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Boletín Martiano

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Boletín Martiano

Newsletter of the Center for José Martí Studies Affiliate
at The University of Tampa

Editor: Denis Rey, Ph.D.

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Message from the Editor

By Denis Rey, Ph.D.

As scholars of the humanities and social sciences, we take great pride in teaching and learning about the fascinating people and places that propelled Cuban independence and *patria*. Throughout the last decade and a half, we have shared our Cuban heritage and passion for history and culture with anyone willing to learn about it. Along the way we have met many others who have answered the same call, and through the CJMSA, have built a community of learning. It saddens us immensely to learn of the passing of a vibrant member of that community, USF Special Collections librarian and historian Andy Huse. To those of us dedicated to the study of the immigrant experience in early Tampa, Andy's dedication to the preservation, study and teaching of the rich history of our community was invaluable, and his books, articles and presentations will remain as lasting testaments to his intellectual labor. Andy was instrumental to the success of the CJMSA's two NEH-funded Summer Institutes, guiding our visiting scholars through the rich archives of Tampa history housed at USF under his care. His good-humor, generosity of spirit, vast knowledge, and dedication to learning, scholarship and preservation will always be remembered by those honored to have known and worked with him, and those who, like us at the CJMSA, considered him a dear friend. We'll miss you, Andy. Rest in Peace.

In this issue of *Boletín Martiano* we shed light on life in Ybor City with scholarship from two renowned scholars, one an emerging young talent and the other an accomplished and seasoned veteran. This issue will also introduce us to a new work of fiction by one of Tampa's most cherished Cuban authors. We begin with an excerpt from *Constructing Cuban America: Race and Identity in Florida's Caribbean South, 1868-1945* (University of Texas Press, 2024), by Andrew Gomez, Associate Professor of History at the University of Puget Sound. The piece provides a close look at the lives of Afro-Cubans in Tampa. The second article, *Ybor City Conversations: Views from the 1930s*, by our friend and collaborator, Gary Mormino, professor emeritus of history at University of South Florida, St. Petersburg, provides an outsider's impressions of Cubans in Ybor City during the Great Depression. The third contribution, *El secreto de la andaluza,* is an excerpt from a work of fiction by Gabriel Cartaya, Spanish editor of *La Gaceta* and former professor of history at the University of Havana. The historical novel integrates the author's vivid imagination and command of Spanish prose with his encyclopedic knowledge of José Martí to deliver a must-read thriller of a story. I hope you enjoy reading this issue of *Boletin Martiano* as much as we have.

Excerpt from *Constructing Cuban America: Race and Identity in Florida's Caribbean South, 1868-1945*

By Andrew Gomez, Ph.D.

Introductory paragraphs:

Constructing Cuban America is an analysis of the first major Cuban-American communities in Florida. Situated in Key West and Tampa, these enclaves were founded as exile centers in response to the Cuban independence wars of the nineteenth century. A central point of analysis in this text is how race became a central theme in understanding both communities. Cubans within these exile waves first entered Florida during the period of Radical Reconstruction in which Black male voting and officeholding became increasingly common throughout the U.S. South. Within this context, white and Black Cubans became a political force in the region, forging alliances with African Americans, Bahamians, and Euro-Americans. However, with the fall of Reconstruction, the region became increasingly defined by racial separatism and the creation of the Jim Crow system. This book seeks to examine how Cubans navigated these shifts and related to neighboring ethnic communities.

This particular excerpt comes from the book's third chapter that examines some of the earliest manifestations of the Jim Crow system in Key West and Tampa during the late 1800s and early 1900s. The earlier sections of the chapter consider how state policies related to multiracial schooling, voting, and interracial relationships became gradually enforced in Cuban South

Florida. The latter sections of the chapter also consider how Key West and Tampa sometimes reflected or contrasted with the racial politics of Cuba and the early republic during the early 1900s. The excerpt below looks at this phenomenon via the lens of education and perceptions of Cuba's *Partido Independiente de Color*/Independent Party of Color.

Excerpt: The Contradictions of Racial Democracy

During the early twentieth century, events in Cuba continued to shape developments in South Florida. The two regions remained closely linked via trade and migration. Cuba at various moments offered either a mirror or a contrast to the Cuban communities of South Florida. In regard to race relations, there were points of similarity and many points of difference. Following the period of US occupation, the early Cuban republic attempted to implement the ideals of racial democracy that guided the independence movement. Scholars of this period have noted the persistent role of racism in shaping the early republic, while some have also noted how Black Cubans were able to use the aspirational goals of racial democracy to their advantage.[1] By comparison, Jim Crow Florida was a far cry from the multiracial democracy of Key West during the late 1800s. Over time, the chasm between the two regions became more noticeable.

Education was one of the areas where the two regions grew more divergent over time. Just as Black Cubans in Cuba were accessing integrated public schooling at much greater rates in

1 For scholars like Aline Helg, this period underscored how white Cubans in power and foreign interests "used a racial ideology together with a myth of racial equality to subordinate and repress Afro-Cubans." In her text, a central case study is the massacre of many Black leaders and supporters of the Partido Independiente de Color in 1912. As she noted, this event "damages forever the myth of Cuban racial equality." Alejandro de la Fuente has acknowledged the role of racism in Cuban society during this period but has also noted that "the rhetorical exaltation of racial inclusiveness as the very essence of nationhood has made racially defined exclusion considerably more difficult, creating in the process significant opportunities for appropriation and manipulation of dominant racial ideologies by those below while limiting the political options of the elites." Rebecca J. Scott similarly noted about the early republic in Cuba that "a practiced eye could easily detect the element of hypocrisy in the Cuban system. But a practiced eye could also see that these formal guarantees created a space for alliance, negotiation, voting, military service, officeholding, union organizing, and education." See Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 2-3, 226; Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 8; Rebecca J. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba After Slavery* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 256.

the early 1900s, Black Cubans in South Florida found themselves in a segregated system.[2] In 1909, a rare public debate over the discord between Black and white Cubans in Florida underscored the fundamental tension between Cuba's claim to multiracial democracy while Cuban schools in the United States used segregationist policies. Various officials in Cuba had proposed apportioning funds to émigré schools in South Florida. On the pages of *El Diario de Tampa*, a debate ensued between Eliseo Pérez Díaz of *La Lucha* and José A. López of *La Discusión*.[3] Little can be confirmed about López, but this was likely the same Eliseo Pérez Díaz who worked as Tampa's Cuban consul for decades.[4] In the *Diario*, López argued that it would violate the Cuban constitution for Cubans in Florida to receive the funds, given the segregated nature of their schools. Pérez attempted to insist that failing to fund the schools would hurt all Cubans, Black and white alike. López asserted that the schools violated the constitutional principles of Cuba and argued that students would "be taught from the beginning, that they will not only form a standard completely different from those in Cuban schools, but one that is antagonistic."[5] Pérez, in response, argued that local and federal laws in the US necessitated different systems, that the Black Unión Martí-Maceo and white Círculo Cubano had amiable relations in Tampa, and tellingly quoted Booker T. Washington's 1895 "Atlanta Compromise" speech claiming that the "agitation of questions of social equality is the extremist folly, and that progress in the enjoyment of all the privileges that will come to us must be the result of severe and constant struggle rather than of artificial forcing."[6] While uncommon, other Cubans did occasionally note the dissonance in Cuban support for segregated institutions. In 1918, one

2 As Alejandro de la Fuente has noted, considerable gains were made in regard to Black Cubans accessing public schooling in Cuba, even as segregation in private schools was a persistent issue. See de la Fuente, *Nation for All*, 139–143.

