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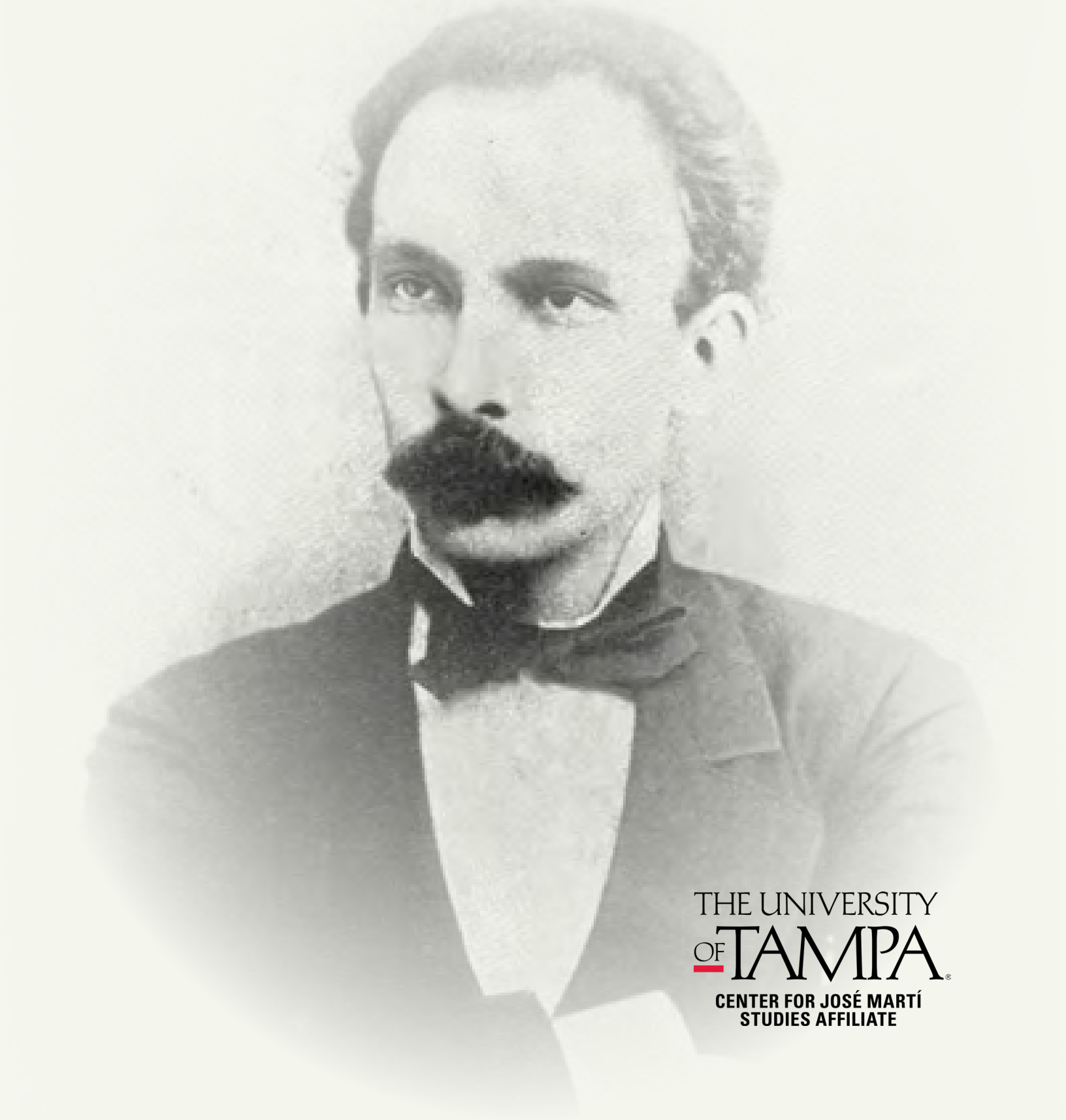
Boletin Martiano



THE UNIVERSITY OF TAMPA

CENTER FOR JOSÉ MARTÍ STUDIES AFFILIATE

Boletin 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.

It is hard to believe that spring is ending soon, as we continue to prepare for the 2023 NEH Summer Institute, The Immigrant Communities of Florida and José Martí in Cuban Independence and the Dawn of the American Century, and to host the assembly of scholars who will visit our campus. We met many gifted scholars during the first iteration of the institute in 2019 and are excited to meet another group of talented and dedicated educators and researchers this time around. James and I would like to thank the numerous individuals who have lent a hand in making the NEH Summer Institute possible and the work of the Center for José Martí Studies Affiliate at the University of Tampa relevant. Our community is continuously expanding, and with it the scholarship that seeks a better understanding of the people, places, and events that have become our passion. The three articles in this issue of El Boletin Martiano illustrate this point well. We begin with an excerpt from Sarah McNamara's recently published book, Ybor City: Crucible of the Latina South, published by the University of North Carolina Press. Dr. McNamara, who serves as Assistant Professor of History at Texas A&M University, provides a brilliant account of how Ybor's women activists organized and mobilized against fascism during the advent of the Second World War. The second article is also an excerpt from a recently published book. The Epic of Cuba Libre: The Mambí, Mythopoetics, and Liberation, by Dr. Éric Morales-Franceschini, who serves as Assistant Professor of English and Latin American Studies at the University of Georgia, was published by University of Virginia press in 2022. The book provides a nuanced analysis of how the likeness and representation of the Cuban freedom fighters during their war for independence have been molded over time into various multifarious forms, from the ethereal to the sublime, to fit diverse narratives. The third piece, Racism and Erasure: Afro-Cubans in and beyond Tampa's Cuban Independence Struggle, is by Dr. Susan Greenbaum, professor emerita of Anthropology at the University of South Florida, and Dr. Kenya Dworkin, Associate Professor of Hispanic Studies at Carnegie Mellon University. Their research examines the role of Afro-Cubans in the fight for Cuban independence. The article provides a thorough and multidimensional exploration of these fascinating individuals. Again, we are fortunate to have such gifted researchers and collaborators in our circle. I hope you enjoy reading this issue of El Boletin Martiano as much as we have.

YBOR CITY: CRUCIBLE OF THE LATINA SOUTH

Sarah McNamara, Ph.D.

Searching

Amelia Alvarez was born in Cuba when the island was a Spanish colony. Yet by Amelia's ninth birthday, her home as she knew it no longer existed. The Cuban War for Independence, which U.S. imperial ambitions turned into the Cuban–Spanish–Puerto Rican–Filipino–American War, brought an end to Cuba's colonial status as well as Cubans' hopes for a truly independent island.[1] When Amelia turned sixteen, U.S. troops occupied Cuba for the second time in her life. That year, 1906, she boarded the steamship Olivette and sailed 110 miles from the Port of Havana to Key West. Soft winds from the Florida Straits wrapped around Amelia as she passed through immigration and rested for a night. The next morning, she climbed aboard the same boat and journeyed another 250 miles northward through the warm waves of the Gulf of Mexico. Once the ship docked, Amelia descended the gangway and walked into Tampa, Florida.[2]

At the turn of the twentieth century, Tampa brimmed with chaotic possibility. Sounds of Spanish and English hovered in the heavy, humid air as Amelia navigated the throngs of people who crowded the port. More than one hundred passengers charged forward with their luggage in hand, while stevedores unloaded bales of Cuban tobacco leaves from the ship's hold.[3] Thirty years earlier, this swampy town featured little more than an obscure military outpost and a settlement of sweaty Confederates. But by the time of Amelia's arrival, the Cuban cigar industry had changed nearly everything. Black and white immigrants, primarily from Cuba, along with others from Spain, Italy, and Puerto Rico, collided in Tampa as they searched for work in the city's new cigar factories. Once hired, cigar workers "stripped, sorted, and bunched [tobacco] leaves," then "rolled, banded, and boxed cigars."[4] The labor of these women and men transformed Tampa into the leading industrial center of the state, while their bodies, cultures, and politics created an international borderland in Jim Crow Florida.[5] On the dock, Amelia stayed near her family, for she had not come alone. Her

sister and brother-in-law, their two children, and three aunts arrived together with fifty-six dollars between them. The family of eight emerged from the bustling masses, they likely boarded a streetcar to carry them six miles down the road to their new home in a neighborhood called Ybor City.[6]

