

# Fear and Gratitude in the *Patria* chronicles of José Martí

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My interest in this essay is to read José Martí's texts and highlight the rhetorical and literary devices that he used to write the political articles in his newspaper *Patria*. I also want to examine his vision of race. For this purpose I will use the myth of 'racial brotherhood' and the arguments and goals of his political discourse as a point of departure. I want to draw attention to how in order to convince his readers Martí mixes fiction and reality, literature, and history in his chronicles. Thus, my intention is to read the *Patria* chronicles with a view to gleaning their more or less hidden political motives, and revealing the political and social fears that are usually ignored when his chronicles are analyzed. The first of these fears was what fueled the racism of a large segment of U.S. society at that time, and certainly contributed to the way in which many whites treated blacks in its southern states. Martí, who was very much up on the segregationist practices that were in fashion in the U.S. during the decade of the 1880s, warned his readers that there was a similar attitude towards foreigners and Cubans, too.

"Vindicación de Cuba" [Vindication of Cuba], written in 1889 as a response to an article published in the *The Manufacturer* of Philadelphia, explained just this sort of attitude and is a classic text of its kind.

The second fear to be faced was the result of the white population's dread of having to incorporate the island's blacks into Cuban society, after the abolition of slavery, in 1886. To those two apprehensions, one must add the terror that was evoked by just the mention of 'secret African societies or orders,' a terror that brought about a 'race war' after the war for independence. In light of this truly threatening panorama, it is understandable that Martí sought reconciliation at all levels of society, and emphasized the similarities among all Cubans. The notion that Cuban blacks owed a 'debt' of gratitude to whites in Cuba, because the latter took up arms and supposedly declared the former free in 1869, was an important factor in Martí's political rhetoric.

I am borrowing Aline Helg's theoretical framework, from her well-known book *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912*, to examine the follow-



There is no image of the Ten Years War (1868-1878) that more eloquently expresses the 'debt' of black people to that struggle's revolutionaries than the allegory titled "La República Cubana" [The Cuban Republic].

According to Guillermo de Zéndegui, who employed it in his book *Ámbito de Martí* [Martí's Arena], it was first printed in 1875 and disseminated in New York by Juan Bellido de Luna. Zéndegui states it could be found in almost all Cuban patriotic clubs in the United States and their counterparts in countries across Latin America. The image occupied a 'place of honor' at the José María Izaguirre School to which Martí went to teach, in Guatemala, in 1877. It contains a representation of the Republic holding aloft the Cuban flag in one hand, and the Coat of Arms in the other. Blacks and their children—with upwardly lifted, grateful arms sporting broken shackles—appear beneath all this. The image contains a close-up of their bodies being illuminated by the divine light of God and the Republic. They are proportionately larger than the rest, and their submissive faces and physical isolation from the rest all serve to distinguish them from the other men in the composition. One can find repeated instances of this imagery—a rhetoric that highlights blacks and emphasizes their 'debt' in the work of Martí and other independence fighters of the 1895 campaign, despite the fact that revolution failed and they were not liberated.

ing dilemma—the myth of ‘racial brotherhood.’ In her book, Helg proposes that during the last decades of the nineteenth century the Cuban Creole elite created a myth of racial equality in Cuba, despite the fact that this ‘apparently contradicted’ what scientific rhetoric was decreeing at the time—the superiority of whites over blacks. According to Helg, the Cuban myth of racial equality, which was “based principally on José Martí’s pre-1895 separatist propaganda, was duplicitous.... It first spread the idea that during the Ten Years War Cuban slaves had been liberated by their owners,” which “eliminated any obligation on the part of whites to compensate blacks or mulattoes for their past treatment... [and] created the notion that blacks should be grateful to whites for their current freedom and not question their society’s racial hierarchy.”