3 "Habla el Sr. José A. López," *Diario de Tampa*, May 29, 1909, 1.

4 See *Herencia: The Anthology of Hispanic Literature of the United States*, ed. Nicolás Kanellos (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 458.

5 "Habla el Sr. José A. López," *Diario de Tampa*, May 29, 1909, 1.

6 "Carta Abierta," *Diario de Tampa*, June 2, 1909, 1; in addition to Washington's fame at the time, some Cubans also would have been directly familiar with his work. As Frank Andre Guridy has noted, Booker T. Washington recruited Black Cubans to be part of the Tuskegee Institute following the US military intervention in Cuba in 1898. See Frank Andre Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African Americans in a World of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 27–28.

Tampa local sharply disagreed with the Círculo Cubano's plea for financial assistance from the Cuban government. Among many reasons for taking this position, the writer noted that the Círculo Cubano was not open to all Cubans, as Cubans of color were "completely excluded."[7]

The founding of the Partido Independiente de Color (PIC), and the 1912 violence that targeted the PIC, only accelerated the racial divisions that became increasingly evident in South Florida. Led by Black military veterans such as Pedro Ivonnet and Evaristo Estenoz, the PIC was founded in 1908 as a means of organizing Black Cubans who were dissatisfied with their treatment in the early Cuban republic. Backlash to the group was swift. In addition to its suppression via the Cuban congress, white Cubans in both Cuba and South Florida depicted the PIC as a racist organization that aspired to undermine the existing government. By 1912, the Cuban government targeted the PIC, resulting in the massacre of many of its members and effectively ending the organization.[8] These events were covered closely in South Florida's Cuban enclaves, with racial tensions sometimes spilling over into Key West and Tampa. In South Florida, this period highlighted the precarious position that Black Cubans were placed in and the limits of racial democracy that became even more constricted in Key West and Tampa.

From its founding in 1908, the PIC was subject to fierce criticism in both Cuba and South Florida. While the organization was often criticized as being devoted solely to the progress of Black Cubans, the PIC's founding documents drew on a much broader set of demands.[9] Their 1908 platform combined aspects of labor reform, civil rights, increased educational access for all Cubans, and greater inclusion of Black officials in Cuban government.[10] The PIC's founders

7 The document does not have a clear author but was likely penned by José Ramón Avellanal. See "Círculo Cubano (Solicitaciones en Cuba)," University of South Florida Special Collections, José Ramón Avellanal Collection, Box 3, Folder 12.

8 See Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 193–226.

9 For an analysis of this platform, see Serafín Portuondo Linares, *Los Independientes de Color: Historia del Partido Independiente de Color*, 2nd ed., (La Habana: Editorial Caminos, 2002), 37-52.

10 El Partido Independiente de Color, "The Independent Party of Color," in *The Cuba Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, trans. Aviva Chomsky, ed. Aviva Chomsky, Barry Carr, and Pamela Maria Smorkaloff (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 164.

attempted to assuage fears during this early period by noting that "the black race has the right to participate in the government of its country not with the objective of governing anybody, but rather with the aim that we should be well governed."[11] Nevertheless, critics—later including the administration of President José Miguel Gómez—labeled the PIC as a racist organization that was antithetical to Cuban values.[12] Drawing on fears of Black revolt that dated back to the colonial era, critics in Cuba and the United States drew constant comparisons to the Haitian Revolution and other racialized tropes.[13] These characterizations were readily adopted in parts of South Florida. When the PIC was formed in 1908, Tampa's *Diario de Tampa* asserted that "the race of color is going to the elections of November 14th organized against whites" while also suggesting fears of a "Black military republic" and a nation similar to Haiti.[14] Similarly, an analysis from another Tampa newspaper warned that if Black Cubans became a uniform voting bloc in the PIC, "it would rule the republic."[15]

Antagonisms against the PIC soon became more pronounced, with a former Key West émigré playing a central role. Martín Morúa Delgado, who had previously served as a South Florida lector and journalist, led the charge against the PIC as a senator in Cuba. While Morúa had a history of calling for the full inclusion of Black Cubans, he viewed any form of race-based organizing as anti-Cuban and in violation of the Cuban constitution.[16] In 1910, the Cuban congress passed a law sponsored by Morúa that forbade political organizations that were centered on a particular race. Known informally as the Morúa Law, the bill was clearly targeted at the PIC's recent founding.[17] The law delegitimized the PIC and spurred mainstream political

11 El Partido Independiente de Color, "Independent Party of Color," 165.

12 As Rebecca J. Scott noted, the Gómez administration was also calculated in attempting to frame the PIC's goals around the concept of a "race war." See Scott, *Degrees of Freedom*, 242.

13 Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 162–163.

14 "¿Una República negra?," *Diario de Tampa*, September 22, 1908, 1.

15 "Out of Cuban Racial Troubles May Grow Political Party of Powerful Influence," *Tampa Morning Tribune*, January 31, 1910, 1.

16 "Gomez Pardons Former Official," *Tampa Morning Tribune*, February 21, 1910, 4; Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 40–41.