To Amelia, Ybor must have felt familiar and foreign at the same time. Red-brick buildings with Moorish arches lined the streets, while ornate wrought iron twisted across glass windows and framed outdoor patios. Architectural remnants of colonial Spain seemed to echo through the streets, but it was the politics of Cuban independence that lived in people's homes. Some of Amelia's neighbors told tales of when José Martí, the famed Cuban poet and revolutionary, organized and collaborated with cigar workers to bring an end to Spanish rule in Cuba. Although this fight ended in 1898, when Amelia was nine years old, the community she joined in Ybor remained unapologetically anticolonial, pro-labor, and radically leftist in their self-proclaimed exile. From the perspective of Amelia's neighbors, Ybor City served as their sanctuary from the restrictive imperialist agendas and the oppressive, anti-labor, antidemocratic conservative forces that lingered in their homeland even after the Spanish relinquished claim over the island. The two-story Centro Obrero (Labor Temple) stood at the helm of this neighborhood and operated as the space where women and men organized unions, planned strike actions, and created a culture of labor on their own terms. Cigar factories defined the city landscape and separated Ybor's immigrants from Tampa's Anglo residents —a racialized border that likely seemed uniquely American.[7] De jure segregation generally did not exist in Cuba during Amelia's lifetime, but de facto segregation did and Amelia likely recognized the practice.[8] As a Cuban woman with white skin, however, being the subject of segregation would have been a new experience that made her acutely aware of her place within the South's racial hierarchy.[9]

Inside Ybor City, Amelia found acceptance. The things that Anglos believed made her seem different—her appearance, her labor, her politics, her traditions, and her language—were foundational

elements that bonded this immigrant community. Despite living in a new country, Amelia never had a problem with communication because nearly everyone in Ybor spoke Spanish, and those who did not learned upon arrival.[10] Sicilian grocers transformed their markets into hybrid bodegas as they sold Spanish chorizo alongside Italian pickled vegetables and elevated, what is now known as, the Cuban sandwich. The local version of this delicacy stacked layers of mojo-marinated roasted pork, boiled ham, and hard salami on slices of Cuban bread dressed with a swipe of yellow mustard, a piece of Swiss cheese, and a sliver of crisp dill pickle.[11] According to community lore, the last three ingredients reflected the food traditions of Jewish merchants who came to Tampa in search of refuge from the escalation of anti-Semitism in Romania and Germany. Many of these families sold fabrics, clothing, shoes, and auto parts in dry goods stores, while others used their profits to purchase cigar factories of their own.[12]

Spanish-language newspapers thrived in Ybor and reported daily news from Havana, Madrid, Key West, and Tampa. This vibrant print culture not only kept Amelia and her neighbors informed of global affairs and local events but made Ybor City an integral hub within a cross-national network of leftist activism and intellectualism that reached from the Caribbean to the Americas and across the Atlantic Ocean. As Amelia walked through the streets of Ybor City, she may have brushed shoulders with women such as Luisa Capetillo and Luisa Moreno—Latina feminist labor organizers and leftist thinkers—as well as Eugene V. Debs and Elizabeth Gurley Flynn—leaders of the socialist and communist movements—all of whom visited, organized, or sought refuge from political persecution in Ybor City. Each Saturday, the Afro-Cuban rhythms of rumba and the melodies of danzón, once outlawed in Spanish-controlled Cuba, spilled out from the ballrooms of the centros (mutual aid societies) and filled the streets.[13] Yet as Amelia twirled across the dance floor of the Círculo Cubano (Cuban Club), she would have noticed that the Black Cuban women and men who worked beside her in the cigar factory were absent from this space. According to her neighbors, when the city of Tampa annexed Ybor City and made it part of Hillsborough County in 1887, Anglo political powerholders

mandated that the centros segregate their membership and create a separate club for Afro-Cubans. La Sociedad de la Unión Martí-Maceo, the mutual aid society built by and for Black Cubans, emerged as a result of this moment.14 The Ybor City of Amelia's youth was a place where multiracial, multiethnic, Latina/o self-determination endured under the watchful eye of a reconstructed southern order

After nearly two years of living and working in Ybor, and shortly after celebrating her seventeenth birthday, Amelia met and married a Spanish immigrant named Pedro Blanco.[15] The young couple moved down the street and rented a house near their families. When Amelia looked out her front door she would have seen rows of identical, whitewashed, shotgun houses that sat on narrow lots and flanked Ybor City's wide dirt roads. In many ways, Amelia's neighborhood was the turn-of-the-century version of a cheap housing development—a company town built for profit, not for comfort. In wintertime, families pasted old newspapers to the walls in hope of stopping cold air from seeping into the house. During summertime, the wooden planks expanded and softened from the inescapable humidity that penetrated the wood. Although the casitas were imperfect, people made do. These homes, flaws and all, were better than the lodgings most cigar workers could access in Cuba or in smaller cigar-working towns such as Key West. Amelia spent her days in the cigar factory and her nights gossiping on her front porch or gambling with other women in secret.[16] Each night after dinner, her husband joined the men of Ybor at one of the local cantinas, where the sounds of clinking dominoes cut through the smoke-filled room and the scent of whiskey clashed with the smell of sweet tobacco and the bellows of masculine laughter. I imagine that, in the absence of men, Amelia and her friends talked about everything from politics and children to money and memories of Cuba, Spain, and Italy.[17]

Amelia created a life in Ybor City, but she never fully let go of the island. She and Pedro had four children—Delia, Pedro, Margot, and Dalia—yet only the last three survived infancy.[18] Her sister, Concepcíon Camero, rented the house next door, until she and her three sons moved to Puerto Rico, where

they stayed. Amelia visited her parents and siblings in Cuba roughly once a decade and always in July. At first, she traveled by water, retracing her original path to Tampa. By the 1940s, however, the steamships stopped sailing and Amelia flew Pan American Airways. Every time Amelia left Florida she used her Cuban passport because she never applied for U.S. citizenship. Perhaps U.S. citizenship seemed unnecessary, perhaps it seemed impossible to obtain, or perhaps Cuban citizenship was a part of herself she never wished to surrender. In 1952, at the age of sixty-three, Amelia passed away and was buried in Ybor City, Florida.[19]

I learned about Amelia when I was a teenager. My grandmother, Norma Alfonso, showed me an article she clipped from the Tampa Tribune in 1990, roughly twelve years earlier. "Sarah, come look at this," she yelled, calling me over to her rose-colored kitchen island. On the counter my grandma placed a white, two-inch, three-ringed binder I had seen many times before. Norma, who was born in Ybor City in 1931, saved anything and everything she found about the old neighborhood. Placemats from lunch counters, pamphlets from museums, excerpts from books, and articles from newspapers all found their way into her portable archive. As I took a seat in the kitchen, my grandmother slipped the pristine clipping from its acetate sleeve, extended her finger, and pointed at two women in a reprinted photograph. "This is Abuela Amelia," she said, "and here's her daughter, your aunt Margot." The black-and-white image captured a sea of women linked arm in arm marching through what I recognized as La Avenida Séptima (Seventh Avenue), the main thoroughfare of Ybor City. As I sat there gazing at the picture, Norma drew two arrows on the clipping and labeled the women in our family.

For as long as I can remember, my grandmother was on a one-woman mission to be sure my sister and I never forgot Ybor City. She drove us through the neighborhood, told us stories of our families, and kept traditions alive. Even before I saw the clipping, I knew Amelia was my grandmother's favorite grandparent. Like Norma, she hated the beach but loved to read. Amelia had a talent for cigar making, a

passion for bingo playing, and infectious joie de vivre.20 Those who knew her say she was loud and outspoken, a family trait that has survived generations. According to my grandfather, Gus Alfonso, Norma's husband, "Amelia was an activist who was always up to something" and the foil to his self-proclaimed respectable, rule-abiding family.[21] In reality, his father was a member and organizer of the Communist Party USA (CPUSA)—a truth he once revealed with a whisper and a look that made clear we would never revisit the subject. Despite the many stories Norma shared, she never told me the context of the image. Instead, I had to search for this answer on my own. In the process, I found that there was much more to Ybor City and the women in my family than my grandma was willing to explain. After all, sometimes it is the stories we hold back, rather than the ones we share, that reveal the essence of who we are.