Secondly, “this myth inspired the notion that the Cuban military forces that fought against Spain had achieved racial equality.”<sup>1</sup> In any event, Helg suggests that the Republic’s politicians talked about ‘racial brotherhood’ when what they really wanted was to prevent a political and racial split in the country, and they tried to invalidate the demands of the Independent Party of Color’s membership. Thus, this rhetoric helps us understand the duplicitous nature of Cuban politics because it reveals the intentionality that lies just below the surface of the idea, which some put forward, believing in its truthfulness. But others use it to homogenize the nation, silence blacks and prevent them from “obtaining what was rightfully theirs.” How was it that the Cuban Creole elite, and particularly Martí, came to craft this ‘myth’ and what was their intention?

It was surely not unimportant to this particular Delegate to the Cuban

Revolutionary Party (Martí), since he frequently saw so many racist comments against creoles, blacks and indigenous peoples in the era’s U.S. press. The root of the dilemma stemmed from the fact that Martí intended to use members of the first two groups—categories that much of nineteenth-century science and many of the era’s politicians considered to be ‘inferior’—to carry out a revolution, create a ‘civilized nation,’ and garner for it recognition from the U. S. and the world’s other countries.

This concern of his is evident in a letter of response that Martí, himself, published—in English (and later translated to Spanish and distributed among the Cuban exile community)—in *The Manufacturer*, in 1889. It is well known that the writer for *The Manufacturer* had been wondering what the advantages or disadvantages of the U.S. annexing Cuba might be; he goes on to provide his own answer by saying that the benefits lay in its geographic position in the Gulf of Mexico, its climate and its resources—but not in its people. He goes on to assert that the native creoles are “effeminate” and that Cuban blacks are “clearly at a barbaric level” [of development]. “The lowliest Negro in Georgia,” he goes on to state, “is better prepared to assume the Presidency [of the U.S.] than the average Cuban black man is for American citizenship.”<sup>2</sup> In light of such a challenge, the journalist believes that the only solution is to “completely Americanize” the island, totally populating it with members of our own race.” Despite this assertion, he is still concerned that the “tropical sun” and other island living conditions might degenerate the American race.<sup>3</sup>

Martí is quick to respond. He composes and publishes an open letter titled “Vindicación de Cuba” [Vindication of Cuba] in which he proves *The Manufacturer’s*

journalist's suppositions to be unfounded. He will return to the issue only a few years later, in his *Patria* chronicles, particularly in one dated April 23, 1892, written after he was confirmed by his fellow Delegates as leader of the Cuban Revolutionary Party:

“It is useless to allege that Cubans, who are being guided without faith or love through this sublime and turbulent time, will be able to persevere through the dissention and disturbances of a time of love and faith. The assertion that Cubans are unfit to carry out noble struggles for liberty because of their intrinsic, racially inherited and permanent vices and ineptitude is also as useless and unworthy as any presumption or celebration of false virtues.”<sup>4</sup>

So, it becomes clear that Martí rejected any supposed “intrinsic, racially inherited ineptitude”—either through an epistolary response to the growing racism of the U.S. press, in scientific discourse, or by defending his own ideas—in order to defend the rights of those Cubans to have their own homeland. It is not surprising then that when Martí wrote his response in *Patria* he focused on and highlighted not the differences between the races but their similarities, the willingness of both races to build a nation “with all and for the good of all.” Yet, it is still noteworthy that although Martí emphasized all the merits and successes of Cubans both in the United States and abroad in his letter to *The Manufacturer*, he neglected to make any reference to Cuban blacks, who were the ones most implicated by the attacks of the anonymous writer. Does this silence mean anything? Was Martí in some way critical of blacks?

Despite the fact that *Patria* was committed to the independence cause and thus

always full of political propaganda and celebrations of Cubanness, the ways in which Martí talks about blacks and for them in his chronicles, in order to convince his readers about several ideas, is noteworthy. One of these ways is that he talks about the non-existence of races; the other is that he suggests that Africans could be improved and re-educated so they might contribute to the general business of the nation. This project is particularly obvious in the article titled “Una orden secreta de africanos” [A Secret Order of Africans].