17 For more on the law and its context, see Portuondo Linares, "La Enmienda Morúa," in *Los Independientes de Color*, 77–87.

parties in Cuba to similarly denounce the organization. The law was fiercely criticized by PIC supporters such as the Afro–Puerto Rican Arturo Schomburg. Referring to Morúa as a Cuban "Judas," Schomburg asserted that Black Cubans were seeking rights that they were historically deprived of and noted that the Morúa Law was comparable to the *Dred Scott v. John F. A. Sandford* (1857) case during the period of US slavery.[18] The PIC's leadership called for a repeal of the Morúa Law as tensions between the organization and the Cuban state grew worse. This would ultimately lead to an armed protest by the PIC in 1912 that soon gave way to the state-sponsored killings of its members that same year. During this conflict, the Cuban state targeted the PIC's remaining members, leading to several incidents of outright massacres that included the killing of "noncombatants."[19]

As was true in Cuba, the anti-PIC paranoia used rumor and racist tropes to cast Black Cubans in Florida as potentially traitorous. During the war, Cubans of color were associated with a variety of plots, with the suspicion among Americans and white Cubans veering into the fanatical. One Florida newspaper noted that the Oriente-based uprising had potentially spread to Havana. The Key West newspaper argued that Black Cubans in the city were acting suspiciously and ordering knives at hardware stores at an alarming rate.[20] Similar claims were made in national outlets as well. The *New York Times* reported on suspicions that thousands of Haitians had arrived in Cuba, "inflaming" Black Cuban rebels.[21] Rumors became so widespread in Key West that Black Cubans organized a public meeting to confront claims that they were helping fund the PIC's army. One member of Unión Cubana, a Black Cuban organization, was pressed to bring financial records to prove he was not funneling money to PIC rebels. In a show of

18 Arthur A. Schomburg, "General Evaristo Estenoz," *The Crisis* 4, no. 3, (July 1912): 143. Hathitrust Digital Library, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044009723073.

19 Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 221–225; Scott, *Degrees of Freedom*, 243.

20 "President Gomez Wants Martial Law Established in His Country," *Key West Morning Journal*, June 5, 1912, 1.

21 "Haitian Negroes and Cuban Rebels," *New York Times*, May 22, 1912, 1.

solidarity, an unidentified group of white Cubans attended the meeting to defend the reputation of some of the Cubans in question.[22]

In South Florida, the performative politics of denouncing the PIC were similarly echoed. In Tampa, a mass meeting of white and Black Cubans took place in May 1912 to pronounce their support of President José Miguel Gómez against the PIC.[23] Moreover, the Afro-Cuban Unión Martí-Maceo publicly declared its support for the Cuban government on various occasions—many assured the city's Cuban consul, Rafael Ybor, that they would be willing to go to Cuba to fight against the PIC.[24] Undoubtedly, many Black Cubans in South Florida supported the Cuban government during the 1912 conflict with the PIC. This was the case in Cuba as well, with many significant Afro-Cuban organizations opposing the PIC and Black Cuban legislators supporting a vision of "racial fraternity."[25] Rebecca J. Scott has similarly noted that while some Cubans of color in Cuba may have sympathized with the broad aims of the PIC, many were likely dissuaded from supporting the group due to their own connections to "multiple cross-racial relationships and alliances in the workplace and in their public lives."[26]

However, there was also a profound pressure on Black Cubans to denounce the PIC in public terms. In Cuba, Black Cubans feared being viewed as promoting "antiwhite racism" in supporting the PIC.[27] The mass meeting in Tampa doubled as a political spectacle that was likely to cast suspicion on Black Cubans who did not show up in support of President Gómez. A separate incident that highlighted such tension involved Evaristo Alfonso, identified by the *Key*

22 "Union Cubana Held Meeting Sunday," *Key West Morning Journal*, June 11, 1912, 1.

23 "Cuban Colony Joins in Support of Government," *Tampa Daily Times*, May 28, 1912, 5.

24 "Cuban Trouble Is Soon to Be Ended," *Tampa Morning Tribune*, May 23, 1912, 12; "Cuban Negroes Here Offer Government Aid," *Tampa Daily Times*, June 12, 1912, 5; "Cuba Offered Aid by Tampa Negroes," *Tampa Weekly Tribune*, June 13, 1912, 10; "Marti-Maceo Society Calls on Consul Ybor," *Tampa Morning Tribune*, November 20, 1912, 9.

25 Alejandro de la Fuente, "Myths of Racial Democracy: Cuba, 1900–1912," *Latin American Research Review* 34, no. 3 (1999): 66–67; de la Fuente, *Nation for All*, 77; for more on the response by Black Cuban organizations that opposed the PIC in Cuba see Melina Pappademos, *Black Political Activism and the Cuban Republic* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 58.

26 Scott, *Degrees of Freedom*, 229.

27 Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 185–186.

"La Unión Martí-Maceo was founded in 1904 in Ybor City. The group functioned as both a mutual-aid society and a social club for Black Cubans. During the 1912 movement against the Partido Independiente de Color (PIC), the group publicly backed the Cuban government in its war against the PIC, showing the complicated politics of how Black Cubans responded to racial debates. Pictured here is the 1917 Board of Directors. (Tony Pizzo Collection. Image courtesy of University of South Florida Special Collections, University of South Florida Libraries, Tampa, Florida.)"

West Morning Journal as a "loyal mulatto," and Disdiero Sola, "a colored Cuban."[28] The two men were part of an argument that ended with Alfonso shooting Sola in the foot. As the newspaper noted, "The trouble between the two men is a result of the revolution in Cuba and is said to have been brewing for several days. It seems that Alfonso . . . had taken a stand for the administration in Cuba, and was being severely criticized by several of the colored Cuban colony in this city among whom was Sola."[29] The mention of PIC supporters points to the likelihood that

28 "Murmers [sic] of Revolution Have Reached Key West," *The Key West Morning Journal*, June 13, 1912, 1.

29 "Murmers [sic] of Revolution," 1.

the organization spoke to some of the anxieties and inequities that Black Cubans endured in South Florida. The PIC-led *Previsión* had connections to former émigrés such as Key West's Emilio Planas.[30] The Cuban newspaper also hinted at other connections to Black Cuban Tampans, including a note on a group of organized PIC supporters in Tampa.[31] However, the climate of paranoia and violence toward the PIC also underscored the social pressure of keeping such sympathies private or within the Black Cuban community.[32]

These histories again underscore how a critical feature of the Caribbean South was the ways in which ideas of race, nation, and power were transmitted and actively discussed across the region. Debates over educational access, Black organizing, and US-Cuba relations were occurring both within these communities and across the Florida Straits. These moments also highlight how elements of white supremacy were being deployed simultaneously in both the United States and Cuba. In some cases, these processes produced similarities. Social discrimination, barriers to accessing political power, and anti-Black violence pervaded the region. The subsequent founding of KKK chapters during the 1920s and 1930s in both South Florida and Cuba is perhaps one of the starkest reminders of this commonality.[33] However, there were also important differences in relation to governmental structures and constitutional barriers.

The PIC controversy and the Pérez-López debate on education underscored the delicate and sometimes illusory nature of the early republic's ideals. Near the end of the Cuban War of Independence, Black military leaders were routinely castigated or cast aside in favor of white

30 For a translated version of a Planas article in *Previsión*, see "Jonatás [Emilio Planas], 'Welcome,' Previsión (Havana, Cuba: Oct. 20, 1909" in *Voices of the Race: Black Newspapers in Latin America, 1870–1960* ed. and trans. Paulina Laura Alberto, George Reid Andrews, and Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 233–235.