Women in antifascist march, Seventh Avenue, Ybor City, May 1937. Handwriting is that of Norma Alfonso, author's grandmother. Author's Collection.

Footnotes

1. Amelia was born in San Antonio de los Baños, Cuba, a rural town roughly fifteen miles from Havana. Louis A. Pérez Jr., *Cuba and the United States: Ties of Singular Intimacy*, 3rd ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003); Louis A. Pérez Jr., "Incurring a Debt of Gratitude: 1898 and the Moral Sources of United States Hegemony in Cuba," *American Historical Review* 104, no. 2 (April 1999): 356–98. Note to readers: I use Spanish-language sources throughout this monograph. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are mine.

2. Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at Key West, Florida, 1898–1945, Records of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1787–2004, Record Group 85, NARA, accessed via Ancestry.com, Florida, Passenger Lists, 1898–1963. The SS Olivette was part of the Plant System of steamships and railroads; see "Map of the Plant System of Railway, Steamer and Steamship Lines and Connections," 1899, Touchton Map Library Digital Archive, TBHC, Accession Number L2009.093.021, M Number M1529, accessed November 2020, http://luna.tampabayhistorycenter.org/luna/servlet/detail /TBHC~3~3~4606~4823: Map-of-the-Plant-System-of-Railway,?qvq=q:Plant;lc:TBH C~3~3&mi=30&trs=52.

3. For detailed information on the construction of the SS Olivette and information on cargo hold and capacity, see Irwin Schuster, "SS Mascotte of the Plant Line 1885–1931," *Nautical Research Journal* 61, no. 4 (December 2016): 246–48; Arsenio M. Sanchez, "The Olivette and Mascotte of the Plant Steamship Line," *Sunland Tribune* 20 (1994): 49–50.

4. Nancy A. Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort: Women's Activism in Tampa, Florida, 1880s–1920s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 1. The term cigar worker refers to anyone who worked within the Cuban cigar industry, whereas cigar maker refers to someone who was a skilled cigar roller. The term in Spanish

for cigar maker is torcedor but in Ybor City the most common colloquial term was, and is, tabaquera/o. In this book, I use tabaquera/o most frequently but torcedor is most precise. See Nicholas Foulkes, *Cigars: A Guide* (London: Penguin Random House, 2017), 146; Robert P. Ingalls and Louis A. Pérez Jr., *Tampa Cigar Workers: A Pictorial History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 67.

5. Gary R. Mormino and George E. Pozzetta, *The Immigrant World of Ybor City: Italians and Their Latin Neighbors in Tampa, 1885–1985*, 2nd ed. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 43.

6. Between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the streetcar system was called the "street railway system," as it ran not on electricity but on coal or steam and embedded railway tracks. In 1907, a more formal and citywide system of street-cars emerged. However, because the distance between the Port of Tampa and Ybor City is six miles, it is likely that the Alvarez family took the railway car to Ybor City. For more, see Meeghan Kane, "Tampa's Trolleys: Innovation, Demise, and Rediscovery," *Sunland Tribune* 30 (2005): 31–43; Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at Key West, Florida, 1898–1945.

7. Louis A. Pérez Jr., "Cubans in Tampa: From Exiles to Immigrants, 1892–1901," *Florida Historical Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (1978): 129–40. Note: Anglo is the term used by Latinos in Tampa to describe people who are non-Latino, non-Black, native-born, and white.

8. While Cuba generally lacked legislation that codified the segregation of space based on race, outside of outside of the slave codes, this does not mean that segregation on the basis of race was less real or that it did not take place. On how de facto practices of racial discrimination effectively and systematically segregated the urban landscape, see Bonnie A. Lucero, *A Cuban City, Segregated: Race and Urbanization in the Nineteenth Century* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019), especially 5–6.

9. Perla M. Guerrero, *Nuevo South: Latinas/os, Asians, and the Remaking of Place* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017).

10. Braulio Alonso Jr., La Gaceta, June 27, 1997; Federal Writers' Project, "Dominica Guinta, Interview" (unpublished manuscript, 1941), SCUSF; Sammy Argintar, interview with Yael V. Greenberg-Pritzker, March 29, 2000, quoted in Ingalls and Pérez, *Tampa Cigar Workers*, 152; see also Mormino and Pozzetta, *Immigrant World*; Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort*; Susan D. Greenbaum, *More than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002).

11. The history of the Cuban sandwich is hotly contested and debated. Cubans from Miami have a version of the sandwich (no salami), which some claim to be the original. Meanwhile Latinas/os from Ybor claim that the sandwich originated in Ybor City (with salami). New research from Andrew T. Huse, Bárbara C. Cruz, and Jef Houck has documented the history of this sandwich and suggests that there was no singular or typified "Cuban sandwich" on the island, but instead there were many versions. However, the version of the sandwich I described in the text is what is recognized today as the Cuban sandwich in Ybor. For more, see Andrew T. Huse, Bárbara C. Cruz, and Jeff Houck, *The Cuban Sandwich: A History in Layers* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2022). For a local perspective of this origin story, see "Our Family and Your Family: Where It All Begins," *Restaurant Brochure, La Segunda Central Bakery*, Ybor City, Florida, n.d.; "The Mayor's Hour—Tampa Traditions, La Segunda Bakery," May 4, 2017, City of Tampa, accessed September 2022, https://www .youtube.com/watch?v=M9_B9yWsR9c; Andrew T. Huse, "Welcome to Cuban Sandwich City," *Cigar City Magazine*, January–February 2006, https://issuu.com/cigarcity magazine/docs? jan_feb_2006/16. For assorted stories of Tampa food culture, see Andrew T. Huse, *From Saloons to Steak Houses: A History of Tampa* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2020). Mojo is a marinade often used in Cuban cooking. In Tampa, it is made of sour orange juice, olive oil, garlic, salt, pepper, and oregano. This

marinade breaks down meat and penetrates it with bright flavors.

12. Yael V. Greenberg-Pritzker, "The Princes of Seventh Avenue: Ybor City's Jewish Merchants," *Sunland Tribune* 28 (2002): 55–68; Huse, *From Saloons to Steak Houses*; Mormino and Pozzetta, *Immigrant World*. Note that over time Jewish and German immigrants were most likely to purchase cigar factories and move out of Ybor City as part of the merchant class and the middle class.

13. On Cuban dance and music traditions, see Ned Sublette, *Cuba and Its Music: From the First Drums to the Mambo* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2004); Christina D. Abreu, *Rhythms of Race: Cuban Musicians and the Making of Latino New York City and Miami, 1940–1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); see also Mormino and Pozzetta, *Immigrant World*; Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort*.

14. Greenbaum, *More than Black*; Nancy Raquel Mirabal, "De Aquí, de Allá: Race, Empire, and Nation in the Making of Cuban Migrant Communities in New York and Tampa, 1823–1924" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 2001); 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). See also chapter 3, "Surviving," in this book.

15. Pedro Blanco and Amelia Alvarez, marriage license, Hillsborough County, Fla., 1907, Hillsborough County Marriage Records, Digital Collections, SCUSF, accessed June 2020, https://digital.lib.usf.edu/SFS0044124/00001?search=Blanco.

16. For a description of the neighborhood and the creation of women's communities, see Jose Yglesias, T*he Truth about Them* (1971; repr., Houston, Tex.: Arte Público Press, 1999). Other testimonios by Yglesias that chronicle the neighborhood and provide historic texture of the community include Jose Yglesias, *A Wake in*

Ybor City (1963; repr., Houston, Tex.: Arte Público Press, 1998); Jose Yglesias, *Home Again* (1987; repr., Houston, Tex.: Arte Público Press, 2002). A testimonio is a first-person narrative that examines experiences of social and political inequality. At times, the author changes the names of main characters and fictionalizes certain aspects of personal experience to represent those of a broader community. This form of memory work is common in Latina/o and Latin American writing. Note: Jose Yglesias did not use accent marks in his name —the exclusion is intentional.

17. For more on the tradition of women and front porch discussions, see Yglesias, *The Truth about Them*; see also chapter 2, "Resisting," in this book. During the first ten years of Amelia's life in Ybor City, her neighbors were all Cuban women. See United States Census Office, Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910.

