{154}

In 1865, Havana had five hundred cigar factories that employed fifteen-thousand workers. The first recorded reading aloud occurred on December 21, 1865 in the \textit{El Figero} cigar factory. The three-hundred workers elected their own lector, and the act garnered much attention from the local press: “Today, even in the heart of the workshops, and during the hours most suited to manual labor, imaginations are busily questioning science and philosophical truths meant to keep the workers abreast of the age to which they belong.” The story continued, “They are reading the works of good modern authors and consulting with each other about any point outside their intellectual grasp; in short they are doing what they can to learn and to continue down the path of civilization.”\textsuperscript{155} After the success of El Figero, other factories in Havana followed suite in hiring their

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\textsuperscript{152} Ibid., 4. \\
\textsuperscript{153} Ibid., 8. \\
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid., 20. \\
\textsuperscript{155} Ibid., 16.
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own el lectores; however, the influence and prominence of the lectores in Cuba was repressed during the revolutionary wars for independence (1868-1878, 1878-1879, 1895-1898), as cigar workers became part of the vanguard for Cuban independence from Spain.

While the lectores in Cuba faced numerous obstacles to practice their craft, those who traveled abroad escaped the Spanish government’s oppression. By the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, workers in nearly every establishment in south Florida, Puerto Rico and New York hired a reader to edify and entertain them during the workday. José Dolores Poyo was the first official lector in the United States who settled in Key West. Before granting Poyo his official position granted by the cigar workers, the lectores took turns reading. Poyo read various works, from English language magazines and newspapers such as the Key West Guardian, to Spanish language ones. However, the Spanish newspapers, arriving from either from Cuba or New York, were often two days late. In addition, when reading the English ones, the lector had to translate the piece into Spanish. Eventually, Poyo started his own Spanish newspaper, El Yara, in Key West in 1878. El Yara consistently defended an independent Cuban republic: “It is just, logical, convenient, and patriotic to seek the only possible solution: the sovereignty of the island, free of the metropolis or any other foreign nation…this is the aspiration of the independent revolutionary movement.”

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156 Hewitt, 2.
157 Tinajero, 64. El Yara was founded in 1878 in Key West in response to the Zanjon Pact. It focused on the Cuban exile community and was the most widely read in Key West. José Martí even read it while his stay in New York. El Yara eventually collapsed in 1898.
158 El Yara (September 22, 1885) cited in Poyo, With All, and for the Good of All, 55.
Poyo eventually moved to Ybor City to become its first el lector, where he re-launched his *El Yara* newspaper to cater to the Spanish speaking audience. Prior to Poyo’s newspaper, Ybor City did not have a press, schools, or libraries; thus, the tradition of el lector was socially, educationally, and culturally important.

The importance of the lector institution was summarized by Cuban writer and essayist Ambrosio Fornet:

> The proletariat encountered in the reading—or ‘the desire to hear reading,’ as an editorialist for El Siglo (The Century) put it—the most democratic and efficient means of acculturation that existed at the time. Oral transmission, effected in their own work place during working hours, was the ideal mechanism for satisfying the intellectual needs of a class that emerged wanting books, but not having resources, the time and in many cases the schooling to read them. The Reading was the first attempt at extending books to the masses for solely educational and recreational reasons. Among the privileged classes, the book had always been a sumptuous object and ultimately, an instrument of domination or lucre; the proletariat converted it into an instrument of self-education, using it only to advance itself ideologically and culturally. 159

Typically, the reader was a cigar maker, union organizer, newspaper editor, or a writer who presented an infusion of local and international news in the morning along with political writings of Marx, Proudhon, Bakunin, and other socialist, anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist authors. At the same time, the lector broadened the workers’ knowledge of literature, politics, and contemporary social thought. For four hours a day, the cigar workers in Florida were informed of the latest news on labor strife and anti-

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159 Ambrosio Fornet, *El Libro en Cuba* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1994), 185, in Kanellos and Martell, 62. Fornet is currently an outstanding figure from the Cuban editorial movement, and serves as a member of the Cuban Academy of Language. Along with being an author, Fornet is also an editor and literary and book scholar.
colonial rebellion around the world, learned the latest techniques of radical intellectuals attempting to organize such struggles, and listened to literary classics that nurtured class consciousness.\textsuperscript{160} Books were widely used by lectores, including ones about the wars of liberation, the French Revolution, Bolívar’s campaign, \textit{Les Miserables}, and the “ever-hopeful” \textit{Don Quixote}.\textsuperscript{161} In 1870, Victor Hugo, a favorite of the cigar workers, received a letter written and signed by three hundred Cuban women in exile in the United States asking him to intervene in the Cuban revolutionary cause. Hugo responded in an emotional letter, “To the Women of Cuba:” “No nation has the right to establish its grip on another, no more Spain over Cuba, than England over Gibraltar…A people do not own another people nor is a man master of another man.”\textsuperscript{162}

In addition to educating the work force, the act of reading aloud in Spanish kept the “native tongue” alive.\textsuperscript{163} Although the Cuban immigrants probably had a higher rate of literacy than that of the native population of Tampa, literacy, per se, was not a good measure of knowledge for Tampa’s cigar workers. Considering most immigrant workers left school at an early age to enter the workforce, the reader essentially offered the workers something “quite rare” in American industry: a cosmopolitan education on the factory floor.\textsuperscript{164} At the same time, the workers granted the reader with something equally as rare—the liberty to present radical ideas to a captive and willing audience—for el elector was beholden not to the employer but the employees.\textsuperscript{165} However, although the lectores were chosen by the cigar workers for their ability to speak clearly and engage

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item 160 Ibid., 3.
\item 161 Tinajero, 64.
\item 162 Ibid., 65.
\item 163 Ibid., 83.
\item 164 Hewitt, 3.
\item 165 Ibid., 3.
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their audience, they had little control over the materials they read in the factories. The selected works were chosen by the workers, and as the lector Abelardo Gutierrez Dias noted, one was expected to “read the materials demanded by workers, not judge them.”166

As the workers listened religiously to patriotic rhetoric from the lector and as they participated in patriotic and cultural events, they ultimately supported the independence movement.167 The cigar factories became the single most important source of revenue for Cuba Libre. “El día de la Patria” (one day’s work for the homeland) became the theme song for Ybor City’s Cuban population in the 1890s. One contemporary source noted that “the insurgents received as much financial aid from these people (from Tampa) as from all other American sources abroad.”168 In May 1896, enraged by the revolutionary activities of the Ybor City tobacco workers, the Captain General of Cuba, Valeriano Weyler, imposed an embargo on the exportation of tobacco, creating a “severe blow.” However, near Ybor City, the Neyland family established a tobacco plantation that produced 350 bales yearly. The Neylands ultimately helped save the cigar industry, and the cigar workers continued to give a day’s work weekly for the cause of Cuban liberty.169

The act of reading aloud not only maintained a sense of their Cuban patriotism, but their identity as well. It ultimately proved to be a “manifestation of Cuban culture brought into the United States, and had remained afloat throughout the war: in Cuba,

167 Tinajero, 75.
168 Ibid., 80.
169 Ibid., 8.
reading had been banned and did not take place for ten years.”¹⁷⁰ The readings in the factories “laid the foundation for a practice that would be carried out for decades outside of Cuba, but also contributed to a Cuban culture phenomenon that became firmly rooted in the United States.”¹⁷¹ Nicolas Kanellos and Hevetia Martell, authors of Hispanic Periodicals in the United States, Origins to 1960: A Brief and Comprehensive Bibliography, state, “It was in fact in these communities [cigar factories] that Cuban nationalism became much advanced, that the revolutionary ideology escaped the workshop and permeated all social activities in the clubs, theaters, and mutualistic societies.”¹⁷²

Although the factories were racially integrated, it did not mean the workplace was completely free of ethnic, class, gender, and even racial distinctions. Born in Ybor City, Afro-Cuban Evelio Grillo, whose mother and father both worked in the cigar factory, stated that he knew of only one black Cuban who achieved the highly honored position of lector.¹⁷³ A system of “occupational hierarchy” resulted from the types of jobs offered to individuals depending on their status. Although workers, regardless of their color, earned the same wages for comparable labor, Afro-Cubans consistently occupied the lowest positions in the workplace.¹⁷⁴ For black Cuban men, however, the occupational hierarchy remained “relatively fluid,” allowing them to work not only as janitors and hauling tobacco leaves, but also as cigar rollers. At the same time, Afro-Cuban women were

¹⁷⁰ Tinajero, 73.
¹⁷¹ Ibid., 83.
¹⁷² Kanellos and Martell, 62.
¹⁷³ Evilio Grillo, 100. Facundo Accion was the only black Cuban lector.
granted few jobs apart from stemming tobacco leaves, an undesirable job that by the 1870s became a separate occupation regarded as “dirty, dead-end, low-wage labor.”