31 A thank-you to Professor Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, who provided the author with digitized copies of *Previsión*. One 1908 article documented the construction of La Unión Martí-Maceo's building and the role of women within the organization. Another 1908 article mentions, and seemingly quotes from, an organized group of PIC supporters in Tampa. See "'Previsión' en Tampa," *Previsión*, December 7, 1908, 6; "Se acentúa el entusiasmo," *Previsión*, October 1908, 4.

32 As Nancy Raquel Mirabal has noted in her analysis of Tampa, Black Cubans rarely discussed racial strife in public or in their own institutional records. As a result, analyzing and reading "silences" is critical to understanding South Florida's racial dynamics. See Nancy Raquel Mirabal, "Telling Silences and Making Community: Afro-Cubans and African-Americans in Ybor City and Tampa, 1899–1915," in *Between Race and Empire: African-Americans and Cubans before the Cuban Revolution*, ed. Lisa Brock and Digna Castañeda Fuertes (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 49–69.

33 In Cuba, these were chapters of the Ku Klux Klan Kubano (KKKK). See de la Fuente, *Nation for All*, 92, 204–205, 207.

leaders that would be chosen to lead the new government.[34] Nevertheless, after the war, racial democracy became a founding tenet of the Cuban republic. While flawed in practice, Black Cubans were able to use the aspirational claim to demand a place in Cuban politics and culture. Moreover, this also tempered how white Cubans exercised power. As Alejandro de la Fuente has argued, "Regardless of how racist many Cuban whites were, it was difficult for them to translate their anti-black prejudices into openly discriminatory practices."[35] The strongest proponents of racial equality, such as the PIC, were suppressed by the state, but other Black Cubans found various means of attaining power and legitimacy in the early republic. As a result, Black Cubans had a forceful, if limited, moral and political argument for their place in Cuban society.

In South Florida, white Cubans were not beholden to the same standard. By the beginning of the twentieth century, growing racial antagonisms throughout the American South, where Black Americans were viewed as second-class citizens, defined the region. Under this framework, white Cubans were not beholden to the multiracial ideals of the Cuban republic. Moreover, some of the limits of Cuban multiracial democracy became more pronounced in South Florida. A central premise of Cuba's racial democracy was that the independence movement had taken the racial divisions of the colonial period and turned them into something akin to a raceless society. However, this also placed Black Cubans in a precarious position when attempting to address racial inequality. Under this view, Black claims of racial inequities became viewed as racist accusations meant to divide the Cuban community.[36] Rafael Serra, an Afro-Cuban who was well known for his contributions to the Cuban independence movement in New York City, warned that this view reduced interracial democracy to mere symbolism. In a 1901 letter, he impressed upon Black Cubans the need to cease backing a "degrading and ridiculous patriotism"

34 Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 173-182; Scott, *Degrees of Freedom*, 152.

35 De la Fuente, "Myths of Racial Democracy," 67.

36 Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 105–106.

and instead argue for a system that would give Black Cubans true justice and equality.[37] However, these types of demands were harder to mobilize in Jim Crow Florida, and white Cubans did not approach these new injustices with the same rigor that they had previously approached the independence movement.

For Black Cubans in South Florida, these limits were juxtaposed against a Jim Crow system that began to rapidly diminish Black rights during the early twentieth century. These changes resulted in a tacit but substantial split between white and Black Cubans in Key West and Tampa. While they continued to share workplaces, other spaces such as theaters, schools, hospitals, and other essential services became bifurcated along racial lines. For Black Cubans that participated in the Cuban independence movement, these changes were jarring and a far cry from the united ideals of José Martí and Antonio Maceo. Their children would be born into a South Florida where Jim Crow policies were even more rigid and the Black and white Cuban experience would grow more disconnected.

37 Rafael Serra, "Carta Abierta," in *Para Blancos y Negros: Ensayos Políticos, Sociales y Económicos* (Havana: El Score, 1907), 92. Hathitrust Digital Library, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924020422501.

Andrew Gomez is Associate Professor of History at the University of Puget Sound. His research focuses on U.S. immigration, the history of Latinos in the United States, and public history. His first book, titled *Constructing Cuban America: Race and Identity in Florida's Caribbean South, 1868–1945*, was released by University of Texas Press as part of the *Historia USA* series in 2024. His writing has also appeared in the *Journal of American Ethnic History*, *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History*, and *Cuban Counterpoints*, among others. He has also worked on various collaborative public history projects related to U.S. immigration history. As part of his public history work, he was a Whiting Public Engagement Fellow from 2019-20.

Ybor City Conversations: Views from the 1930s

By Gary Mormino, Ph.D.

Dr. Gary Mormino, professor emeritus of history at the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg, shared with us a fascinating document he found at the USF Special Collections. It is a report on daily life in Ybor City produced by the Federal Writer's Project, an agency created in 1935 as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal legislation to provide work to unemployed writers. According to Wikipedia, the "FWP employed thousands of people and produced hundreds of publications, including state guides, city guides, local histories, oral histories, ethnographies, and children's books. In addition to writers, the project provided jobs to unemployed librarians, clerks, researchers, editors, and historians."

Upon our request, Dr. Mormino graciously provided us the following prologue to the original report. Afterward, the text of the report is reproduced, together with the original document as preserved by the Special Collections library at USF.

The wonderfully frustrating aspect of studying Ybor City and West Tampa is that old documents surface seemingly weekly. Arriving in Tampa in 1977, eager to begin a teaching career at the University of South Florida, I had just received my doctorate at the University of North Carolina. There I wrote my dissertation on a famous Italian community in St. Louis, "The Hill," home to Joe Garagiola and Peter Lawrence "Yogi" Berra.