18. Delia Blanco, Amelia's first daughter, did not survive. In the 1910 federal census, Amelia Alvarez noted that she had one child and zero living. Immigration documents reveal that she took Delia to Cuba when she was nine months old. See Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910; Delia Blanco, February 7, 1910, Woodlawn Cemetery, Tampa, Fla., Ancestry.com, U.S., Find A Grave Index, 1600s–Current, accessed November 2020, www.findagrave.com/memorial/35241301/delia-blanco.

19. Amelia Blanco, December 17, 1952, Centro Español Memorial Cemetery, Tampa, Fla., Ancestry.com, U.S., Find A Grave Index, 1600s–Current, accessed November 2020, www.findagrave.com/memorial/57783120/amelia-blanco.

20. Amelia's grandson, Nelson Pino, remembers that when she passed away they found little bags of coins hidden throughout the house. These were pouches of her gambling money. Nelson Pino, discussion with the the author, June 2020, field notes in the author's possession.

21. Gustavo Jesus (Gus) Alfonso, discussion with the author, June 20, 2020, field notes in the author's possession.

Sarah McNamara is assistant professor of History at Texas A&M University. She is a Tampa-native and her family is from Ybor City. *Ybor City: Crucible of the Latina South* is available locally at Tombolo Books, in-store and online, as well as through all major online book retailers. Link to order at Tombolo: https://tombolobooks.com/item/EpPBM6i8V1afI00PGPnr2g

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THE EPIC OF CUBA LIBRE: THE MAMBÍ, MYTHOPOETICS, AND LIBERATION

Éric Morales-Franceschini, Ph.D.

Introduction: Epic of the Dispossessed

> Yo soy bueno, y como bueno / moriré de cara al sol
> —José Martí, Versos Sencillos

In defense of the July 26, 1953, assault on the Moncada barracks, in what would amount to the storied manifesto History Will Absolve Me, a twenty-seven-year-old Fidel Castro proclaimed:

> We are Cubans, and to be Cuban implies a duty: not to fulfill this duty is a crime, a treason . . . We were taught from early on to venerate the glorious example of our heroes and our martyrs. Céspedes, Agramonte, Maceo, Gómez, and Martí were the first names engraved in our minds; we were taught that the [Bronze] Titan had said that liberty was not begged for, but conquered with the blade of the machete . . . we were taught that October 10th [1868] and February 24th [1895] are glorious events worthy of patriotic rejoice because they mark the days on which Cubans rebelled against the yoke of an infamous tyranny; we were taught to love and defend that beautiful, solitary-starred flag and to sing every afternoon a hymn ["La Bayamesa"] whose verses say that 'to live in chains is to live in disgraceful and opprobrious submission,' and that 'to die for the patria is to live."[1]

Like Pericles or the Homeric poet, Castro dictated what was in effect a funeral oration, one that rhetorically cast his fallen comrades as heirs to the grandeur and transcendence that was the nation's "glorious epic" (epopeya gloriosa).[2] For history had not just "absolved" those who took up arms and sacrificed their lives for the nation (pro patri mori): it had come to exalt them.

And not superfluously so. Between 1868 and 1898, Cubans fought and died in what amounted to the most deadly and destructive of all wars for independence in the Americas. The Ten Years' War (1868–

78), the Little War (1879–80), and the War for Independence (1895–98) resulted in as many as six hundred thousand casualties, approximately one in every five Cubans. Entire towns and villages were destroyed, estates and crops scorched, livestock systematically slaughtered, civilians interned and starved, families irrevocably torn apart, and the economy ravaged. "The losses were incalculable, the suffering was unimaginable," says historian Louis Pérez Jr.[3] And a pyrrhic, or at least equivocal, victory it was. Not only because of the extraordinary costs, but also the dubious outcomes. The United States had militarily intervened in 1898 and all but unilaterally ended the war with Spain. They then occupied the island until 1901 and left in their wake a so-called republic subservient to American "interests," as it is blandly put.

That said, Cubans did not look to their wars as melancholic or dismal affairs. For not all was sheer misery and humiliation. Loss could readily be narrated as "sacrifice" and their dead as "heroes." Indeed, Cubans now had battles to commemorate and martyrs to revere, a flag to salute, and an anthem to cheer. They, especially veterans, had an emboldened sense of dignity and entitlement. And if nothing else, they now had a founding myth, the story of all people who sacrificed everything to found a republic "with all and for the good of all." The story of Cuba Libre (Free Cuba).

That story would become familiar to all Cubans, from its most hallowed surnames and battles to the nation's archetypal hero, the mambí, as the rank-and-file independence soldier came to be known. No other story is as ritualistically retold, no other archetype as beloved. Not then. Not years later. Not now. And why wouldn't it be? The wars are a bountiful "archive" for storytellers (and audiences) who wish to rejoice in motifs as sacred as creation and as seductive as redemption. And rejoice Cubans have. Whether in town festivals or school plays, comics or films, museums or monuments, hymns or textbooks, on logos or the national currency, the mambí and his quest for a Cuba Libre have reigned in the popular imaginary and borne quite decisively on national identity and revolutionary ethos.[4] So much so, evidently, that its mythical

aura has not aroused much scrutiny. For rarely has the mambí been analyzed as a rhetorical or mythopoetic referent and, rarer still, as a referent in the twentieth century. An excellent historiography does, to be clear, exist.[5] Be it military strategy, demographics, social history, or international relations, the wars have been amply researched. But the ways in which the wars have been aesthetically rendered has received far less scrutiny, least of all when it comes to its twentieth-century iterations. And while this is typical of studies on wars and revolutions, it is regrettable. For neither the mambí nor Cuba Libre became any less salient in the postwar years, and never have they conveyed just one emancipatory possibility. A past so intensive and extensive can, after all, easily foster a multiplicity of stories and, accordingly, a multiplicity of "lessons" bequeathed to future generations. Those stories told and lessons bequeathed are the subject of this book.

In so doing, what we learn is that the stories told about the mambí and Cuba Libre do not seamlessly abide by the epic, classically conceived. How, for instance, does one account for a hero that is not a demigod or a noble, but a racially stigmatized other? Or for tactics more sly than virtuous? Speech more colloquial than decorous? For deaths that could not credibly be narrated as "sublime"? And what of the epic heroine, the mambisa? This study elaborates on what these idiosyncrasies bespeak and how they have come to edify as well as vitiate emancipatory possibilities in Cuba. To do so, it draws on an ensemble of artifacts—be it poetry, plays, memoirs, monuments, songs, speeches, or films. For there is no single canonical text titled *The Epic of Cuba Libre*, much less an epic poem written in hexameter verse or its equivalent. What there is, is a copious "archive" left behind by generations of Cubans who have reckoned with those wars and their mythical aura. This inquiry is, thereby, a critical exegesis of the cumulative and salient "text" (Latin texere, "to weave, braid") that is the mambí epic. […]

1 The Epic Marooned: Blackness and the Desire Called Cuba Libre

> Poor us if we continue with this sepulchral silence!
> —Ricardo Batrell & Alejandro Neníngер (1907)

Arguably no other attribute is as archetypal to the epic as is the virile hero and his prowess. Gilgamesh subdued lions and stone men, Beowulf conquered the monster Grendel, and Sundiata tore a baobab tree from its roots as a child. Indeed, the epic hero is rarely a mere mortal and is never less than regal. Gilgamesh was son to the goddess Ninsun; Rama the son of Vishnu; Achilles the son of King Peleus and the sea nymph Thetis; Beowulf becomes king of the Geats; and Sundiata, son to a chieftain and a sorcerer mother, becomes emperor of Mali.

In Cuba, Antonio Maceo comes closest to the classical epic hero. His twenty-six wounds and over six hundred battles (nearly all victorious) all but defy the merely mortal. Not coincidentally is he known as the "Bronze Titan," an epithet that cast him as sturdy as a resilient metal and as otherworldly as Greek deities renowned for their colossal stature. Yet his heroic title did not refer to nobility inasmuch as his skin color. And this was no idle referent. For the Bronze Titan was mulatto at a time when racial slavery was legal (until 1886) and anti-Black racism normatively entrenched. The mambises were mostly men of color and, at least initially, the formerly enslaved. But rather than sully the national epic, this fact endowed it with a sense of poetic and populist justice. Maceo and the mambises came to symbolize a "moral republic" in which citizens were judged by merit and character—not by caste or color—and the wars narrated as a seductively redemptive tale in which the sins of slavery and racism were atoned for.