Female Afro-Cuban cigar workers often worked alongside other immigrant women in areas separate from the men. Within these separate spaces, women discussed, formed arguments, and ultimately created a community within the factories, labor unions, and within the larger Ybor City and Tampa community. Not only did women congregate in the cigar factories, but they also intermingled while working as seamstresses, midwives, cooks, domestic workers, and boarding-house keepers. During the final revolutionary war against Spain, these social networks became particularly important to Cuban women who were involved in the revolutionary movement. In addition, they were allowed to move beyond their separate work environments in order to join Cuban male cigar workers, as well as those who worked outside the industry, in effort to raise money and to form revolutionary clubs.

Although the black Cuban population was relatively small, they were well represented within the nationalist movement due to their work in the cigar factories. Hearing the news of the breakout of Cuba’s final War for Independence on February 24, 1895, 3,200 Cubans of all backgrounds and races left work to gather together to discuss the war. Both Afro-Cuban men and women served as delegates to the Tampa chapter of the *Partido Revolucionario Cuban*, wrote for revolutionary newspapers, raised funds, and “performed their duties zealously.” However, regardless of their relentless activism and dedication to the movement, Afro-Cubans were given little recognition as a

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175 Ibid., 54. The Afro-Cuban men were allowed to roll the less expensive cigars.
176 Ibid.
177 Mormino and Pozzetti, 113.
community for their work and offered few positions of power within the movement.

“Afro-Cubans play shadowy and supporting roles,” Miriam Jimenez Roman and Juan Flores state, “and are portrayed as simple and unlettered.”¹⁷⁹ Those who did actively contribute to the movement were either not mentioned at all in historical texts or their identities as Afro-Cubans are not indicated. José Martí worked relentlessly to build a movement that could withstand these deep-rooted racial divisions, and viewed the Afro-Cuban participation as crucial to its success. Greenbaum notes that the Afro-Cuban “prominent participation in patriotic activities was a visible indication of racial solidarity among the insurgents, which Martí would contribute to victory and ease the creation of a just society.”¹⁸⁰ Not only did Martí champion a Cuba free from Spanish rule, but also a country from which racism, exploitation, and oppression had been eliminated. Noting the vital importance of the exile community in the United States, particularly from both black and white cigar workers, Martí often spoke in their factories to garner support for Cuba Libre.¹⁸¹

In the late 1880s, Martí gave a famous speech in Tampa that redirected the meanings and uses of race within the Cuban nationalist movement:

Shall we fear the black, the noble black, and the black brother who has forgiving the Cubans who still mistreats him? The revolution, which has brought together all Cubans regardless of their color, whether they come from the continent where the skin burns, or from people of gentler light, will be for all Cubans.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Roman and Flores, 53.
¹⁸² Mirabal, “Scripting Race, Finding Place,” 192.
Although Martí spoke on behalf of the Afro-Cuban population, his primary motive was to convince white Cubans to change their ideas about race and war, and to, ultimately, “revise the nationalist movement’s revolutionary platform so that it took seriously racial equality and civil rights.”

Between 1891 and 1895, Martí made several trips to Tampa and Key West and was well received by the cigar workers. Regarding Martí’s influence on the cigar industry, Peréz states, “No other sector of the exiled patriots was more disposed by temperament and tradition to identify with Martí’s version of Cuba Libre than the Florida cigarworkers.” In 1892, during a visit to Tampa, Martí announced the creation of the Cuban Revolutionary party (PRC), dedicated to Cuban independence. For the following six years, residents of Ybor City labored tirelessly for Martí’s dream while establishing thirty patriotic clubs, vital to the infrastructure of the PRC. These communities in Florida gave Martí “enthusiastic support and eventually became the backbone of the independence movement.” The speeches he gave in Florida cities became famous and part of his literary canon. In one of his most celebrated speeches given in November of 1891 in Tampa, Martí called for the new generation of Cubans to take up the struggle that began twenty-three years earlier. Taking in the Floridian scenery, Martí stated:

Let us sing today an anthem to life before their well remembered graves. Yesterday I heard it, rising from the earth itself, as I crossed the dreary afternoon on my way to this faithful town…Amidst the shredded clouds, a pine tree defied the storm and thrust the stately trunk upwards. Suddenly, the sun broke

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183 Ibid.
184 Figueredo, interview with Susan Greenbaum, 63.
185 Peréz, Essays on Cuban History: Historiography and Research, 28.
186 Ibid., 29.
through a forest clearing, and there, by a swift flash of light I saw, rising from the yellowed grass amidst the blackened trunks of the fallen pines, the joyful shoots of the new pines. That’s what we are: new pines!\textsuperscript{188}

Martí’s famous oration resonated among his countrymen as he addressed Florida Cubans on the occasion of the 20\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the 1871 massacre of students by a pro-Spanish militia in Havana. Invited to Tampa by José Dorlores Poyo and other leading Cubans, Martí’s goal was to galvanize Florida Cubans and convince them to contribute political support and economic resources to the cause.

When visiting Tampa, Martí often stayed with Paulina and Ruberto Pedroso, an Afro-Cuban couple who owned a boarding house across the street from the Ybor City cigar factory. In 1893, two Spanish agents attempted to poison Martí while he visited Ybor City. After the attempt on Martí’s life, the Pedrosos took the Cuban leader into their home as a place of refuge. Whenever Martí stayed at their home, the flag of the budding Republic of Cuba fluttered outside above the street. In the evenings, groups of Cubans gathered outside the Pedroso house to watch the “Apostle of Freedom” through the windows; his room remained lit until late at night, and at times in the silence, the “scratching of his pen” could be heard.\textsuperscript{189}

Martí’s and the Pedrosos’ relationship exemplified Martí’s message regarding race relations; they were reassuring symbols of blackness that Martí himself wanted to emphasize.\textsuperscript{190} The great orator was careful to cater to Afro-Cubans in his quest to garner

\textsuperscript{188} “José Martí Trips to Florida, Part 1,” Cuban Heritage.org http://www.cubaheritage.org/articles.asp?IID=1&artID=205. Martí’s speech was recorded by Francisco Maria Gonzalez, a lector at the Gato factory.

\textsuperscript{189} de Quesada, 8.