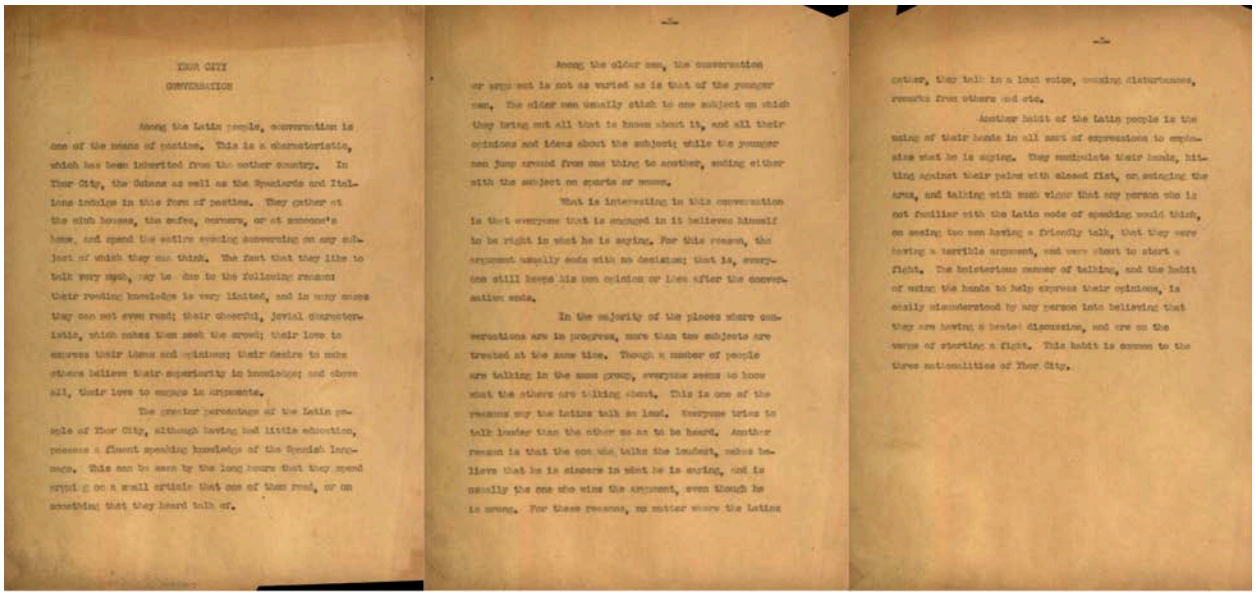
My career as a researcher had hit a big bump in the road when I discovered that any printed documentation on "The Hill" was rare. Desperate —and feeling like an idiot that I had not checked out the archives beforehand— I purchased a cheap tape recorder and began

interviewing anyone who looked older than fifty. The interviews became part of a book that was published in 1986, Immigrants on the Hill (University of Illinois Press).

Determined that the interview model would work in researching the histories of Ybor City and West Tampa, I witnessed what researchers for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) realized almost fifty years earlier. Immigrants and sons and daughters of Cubans (White and Black), Spaniards, and Italians (principally Sicilians) loved to talk. The first two sentences of the document read: "Among the Latin people, conversation is one of the means of pastime. This is a characteristic which has been inherited from the mother country."

A wonderful example of this inheritance is what Southern Italians call "*la passeggiata*," the custom in Ybor City involving males walking clockwise down Seventh Avenue and the females counter-clockwise. Along the way, the groups gossip, flirt, and converse. The evening ends at the clubhouse, dance floors, movie theaters or cafés. In Spain, Cuba, and Ybor City, the custom was called "el paseo." While researching in Sicily in 1981, I visited my family's hometown, Alia, in Central Sicily in the province of Palermo. The neighboring community of Lercara Friddi is home to Frank Sinatra's family, and next to the infamous Corleone! There, I accompanied my Sicilian relatives on a Saturday evening passeggiata, stopping for a *caffé* and lively conversation.

Surprisingly, the WPA writer never mentioned "el lector," the reader in the cigar factories from 1886 until they were banned in 1931. One curious argument in support of the treasured *lectura* was that the reader allowed *the tabaqueros* to concentrate upon the grading and rolling of cigars rather than conversing! Conversations among factories workers meant gesticulations and fists pounding on wooden desks, inefficient motions for the manufacture of hand-rolled cigars.



YBOR CITY
CONVERSATION

Among the Latin people, conversation is one of the means of pastime. This is a characteristic, which has been inherited from the mother country. In Ybor City, the Cubans as well as the Spaniards and Italians indulge in this form of pastime. They gather at the club houses, the cafes, corners, or at someone's home, and spend the entire evening conversing on any subject of which they can think. The fact that they like to talk very much, may be due to the following reasons: their reading knowledge is very limited, and in many cases they can not even read; their cheerful, jovial characteristic, which makes them seek the crowd; their love to express their ideas and opinions; their desire to make others believe their superiority in knowledge; and above all, their love to engage in arguments.

The greater percentage of the Latin people of Ybor City, although having had little education, possess a fluent speaking knowledge of the Spanish language. This can be seen by the long hours that they spend arguing on a small article that one of them read, or on something that they heard talk of.

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Among the older men, the conversation or argument is not as varied as is that of the younger men. The older men usually stick to one subject on which they being out all that is known about it, and all their opinions and ideas about the subject; while the younger men jump around from one thing to another, ending either with the subject on sports or women.

What is interesting in this conversation is that everyone that is engaged in it believes himself to be right in what he is saying. For this reason, the argument usually ends with no decision; that is, everyone still keeps his own opinion or idea after the conversation ends.

In the majority of the places where conversations are in progress, more than two subjects are treated at the same time. Though a number of people are talking in the same group, everyone seems to know what the others are talking about. This is one of the reasons why the Latins talk so loud. Everyone tries to talk louder than the other so as to be heard. Another reason is that the one who talks the loudest, makes believe that he is sincere in what he is saying, and is usually the one who wins the argument, even though he is wrong. For these reasons, no matter where the Latins

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gather, they talk in a loud voice, causing disturbances, remarks from others and etc.

Another habit of the Latin people is the using of their hands in all sort of expressions to emphasize what he is saying. They manipulate their hands, hitting against their palms with closed fist, or swinging the arms, and talking with such vigor that any person who is not familiar with the Latin mode of speaking would think, on seeing two men having a friendly talk, that they were having a terrible argument, and were about to start a fight. The boisterious manner of talking, and the habit of using the hands to help express their opinions, is easily misunderstood by any person into believing that they are having a heated discussion, and are on the verge of starting a fight. This habit is common to the three nationalities of Ybor City.

This anonymous report, titled "Ybor City Conversations," was written as part of the Federal Writer's Project in the 1930s. The program was administered by the Federal Works Agency in an attempt to employ writers in the aftermath of the Great Depression, and was part of the Work Projects Program developed by the Roosevelt administration. The report offers an outsider's view of life in Ybor City among its Cuban, Italian, and Spanish communities.

The WPA researchers also noted that non-verbal gestures were understood clearly. The researchers explained, "Another habit of the Latin people is the using of their hands in all sort of expressions to emphasize what he is saying. They manipulate their hands, hitting against their palms with closed fist, or swinging the arms, and talking with such vigor that any person who is not familiar with the Latin mode of speaking would think, on seeing two men having a friendly talk, that they were having a terrible argument, and were about to start a fight."

Researchers and writers working for the WPA quickly discovered that Cuban coffee and conversation represented the currency of the realm in Ybor City. One should add that at the very moment WPA workers were gathering reams of information about Ybor City, the futures of Spain, Italy, and Cuba were experiencing turbulence, authoritarianism, and repression. Conversing loudly and freely is a precious democratic virtue.

Anyone old enough to remember walking into Ybor City's La Tropicana Cafe, El Centro Español, or West Tampa's Fourth of July Café, will recall a din of noise, consisting of laughter, loud conversations, and the shuffle of dominos.

