

Juan Gualberto: his two battles

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The anxiety and tenacious fights for the social vindication of the black Cubans - stellar protagonists of the economic development of the Island way back from colonial times - and its important presence, as well as significant, in the two main independence wars which took place in 1868 and 1895 for the sake

of gaining the plenary rights in order to face the hated discrimination and the crude racial prejudice of which they were victims, finally found its better interpreter and defender at the end of the XIX century, in the Cuban patriot Juan Gualberto Gomez Ferrer (1854 - 1933).

Without the prestige and talent of this illustrious “matancero”, the battle to give the black Cubans the social location of which they’ve always had the right to, surely would have continued in diapers far beyond the born of the Republic.

Nobody can deny that the two more important battles in favor of the blacks already at the end of XIX century and first years of the XXth, had in Juan Gualberto Gomez; with his ferocity dialectic and a solid doctrinaire - intermingled both with a straight and invariable conduct - its best leader in the stubborn defense of all black Cubans’ civil and political rights... therefore the vigor and deep roots which gave birth to the “Central Directory of Societies of the Color Race” and the “Committee of Veterans and Societies of the Color Race”.

Surely, what can embrace more the figure of Juan Gualberto Gomez was, indeed, its fight without truce in two-way traffic: to obtain the recognition for black Cubans of his more elementary civil rights and the independence of the mother land.

His task in the “Central Directory of Societies of the Color Race” was not easy for him, whose primary purpose was to regroup men and women of his own race - dispersed in an endless number of small and isolated institutions of recreation - under a single command, to enlist them in the crusade for the Cuban independence and, thereafter, to subtract them and to move them away from other movements which defended an opposite position, the “autonomismo”, through which, it was obvious, the bonds with the Spanish metropolis were not radically cut.

So was the noble and powerful life and work of Juan Gualberto: to battle against organized racism against the black in order to gain its space in Cuban society and to contribute very closely, side-by-side to Jose Martí, to start the revolutionary spark which became a gigantic and patriotic fire all over the Island from the 24th of February 1895.

But let us return to his origins. Juan Gualberto has positioned himself within the history of our mother land as a very important figure. The municipality of Sabanilla del Encomendador, in the province of Matanzas, had the honor to count him among its best children. Later, in his honor, this municipality was red-baptize with his name.

He was born in the Villocino Farm, in Sabanilla, on the 12th of July 1854, from enslaved parents who bought his freedom before his birth, thus he was born free. Juan Gualberto in his childhood attended the school of “Nuestra Señora de los Desamparados”, in Havana, and later - in 1879 - he went to Paris to study carpentry.

This anxious young man began to work like a journalist in Paris, where he met two Cuban patriots: Francisco

Vicente Aguilera and Manuel de Quesada. Out of that friendship, his love for the Cuban freedom cause was born.

Juan Gualberto wrote for newspapers like “El Progreso”, “The Abolitionist”, “El País”, “La Tribuna del Pueblo”, among many others. His brave pen compromised. In an article (“Our Purpose”), he finished with a phrase that displeased the Spanish authorities: “For the mother land, freedom and democracy” and with bravery, Juan Gualberto, published an article entitled “Why we are separatist”, indicating with pride that honored all Cubans: “the time for separation has began” and ended up adding: “let’s give ourselves a warm hug of goodbye and may the force protects us both...” When mentioning “both” he was referring to Cuba and Spain. The Spanish authorities, with the brutality that characterized them, condemned him to three years in prison and ended up serving 240 days in the prison of Ceuta, in northern Africa.

In Madrid, his agile and brave pen stings the heart of Spain. When the conditions for a general civil disturbs approached, he returned to Cuba where the Apostle Martí gave him the order to start the uprising of the 24th of February 1895.

Exile and prison were synonymous in the lives of Gomez and Martí. Juan Gualberto was sent to Ceuta, the African Spain colony and the apostle was sent to Madrid. On the 5th of March, 1933 Juan Gualberto died as he lived, in total poverty but immensely rich in citizen virtues.