In the postwar "republican" years, racial justice was treated, accordingly, as an issue one need only commemorate. Yearly odes to the Bronze Titan and chronicles and memoirs of the wars lauded Cuba as a racial democracy or else did not substantively address the "race question" at all. Afro-Cubans were not pleased, that said, with the postwar "republic," as evidenced by the formation of the Partido

Independiente de Color (PIC), the Independent Party of Color. Led by Black and mulatto mambí veterans, the PIC advocated for Afro-Cubans' rights and framed Cuba Libre as a hope not yet realized. One of its members, Ricardo Batrell, wrote the only known chronicle-cum-memoir of the War for Independence authored by a Black soldier, an account that inflected the mambí epic with Black valor and prophetic critique. That Cubans were not ready to heed the PIC's or Batrell's words was, however, best evidenced by the massacre of 1912, whereby Afro-Cubans' hopes for racial justice were tragically silenced.

The "Afrocubanismo" movement of the 1920s and 1930s and the Revolution of 1933 did enliven such hopes. Afro-Cuban symbols, religion, dialects, and music were incorporated into the island's culture and arts, and the Patria identified as a "mulatto nation." Yet this movement was more about white bourgeois festivity than racial justice, and the Revolution of 1933 largely stifled. It was not until the Revolution of 1959 that racial justice was substantively addressed. Under the auspices of the "bearded ones" (barbudos), various reforms and color-blind policies were called on to enact a socialist republic in which racism was, allegedly at least, eradicated. To be a revolutionary—and, later, a communist—meant to be anti-racist. The story of Cuba Libre was not inconsequential to any of this. A series of artistic and literary innovations projected Cuba Rebelde (Rebel Cuba) as indebted to the mambí epic and, more exactly, Black resilience and insurgency. The mambí was no longer a slave liberated by benevolent masters inasmuch as heir to the emancipatory desires and rebel spirit of the cimarrón (maroon). In works such as the heterodox Marxism of Walterio Carbonell, the "imperfect cinema" of Sergio Giral, and the "testimonial novel" of Miguel Barnet and Esteban Montejo, blackness was recast as the revolutionary vanguard and Africanness as a decolonial aesthetic. And such cultural politics echoed in Cuba's internationalist politics—not least its "African epic" in Angola and its cachet as headquarters to the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa, and Latin America (OSPAAAL), popularly known as the Tricontinental.[1]

With the fall of the Soviet Union (1989–91), however, socialist Cuba found itself adrift in a world where history had come to an end, so to speak. No longer able to capitalize on Soviet subsidies and subject to renewed US hostility, Cuba entered its "Special Period in Times of Peace"—a period marked not only by hunger, scarcity, and disenchantment but also racialized inequality. In these fraught years, patriotic pleas resounded hollower than ever. Against this, Afro-Cuban artists and intellectuals curated their own narratives and looked to the mambí (not the barbudo) as an archetype of emancipatory desire and Black dignity and to hip-hop (not nueva trova) as an aesthetic to voice Black consciousness and critique. […]

2 ¡Empínate!: Of Motherhood, Mimicry, and the Mambisa

> The revolutionary epic was much too profound, dramatic and beautiful
> for me not to have immediately made it my own.
> —Excilia Saldaña (1982)

Women are not customarily, if ever, the heroic locus of epics. This is not to say that they are inconsequential or powerless. The women of ancient epics included goddesses, queens, sorceresses, and, occasionally, soldiers who facilitated or could frustrate heroic deeds. The goddess Ninsun counseled her son Gilgamesh; Isthar conjured the Bull of Heaven and seduced kings; Athena conspired for the Greeks and and Aphrodite the Trojans; Dido, Queen of Carthage, cursed Rome; Sundiata's mother, the "Buffalo Woman," had occult powers; and the Amazonians were legendary warriors. That said, the women of epics are usually known as the mothers, wives, and daughters of heroic men. They figure in the drama as those who mourn for the dead or as docile and chaste victims whose "honor" must be defended. Indeed, rare is the epic authored (or recited) by a woman.[1]

The epic of Cuba Libre has proved just as ambivalent when it comes to women. In the wars for independence, Cuban women were praised as "Spartan" mothers who stoically bore the deaths of their husbands and sons. This conferred a measure of moral gravitas onto the wars and the nationalist cause, but

women as such were mere familial appendages to heroic men. The truth is that the mambí epic never amounted to a narrative in which women's liberation was crucial—certainly not as crucial as Black liberation. Never did the words mambí or mambisa bespeak a critique of patriarchy—let alone a robust feminist agenda. But as historian Teresa Prados-Torreira has pointed out, women did take on roles that defied gendered ascriptions and, consequently, rearticulated their sense of entitlement and capabilities. No longer bound to prayer, embroidery, or domestic servitude, the wars offered women the opportunity to contribute as spies, propagandists, delegates, and even soldiers.[2]

All the same, the identity (and attendant labor) to which women were most tenaciously bound was as mothers. This was the case not only in the wars but throughout the republican years, years fraught with social ills such as prostitution, alcoholism, gambling, suicide, illiteracy, orphanages, and poverty—let alone the Platt Amendment and other such humiliations. But the "maternal" had a moral authority that could be socially and politically consequential. And women capitalized on this. In the 1920s, they joined the campaign to "regenerate" Cuba. The utopian ecstasy that Cuba Libre once held out could not be realized, women insisted, without the moral integrity that they as "feminine" and, especially, as mothers embodied. To this end Cuban women evoked mambisa heroines as philanthropic benefactors and respectable citizens; the Virgen mambisa, as chaste and compassionate mother who cares for and blesses her children (i.e., the Cuban people); and Mariana Grajales, as fecund mother who birthed titans. But only belatedly was a woman's right to vote (1933) and legal equality (1940) constitutionally recognized, and only episodically did the mambisa receive commemorative honors. The lives and deaths of men were what prevailed in the poetry, ballads, oral history, chronicles, monuments, and miscellanea that was the mambí epic.

With the Revolution, however, a more militant iconography and historiography emerged, as did

new sympathies and opportunities for women's empowerment. Women advocated for and received access to health care, university education, equal pay for equal work, maternity leave, childcare centers, divorce, and reproductive rights. And in due course, they began to rank among the nation's doctors, engineers, athletes, and union and civic leaders. Consistent with this was the impetus to retell the nation's history with women as protagonists, as evidenced by the film Lucía (1968) and Nancy Morejón's poem "Black Woman." The mambisa was recalled as a rebel combatant whom the new socialist woman could emulate. But such processes were not without their contradictions. The revolutionary expectations placed on women were unfair insofar as they continued to do most, if not all, of the childrearing and domestic labor. Nor was it clear whether the revolutionary woman was celebrated sui generis—as embodying, that is, a different conception of the "heroic"—or as someone who merely mimicked the revolutionary man and his ascribed "epicness." It was not auspicious that women continued to be underrepresented in the Revolution's highest echelons of state power, whatever the celebratory invocations of the militant mambisa, and it was an outright scandal that for so many women the most economically viable job of the Special Period was sex work. Despite the difficulties, they continued to organize and agitate for each other, and to write themselves and their foremothers into the nation's epic as archetypes of rebel dignity and hope. […]

3 The Epic Travestied: Choteo and the Mambí as Populist Trickster

> ¡Eso habría que verlo, compay!
> —Elpidio Valdés

The comical and the epic are not exactly literary comrades—at least not conventionally so. Classics like Gilgamesh, Ramayana, Iliad, Aeneid, Beowulf, Sundiata, and Song of Cid are not known to elicit laughter, nor do they revel in irony or the vulgar. Indeed, the comical may well be understood as inimical to the epic. With subjects as sober and as lofty as war, sacrifice, and nation, the epic arouses and

dwells in solemnity and grandeur. Hardly, that is, does it call for or easily accommodate humor.