The title of this chronicle, which was published in *Patria*, portends a discussion of something Martí actually never mentions. According to Aimée González, the title suggested that Martí was going to speak to his readers about one of the secret societies most feared by whites in Cuba at that time—like the *Ñáñigo* societies, and those of the practitioners of *Regla de Ocho* and *Palo*—in a way that “confirmed the prejudice, racial discrimination, ignorance and injustice that was inherent to the island’s dominant ideology and its ‘official culture’—with its value judgments concerning these secret societies and syncretic popular religious practices.”<sup>5</sup> Instead though, what Martí did was talk about Tomás Surí, whom he calls “the African,” a seventy-year old Cuban exile in Key West who learned to write in one of its schools. The counterpoint of the chronicler’s dark reference (the religious societies) to its explicit reference (the education) is precisely what maintains the tension that Martí—who clearly focused on the latter of the two meanings—intended for his entire text. He wrote: “Tomás Surí is a member of a mysterious, dangerous, evil and secret order in which those who cannot read may not participate in its third grade.”<sup>6</sup>

It should not surprise us that Martí continued to employ this technique, since we know that in the rest of the world the validity of European culture, and its precepts, and the supposed superiority of the Caucasian race, are not questioned until the anthropologist Frank Boas (1858-1942) did so at the beginning of the twentieth century. Yet even Boas reproduced many of the tired stereotypes that the ethnographic work that preceded his had produced. Today, we should agree to the fact that Martí's focused on the importance of education while he demonized African religion is unacceptable, particularly since this rhetoric has been repeated ever since the Conquest and Inquisition for the purpose of stripping others of their freedoms. Lillian Guerra uses this chronicle to assert that Martí justified a model for admission to the rank of equality for educated Cubans.<sup>7</sup> But to what degree did learning Castilian and not belonging to a 'secret order' constitute a valid program?

According to Aline Helg's analysis in *Lo que nos corresponde* [Our Rightful Share], Martí believed that blacks "should embrace Western culture instead of reaffirming the value of their African heritage."<sup>8</sup> Yet, elsewhere he reminds us that during the colonial period black children had very limited access to education and that many public schools would not accept them, or imposed a special fee on them.<sup>9</sup> Not until 1893, thanks to the actions of Francisco Bonet, Antonio Rojas, and other prominent black citizens of Havana, did Governor General Emilio Callejas agree that black children of both sexes should be able to attend municipal schools, by which he decreed the desegregation of the educational system.<sup>10</sup> Denying African slaves, and free blacks and mulattoes, an education was another way of keeping them ignorant about their rights. The fact

that a slave or freeman might be able to read and write represented a grave threat to the colonial system because it meant that he could discover what his rights were through some alternative manner and use this knowledge to protest and register evidence of the injustices [to which he had been subjected], or just open up opportunities for himself in a society where Spanish was the lingua franca and European culture was hegemonic. This happened with a number of slaves, including Juan Francisco Manzano. So we must believe that just like many black activists, Martí believed that education and the integration of blacks into Cuban Creole culture would help the former slaves improve their lives, and that this would be a vehicle by which to express their complaints and eliminate racism—in the long term.

Having said this, if one logically examines Martí's intentions in this chronicle at the present time, it is clear that he still expressed a sense that it was through some sort of cultural purification that blacks could be more like whites and abandon their ancient rituals. Such was the case with the suggested elimination of "brujería" [witchcraft] and the mutual aid societies that were created by African descendants. They had already been labeled as "criminal" and begun to worry the island's costumbrista writers [authors about local customs and manners] and politicians before the Ten Years War. This subject once again occupied an important place in newspaper discussions during the decade of the 1880s.

Something that helps us understand the historical exclusion of African culture on the island is the fact that Martí always advocated for an autochthonous culture; he incorporates indigenous myths and symbols into Cuba's national memory. But, he never does the same with their African counterparts. Even just calling the order "African" is another

er indication of how he temporalizes the other; how this is another way of objectifying blacks and distancing elements of their 'primitive' culture from the Creole one. The fact that Tomás Surí spoke Spanish, or had a Spanish name, or lived in Cuba for many years, didn't cause Martí to consider him anything more than "African." Moreover, the descendants of African slaves in Cuba were not the only members of those "secret orders"; the period's press made sure to publish the fact that white men, too, participated in *Ñáñigo* games, which is why there was so much fear that their popularity would continue to increase and degrade Creole culture. For those educated Cubans who were concerned about this issue, the only solution was to educate blacks in the ways of Westerners. If not for this, they would corrupt the rest of the population sooner or later.