On July 18, 1979, I interviewed Angelina Spoto Comescone. When asked about her memories of growing up in Ybor City, she explained in the most beautiful language the essence of community. She reminisced, "If someone was sick, all the neighbors came with different remedies . . . Spanish, Cuban, and Italian. In the evenings our parents took us walking. We all loved one another. We would sing as loud as we could, Italian, Spanish, and American songs. Other children would sing back at us while doing their homework. Nobody walks anymore. It was beautiful then. Nobody sings anymore." Authentic communities are rarely silent!

The WPA papers stored at the University of South Florida are endlessly interesting and should be read and debated by future generations of researchers and readers.

Ybor City Conversations, circa 1930s

Tampa WPA Office Papers

YBOR CITY

CONVERSATION

Among the Latin people, conversation is one of the means of pastime. This is a characteristic, which has been inherited from the mother country. In Ybor City, the Cubans as well as the Spaniards and Italians indulge in this form of pastime. They gather at the club houses, the cafes, corners, or at someone's home, and spend the entire evening conversing on any subject of which they can think. The fact that they like to talk very much, may be due to the following reasons: their reading knowledge is very limited, and in many cases they can not even read; their cheerful, jovial characteristic, which makes them seek the crowd; their love to express their ideas and opinions; their desire to make others believe their superiority in knowledge; and above all, their love to engage in arguments.

The greater percentage of the Latin people of Ybor City, although having had little education, possess a fluent speaking knowledge of the Spanish language. This can be seen by the long hours that they spend arguing on a small article that one of them read, or on something that they heard talk of.

Among the older men, the conversation or argument is not as varied as is that of the younger men. The older men usually stick to one subject on which they bring out all that is

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Gary Mormino is professor emeritus of history at University of South Florida, St. Petersburg, and holds the position of scholar-in-residence at the Florida Humanities Council. He earned his Ph.D. in History from the University of North Carolina and taught at the University of South Florida from 1977 to 2015. His books include *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors* (University of Illinois Press, 1987), co-authored with George Pozzetta, which was awarded the Theodore Saloutos Prize for the best book in immigration history. He also wrote *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Florida* (University Press of Florida, 2006), which received the Charlton Tebeau Prize for the best book in Florida history. In 2007, PBS and WEDU adapted the book into a documentary, *The Florida Dream*, which was awarded a regional Emmy. He is also the author of two other volumes: *Immigrants on the Hill: Italians in St. Louis* (University of Illinois Press, 1986), which was awarded the Howard Marraro Prize for the best book in Italian history, and *Spanish Pathways in Florida, 1492-1992* (Pineapple Press, 1992). Dr. Mormino has received numerous awards and accolades for his work on Florida history, including being honored with the "Distinguished Author" award by the Florida House of Representatives in 2012, and the 2015 Florida Lifetime Achievement Award in Writing.

Prólogo a *El secreto de la andaluza*

By James Lopez, Ph.D

Se publica a continuación el discurso impartido por el Dr. James López, co-director del CJMSA, en el lanzamiento de la novela El secreto de la andaluza de Gabriel Cartaya el 12 de julio del 2025 en la sede de la Unión Martí-Maceo de Ybor City.

El secreto de la andaluza de Gabriel Cartaya

Muy buenos días a todos. Gracias por acompañarnos en este encuentro tan especial. Quiero comenzar saludando con afecto a todos los presentes, especialmente a Alberto Sicilia por haber creado el Tampa Lector Consortium, a la Unión Martí-Maceo por brindarnos este lugar tan especial y querido por nuestra comunidad, al público reunido por su interés y dedicación a mantener vivo el legado cultural cubano y martiano de esta ciudad, y, por supuesto, quisiera extender un reconocimiento muy particular al autor que nos convoca hoy: Gabriel Cartaya. Su obra no solo enriquece nuestro panorama literario, sino que nos obliga a repensar, con hondura y sensibilidad, algunos de los pilares fundacionales de nuestra identidad.

Como ustedes bien saben, Gabriel ha realizado una contribución valiosísima al entendimiento de la vida y obra de José Martí y de la emigración cubana de Tampa, y que esto lo

ha logrado tanto en el campo de la historia mediante su importantísimo volumen *Tampa en la obra de José Martí,* como en el campo de la literatura, mediante su bello libro *Domingos de tanta luz,* y ahora a través de esta novela, *El secreto de la andaluza*. Esta capacidad multifacética como periodista, historiador y novelista, unida a su profundo apego intelectual y espiritual a la figura de Martí, dan a su obra un gran peso estético y moral, recordándonos de que el intelectual y el artista ambos tienen el deber ineludible de cuestionar la realidad que habitamos, y de asumir una postura ética, honesta, valiente, y transparente incluso ante los aspectos más incómodos y dolorosos de nuestra historia.

Quienes han tenido ya el privilegio de leer *El secreto de la andaluza* sabrán que su punto de partida es tan intrigante como revelador: las páginas perdidas del *Diario* de Martí, aquellas páginas arrancadas por razones misteriosas, aunque no del todo incomprensibles, y que algunos atribuyen al Gen. Máximo Gómez. Esta novela ofrece una versión alternativa de los hechos y de las razones que llevaron a esa notoria omisión, que tanta repercusión ha tenido en la historia cubana. A partir de ese vacío, Gabriel construye una historia alternativa —una *contra*-historia— que le permite explorar el origen mismo de la República Cubana, y su posible evolución (accidentada, por cierto) hacia una democracia moderna, representativa, y fiel al espíritu martiano, antes de ser interrumpida por la Revolución de 1959.

Esta estrategia literaria se inscribe en una larga tradición de novelas históricas latinoamericanas —pensemos en *El general en su laberinto* de García Márquez, por ejemplo— en donde la literatura despliega su prodigiosa capacidad especulativa para enriquecer y

profundizar nuestro sentido histórico, liberando a los grandes personajes de la historia del mármol que los ha inmovilizado, y devolviéndoles su humanidad, es decir, su fragilidad, su cotidianidad, sus dolores y sus dudas. En el caso de *El secreto de la andaluza*, este proceso ocurre cde manera solapada, mediante una protagonista inesperada: una mujer andaluza, sencilla en apariencia y ambición, y que sin embargo parece encarnar toda la sabiduría popular cubana, articulando en su lenguaje directo y sencillo una visión limpia de ideologías y ambiciones. Esa "linda andaluza" que Martí eternizó en la breve descripción que de ella incluye en las páginas de su *Diario*, adquiere en la novela de Gabriel dimensiones casi míticas, y a través de su narración nos devuelve el espíritu de Martí, como hombre, como amante, como pensador, y como cubano—como si su voz reemplazara, con ternura y lucidez, las páginas desaparecidas del Maestro.