The epic of Cuba Libre echoes precisely this generic proclivity. It tells the tale of archetypal heroes and momentous events that the interpellated are expected to admire, if not stoically emulate. For rarely, if ever, do such epic narratives and their memorials yield jovial pleasure—let alone laughter—inasmuch as reverence and awe. The ritualistic tributes to the Bronze Titan Maceo and the Apostle Martí call on citizens to emulate their military prowess, moral rectitude, and love of Patria. The interpellated, in short, are called on to enact their own Protest at Baraguá or Fall at Dos Ríos. Yet the epic is not altogether immune to the comical, whether as mockery or otherwise. The ancient Greek Battle of the Frogs and Mice (Batrachomyomachia) employed the poetic metrics and heroic motifs of Homer's Iliad to comical effect, whereby grandeur was rendered laughably trivial. Parodies, satire, and the burlesque are all renowned for their capacity to travesty and scandalize the serious and the sublime. With their levity and folly—if not outright vulgarity—they can render the lofty lowly and the venerable vile. And this is what makes the comical not only enjoyable but also politically salient.

Cuba, too, has enjoyed its quota of the comical. Its "buffoonery theater" (teatro bufo) and an idiosyncratic sense of humor known as choteo are no strangers to the enjoyable and the populist. Choteo and the jocular familiarity with which Cubans treat each other can be read as an egalitarian ethos in which all subjects are liable to ridicule and nothing is taken too seriously. Choteo can be understood thereby as a "salutary" humor that sullies, desacralizes, or otherwise "lowers" that which is unjustifiably venerated or esteemed. Yet so, too, can it be "toxic," as Cuban essayist Jorge Mañach famously put it.[1] For it could amount to a species of melancholic humor that knows not how to distinguish the venerable from the unvenerable. Choteo as such may perilously foster a belief that humans cannot better themselves or their world—a belief very much at odds with epic emplotment.

How the comical has come to inflect, if not "travesty," the epic of Cuba Libre is the subject of

this chapter. Nowhere is this more richly the case than with the animated film series Elpidio Valdés (1974–2003). Largely set in the War of Independence (1895–98), the series chronicles the "adventures" of the fictional cavalry officer Elpidio Valdés and his merry mambises as they cleverly and courageously fight for Cuba Libre. Although a far cry from parody or satire, it does rely heavily on vernacular humor and jovial antics in ways that have rendered it irresistibly popular. Rare is the Cuban, whether young or senior, who does not speak fondly of Elpidio. This makes the series quite distinct from the panegyric sober oratory, hymns, manifestos, and monuments that so routinely characterize the mambí epic. And this may well explain why Elpidio Valdés is so beloved and popular. It offers a portrayal of revolutionary war and nationalist loyalty as a jocular and festive affair. So, too, is it cast as a "genealogical past" that bespeaks a "prophetic future."[2] It interpellates Cuban youth as heirs to the mambí epic and conveys its relevance to the contemporary socialist epic. Yet its valorization of—and calls for—virtues such as vigilance, loyalty, and martial preparedness are neither dull nor didactic, which is why the series could simply be read as a more efficacious state propaganda: more efficacious precisely because so enjoyable.

But another read is possible. Elpidio Valdés could also be read as a "salutary" choteo that critiques and, accordingly, enriches the mambí—and revolutionary—epic. On this read, its portrayal of a far less "titanic" or "apostolic" mambí constitutes a less aristocratic alternative to the classical epic hero and the genre's hackneyed—or altogether impossible—chivalry and solemnity. With the series, Cuba's youth can revel in an epic hero more akin to a trickster than to a Spartan warrior (Maceo), saintly martyr (Martí), or "heroic guerrilla" (Che Guevara). In fact, one could argue that the series' true hero is a collective and populist subject (el pueblo cubano) whose humorous ways invite viewers to laugh not only at their foes but also at their fallible selves. In this regard, the ridiculing laughter and "carnivalesque" attributes of Elpidio Valdés can be read as tactics that productively exploit the

comical's capacity, as Vladimir Propp and Mikhail Bakhtin theorized, to lower and scandalize the lofty.[3] Or, as Terry Eagleton has put it, they are tactics that bespeak the "plebian wisdom" of folk humor: we can only expect so much of our fallible selves and each other. […]

4 ¡Al machete!: On Epic Violence

> When the slaughter ended, we could see mounds of little Spanish heads
> along the pineapple grove. I've seen few things more striking than that.
> —Esteban Montejo, Biography of a Runaway Slave (1966)

If every epic has its hero, every hero has his weapon—and rarely is it an ordinary one. Like the classic hero himself, the epic weapon is almost always of divine or royal stock and its significance to the drama neither trivial nor accidental. Rama felled the wicked Ravana with the Brahmastra; Achilles's and Aesneas's shields possessed genealogical and prophetic wisdom; Beowulf's and el Cid's swords were royal heirlooms. Such weaponry says something about the hero's violence. As divine or royal gifts, they symbolize the noble and the good. Theirs is a violence employed in the service of the vulnerable and the wronged. Rama rid Lanka of the demon king Ravana; Beowulf rid Scandinavia of the monstrous Grendel and his mother; Sundiata liberated Sosso from the evil sorcerer Soumaoro. But the violence of the epic and its heroes is not necessarily "civilized." Indeed, it can be ferocious. Achilles disgraced Hector's dead body; Aeneas was merciless with Turnus; Beowulf tore Grendel's arm out and decapitated his mother. Such violence communicates potency and solicits awe, all the while coded as just, redemptive, and emancipatory.

The mambí epic has its prized weapon, too: namely, the machete. But like the mambí, it is neither divine nor royal. And this has made all the difference insofar as Cuba's is a subaltern epic. For while the machete was once a tool synonymous with exploitation and toil, in the midst of the nation's wars for independence it came to signify prowess and liberation. In the hands of the formerly enslaved, it was

symbolically endowed with redemptive powers—as that humble yet deadly weapon by which the "slave" became "soldier" and the "colony" a "republic." A catachrestical revolt, so to speak. But its violence could be fetishized, even if merciless. The Republic in Arms may have touted the discipline and "decorum" of its soldiers, but Cubans were (and remain) enamored with their mambises as machete-wielding furies. No other epic "scene" was as sensational(ized) as that of the mambí charging into the Spanish lines with his machete held high, crying out "¡Viva Cuba Libre!" The propagandistic value of this scene could not be overstated. The mambí as fierce machetero emboldened the emasculated colonial subject and endowed him with a sense of bodily prowess and consequence—the corollary of which is that it terrified Cuba Libre's foes. Not surprisingly, thus, did the mambí epic become the tale of a dispossessed people who reclaimed their dignity and the Patria's sovereignty one machete charge after the next.

That narrative, however, belies how the wars were actually waged. For all its mythic grandeur, the machete charge was a tactic used sparingly. The mambises were most successful as an army that waged war not on conventional or "heroic" fronts but on the colony's infrastructure, especially its lucrative sugar plantations. To this end, not the machete but the torch was the mambí's most decisive "weapon," as was the mosquito his deadliest. The mambises were their most formidable not as machete-wielding furies, that is, but as guerrillas that sabotaged the colony's sugar estates and protracted the war so that Iberian soldiers could fall prey to tropical diseases. As a case in point: nine out of every ten Spanish casualties fell not to the blade of the machete but to the pathogenesis of microbes—yellow fever, above all else. But such guerrilla tactics did not as alluringly evoke the classic epic hero. They all but equated the mambí with an arsonist or saboteur, one that avoided epic battles. To memorialize the mambí as such was to repudiate the "grandeur" of the epic and its venerable hero. Little wonder, then, that Cubans opted to memorialize the mambí (not the mosquito) as a mounted warrior with machete (not torch) in hand. The republic conceived of itself as free thanks to Homeric valor and sacrifice, not devious

sabotage and a "friendly fever." In doing so, many orators, poets, and sculptors also subtly euphemized or ennobled the mambí's ferocity, disavowing any of its populist connotations. The mambí was to be remembered as a respectable soldier, not a dissident Afro-Cuban or dispossessed guajiro (peasant).