Thus, it is impossible to disarticulate this chronicle by Martí from those intellectuals who criticized and persecuted those games in order to avoid just such consequences. Martí even included the story of Tomás Surí in it, to make it even more effective. In it he quotes several paragraphs from a letter he claims to have received. In one of those paragraphs, upon attempting to explain why black members of the order agreed to tithe part of their salaries for the revolutionary cause, Martí asserts:

"Among the things that were said was that 'they,' those who had been slaves, were the only ones who had gained from the revolution; that all the blood and tears spilled by those men who were unaccustomed to war but willingly went to fight had only served to gain the freedom of blacks; that it was impossible that men who came together in order to progress remained deaf and dumb

precisely at a moment when everything was working towards the continuation of an interrupted struggle."<sup>11</sup>

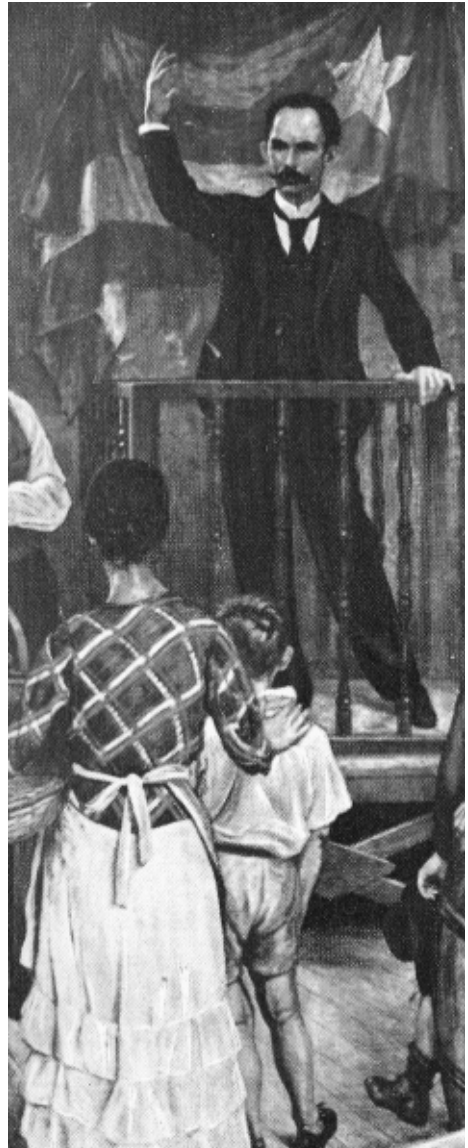
Logically, Martí shared the ideas of many of these ex slaves; they are central to his rhetoric of racial brotherhood. With this letter, he managed to instill in his readers' minds the notion of the "debt" of gratitude that black ex-slaves owed whites in Cuba, since as he said, they were the only ones to truly gain from it. Whites appear to be the ones who by virtue of their sacrifice redeemed blacks; it is they who set their shoulders to the task of freeing them, achieving this even if the war effort failed.

The very same day Martí published his article in *Patria*, April 1, 1893, he published another one titled "El 22 de marzo de 1873, la abolición de la esclavitud en Puerto Rico" [March 22, 1873: The Abolition of Slavery in Puerto Rico]. In this chronicle, once again Martí writes about the white fear of blacks; he does so with the intention of showing Cubans why this was an unfounded fear. He asserts that when the Cuban independence fighters held their assembly in Guáimaro, on the 10th of October of 1869, they decreed the freedom of all Cuban slaves—"without reparations or pay"—and that this "gloriously legitimate" deed "totally and completely spared blacks from servitude, who in their grateful and uninjured condition would never, in turn, subject Cuba to violence and disruption at the hands of freed slaves."<sup>12</sup> Yet, Martí does not mention that the very same legislative body [that declared the freedom of the slaves] met two months later to issue a law that placed limits on the constitutional category of freedmen. Martí always preferred for his chronicles to present us with the declaration of freedom as a given—free of doubts or contradictions, and in order to highlight

the degree of gratefulness blacks felt in light of this situation, he tells us how during festivities that celebrated the manumission of slaves in Puerto Rico “the slaveowner would say to his black man: ‘You are now free!’ [to which] the black man responded: ‘I’ll not be free so long as my master lives’”<sup>13</sup>