\textsuperscript{190} Figueredo, 64.
support for an independent Cuba; he knew he needed to reach across the color line in order to expect revolutionary success. According to Martí and his followers, because blacks fought so bravely in battle during the Ten Years War, and whites officially “ended” slavery in 1886, the two races were now able to live in “harmony.” In effort to unite the races under the banner of Cuba Libre, Martí condemned racism while urging whites to forsake racial pride and blacks to expunge their anger. Greenbaum states, “Race relations in the Tampa Cuban community of that brief period were extremely cordial, perhaps uniquely so.”\(^{191}\)

José Martí grew to understand the value of education and the importance of being read to aloud once he visited the Ybor cigar factory in 1891.\(^ {192}\) Martí admired the task of reading aloud, which is why the lector was to him like a priest or teacher in a temple. He referred to el lector as an “advanced pulpit of liberty.”\(^ {193}\) Conscious of the lector’s power and influence, Martí suggested to the lectores what kind of conferences to organize and what kind of texts to read.\(^ {194}\) In the cigar factories, the lectores were the ones who announced a variety of activities at the clubs and at their headquarters. In the introduction of his famous speech given in Ybor City, known as “With all, and for the Good of All,” Martí mentioned reading in the workshops: “Cubans, for suffering Cuba, the first word.” Without the assistance of the lectores who spread Martí’s message and fueled the flame for independence, the “Apostle of Freedom” could not have achieved so much success in

\(^{191}\) Ibid., 63.
\(^{192}\) Tinajero, xvi.
\(^{193}\) Mormino and Pozzetti, 103.
\(^{194}\) Tinajero, 83.
Martí understood that he had to win over the lectores in order to gain the support of the cigar workers. On October 12, 1894, Martí delivered his last revolutionary speech in Ybor City from the lector’s pulpit amidst the wild acclaim of the Cuban cigar makers at the Emilio Pons Cigar Factory. The final words of his prophetic speech were, “We shall triumph! Their hammer blows will be met by a destructive file of steel.”

If the cigar industry “functioned as the economic heart of Ybor City, the mutual aid societies served as its soul.” The history of mutual aide societies can be traced as far back as the middle of the sixteenth century. In order to mitigate the psychological and cultural shock of transplantation from the familiar to the new, these organizations were set up to alleviate the migrant’s chaotic transition. For African slaves in Cuba, these organizations provided a gateway into their old world traditions and heritage, a venue to uphold and maintain their identities. Afro-Cubans had operated their own tribal societies (cabildos) since the late 1700s, incorporating both religious and mutual aid functions. By the middle of the nineteenth century, these societies served both the free and the enslaved Africans in Cuba. As opposed to outlawing and cracking down on the black “witchcraft” practices of their slaves, many of the plantation owners in Cuba ignored their presence all

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195 Ibid., 91. The lectores also assisted the revolution by hosting Cuban revolutionary leaders such as Máximo Gómez and Antonio Maceo. In 1885, Gómez and Maceo visited Key West for one simple reason: to raise money for future expeditions to Cuba. Guided by lectores, the two famous revolutionaries traveled from one factory to the next. In fact, it is no “exaggeration to say that, without the presence and participation of the lectores, Gómez and Maceo would not have been able to raise the sum that the cigar workers contributed (73).  
196 de Quesada, 8.  
197 Mormino and Pozzetti, 171.
together, claiming they had little time to monitor them and not enough money for
Christian conversion. 198

By the nineteenth century, a number of mutual aid societies had been established
throughout the island offering economic, health and social benefits to both white and
black Cubans. Besides offering essential benefits, particularly to Afro-Cubans, these
societies functioned to preserve and maintain an ethnic identity, and protected them from
the oppressive structures of the Spanish government. Just as these societies helped
mitigate the adjusting of Afro-Cubans and white Cubans in Cuban society, they also
aided the newly arrived Cubans in Ybor City. As Greenbaum notes, “Immigrants of the
same nationality who inhabit small, tightly knit communities can oversee each others’
behavior and enforce compliance with norms of participation and cooperation.” 199

Upon arriving to the Florida city, the various immigrant groups formed their own,
distinct mutual aid societies, and nearly all the cigarmakers and their families belonged to
one of these clubs. 200 Although fraternal organizations existed in the United States during
this time, they did not compare to the Latino community’s societies and what they
offered to the immigrants. 201 The Spaniards and Cubans each developed two societies
divided by race and region, and the Italians established their own as well. 202 Ybor City’s
organizations were unique because of their consolidating nature and the encompassing
character of the separate societies. 203 Much of the socio-economic progress, including

198 Greenbaum, More than Black, 42.
199 Susan Greenbaum, “Economic Cooperation among Urban Industrial Workers: Rationality and
Community in an Afro-Cuban Mutual Aid Society, 1904-1927,” Social Science History 17, no. 2 (Summer
1993), 175.
200 Greenbaum, “Marketing Ybor City,” 63.
201 Lobo, interview.
203 Mormino and Pozzetti, 183.
cooperative relief organizations, paid medical care, community hospitals, and even paid
funeral expenses, could not have been possible without a creative and intercultural
community cooperation. As Mormino and Pozetti state, “The genius of Ybor’s collective
associations was their ability to adjust to the changing realities of ethnic group relations,
the workplace, and new waves of immigrants.” 204 Considering the immigrant groups
received little assistance from the native white people of Tampa and could not merge
with already existing immigrant communities like many other immigrants did during this
time, these organizations reflected an organizing impulse to serve the community socially
and economically, as well as its health. 205

These five societies were highly developed and organized, each having
constructed a large social hall and offering their members a wide range of medical and
economic benefits. Members of each club raised funds and built multistoried clubhouses
with libraries, cantinas, and ornate ballrooms which ultimately provided daily gathering
points where the cigar makers stopped in after work. According to Janet Metzger, a
resident of Ybor City during the late nineteenth century, “The Clubs were a way for the
Latinos to keep their pride and identity in a country that seemed strange and sometimes
hostile. But belonging to a club was also a matter of survival.” 206

In addition to providing a social benefit to the immigrants, these societies also
established a system of comprehensive socialized medical care that included clinics,

204 Ibid., 200.
205 Ibid., 171. As an example, in northern urban areas Italians frequently occupied areas recently
vacated by Germans, Irish or Jews. In Ybor City, the newly arrived immigrants encountered a very
different situation. As opposed to simply occupying a previously owned space, they had to wait until one
was built. In addition, there were no institutions to minister the immigrants, such as charitable agencies.
The Catholic Church, which often aided other immigrant groups during this time, was despised and rejected
by the Cuban community, as explained in the Introduction of the paper.
206 Schneider, 335
midwives, dentist, pharmacies, and two hospitals. Benefits included both sick leave and burial expenses. In 1888, Dr. Guillermo Machado, a Spanish physician living in Ybor City, established La Igual (the Equal) for the cigarmakers in the city. For 50 cents a week, immigrant cigar workers received medical care. One particular plan called “El Porvenir” (The Future) provided services of a physician for a fee of a $1.50 a month. By 1905, one of the first immigrant hospitals constructed in the United States was built in Ybor City. El Centro Asturiano was the “most modern” and “best equipped” hospital in Florida, costing roughly $15,000 to construct and employed seventeen Cuban and Spanish physicians and nurses. The sixty-bed hospital included a pharmacy, an x-ray lab, and a modern operating room. Before long, Ybor City’s residents couldn’t expect better healthcare anywhere else in the Tampa area.

The various societies organized by the cigar workers ultimately halted all trade union activity during the duration of the Cuban War for Independence, as class was subordinated to nationalism. The PRC leaders “frowned on strikes, perceiving work stoppages as a threat to the independence cause.” In February 1896, a threatened strike in Ybor City prompted Tomás Estrada Palma, the chief of the New York delegation, to visit the city to urge employees to return to work in behalf of Cuba Libre. According to Pérez, “The politics of class, moreover, became a secondary concern as both labor and management found themselves inexorably linked on the same side of the independence

207 Greenbaum, “Marketing Ybor City,” 63. The Anglo doctors of Tampa, members of the Hillsborough Country Medical Association, made repeated efforts to dismantle the socialized medical system that developed in Ybor City. Doctors and nurses involved in the system were blacklisted and barred from practicing elsewhere in the city.
208 Mormino and Pozzetti, 188.
209 Ibid., 198.
Many of the cigar factory owners, including Ybor himself, publicly supported Cuba Libre and donated tens-of-thousands of dollars to independence cause.