The reverence bestowed on the mambí kept alive, moreover, the mystique of armed violence as the truest means by which to liberate the Patria. To wit, the so-called republican era was riddled with armed revolts, each rhetorically cast as a fulfillment of the mambí epic: the Liberal Party revolt of 1906, the Independent Party of Color's revolt of 1912, the Veterans and Patriots' Movement revolt of 1924, the Revolution of 1933, the Moncada attacks of 1953 and the revolutionary war of 1956–58. With the Revolution, the barbudo came to signify the glamour and efficacy of guerrilla warfare. The story of Cuba Libre became a tale of citizen-soldiers as savvy as they were valorous. Mambí chronicles and memoirs were reissued to stress guerrilla tactics and a people's army. But never were such tactics as dramatic or seductive as the mambí's machete heroics. No account of arson or sabotage could rival the "enthusiasm" and prowess of the mambí in the throes of battle. And so, for all its populist and anti-imperialist storylines, the national epic remained narratively and aesthetically tethered to armed violence, even when such a "necro-aesthetic" seemed least likely to be salient, namely in the Special Period. […]

5 The Epic (De)Sacralized: Sacrifice and the Specter of the Camp

> La doctrina del sacrificio es la madre de lo poco que somos.
> —José de la Luz y Caballero

Arguably the most seductive and venerable quality of the epic is the heroic death. It is a species of death both dramatic and almost always sacralized, a death with elective affinities to a martyred prophet. For the epic hero knowingly wagers his life and does so for the sake of some greater good. But unlike the prophet, the hero dies in the throes of battle. This is essential. The Occidental world's heroic archetype is,

after all, none other than Achilles: the consummate warrior who forsook a peaceable life for a violent death that would forever crown the Greek's name in glory.

More exactly, it is not violence or killing inasmuch as being killed that shrouds the epic in an aura of sublimity. For the heroic death is best understood as a sacrificial death. One dies willingly and in doing so purifies and redeems a wronged or wayward nation. Indeed, it is as if death itself is vanquished: "fear not a glorious death / for to die for the patria / is to live," resounds "La Bayamesa," Cuba's national anthem. That anthem was written in the hour of the nation's birth (1868), and its author, Perucho Figueredo, sang it aloud as he faced down his executioners. As sensational as it sounds, Figueredo's story was not so exceptional. For the story of Cuba Libre reads like a litany of epic deaths. The nation's most revered names are those of men who died in combat (e.g., Ignacio Agramonte, Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, José Martí, Antonio Maceo). Nor is it any less telling that era's most routinely invoked phrase was "sublime abnegation." Patria was that secularized deity to which one sacrificed. "Patria is altar, not pedestal," proclaimed Martí. And that sacredness was derived not from philosophical ideals or the poetically beckoned beauty of the island inasmuch as these epic deaths, these sacrificial offerings. Patria called for bloodshed, and the more bloodshed the holier.

The nation's "sublime" and "necessary" wars produced, nevertheless, an entirely different species of deaths, namely the reconcentrados, the name for those interned in Spain's "camps of reconcentration" (1896–97).[1] As a military strategy, Spain forcibly relocated Cuba's rural populations to garrisoned "camps" near or inside towns and cities. With inadequate food, shelter, medicines, and waste disposal, these densely populated camps became nuclei for starvation and epidemics. No fewer than 400,000 were interned and as many as 200,000 died—or, rather, were strategically let to die. This was a number that far exceeded (i.e., by a factor of as much as 20) deaths on the battlefield. But its significance was not just quantitative. What mattered at least as much were its qualitative attributes: the camps were

conspicuous for their absence of war, conventionally conceived. Those that died therein were unarmed civilians, mostly women and children. In other words, no "sublime blood" was shed.

The epic as genre and sentiment could not, thereby, so easily account for reconcentrados. But account it did, however inadequately. Reconcentrados came to symbolize ineradicable proof of Spanish barbarism, of a tyranny that brutalized an innocent Cuba. And the mambí was her valorous and redemptive savior. He coincided with the classic hero (male, armed, virile) and his death in battle was the archetype of sacrifice and the sublime. Little wonder that in the postbellum years it was to the mambí's honor that monuments were erected, streets renamed, holidays declared, and poems recited. For all its scale and "unspeakable" horror, that is, reconcentration and the reconcentrado were mere footnotes to an otherwise glorious epic. It was the mambí titans and apostles that Cubans learned to admire, if not emulate. Fidel Castro and his fellow barbudos professed to do precisely that. But it was no trivial irony that the Revolution itself made use of forced labor camps from 1965 to 1968. Those deemed not fit for or insufficiently committed to the Revolution were liable to be sent to such camps, in which prison-like conditions and abuses of power prevailed—not least for gay men and Jehovah Witnesses, those who did not abide by the martial and hyper-masculine credo or who refused to defer to the secular deity known as Patria. That said, this scandal was a relatively quiet (and small-scale) one. The Cuban popular imaginary remained invested in the historic mambí and the bearded guerrilla as archetypes of "revolutionary intransigence."

With the scarcities and uncertainties of the 1990s Special Period, however, Cubans writ large came to resemble not the mambí inasmuch as the famished reconcentrado. This was not lost on the state. The oratory and historiography of the era likened the refortified US embargo (el bloqueo) of the 1990s to the US naval blockade of 1898, responsible for as many as half of the reconcentrado dead. If the analogy was fair, its corollary was less so: the reconcentrado was resignified as patriotic "resister" and her or his

death a sacrifice. In other words, the Revolution continued to be narrated in the epic terms of a willingness to die (and kill) for the Patria. That reconcentration and the reconcentrado could constitute the basis for a different story—a story about the precariousness of life and an ethical summons to care for it—was, evidently, unthinkable. […]

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Racism and Erasure: Afro-Cubans in and beyond Tampa's Cuban Independence Struggle

Susan D. Greenbaum, Ph.D.
Kenya C. Dworkin, Ph.D.

Afro-Cubans were an essential part of the Cuban independence struggle against Spain that began in 1868 and ended 30 years later. Antonio Maceo, Juan Gualberto Gomez, and Martín Morúa Delgado are among the better known, but more than half the independence fighters were black, and slavery was a major issue in the rebellion. General Maceo, known as the "Bronze Titan," emerged as a hero, but many other Afro-Cuban independence activists, both men and women, spent time in or settled in Tampa and were influential in organizing and fundraising among the cigarmaking community, and also in keeping it informed. Moreover, there were teachers, writers, and journalists among these figures, too, yet all but a mere two or three have been omitted from popular and presumably informed accounts of Tampa's role in the war for Cuban Independence. The same can be said about the manner in which local historical reenactments and local museum exhibits, and tourist attractions and their materials, are presented. Thus, the goal of this brief piece is to bring a number of them back into 'the picture' and give them their rightful place in Tampa history and memory.

Cuban poet, essayist, teacher, translator, and activist José Martí made more than 20 trips to Tampa prior to his death in battle in 1895.[1] In Tampa and Key West, he encountered a unity of vision and purpose regarding Cuba's future that did not entirely exist in New York, where he was headquartered. The inspiration and highly developed, pro-*Cuba Libre*, organization and activism he found in South Florida caused him to realize that it was there he needed to consolidate the Bases and Resolutions that would guide the final war for independence from Spain. He was much revered and very successful in organizing

[1]For a thorough description of José Martí's visits to Tampa and Key West, see Emiliano J. Salcines, Jr.'s *Jose Marti in Tampa: 20 Documented Visits (1891-1894)* (Independently published, 2022).

support and finances for the revolution in South Florida, New York, and other American and international cities. But it was also in Tampa, on November 26th, 1891, speaking to a large crowd of Cubans at the *Liceo Cubano* in Ybor City, that he first argued that Cuba's future depended on the good will and mutual acceptance of Cubans for *all Cubans* , despite their race or even nationality—a call for putting racial and ethnic hierarchies aside "for the good of all."[2] However, during that same period Tampa was also a racist, post-Confederate stronghold that offered a contradictory environment for Afro-Cubans, who were about 15% of Cuban cigarmakers, and even for racialized, light-skinned Cubans.

La Resistencia

Our research found more than a dozen Afro-Cuban men and at least two women who were active in the revolutionary leadership. Two whose stories have been only partially told are Ruperto and Paulina Pedroso, in whose Ybor City boarding house Martí always stayed while visiting Tampa. Paulina became and continues to be the face of Afro-Cuban contributions to the struggle—but there were more.

[2]This partial quotation is a translation of the original Spanish: it comes from the title given to a speech José Martí gave in Tampa at the Liceo Cubano on November 26, 1891, during his first visit—"Con todos y para el bien de todos" [With all and for the good of all]. It was a powerful call for all Cubans—regardless of race, class, or ethnicity—to come together and support the final war for Cuban independence from Spain.