I must insist that his method of ‘speaking’ for blacks to demonstrate their sense of indebtedness is a rhetorical device that Martí uses in his U.S. chronicles and his persuasive political discourse. The locutions of those other actors who appear in his writing leave the reader with the impression that he is reading the actual thoughts of black Cubans and that the actual voice of the chronicler is apparently displaced. Yet, it is precisely at these moments that he most masterfully controls the scene. Sometimes these other characters are anonymous and fictitious; in them the writer projects part of his own personality, as is the case when he refers to himself in the third person.

Critics of Martí’s work have made a great deal of the very literary and deeply theatrical quality of his chronicles. For example, in explaining the way in which Martí “participates” and gets inside the characters about which he writes, Fina García Marruz states that this looks like a “theatrical procedure for giving voice to what others think or say, a novelesque reconstruction of situations and places he never saw,” which allows him to use his imagination to “create facts about the reality” of scenes of his life in the United States.<sup>14</sup> Eduardo Bejar, too, in his analysis of the *Patria* chronicles, says that Martí uses a sort of “false syllogism” and resemantizes the meaning of the word “patria” [homeland], imbuing it with a sense of maternity and paternity. According to Bejar:



“In the first issue of *Patria*, Martí sets forth a revolutionary set of ideas; in one of the articles devoted to a sketch of Cuban womanhood he specifically says: ‘Oh, I will be a nursemaid: a nursemaid for all: I hate no one: my servants are like my brothers: what I want is for this shame and slavery to end’ (*Obras completas* 5:34). That the call to arms be heard via a woman’s voice, that is, from *Patria*, could be considered a discursive strat-

egy that canceled out those patriarchal bands that were fighting for supremacy and guaranteed the initiative's success because it was founded upon principles of love, virtue and truth."<sup>15</sup>

In addition, I should clarify that there is not one single letter among Martí's correspondence from one of those (religious) "orders" or in which one of those ex-slaves talks about the debt of gratitude of his race to the island's white. In his voluminous *Destinatario José Martí* [Addressee José Martí], Luis García Pascual published all of the archived letters to Martí; none of them contains the name Surí or this very essential theme of Martí's rhetoric. There are many from different Cuban immigrant clubs throughout all of the United States, from the time corresponding to the creation of the Cuban Revolutionary Party. They are from political figures and old war generals. One of these letters does, indeed, speak in detail about the race issue in the context of the 1895 war; it was written by Commander Alejandro Rodríguez, a veteran of the 1868 war who later became the first mayor of Havana.

In his letter to Martí, Rodríguez informed him that the condition of blacks in the colony had changed and that they were now citizens. They were, he goes on to say, at the lowest level of society, which caused him to fear that in another war the Spanish would surely "love this very appreciable, very unconscious, very energetic mass that was so ready for a war of hate and extermination; and that they would take advantage of this situation by conceding privileges, honors, blind tolerance and the very desired white woman to blacks" All this, Rodríguez said, would serve to pay back the government for all its support against the aspirations of the

revolutionaries. Rodríguez ends by categorically declaring:

"This state of affairs cannot be overcome by education or propaganda. Hatred and the mutual rejection of the races will remain alive and well so long as they endure; until a racial fusion takes place or nudges the white race towards the black race the danger of which I speak will exist."<sup>16</sup>