Due to the collective effort and unceasing financial and moral backing of supporters of Cuba Libre, both black and white Cubans came together in 1899 to establish *El Club Nacional Cubano, Octubre 10*. José Rivero Muñiz, friend of José Martí, wrote “White and negro Cubans lived in harmony, all being admitted without exception to the various revolutionary clubs, and none ever protested.” Muñiz continued, “The relations between Cuban whites and negroes were most cordial and there was not racial discrimination…they were mutually respectful.” In fact, one of the club’s officers was an Afro-Cuban. At the beginning, this integrated mutual aid society included cigar workers involved in the independence movement. Originally established as a testimony of the shared black and white struggle against Spanish rule, the society flew in the face of the South’s laws forbidding racial integration in virtually every aspect of public and private life. José Romon Sanfeliz came to Ybor City in 1890 and eventually helped to establish the *El Club Nacional Cubano*. Sanfeliz recalled that the black and white members resembled “a sort of rice with black beans,” with no distinction of race when the club was originally formed. However, this integrated solidarity was short lived: in less than a year the black members were expelled from the organization and the

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211 Susan Greenbaum, *More Than Black*, 104. Today the Martí-Maceo Society recognizes October 26, 1900 the date on which the Club Nacional Cubano was founded, as the original founding date.
212 Mormino and Pozzetti, 185.
213 Ibid., 186.
214 Figueredo, 63.
215 Mormino and Pozzetti, 186.
white Cubans retained their building and other assets. Eventually, the white Cubans renamed their club *El Circulo Cubano de Tampa*.

Although Afro-Cubans and their white ethnic counterparts in Ybor City were, for the most part, successfully able to unify and ignore the discriminatory Jim Crow laws of Florida during the 1880s and 1890s, by the turn of the century with the culmination of the War for Independence, Anglo-Americans ultimately pressured Ybor City’s white Cubans to dissociate themselves from blacks. One contemporary Afro-Cuban source recalled, “The government [both state and local] told them [Cubans] we could not work together, have a society together, and would have to keep the races apart.” Another Afro-Cuban stated, “That was the law of the country, so we blacks decided to build our own club.”

In 1901, the black Cubans who were ousted from the *Club Nacional Cubano* quickly formed their own, independent club, *Los Libres Pensadores de Martí y Maceo*, which eventually merged with another Afro-Cuban mutual aid society to become what is now known as the *Sociedad La Union Martí-Maceo* (Martí-Maceo Society). The organization’s name originated from the two heroes of Cuban independence and who died on the battlefield: José Martí, the voice of Cuban liberty, and Antonio Maceo, the most well known black Cuban general. Greenbaum notes the symbolism of naming their club after the most potent icons of Cuban racial solidarity “seemed blatantly accusatory,” although she could never find any corroboration that the name was intended as a “poke” at the white Cubans, who ultimately betrayed these martyred heroes immediately after

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216 Figueredo, 63.
217 Mormino and Pozzetti, 186.
218 Greenbaum, *More Than Black*, 160. In 1904, a group within the club formed a new organization, La Union, which was more explicitly oriented toward mutual aide. By 1907, the two groups merged into La Union Martí-Maceo.
both had died.\textsuperscript{219} The founders of the Afro-Cuban society included Ruperto Pedroso and Bruno Roig, both whom had been active in local political groups. The organization was modeled after the Antonio Maceo Free Thinkers of Santa Clara in Cuba, of which Bruno Roig was a member. By the end of 1901, Martí-Maceo membership totaled 117, representing roughly one-third of the Afro-Cuban households in Tampa.\textsuperscript{220}

Interestingly, the rejection of the black members from the \textit{Club Nacional Cubano} was not officially accounted for in the contemporary organizational documents of the Afro-Cuban organization that eventually formed as a result of the break.\textsuperscript{221} Within the records and meeting notes of Martí-Maceo, there was “missing evidence” regarding the split, as well as information regarding the War for Independence itself, ultimately forcing historians to look past the written sources. Lisa Brock asserts that if the members had recorded in the minutes concerning the society’s forced separation from their white Cuban comrades, they would have been “forced to acknowledge” their situation in the Jim Crow South, and how their racial identity was subject to redefinition now that they were in Florida.\textsuperscript{222}

Interviewing countless current members of the Martí-Maceo Society regarding reasons for the split, Greenbaum received varying explanations; however, she ultimately discovered that some members did attribute the ejection of Afro-Cubans to the prevailing laws and customs of the era in the Jim Crow south, which adamantly discouraged the formation of interracial organizations. In one interview with an elderly descendent of a white Cuban leader in the original club, Greenbaum was told there were threats against

\textsuperscript{219} Figueredo, 63.  
\textsuperscript{221} Greenbaum, \textit{More Than Black}, 104-106.  
\textsuperscript{222} Brock, 51.
their families. Greenbaum also found that others believed the split had more to do with racial prejudice on the part of white Cubans who discerned that due to the culmination of the War of Independence against Spain, there was no longer a need for racial fraternity. However, in José Muniz’s contemporary account of the meeting where the split occurred, he indicated that the split was amicable. The absence of official records, however, makes it difficult to ascertain which of these reasons, or a combination of these reasons or other unknown factors, may have produced the ultimate break.

Regardless of the split’s origins or motivations, the Afro-Cubans did not “feel too amicable about it,” although they “acquiesced and did not complain publicly, for their own safety in relation to the Klan, and for their future social comfort in the Ybor City community.” The Martí-Maceo society ultimately granted Afro-Cubans a venue to exchange ideas and opinions on various topics, as well as offer a degree of stability for Ybor City’s immigrant community. As previously discussed, both black and white Cubans frequently returned home to Cuba, which might have resulted in “chaos” for the organization were it not for the ongoing presence of a core groups of members whose efforts were sufficient to maintain operations and preserve continuity. In order for mutual aid societies to work, they needed to be “embedded in stable, cohesive communities.” Considering the majority of its members were cigarworkers, the society had an extremely mobile make up. Whether it was due to taking vacations to Cuba or leaving on account of strikes, the cigarworkers rarely stayed in Ybor City for an extended

223 Figueredo, interview with Susan Greenbaum, 63.
225 Figueredo, interview with Susan Greenbaum, 63.
226 Ibid. Greenbaum interviewed several descendents of the original members, including one whose father was among those asked to leave the organization.
period of time. “Theoretically,” according to Greenbaum, “such high levels of mobility should have detracted from La Union Martí-Maceo’s operation.” However, upon reaching Ybor City, Afro-Cubans greatly benefited from the economic and social benefits offered by the Martí-Maceo society. Although those who served as officers were less likely to relocate, they stayed in Ybor City longer when they did return from travel and maintained more constant membership. These individuals typically kept the society from deteriorating or falling into bankruptcy. Greenbaum noted that there is evidence that the “existing members assumed an explicit role in helping new immigrants adjust to life in Tampa.” Many of the officers and more stable members traveled either rarely, or not at all, and many were more skilled as cigarmakers and, hence, had greater job security. A few even owned businesses. In addition, the Afro-Cuban independence veterans in Ybor City who started La Union Martí-Maceo had considerable experience with collective efforts and grass-roots leadership.

