

As I write these notes, Cubans commemorate one of the most significant events in the history of their struggle for independence and national sovereignty: The Protest of Baraguá. That is precisely why, in this issue we want to honor the hero behind this act: Antonio Maceo y Grajales.

After ten years of warfare against Spain, the circumstances among the rank and file troops of the Liberation Army were continuously getting worse. Regional bickering, lack of discipline, and tyrannical leadership undermined the essential unity required in the midst of a war of attrition. It was for this reason that a group with-



in the Cuban leadership decided to sign an armistice with Spain historically known as the “Zanjón Pact.” However, the terms which would have established the peace, were not acceptable to Antonio Maceo and other important figures in the Liberation Army because they did not reflect the goals for which they had fought for over a decade. As far as Maceo was concerned, a peace without independence and, conse-

quently, without the emancipation of the slaves, was unacceptable. He made his position clear from Mangos de Baraguá, where he penned one of the most glorious pages in the history of Cuba. In this way, Maceo became a definitive figure in the pantheon of Cuban patriotic thought.

But the list of services rendered by the insurrectionist general continued to increase incrementally. If the Protest of Baraguá lit the torch of liberty and reaffirmed the proposition that only independence would deliver the abolition of slavery, the final part of the struggle for independence, which began in 1895, would testify to his greatest military achievement: the east-to-west sweeping invasion of the island.

The operation, under the command of General Máximo Gómez and his Lieutenant General Antonio Maceo, brought about the fulfillment of the oft expressed yearning of taking the war to the western part of Cuba; a location of the concentrated riches upon which the government of Madrid fed itself. During the campaign, Maceo’s military strategy was once again tested. In the process, he became the key figure in amazing accomplishments and military victories. His bravery in combat, his success as a military strategist, and his string of victories gained him the nickname, “Bronze Titan.” Unfortunately, Maceo did not live to see the end of the

war. Having achieved the primary objectives of the campaign, he met his death in combat on December 7, 1896, in San Pedro, just south of Havana.

The articles we publish herein offer a succinct historical perspective on the life of Maceo, showing him not only as a relevant military strategist, but as a man whose example, ideas and understandings contributed decisively to the development of Cuban patriotic thought. At the same time, some of these works will give a glimpse of the international dimension and repercussion of the insurrectionist general.

It seems appropriate to point out that Maceo achieved historical relevance in spite of serious adverse circumstances. The fact that he was a mulatto, often placed him in conflicting and delicate positions. The prevailing racism in a country where slavery had existed over the centuries could not erase his achievements as a warrior, nor the importance of his revolutionary ideals. However, there were many who, because of their prejudice, feared Maceo's prominent place which he acquired from the earliest stages of the fight for independence. The influence of the "Titan" and other black leaders and officials, cast shadows upon their ideal of a Cuba not only freed of Spain, but of the obvious and mighty influence of blacks.

The integrating currents within the ranks of the revolutionary movement were often obstructed by the power exercised by racist ideologues. This is evidenced in a letter written by Antonio Maceo in 1876, to the President of the Republic in Arms that we reproduce in this issue. In it, he openly condemns the racist attitudes and positions found within the army that had reached the point of generating personal accusations, and requests intervention by the government to stop it. In this case, as he reports, it was a matter of a small circle of soldiers who did not want to serve under his command because they could not accept the "superimposition of colored men over white men."

If this could happen to a figure as important as Antonio Maceo, what could be expected for the masses of black people from the slave barracks or from among the lowliest of the population who comprised a large part of the insurrectionist army? To this end, it is worth quoting the historian Hortensia Pichardo, who (when referring to the first stages of the war of independence and the strong prevailing conflicts and ambivalences in reference to abolition), noted, "there were still many ties to the system and whites were not as of yet convinced that freed slaves would not put their new found freedom to evil use."

Almost 150 years after these events, the current reality convinces us ever more strongly of the necessity to face up to the problem of racism and its manifestations (no matter how subtle), in contemporary Cuba. A number of articles published in

this, and previous issues of *Islas* point in this direction. The essay by Manuel Cuesta Morúa, “Cuba: Where do we stand relative to the nation?”, that we publish here is particularly enlightening in this sense.

In this issue we pay particularly close attention to the city of Tampa in south Florida, and specifically to the Afro-Cubans who, from the end of the XIX century played an active and determining role in this community. There are many threads that knit Tampa to the history of Cuba in general and of Afro-Cubans outside the island in particular. In its neighborhoods and streets, in its daily life, in its tastes and preferences can be found the indelible imprint of Cuba. This is a process that began almost one and a half centuries ago, when the city became a key enclave in the organization and preparation for the war of independence. It was there that many of the key figures of the independence movement found space and support. To mention a curious but important historical anecdote, the cigar which hid the order calling for the uprising that started the War of Independence of 1895, was manufactured in West Tampa.

The picture of the mural appearing on the cover offers an eloquent synthesis of two central aspects of this present issue. The mural, painted on one of the walls of the building that serves as the headquarters of the Martí-Maceo Union, is the result of a school project in this Florida community. Focusing on the image of the two key Cuban historical figures; as well as that of Paulina Pedroso (a resident of Tampa of Afro-Cuban descent who collaborated strenuously with the conspirators), the mural depicts multiple symbolic scenes which allude to moments throughout Cuban history.

We shouldn't conclude this note without recognizing the contributions of Professor Kenya C. Dworkin y Méndez in the preparation of this issue. Few pages herein do not reflect her collaboration at least in part. Of great importance in particular was her work in contributing as well as editing the translations. The relationship established with her has enabled us to initiate a collaboration with students of her translation course at Carnegie Mellon University, in Pittsburgh, allowing many of them to provide translations as part of their academic work. I was able to witness personally the strong impact that the content of our articles had upon them, and the enthusiasm with which they worked. We hope to continue similar undertakings in the future.

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