If I set aside whether or not the letter Martí quotes in his chronicle is real, or if the conversations he quotes in his article about Puerto Rico are true, what I remain interested in is highlighting the mere fact that his having privileged, selected and reproduced these words in his writing demonstrates his particular interest in setting forth an idea. In addition, that this idea seems like the confession of a witness, of an ex-slave, he gives this text a definitive power that it would not have if Martí spoke or wrote the words in the first person. This kind of ventriloquism shows just how important it is to read his chronicles as texts that were written to convince readers, as artifacts constructed to create the effect of truthfulness, commitment and cohesion among exiled Cubans. In other words, it was a narrative strategy that legitimized the position of the interlocutor via another's testimony, through the voice of a redeemed victim who dramatically expressed his debt, his commitment to the revolutionary cause and gratitude to his former owner. In every instance, Martí makes the African "speak" while he is concomitantly committing him to fight for Cuba and not be "free so long as his master lives."<sup>17</sup>

As with the example of the indigenous peoples, Martí praises Africans precisely when they convert, as soon as they have the same attitude as his, and publicly commit



themselves to the cause. Of course, black slaves did not have to wait for creoles to give them their freedom. Thousands of them fought for it, from the time they were brought from Africa in the sixteenth century and lived free, or as “cimarrons,” until their death or execution. But the writer prefers to silence this fact, given its violent implications and the fact that this debt now allows him to ask blacks for yet another sacrifice. In other words, he would rather go back to when whites freed them and turn this moment into a redeeming memory for the whole nation. It is no wonder, then, that Elías Entralgo says that with regard to race Martí extrapolated from the Ten Years War all kinds of “valuable angles” with which to promote the campaign of 1895.<sup>18</sup> That he was just as happy to tell the story of the black sergeant who carried a white lieutenant on his back, than to share the one about the white patrician who buried his daughter next to a black person. All this served to urge racial brotherhood and justify his thesis that the independence war united both races.

Martí includes the very same idea he has his black members of the “secret order of Africans” express in one of his notes to himself. In one of these, found in an incomplete notebook of his, he asserts: “for whites to respect blacks, for partly owing them [the country’s liberty] and for blacks to respect whites because they received their freedom from a white man.”<sup>19</sup> These notes show how Delegate Martí had been working on this idea, an idea that would keep the two sides bound to each other and force them to accept each other as if through a debt of honor, for a long time. This ‘debt,’ however, cannot be taken as anything more than a rhetorical device that actually obscures its strong implication of power and the fact it was designed precisely so it could be exercised. As a method it is not new, but it is one of the most per-

verse and oft used ones in the island’s political rhetoric. For example, some slave-owners believed that when they enslaved blacks and brought them to America they were doing them a favor, or that they were saving them from a worse life in Africa—since there, they were convinced, the other Africans would have killed, enslaved or eaten them. The Countess of Merlin affirmed that in the case of the Spanish colonies in America at least the creoles gave blacks the ‘benefits’ of civilization and treated them as though they were family members. Thusly, blacks should be eternally grateful to whites for all this. I should emphasize that this kind of rhetoric did not disappear from Cuba when it went from colony to Republic, through the independence struggle; instead, it is still a fundamental part of the post-1959 Revolution’s politics—even now. In this new spin on the same old talk, blacks and poor people are the ones who have most benefited from the new political changes and should, therefore, express their gratitude to the government for the State having eliminated racism and racial inequality in Cuba.

In another *Patria* article, Martí repeats this idea, to dismiss the fact that Spain also liberated the slaves. He states that his objective was to prevent blacks from joining up with a new revolution, asserting that it was the 1868 revolutionaries who really deserved the true credit:

“Oh, blessed revolution! She was our mother, the first, the foundress! She, in her nearly superhuman greatness wrenched blacks from the hands of Spain and declared them her brothers in freedom. With her awe and fear she inspires, she now compels Spain to cede to Cuban blacks the equity she already gave them in practice, because it is a natural consequence of their human rights.”<sup>20</sup>

In considering these notes, it seems that for Martí the ex slave would always owe a debt of gratitude to whites, and that whites would always “partly” owe blacks [Cuba’s] liberty. Blacks would be free but forever tied to this commitment. All this, and the air of camaraderie with which he imbues his story about Puerto Rico, allowed him to show his readers that the transition in Cuba would not be violent, just as on the neighboring island, and that it would not be threatened by the kind of rancor blacks might harbor after so many years of slavery. Yet, even though the liberation of the slaves in Puerto Rico was very peaceful, they were much fewer in number than in Cuba, so any comparison of the two countries is most unfair.