La Union Martí-Maceo’s community hall became a central gathering point, where black cigar makers met daily after work to play dominos and have a drink, while others took classes to further their education or learn English. “In order to keep our heritage,” one elderly member of the organization explained, “we organized a school at night to teach the Spanish language and Cuban history.” In these particular classes, English was actually forbidden. Children were encouraged to learn to play musical instruments and were offered classes to learn or maintain their Spanish language. Dances, plays, picnics

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228 Greenbaum, “Economic Cooperation,” 179.
229 Greenbaum, “Afro-Cubans in Exile: Tampa, Florida, 1886-1984,” 87. Greenbaum also notes that a reciprocal benefit of this assistance was that those who later departed contributed to the development of a broad network of Afro-Cuba contacts in other cities.
231 Greenbaum, More Than Black, 157.
232 Mormino and Pozzetti, 187.
and other family social activities brought Afro-Cubans across generational lines together as well. The organization eventually established a library, maintained a cantina, and sponsored orators and musicians to play for its members. Women, although active, were often given subordinate roles in the affairs of the society, and generally attended the club only when it held dances or other social events.233

In order to maintain their place in the mutual aid system in Ybor City, la Union Martí-Maceo often struggled to faithfully pay the members’ medical bills and meet benefit obligations. However, these difficulties notwithstanding, “participation was extremely valuable in terms of the material benefits available.”234 In addition, the society had the added function of enabling black Cubans to escape some of the problems they encountered on account of their race. The medical benefits offered to members allowed them to receive hospital care otherwise denied to blacks at that time or deemed substantially substandard. Segregation excluded black Cubans from virtually all forms of public recreation; however, within the walls of La Union Martí-Maceo, they were able to construct their own world.235 Due to their stable employment in the cigar factories, as well as their benefits through the Martí-Maceo society, black Cubans were able to avoid many of the hardships their African-American counterparts suffered in the “Scrub.”236 Thus, it was “highly advantageous” for black Cubans to blend into the immigrant

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236 Greenbaum, More Than Black, 158. The Scrub was an area outside of Ybor City that was designated for African-Americans.
enclave, and their society “emblematized the legitimacy of their place in that community.”

Susan Greenbaum noticed in her research on the Afro-Cuban society that although the mainstream Tampa press and immigrant newspapers featured stories about the various mutual aid societies, the Martí-Maceo society was mostly omitted from 1900 to the 1930s. Articles regarding the various white clubs’ activities in Ybor city appeared in the newspapers, leaving the actions and voices of Afro-Cubans out. Greenbaum notes that it was journalist discretion, as opposed to lack of information, that explains the black club’s public absence. If Cubans, particularly the press, did not address and acknowledge racial inequality, it simply did not exist. Although the organization declined in the 1930s due to the Depression, the ultimate demise of Martí-Maceo’s benefit system was unrelated to the motives and choices of the actors involved. The economic downturn resulted in the bankruptcy of the cigar industry and a rising unemployment rate, and “no amount of altruism or ingenuity could rescue the benefit system that the Afro-Cubans had devised”. Although the organization could no longer offer benefits to its members, a large number of former members who moved away during the Depression returned to Tampa and joined the club. To this day, the society continues to sponsor social activities, hold monthly meetings, and celebrate important national holidays.

238 Figueredo, interview with Susan Greenbaum, 63.
240 Sociedad La Union Martí-Maceo website, “The History: Ybor City’s Cuban Club since 1900,” http://www.martimaceo.org/Pages/aboutus.aspx. The Martí-Maceo society’s building was actually destroyed by Urban Renewal in 1965, although by the 1970s and 1980s, many of the Afro-Cubans migrated back to the Tampa area in search of better opportunities and resurrected the club. By the 1980s, the society fought successfully to be labeled as a National Historic District and secured a state bill that protected their building from future urban renewals.
Gonzalo de Quesada’s spark that ignited the cry for independence ultimately helped unite the white and black Cuban under the banner for Cuba Libre; the strength and intensity of the island’s revolution during the 1880s and 1890s in Florida was able to overshadow the South’s ideas on color, race and class interests. Mobilized in part by the vision of Martí, exiles provided the initial leadership and financial backing for independence, and no other sector of the exiled patriots were more active than the Floridian cigar workers. Both black and white Cubans were locked together in a revolutionary nation-building project, and racial boundaries between Cubans were deliberately obscured. However, once that spark died out, and the fate of Cuba rested in the hands of the United States, Cuba Libre no longer signified a nation from which racism, exploitation, and oppression could be eliminated.\(^{241}\) The end of the war in 1898 had immediate and dire consequences for Cubans in exile: for many, support of the independence movement had defined in very specific terms the nature and function of exile. Now, they faced an uncertain future. To return to Cuba or stay in the United States proved to be a painful choice. For many, they viewed Ybor City as their permanent home and saw little incentive to return to the war-ravaged, economically-crippled Cuban country. Others, mostly professionals, lost little time in returning to Cuba. However, as the newly returned exiles soon discovered, no aspect of Cuban society remained immune from the annexationist design of the United States.\(^ {242}\)

Those who remained in Ybor City soon witnessed an evolving racial climate, one in which black Cubans could no longer silently blend in with their white Cuban countrymen. The end of the War for Independence, along with the U.S. Supreme Court’s

\(^{241}\) The culmination and outcome of the war is further explained in the Introduction of the paper.

\(^{242}\) Louis Peréz, Jr., *Essays on Cuban History: Historiography and Research*, 39.
“separate but equal” doctrine, not only shattered the dreams for Cuban freedom, but it also brought the end of Cuban racial solidarity in Tampa, as the lines separating black and white hardened. The Jim Crow laws had pervasive effects on institutional arrangements and greatly raised the stakes on whiteness. According to Susan Greenbaum, life was truly “worse” for Afro-Cubans, for Jim Crow did not differentiate between national origin, but by color.  

The former prominent revolutionary clubs were dissolved and segregated mutual aid societies took their place. By 1900, Afro-Cubans were ousted from white Cuban organizations and white Cubans began to discriminate even more vehemently against black Cubans on account of proving themselves “to become American.” Afro-Cubans now faced the burden of blame simply because of their skin color while they remained in the Jim Crow South. During the first decade of the twentieth century, the “growing distance between black and white immigrants, deepened the disadvantages confronting black Cubans and greatly intensified the significance of color.” Just as the U.S. presence significantly shaped Cuba’s identity and reshaped its racial ideas and practices in the early twentieth century on the island, the racially prejudiced American South ultimately altered Ybor City’s race relations. Although Afro-Cubans themselves focused on their Cubanness, as opposed to their blackness, the Southern obsession with race ultimately controlled how the community at large regarded the black immigrants. Thus, black Cubans could no longer count on their white revolutionary brothers, but were forced to form economic, political and social ties with

244 Ibid., 108.
245 Ibid., 119.
those already disenfranchised by the laws of segregation and racism in the United States: African-Americans.
Chapter Four: Conclusion

Race Relations in Present Day Ybor City

In October 1999, during Ybor City’s centennial celebration, the city held a number of panels to provide the public with the history of the Floridian town. A total of five events, held over the course of a year, were planned to celebrate the “common origins in the early Cuban community of Tampa,” and to examine and better understand “the divisions that have existed between black and white Cubans” since 1900. Overall, the centennial events were well-received by audiences of about 50 to 60 who traveled to hear about the stories of Cubans and their contributions to the city. However, the one exception proved to be a panel discussion that was held to examine the racial reconciliation among contemporary Cubans in Tampa. During the session, an Afro-Cuban audience member, who appeared to be in his late 40s or early 50s, raised his hand to assert that the two white panelists had “no intention” to address the pain black Cubans felt at being discriminated against by their fellow Cuban immigrants. He demanded to know if they thought to place themselves in an Afro-Cuban position: how would they react to racial discrimination? After much hesitation, one of the panelists, the elderly member of the Circulo Cubano, stated that he was, of course, sorry for the events that unfolded over fifty years ago, but white Cubans had been unwilling to challenge the Jim Crow laws in place at the time for fear of repercussions. At this response, the audience

\[\text{1} \text{ Linda Callejas, Contemporary Afro-Cuban Voices in Tampa: Reclaiming Heritage in “America’s Next Greatest City,” (PhD diss., University of South Florida, 2010), 68. The centennial celebration focused on the history and relationship of the Afro-Cuban Sociedad La Marti-Maceo society and the white Cuban Circulo Cubano society. Susan Greenbaum, who worked with the members of the Marti-Maceo society for nearly a decade, assisted them by reconstructing a written history of their organization. The various panels were held at both the Afro-Cuban Marti-Maceo Society’s social hall and the white Cuban Circulo Cubano.}\]
member laughed and asserted that he was “no fool:” this reply was just a “cover for racism on the part of white Cubans.”