Si bien la novela se titula *El secreto de la andaluza*, lo cierto es que esa andaluza no guarda un secreto, sino muchos secretos. Secretos que le permiten ver lo que Unamuno llamó la *infrahistoria*, esa historia que no se encuentra en los libros escolares, sino en las experiencias de vida de quienes desde el anonimato sostienen una nación: los que luchan, aman, sufren y mueren entre los vaivenes de la política doméstica e internacional. Y así es que la andaluza de la novela se convierte en el vehículo para que el autor efectúe una reevaluación de los logros y fracasos de la nación cubana, ofreciéndonos una radiografía lúcida de la República y de muchas de sus figuras conocidas, y muchas otras olvidadas, borradas por la amnesia impuesta tras la Revolución.

Ahora bien, es importante decir que no se trata de una novela solo para iniciados en la historiografía cubana. Es cierto que *El secreto de la andaluza* es una novela profundamente cubana –conociendo a su autor no pudiera ser de otra manera– y también es verdad que requiere de cierto conocimiento histórico para aprovechar toda su riqueza referencial. Pero también es —como soñaba Martí— una obra "con todos y para el bien de todos". Por eso no quisiera dejarles con la impresión de que se trata solo de una novela de tesis, o una novela de ideas. Lo es, sin duda, pero también es mucho más que eso. Porque esta andaluza —que tanto ve, tanto sufre y tanto goza— descubre en la naturaleza, en la forma de hablar de la gente independiente de su procedencia social, en la cotidianeidad familiar, en el contacto humano y lo erótico, la verdadera clave de la felicidad, y la medida de lo esencial. Más que en el discurso político, lo que le da su profunda sabiduría es su capacidad de observación y su sensibilidad.

Y es aquí donde quisiera destacar el talento de Gabriel como escritor, porque si bien el contenido de la novela es importante y valioso, es, después de todo, una *novela*, una obra de arte, y hay que reconocer su gran valor literario.

Gabriel es un gran pintor; pinta con la palabra. Sus descripciones de la naturaleza cubana, su reproducción del habla popular, comparables a las del propio *Diario* de Martí, poseen una belleza serena e inigualable. Recuerdo aquí a uno de mis maestros, Iván Schulman, cuyo primer libro se tituló *Símbolo y color en la obra de José Martí*. Ese libro me enseñó que para Martí lo poético era inseparable de lo político y de lo ético, y que en la contemplación de la naturaleza y su representación artística se descubre el fundamento de su moral en cuanto modelo de la

mesura, la belleza, y lo ideal. Basta con leer los *Versos sencillos* o el ensayo dedicado a Ralph Waldo Emerson para darse cuenta de ello. Gabriel, por ser un escritor de exquisito gusto y un martiano hasta la médula, ha sabido interiorizar esa sensibilidad poética y esa capacidad por reconocer y reproducir en una prosa clara y deslumbrante el mundo natural de manera que no es solo fotografía verbal sino guía espiritual.

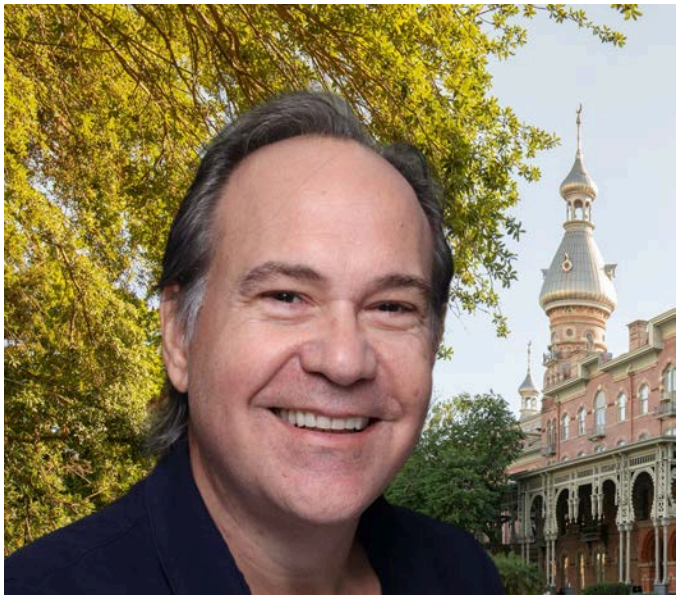
Así pues, aunque *El secreto de la andaluza* es una novela imprescindible para una consideración renovada de la historia de Cuba, para recorrer algunos de los debates fundacionales de la nación, para reevaluar algunas de sus figuras históricas más estudiadas y recordar otras olvidadas, para entender mejor el largo conflicto entre el civilismo y el personalismo en la isla, un conflicto que sin duda fue el blanco de esas páginas perdidas del Maestro, y también para contemplar la figura de Martí desde una perspectiva novedosa mediante una fecunda especulación sobre sus últimos día, no he querido dejar de lado este otro aspecto, que para mí, puesto que soy profesor de literatura, es esencial.

Hay una imagen que reaparece una y otra vez en la novela, y es aquella que Martí capta en su poema “Dos patrias”, que no se publicó hasta mucho después de su muerte en Dos Ríos: “Dos patrias tengo yo: Cuba y la noche. / ¿O son una las dos?”. Esta imagen se repite a lo largo de la novela, convirtiéndose en una profunda meditación sobre el abismo infranqueable que existe entre lo real y lo ideal, entre lo posible y lo deseado. Ahí se halla el nudo del secreto que guardará la andaluza durante su larga vida. Esa “linda andaluza, subida a un poyo, pilando café” que Martí describió en su *Diario* poco antes de morir, se convierte no solo en la guardiana del

último gran secreto del Maestro, *sino también en su intérprete*. Porque ese secreto no es un documento, ni una teoría, ni un programa político, sino, al fin y al cabo, *es un sueño*, una visión, un anhelo, es tal vez esa segunda patria a la que alude Martí en su poema. Así lo expresa él mismo cuando visita a la protagonista en un sueño y le dice: "La perfección mata los sueños, porque los sueños son la búsqueda eterna de la perfección."

No les voy a revelar lo que hace la andaluza con el secreto de Martí, aunque les aseguro que nos dice mucho más sobre el sueño del Maestro que lo que pudieran habernos dicho las páginas arrancadas del *Diario*. Porque, al fin y al cabo, la Cuba por la que murió Martí es menos un lugar terrenal que una visión humanista dedicada a la defensa de la dignidad humana y la justicia. Y en esta obra de Gabriel Cartaya, vemos resucitado lo mejor de Martí: su espíritu humanista, su reclamo eterno por la decencia, la solidaridad, el deber, la disciplina y la belleza como los únicos baluartes frente a la arrolladora deshumanización de la modernidad.