But, what really happened in 1869? Did the Independents abolish slavery? Not according to Raúl Cepero Bonilla. Two different groups of Independents showed up at that assembly in Guáimaro: they had two very different ideas as to how to carry out the revolution and what to do with the slaves. On one side was Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, the movement’s principal figure, who was concerned about what the sugar mill and slave-owners of the island’s eastern region might think [if he actually freed his slaves]. The other side was made up of revolutionaries from the central part of the island. They were calling for emancipation for all and for a democratic government. The second group was the victorious one at the Guáimaro Convention, which is why Article 24 of the April 10, 1869 Constitution, declared: “all of the Republic’s inhabitants are entirely free.”<sup>21</sup> Yet, Bonilla adds, they were not willing to break ties with the members of the slavocracy, and three months later, by the end of July of 1869, a 25th amendment was added to the very same Constitution. The part that had formerly read that “all of the

Republic’s citizens should be considered soldiers of the Liberating Army” was changed to read: “without distinction, the Republic’s citizens are obliged to assist it in any way possible, in accordance with their abilities.”<sup>22</sup> There was a swift reaction to this, particularly from the U.S., which interpreted this as “an effort to maintain the slave system.” The new wording—or correction—forced freedmen to carry out any work that would serve the Republic and its representatives, which remained the case till 1870.<sup>23</sup> This explains why Bonilla emphatically believes that the Guáimaro assembly did not, in fact, abolish slavery.

Martí, however, was not the only one to use the rhetoric of debt to gain black support for the independence project. What he was really trying to do was compete with the Autonomist Party over the idea that they were the ones who had actually achieved the abolition of slavery in 1886 [and not the Independents]; this would ensure the survival of the revolutionary movement.

In his book *Liberación étnica cubana* [Ethnic Liberation of Cuba], Elías Entralgo discusses the abolitionist-inspired conversations of Cuban representatives of the Autonomist Party that took place in the Spanish Cortes. Alberto Ortiz, Rafael Montoro, Rafael Fernández de Castro, Julio Vizcarrondo, Miguel Figueroa, Bernardo Portuondo and Rafael María de Labra were the authors of the legal and budgetary amendment that finally brought an end to the exploitation of the remaining 26,000 slaves in Cuba. After much deliberation, the law was approved and slavery was abolished. Entralgo explains that as soon as the Autonomist delegates arrived in Cuba they began their campaign to draw all blacks to their side: “the only party in which black

Cubans could achieve their greatest wish,” according to Miguel Figueroa.<sup>24</sup>

For the next ten years, the Autonomists worked to earn the black vote using this rhetoric; this is what so concerned Martí when he was organizing the war during the 1890s. So, what side should blacks take?

Manuel Sanguily attempts to answer this question in his March 31, 1893 article. As an old veteran of the Ten Years War, and friend of the Autonomists, he declared: “I believe it is perfectly natural for Cubans to recommend to black men that they vote for the Autonomists in the elections, I also believe that this should invite criticism from those who continually remind blacks that they owe their freedom from slavery to the efforts of Cubans.”<sup>25</sup>

On March 16, 1894, *Patria* picks up this polemic. It published an article titled “About Blacks and Whites” that summarized and problematized yet another article, with the very same title, written and published in January of the same year by Manuel Sanguily. Yet, the voice in this article is not that of Martí but of his friend Rafael Serra, a prestigious black intellectual who with him had established the “Liga” [the League, an instructional institution] of New York. Serra’s article had originally appeared in the Havana newspaper *La Igualdad*. In it, he defined the two principal parties in Cuban politics (the Independents and the Autonomists), promptly affirming that the Autonomists were also “Separatists at their core,” but that they were “inspired by their own selfish and centralizing spirit” because what they wanted to do was achieve their goals by dismissing and debasing the black race.<sup>26</sup>