As an Afro-Cuban, the original audience speaker wanted reconciliation and acknowledgement from the white Cubans for what they did to him and to his family in the past. His wife boldly stood up and identified herself as an African American:

I realize that I am not part of this community, but I want to tell those of you who want my husband to “just get over it”...Can you imagine family members pretending they don’t know you know? Or not being able to go somewhere because of the color of your skin? For those of you that haven’t experienced this in your life, I’m asking you to try to understand this man’s pain. That’s what this is about, pain.

The pain experienced by countless black Cubans so many years before had resurfaced, bringing with it animosity, resentment and accusations. As white Cubans attempted to defend themselves from charges of racism, it became evident of their own discomfort of having to confront individuals in the denigration of fellow Cubans. More importantly, the event illustrated that the long buried horrors of racism were still relevant today, as it moved beyond the academic discussion, addressing the lived experiences of community members as well as posing important historical questions: At what point did the split between white and black Cubans occur? When did cordial, even intimate relations, develop between black Cubans and black Americans? More importantly, why

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2 Ibid., 78. Another white panelist stated that he should not have to pay for what people did in the past.

3 Ibid., 77. Callejas notes that this event illustrated the resentment that many of the Martí-Maceo members and other black Cubans felt at being excluded from the larger Cuban community in Ybor City. During the panel discussion, white Cubans of the panel noted that they had also been discriminated against by Tampa’s white power elite; however, this assertion did little to appease the pain and outrage expressed by the Afro-Cuban audience members who experienced discrimination within the city at the hands of their fellow white Cubans who were their supposed friends and neighbors. The event also revealed the discomfort that whites felt when “talking about racism/white supremacy” which ultimately forced them to “confront their role as oppressors, or at least beneficiaries of the racial oppression of others.”
did race ultimately trump language, heritage and nationality as the twentieth century progressed?

The Afro-Cubans who arrived in Florida during the Jim Crow period enjoyed differential relations with predominantly two other nationalities: the most complex, and yet most significant, with white Cubans on one hand, and with black Americans on the other. Although strong cultural and political unity existed among all Cubans during the early period of settlement (1880s-early 1900s) along national and linguistic lines, their social lives became increasingly separate. The cohesion of black and white Cubans in the Tampa area declined significantly after the War of 1898, as many of the exiles transformed themselves into immigrants who settled in the area for good on account of the post-war problems of Cuba. The common oppression of Latins in Ybor City by the Anglos initially created a sense of group cohesion and common identity. During their early encounter, Anglos referred to all Cubans as “niggers,” and part of the explanation for the growing fissure between black and white in Ybor City might very well have been an attempt on the part of white Cubans to avoid their “niggerization” on the part of the powerful Anglos. It became evident that as time progressed, as the bonds of common national identity weakened and racial distinctions between Cubans grew in importance, black and white Cubans were not treated alike and they eventually did not regard themselves as comprising a single group. In formal terms, “the civic culture of Tampa,


and Florida generally, grew worse as the nineteenth century progressed and the new century began.”

Jim Crow ultimately pushed racial segregation to the extreme by providing incentives for white Cubans to disassociate themselves from their black compatriots. Between 1890 and 1910, the Jim Crow laws came “thick and fast,” as black residents witnessed deterioration in their status, rights and legal standing. Those who lived during this time period provided ample testimony about how “racially times and circumstances had changed.” By the 1920s, the Klu Klux Klan had established a substantial and visible presence in the state of Florida. In essence, the dire consequences of post-Reconstruction and Jim Crow laws escalated anti-Black racism and increased the need for Afro-Cubans to establish and form ties with other “blacks.” The so called “golden age” of racial harmony and amity in Ybor City came to an end, as Jim Crow’s siege of Ybor City tightened with every passing day. Afro-Cubans were at last forced to “bow to the American God of Race.”

Due to the United States’ occupation of Cuba and the ever-growing migratory presence of the small island’s inhabitants in New York and other northeastern cities, Afro-Latins began to focus their attention on building relations with African Americans, and more generally with an African diasporic world. Ironically, for many Afro-Latins the overt nature of Jim Crow in the United States would actually prove to be liberatory; as opposed to the hypocritical and vague rhetoric of Latin American and Caribbean racial

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6 James, 250.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., 257.
democracy, discrimination was more transparent in the United States. Before long, due to the social and legal discrimination they faced, Afro-Latinos found they had more in common with African Americans than with the remainder of the Latin community. For many Afro-Cubans, identifying with and eventually becoming members of the African American community turned out to be their most ready access to society in the United States, as well as their most evident recourse in the face of racist rejection by their Latino comrades.10

The Martí-Maceo society became a formal arbiter of color classification within the Latin community: those who voluntarily joined or those who were told they had no other option became marked racially as being distinct from other Latinos within Ybor City. Some present-day members of the society who were interviewed by Linda Callejas recounted being passed on the street by extended family members who no longer acknowledged them because they were generally identified as white within the wider immigrant enclave. Others recalled experiencing discrimination at popular Ybor City establishments where they were expected to use back doors or small windows.11 Susan Greenbaum notes that “white immigrants did practice active discrimination—they often rejected subtle racist attitudes in their interactions, and gained certain obvious advantages from the exclusion of blacks—because the setting both encouraged and permitted them to

10 Ibid., 13.
11 Callejas, 7. Callejas notes that the fact that white immigrants, including white Cubans, practiced overt discrimination has rarely been addressed in historical accounts of immigrant life in Ybor City. However, a number of Callejas’ informants have outlined specific instances and locales within Ybor City where they were expected to accept such practices as a matter of course.
do so. It was part of learning to be an American, a prerogative attached to their white skin.”\footnote{12}

Employment in the cigar factories served as a significant economic advantage as well as a cohesive bond for Afro-Cubans in Ybor City. In the early twentieth century, the vast majority of black Cuban men were cigarworkers (84 percent in 1900, 86 percent in 1910). By 1914, however, their numbers dropped to 76 percent; and by 1924 it was down to 64 percent. This initial decline could have been partially due to reported displacement of black Cuban men by Italian women, followed by the introduction of mechanization during the 1920s which resulted in many layoffs within the factories.\footnote{13} Finally, the Great Depression also played a significant role in the later decline of not only Afro-Cuban men working in the cigar industry, but white Cubans as well.

In December 1931, due to the decline of cigar sales and dwindling factory profits, seven thousand Latin workers declared a strike against the largest Ybor cigar companies in effort to save their jobs and standard of living. At the beginning of the month, the factory managers had announced an impending wage-cut on account of the decrease in the demand for finely crafted cigars during the economic downturn. Therefore, in order to maintain high profit margins, the factories chose to lower their employee’s salaries, resulting in widespread protest. At the end of the particularly bitter strike in 1931, workers in all Ybor City and West Tampa cigar factories were forced to agree to remove all of their lectores, ending the educational and coveted tradition for Ybor’s cigar workers completely. Most of the factory owners felt the lectores stirred up their workforce by

\footnote{13} Greenbaum, “Afro-Cubans in Exile,” 87. Greenbaum notes that a large number of Italian women entered the factories as apprentices during that period.
fostering “radical ideas.” In fact, many factory owners negotiated the removal of the lectores as part of an agreement to end a labor strike as early as 1921. According to Domenico Giunta, a native of Ybor City, the removal of the lectores was a “big blow” to the cigar factory workers considering that for many, the art of reading aloud served as their only source of education.  