Por todo eso —y por mucho más— le agradezco a Gabriel por su obra, por su amistad, y por su ejemplo. Y también a ustedes, por compartir esa admiración, y por contribuir, con su atención, su intelecto, y su presencia, a la propagación del espíritu martiano en esta ciudad que tanto amó el Martí. Muchas gracias.



James López is Professor of Spanish at the University of Tampa, where he founded and co-directs the Center for José Martí Studies Affiliate. The CJMSA's dedication to the study and teaching of the history of the Cuban émigré communities of the 19th and early-20th century has been recognized with two major grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Florida Humanities Council. Prof. López is also a scholar of Latin American literature and literary translation, and was awarded the 2019 Louise Loy Hunter Award for Outstanding Faculty Member at The University of Tampa. He is the grandson and great-grandson of cigar factory *lectores*, or readers, and is the proud descendant of the founding generation of Cuban cigar workers in Ybor City and West Tampa.

Fragmento tomado de *El secreto de la andaluza* de Gabriel Cartaya (ClassicSubversive Ediciones, 2025)

By Gabriel Cartaya, M.A

…Estaba ensimismada en el espejo de la nube más alta, donde aparezco con el cabello aprisionado en lo alto, para que la cola se deslice a través de la espalda, en cauda, como dijo Él. Y claro, sentada en el poyo de mármol que reina en el sitio más distinguido de la cocina, con la mano de granadillo pilando una y otra vez el mismo café, el que tomaron ellos mientras comían el queso en lonjas de a libra, una exageración puesta en la historia. Y todavía, con los pies fuera de la tierra, volando en las únicas pantuflas de flores que sobrevivieron a todos los tiempos.

Estaba loca, rematadamente loca, decían. Yo, sin embargo, entendía que no me entendían, al menos cuando la realidad volaba en el nimbo de una fantasía que era, seguramente, ininteligible, o cuando la alucinación tropezaba con una certeza que resultaba, todavía, más inexplicable. Entonces eran dos vidas: una en la realidad y otra en la imaginación y no saber cuál de las que contaba era la genuina y cuál la figurada es lo que diagnosticaron los matasanos como una mente perturbada.

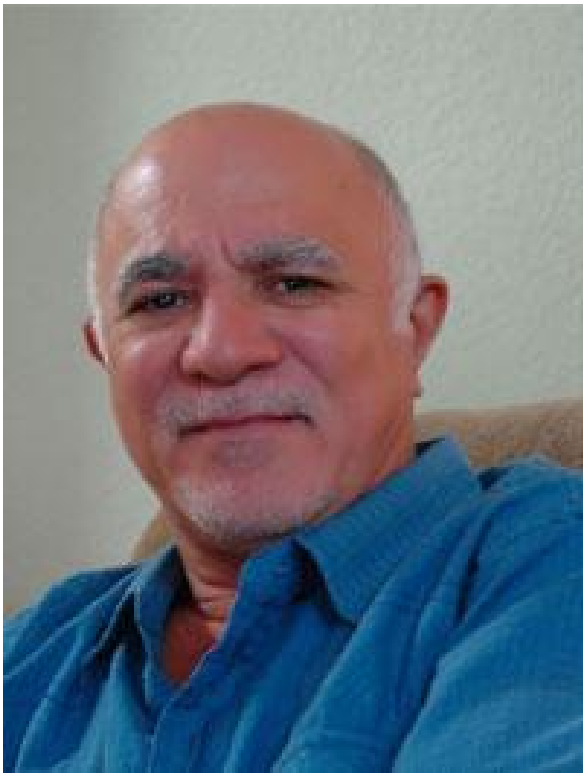
Desde lo tangible, todo se precipitó al querer cerrar la ventana del cuarto, para que no entrara un relámpago adelantado a rajar el cristal de mirarme gozosa. Lo estaba poniendo al revés para que un rayo no recurvara a romper tantos deleites, cuando una corriente de aire me

obliga a retroceder, exclamando con mucha fe un Dios nos guarde al que solo acudo en casos extremos. En el segundo intento se interpuso el hechizo, porque en la nube más densa apareció un rostro inconfundible que desde antes de llegar a Dos Ríos no se me desprende de la cabeza. Es el Presidente que viene, dijeron, cuando los cascos de una caballada rompieron el andar latoso de los días. El sigilo es porque yo conocía al hombre que estaba adentro de ese título tan porfiado. Al detenerse frente a la portería, cuando Rosalío corrió raudo a abrir, se demoró más un gallo arisco en bajarse de una polluela que yo en distinguir al jovencito que tropezó una mañana con mi desconcierto juvenil en el puerto de Cádiz.

Si él la hubiera reconocido, lo habría apuntado en la libreta donde iba poniendo todos los asombros que le pasaban por los ojos. Pero no la reconoció a ella, reconoció a la señora de Rosalio, a pesar de ir vestida con el túnico morado que se puso a la carrera para la ocasión, por ser del mismo color de la blusa que lucía en el puerto de Cádiz aquel primero de febrero de 1871, cuando era una muchacha libre al borde de los 18 años. Tampoco asoció con nada el pie descubierto y aunque volvió a decir que era linda con la zalamería de la primera vez, pareció estar más atento al sonido del pilón que a un guiño de la memoria que, por Dios, le recordara a ella, porque ella no fue siempre la señora de Rosalío. Que, por favor, se apretara la sien hasta volver a la plaza gaditana de Mina, donde dijo que yo era como la ciudad, como la había eternizado la poetisa Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda al distinguirla en el horizonte: blanca y resplandeciente, linda, esbelta, coqueta y seductora.

– Con qué adjetivo me quedo? –pregunté entonces.

– Linda, contestó raudo el cubanito, el mismo José Martí que con igual galanteo acaba de escribir esa palabra en la libreta que abre delante de mí en la página que dice doce de mayo, para que yo mire que es la misma verdad, el nombre y la confesión, para que vean que no es una imaginación.



Gabriel Cartaya holds a master's degree in Latin American, Caribbean and Cuban studies from the University of Havana, where he worked as a professor and researcher. He is a recognized Martí specialist, author of the books *Con las últimas páginas de José Martí* (Editorial Oriente, 1995), *José Martí en 1895* (Cuba, 2001), *Luz al universo* (Gente Nueva, 2006), *Domingos de tanta luz* (2019), and *Tampa en la obra de José Martí* (Ed. Surco Sur, 2021). In 2010 he founded the *Revista Surco Sur*, a journal dedicated to Latin American art and literature. Its digital edition is published by the University of South Florida. He is the Spanish editor of *La Gaceta*, the nation's only trilingual newspaper, currently celebrating its 103rd year of continuous publication. His latest novel, *El secreto de la andaluza* (Ed. ClassicSubversive, 2025), takes as its starting point the lost pages of José Martí's diaries in order to reimagine the early history of the Cuban Republic.

For more information about *El secreto de la andaluza* you can visit https://surl.lu/ihevqf