Serra was not wrong. As Marta Bizcarrondo and Antonio Elorza explain, the Autonomists always reserved their own

agency in political decisions and saw “transitory inferiority” in their colored counterparts. Their arguments often led to racist positions, and even to extreme aversion, as was the case with their attitude towards the Chinese.<sup>27</sup> According to Serra, Sanguily’s article confirmed all this and demonstrated “blacks would count for little, and that this was evident in the little or total lack of interest the [Autonomist] party had in helping lift them and, ultimately, in the glacial indifference” they expressed towards the newly established laws. “I don’t believe that this sort of behavior is a good way to gain black support.”<sup>28</sup> This is how the dispute between the two parties was newly resolved and a black intellectual favored separatism.

In reading Martí’s chronicles, in order to find the points of convergence and legitimation in his rhetoric, one must pay attention to their changes in voice and doubt their credibility just a bit. The issue of any so-called debt is taken up by Aline Helg, in what she calls the myth of racial brotherhood, something that has been ignored in Martí’s work and about which there has been no interest, so much so, that in her explanation of the ideology behind the racial brotherhood she includes the following in the book’s note 47: “[the] later manipulation of Martí’s texts “Mi raza” [My Race] (1893) and “Los cubanos en Jamaica y los revolucionarios de Haití” [The Cubans of Jamaica and the Revolutionaries of Haiti] (1894) was the basis for the creation of the myth of racial equality.”<sup>29</sup> This reveals that her research will focus on the “little war of 1912,” but it also simultaneously points to Martí’s innocence in this process, given that the word ‘manipulation’ has a negative semantic load since everyone accepts that any finagling of this sort falsifies and corrupts the original doctrine.

For example, according to (post-1959) Revolutionary historiography, Martí's legacy was grossly "manipulated" during the Republican era and continues to suffer so in the United States at the hands of critics who oppose the [Castro] regime. Thus, Helg's thesis is that what might have been only insinuations in Martí's work were later employed by the Republic's Creole racist elite for its own demagogic purposes. Yet, isn't this "manipulation" already present in Martí, since in his chronicles he very effectively mixed his ideas with those of black Cubans? Furthermore, didn't the members of the Liberal Autonomist Party resort to this type of justification way before Martí did, in order to draw blacks to their group? The truth is that the Independent veterans of the Ten Years War were the first to propose that the liberation of blacks was a sacrifice that whites had to make during the war. Calixto García Íñiguez was one of them, Manuel Sanguily another.

In summary and conclusion, José Martí's *Patria* chronicles are an ideal place in which to read the strategies of his political rhetoric and the literary devices he employed to convince his readers. They are also examples of what a politician can promise and what he can aspire to achieve in the future. In the context of racial politics, his rhetoric tried to unite whites and blacks by placing them in more encompassing categories like 'Cuba' and

'humanity.' Nevertheless, a careful reading of some of his chronicles shows that Martí was indeed very concerned by black cultural practices and in particular with finding a mechanism by which to get both groups to go to (the independence) war together. Said device ended up being the debt of gratitude that blacks should have with whites—and vice versa. Notwithstanding, this argument ignores the struggle that blacks kept up from the very beginning of their lives as slaves until they achieved their liberation. He prioritized a politically tooled foundational moment in which whites freed them. This memory is what allowed Martí to ask blacks to make another sacrifice, this time for the independence of the homeland. He found no better way to achieve this than to have them publicly express this sentiment in a letter that he, himself, published in his newspaper. Thus, it is the others, the former victims, who speak and commit to the struggle. The fact that the writer was incorporating the voice of others into his own makes me question his literality, his reason for using artifice to convince his reader. For this reason it is essential in any reading of his political texts to understand the literary tools Martí generally used, as well as the desires, aspirations, and political objectives he pursued, some of which, as his famous letter states, should remain hidden so they would not be ruined.

## Notes

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