By 1934, the Workers Progress Administration (WPA) arrived in Tampa to help alleviate the falling employment rate. The federal organization created a variety of programs, from constructing buildings and bridges, to working in government offices, to documenting the culture and folklore of Ybor City. As a result, the WPA “radically re-shaped both Tampa’s environment and the relationship between the city’s disparate ethnic communities.”

Although the WPA employed reportedly 23,129 Latins by the end of 1935, it was not without discomfort and hesitation. Former “proud cigar workers viewed government employment in a different light….tying their independent factory work to notions of manhood, these individuals saw WPA work as a badge of failure and shame.” One unemployed Latin cigar worker described to a WPA writer in 1935 that, “Though I still have my sight and sensitive fingers and quickness of movement for making cigars, I have been unable to find work in any factory. So I had to fall where so many jobless men have

14 Domenico Giunta, interview by Gary Mormino and Gayla Jamison, May 18, 1984, Ybor City Oral History Project, University of South Florida. http://digital.lib.usf.edu:8080/usfldcFedoraCommonsViewers/USFLDCfOHPviewer?pid=usfldc:Y10-00073. 26. Don Giunta’s parents were Italian farmers who migrated to the Tampa area in 1900. Mr. Giunta was interviewed at his home in Ybor City.

fallen, forced to register to receive aid, which seems more like a beggar’s alms than real aid to the needy.”

The devastating economic and social effects of the Depression resulted in a reduction in size of the Latin neighborhoods between 1930 and 1940. As a result of unemployment and job insecurity, a massive migration of Latin immigration pushed outward from Ybor, “illustrating the economic limitations of the Cigar City.” The single industry city could not provide another industry to replace the deteriorating cigar factories, forcing thousands of skilled and diligent workers to search elsewhere. Greenbaum notes that the effects of the Depression and the widespread layoffs forced both black and white cigarworkers to seek alternative work in other sectors of the depressed community’s economy. For many Afro-Cubans, the best option was to migrate out of the area, resulting in an “unparalleled contraction” in the size of the local Afro-Cuban community. Between 1930 and 1940, the foreign-born black population of the area decline by more than half (from 631 to 311). The principal destinations were New York and Philadelphia, where there were established centers of Cuban settlement and cigarmaking.

Those who stayed tried earnestly to pull resources together in effort to support one another, regardless of ethnicity. However, with the severe decline in the Cuban community’s population and the collapse of the cigar industry, it became increasingly

16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Greenbaum, “Afro-Cubans in Exile,” 88. Although migration out of Ybor City and Tampa are scarcely novel for the Afro-Cuban mobile population, the fact that there was no accompanying migration of Afro-Cubans into the city that would eventually balance their departure signaled a great change in the community.
19 Ibid. According to Greenbaum, considering that the younger native-born members of the Afro-Cuban community were disproportionately involved in the migration, the migration numbers are regarded as a conservative estimate of the magnitude of the departures.
hard to maintain their economic and social intuitions that once created Ybor’s distinct Latin culture. The radical protests and collective actions that had made the city distinct in previous years began to crumble as residents begrudgingly accepted any available work, regardless if it was offered within the Ybor’s city’s limits. One of the dire consequences of the mass exodus of black Cubans was the deterioration of La Union Martí-Maceo’s membership and funding. The membership’s size had remained fairly stable at around 200 since 1910; however, by 1930, it dropped to 107, and by the following year had declined to 58. In the subsequent years, membership rarely exceeded 100. Regardless of the depressing economic times and decrease in member numbers, the society never fell into bankruptcy due to the mortgage on the building being paid, revenues accrued from the rent on two small houses owned by the society, from frequent rental of the facility to other organizations, and deficits were made up by periodic special fundraising events. In addition, because the society maintained close communications with government officials in Havana who regarded the organization as Cuban, rather than American, Martí-Maceo occasionally received grants of assistance from the Cuban government.20

Renting out their dance hall and cantina to black American organizations served as a major source of revenue for the Martí-Maceo society throughout the 1920s and the Depression. Not only did the added income compensate for the loss of income due to reduced membership, but the rental transactions linked the two black groups together. In fact, despite restrictions on nationality for membership, six or seven African Americans

20 Ibid. The club periodically sent donations to Cuba for such things as hurricane disaster relief or to victims of the 1918 flue epidemic, while at the same time, received loans from the island’s government in order to repair their building.
joined the organization in the early 1920s. Greenbaum states that the society’s dance hall was the “largest and best equipped” facility available to blacks in all of Tampa. Although African American luminaries such as Cab Calloway and Chic Webb were often known to lure the second-generation Cubans into the building to hear their music, for the most part, black Cubans did not attend the festivities that were held by black Americans.

The Depression and the eventual decline of the cigar factories signaled the end of Afro-Cuban isolation from black Americans, and increased interactions and perceptions of common interests between black Cubans and black Americans. By 1940, because of the sharp decline in the number of black Cubans in Ybor City, making up less than 3 percent of the black population, Afro-Cubans found it increasingly hard to remain a distinct black Latino community. As early as 1910, black Cuban children more often attended the public junior and high schools, where they ultimately broke the ethnic barrier that separated the two groups for so long. These children were at a stage in life when friendships, as well as romances, were likely to occur. Afro-Cubans also tended to worship at different churches than lighter-skinned Cubans. Due to their shared experience of racism, and their socialization by “black informational networks” (churches, media, schools), eventually led the second and third generations Afro-Cubans to begin sharing the political struggles, interests and ideologies of African Americans. Lisa Brock argues that “although racism and empire thrust African-Americans and Cubans into each other’s assigned physical spaces, it was who they were before and after segregation and

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21 James, 256. James notes that the rules that limited the membership on the basis of ethnic orientation changed in part because they were “doing the same thing that the [white Cubans] were doing to the Afro-Cubans.”

exploitation that most influenced their cultural relations.” Both groups discovered they shared educational and social commonalities that moved beyond the color of their skin.

In 1950, several Afro-Cuban members of Martí-Maceo opened a recreation center for black youths called the “Pan American Club.” The activities offered included plays, pageants and dances. Not only were African American teenagers involved, but a black American served as president of the club. Greenbaum notes that this was a “practical” solution to the numbers problem, but “it also represented a deliberate attempt to lessen the distance that had long existed between the two groups.”23 Before long, black Cuban ties to the African American community grew due to intermarriage and increased contact between each group’s youth and young adults.

More intimate relations between black Cubans and black Americans were reflected in the marriages between Afro-Cuban males and African American women. Although these particular types of marriages were quite numerous, there were no examples of Afro-Cuban females marrying African American men.24 These mixed marriages not only brought contact between the spouses, but also included American in-laws and a local connection to networks of other friends and neighbors who were black Americans.

Baseball was another arena in which segregation promoted contact between black Cubans and black Americans. Afro-Cubans living in Ybor City organized a team called the Tampa Baseball Nine. Originally, black and white Cubans were part of the same

23 Greenbaum, “Afro-Cubans in Exile,” 90.
24 Susan Greenbaum, “Afro-Cubans in Tampa,” in Miriam and Jimenez Roman and Juan Flores The Afro-Latin Reader: History and Culture in the United States, 58. The 1900 Census data revealed sixteen Afro-Cuban-American unions, more than 10 percent of the 156 two-parent households enumerated that year.
league in Tampa, but by the middle of the 1890s, black Cuban ball players had been reassigned to the growing circuit of black teams in Florida due to segregation. In May 1894, declared a major event of the season, they played against an African American team from Gainesville. Close to four hundred black fans traveled from Gainesville by train to watch the game. Among the spectators included a large number of local African Americans, as well as the Tampa Colored Band who played music for the crowd.25

Due to the Jim Crow laws, the Afro-Cubans seldom could experience the rivalries of the ethnic society baseball teams. The local ethnic mutual-aid societies, such as the Circulo Cubano, Centro Asturiano, the Italian Club and the Loyal Knights lodge formed the Inter-Social League in 1938. The Martí-Maceo society did create its own team, Los Gigantes Cubanos, in 1900, although it never played a game. Even if they did, the black Cuban team “likely would not have been allowed to play white teams in Ybor City.”26 Not only were the fields segregated, but the stands were as well, where “colored sections” were still in use in Tampa as late as the 1950s.

Racial discrimination was one of the main motivating factors that ultimately forged more permanent unions between the two groups. Cesar Marcos Medina recalls that although the Afro-Cubans were not initially segregated in Ybor City, they were treated “more or less” like the blacks, especially by native white Southerners.27 In many

25 Ibid., 58.
27 Cesar Marcos Medina, interview by Gary Mormino and Gayla Jamison, May 22, 1984, Ybor City Oral History Project, University of South Florida http://digital.lib.usf.edu:8080/usfldcFedoraCommonsViewers/USFLDCfcOHPviewer?pid=usfldc:Y10-00065, 22. Cesar Medina’s father was a Cuban cigar maker who worked in the Ybor cigar plant where he eventually became one of the managers and a lector. His father originally traveled to the United States in the early 1890s from Havana for work before returning to the island. Cesar Medina was an infant during the
cases, the restrictions placed on blacks in Tampa, even within Ybor City, forced Afro-Cubans into the same social arena as black Americans. A number of residents recall when Ybor City’s restaurants and businesses practiced active discrimination. One interviewee explained how he was no longer allowed to purchase Cuban sandwiches at one of the establishment’s front windows; instead, as a black man, he was forced to go around back and “order through that little hole and then, they’d push the sandwiches through. That’s the way it was.”

Another resident, after returning injured to Ybor City from the Korean War, took a bus through the town wearing his uniform while using his crutches for support. “So, I got on the bus coming back…the bus stopped…a lot of white folks was getting on the bus. [the bus driver] turns around and he says, ‘all you Black folks get up and let these white folks sit down’…I will take that to my grave with me. I will never forget that. And that was in ’51 that that incident happened. And to this day, I always think about it.”

Another Afro-Cuban recalled when her Aunt needed brain surgery while living in Tampa. Black members of the community were not allowed to enter the white hospitals in the area, and the only hospital available to them, the Clara Frye Negro Hospital, did not have the capacity to perform surgeries. “So the brothers here, the family, decided to send her to Cuba, and she had the surgery.”

By 1960, the landscape of Ybor City changed dramatically due to the Urban Renewal program that reserved $9.6 million dollars to “rehabilitate, clear, and redevelop” United States occupation of Cuba, and shortly after his family moved permanently to Ybor City in 1903 to settle.

28 Callejas, 74.
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid., 72. The Clara Frye Hospital was established in 1915. Black Cubans were not allowed to enter the hospitals established by the Centro Asturiano and the Centro Espanol, and were forced to travel to Cuba when hospitalization was necessary.
Ybor City. Wanting to turn Ybor into a tourist attraction, the City of Tampa relocated 1200 families as they bulldozed their former shotgun-style homes. Domenico Giunta recalled that the federal government “thought that by removing old homes, they would be removing a blot, but they didn’t realize that it would be scattering the neighborhood and destroying all these things that we’re talking about: neighborliness, cooperatives, and love and respect for other ethnic values, which have been gone to winds forever.”\(^{31}\) The African American “Scrub” area was also redeveloped during the urban renewal, pushing many dislodged black Americans into former white and immigrant areas. In addition, coupled with the desertion by the once proud Latin population, between 1950 and 1980, the city of Tampa’s change in demographics resulted in its reputation of a “black ghetto.”

The Urban Renewal program in Tampa resulted in the Martí Maceo society’s original social hall being bulldozed in 1965, along with over fifty percent of the properties and homes in Ybor City. By the 1970s, the Martí-Maceo society attempted to revive their organization by purchasing an old warehouse on Ybor City’s main avenue. However, as members worked tirelessly to revive their club, factions emerged that emphasized ethnic and intergenerational differences among them. Disputes between the newly relocated immigrants from up north and the Afro-Cubans who never left surfaced: those who previously left to move north often married Puerto Ricans or other Cubans, while those who stayed in Tampa typically married African Americans. Thus, “this emergent awakening was not without friction…the New Yorkers tended to hang together because they knew each other better.”\(^{32}\) Linda Callejas adds, “Some of [the members] who stayed in Tampa criticized what they perceived as an air of superiority in the

\(^{31}\) Giunta interview, 38.

New Yorkers, based on these various differences, and their greater educational and employment advantages in New York. Their childhood friends, who moved away and avoided many of the problems that they had to face growing up in the South, did not seem to appreciate the battles they had fought.”

The struggles black Cubans faced in order to preserve their cultural, ethnic and racial identity during the most turbulent times, such as during the Jim Crow period, the Depression and the Urban Renewal program, ultimately proved to be triumphant: the Martí-Maceo society still stands today as a distinct black Cuban organization. Members continue to pass down ethnic practices and tradition, and most of them share multiple kinship ties that have persisted in some cases for more than a generation. The Martí-Maceo society historically provided Tampa’s black Cubans access to economic and social resources; now, its primary purpose is to transmit cultural knowledge to subsequent generations, “thereby culturally and socially reproducing the black Cuban community.” Within the four walls of the organization, members have continued to socialize with not only each other, but with extended family members, friends, as well as with community members. More importantly, this space has allowed black Cubans to work together and share resources in the face of adversity. As much as segregation and discriminatory laws may have played a role in the need for establishing a separate black Cuban organization, discrimination by white Cubans who sought to differentiate themselves from their black countrymen in the eyes of the larger power structure appears to have played an equally important role. As evidenced by the panel discussion in 1999 regarding Cuban race relations in Ybor City, historical wrongdoings still shape and

33 Callejas, 9.
34 Ibid., 225.
influence the present. The original enraged Afro-Cuban audience speaker concluded, “there can be no reconciliation if these people are not willing to acknowledge what they did to us, to me, to my family in the past.” Members of the panel subsequently responded to the speaker’s comments, stating that although it was painful to address these issues, they were willing to come to some sort of understanding and reconciliation for the future: that as Cubans, both white and black share a unique ethnic and cultural bond that moves beyond the color of one’s skin.

35 Ibid., 77.
36 Susan Greenbaum and Linda Callejas, “We All Lived Here Together: The Hidden Topic of Race Between White and Black Cubans in Tampa,” in Andrea O’Reilly Herrera, ed. Cuba: Idea of a Nation Displaced (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 139. Since the centennial celebration, both clubs are still in operation, although struggling financially. They have increased their involvement with each other, as well as with other historic ethnic clubs in Ybor City, in effort to stay afloat. Both the Martí-Maceo and Circulo Cubano club have too few members, too little revenue, and heavy costs of debt service and maintenance. The shared centennial celebration highlighted the remarkable fact that both have survived for a century, and that if they should continue to do so, they should focus on their common heritage as a resource that can be leveraged into a more durable arrangement. The various panels and programs in their joint celebration attempted to examine and reconcile past conflicts, even though Cubans do not like to talk about race. However, perhaps in this new century they will find common ground where José Martí once urged them to fight together.
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