Paulina Pedroso portrait

Martí's close relationship with this couple, and his frequent practice of strolling arm in arm with Paulina, were deliberately transgressive of racial norms in Tampa at the time. Martí's attitudes about race were unusually liberal and also politically pragmatic.[3] This public display was part of his strategy to build racial solidarity among Cubans in the coming fight—an essential solidarity that did not necessarily exist among the Cuban elite in New York, where the *Partido Revolucionario Cubano* [Cuban Revolutionary Party] (PRC) was headquartered. Martí described Paulina as a "second mother," deflecting any suggestions that their relationship was sexual: she is portrayed as a middle-aged, not very attractive *patriota* , yet was actually two years younger than Martí. However, as the symbol of African involvement, she is non-threatening -- allegedly illiterate but devoted to the cause of *Cuba Libre* . Similarly, Ruperto is briefly described as doggedly loyal to Martí, willing to die to prevent harm coming to him. After a failed assassination attempt against Martí, when he was in Tampa, Ruperto would sleep outside his door to ward off other potential assassins.

Many decades later, in the 1950s, the owners willed the Pedroso boarding house property to the Cuban government who created a park named for Martí on the site—Parque Amigos de José Martí (the

[3]For a contemporary analysis of Martí position on and writing about race and racism, see Kenya C. Dworkin y Méndez, "When Words Are Not Enough: José Martí, Race, and Writing/Righting the Imagined Nation. *Latinx Literature in Transition. Volume I* (Cambridge University Press, 2024). [Forthcoming]

property still belongs to the Cuban government.)[4]

Back wall with plaque

Paulina's image is on a plaque that Cuba had also donated in 1950s. According to our interviewees, it was initially hidden and never taken out of the box. It was later discovered in a Tampa City warehouse and grudgingly fixed to the back wall of the park, up high where it is hard to examine. The historic marker does mention the Pedrosos, but not their blackness, and in most written accounts, the Pedrosos are presented as simple humble folk, neither dangerous nor ambitious. In reality, both were actively involved in political and civic endeavors. Paulina was not actually illiterate, but this was only due to her self-taught capacities to read, write, and compose music. The Pedrosos were also successful entrepreneurs who managed to assemble a fair amount of Ybor City real estate in the early 1890s.[5] They were part of a large group of Afro-Cuban activists who occupied leadership roles in founding, organizing, and administering Cuban revolutionary clubs, schools, cultural organizations, and labor struggles. Although racial segregation was practiced in Tampa, nineteenth-century Ybor City was different. Most

[4] On June 8, 1951, Sallie C. Crenshaw sold the property to Manuel Quevedo Jaureguizar and his wife, Mercedes Carillo la Guardia, Cuban citizens residing on the island. It was they who transferred ownership of the property to the Cuban State on September 10, 1956, as a demonstration of their love for their country and its history. For a full accounting of who owned the property, starting from the time the Pedrosos did and then sold in 1905, until 1956, when Quevedo Jaureguizar bought it and deeded it to Cuba, see Mark Ira Sheinbaum's *José Martí Park: The story of Cuban property in Tampa* (Tampa, FL: University of South Florida International Studies Program, 1976).

[5] Josefine Toledo Benedit's biography of Paulina Pedroso, *La madre negra de José Martí* (La Habana: Casa Editora Verde Oliva, 2009) provides ample information about both Paulina and Ruperto, their arrival first in Key West and then in Tampa from Cuba, and their education, activism, and contributions to Ybor City and the cause for Cuban Independence.

organizations within the Latin enclave were integrated at that time, and Afro-Cubans played significant roles. This group included other successful entrepreneurs who owned businesses and real estate, and invested their skills and money in the cause of Cuban independence.

There are no known photos of most of these individuals. Exceptions are a handful of writers and editors whose images were reproduced in a biographical account, *Figuras y figuritas* , published in Tampa by one of their own, writer and publisher, Teófilo Domínguez in 1899, to fill a gap that he decried in its "Introduction."[6]

Another exception is Bruno Roig shown here in 1904, who does receive brief mention in older accounts (Muñiz 1976:46).

6 The copy of *Figura y figuritas* to which the authors of this article had access, a digitized copy of an original held by the HathiTrust Digital Library, was sent to Afro-Puerto Rican historian, writer, collector, and activist Arturo Alfonso Schomburg by José D. Rodríguez of New York on April 4th, 1910. He dedicated the book to him with a note (in Spanish) asking him to please accept the book as a modest gift, but it is clear that he considered its contents important enough for Schomburg to include in an institute he co-founded with John Edward Bruce, in 1910, in New York City—the Negro Society for Historical Research. By the 1920s, Schomburg was an avid scholar and collector and curator of Afro-American and Afro-Caribbean artworks, manuscripts, artifacts, all of which were eventually purchased by the New York Public Library and converted into the world-renowned Schomburg Collection.

Bruno owned a grocery store on 7th Ave and 11th St. He was well educated, good at math, and served as the treasurer of *Club Ignacio Agramonte* , the main Cuban revolutionary club in Ybor City that arranged Martí's first visit to Tampa in 1891.

Roig was among the group of Afro-Cubans who Martí recruited to form a school named *La Liga Patriotica de Instrucción de Tampa.* It was modeled on one in New York founded by Rafael Serra, a well-known Afro-Cuban journalist, writer, organizer, and close friend of Martí. Yet, there is irony in the creation of this school because *La Liga* in New York, the night school where Martí taught, served only black Cuban and Puerto Rican cigar makers, but the *Liceo Cubano* , the meeting hall for Cubans in Tampa at that time, offered the same kind of instruction—except it was racially integrated—and in the Jim Crow South.[7]

Other notable Afro-Cubans who collaborated with Martí in Tampa are missing from most contemporary accounts, especially those in sources accessible to the general public. The following snapshots, available primarily because of the dedication and foresight of Teófilo Domínguez, give them existence today and help weave the significance of race into the story of Cubans in Latin Tampa.

Cornelio Brito: *La Liga* was first formed in the home of Cornelio Brito, a very interesting person who nearly slipped into oblivion. He was very active in Key West before moving to Tampa in 1890 (Poyo 2014:27). Both prosperous and well regarded, he was a director in *El Club Revolucionario*, another important revolutionary organization, and was included in the select welcoming party for Martí's visit to the *Liceo Cubano* in 1891. Mañach described him as a "man of intelligence and wealth, outstanding among his race" (Mañach 1950:276). A close friend of the Pedrosos, he first introduced them to Martí in Key

[7] A historical marker in Ybor City acknowledges the establishment of La Liga Patriótica de Instrucción but fails to mention who was responsible for the idea of establishing it: José Martí, who sought out help from the Afro-Cuban leadership, Bruno Roig, who he sought out, among others, and those responsible for hiring educators for it. The only person it mentions is Don José Guadalupe Rivero, who is credited with teaching there, but is nowhere mentioned in a letter from Joaquín Granados to José Martí, describing the institution, who the teachers (and even some of the students) were, what subjects were taught, and the weekly schedule.

West. Brito had either a store or restaurant at 13th and 7th Ave (the present location of the Martí-Maceo building).

In the 1890s, he and the Pedrosos acquired several properties in Ybor. They sold them all in 1894, presumably to help fund the revolution. In 1895, Brito gave all his remaining wealth (11,000 pesos) to Gen. Maximo Gomez and joined the armed struggle in Cuba. Muñiz described him as "a rich and respectable black who went to the front for Martí and died in poverty in a Havana hospital" (Muñiz 1976:58). The date of his death is unknown.

Manuel Granados: Manuel was the brother of Joaquín who will be described shortly. Both were born into slavery in Havana in the 1850s, but their parents managed to buy their freedom while they were still children. In adulthood, Manuel became a barber and an exiled revolutionary. He initially settled in Key West, where he was a member of *Sociedad El Progreso* , a mutual aid society founded by Guillermo Sorondo (who is next). Manuel arrived in Tampa in the late 1880s. His barber shop was in the *Liceo Cubano* and was a major gathering point. Martí reportedly got his hair cut there. Manuel and his brother, Joaquín, were active in revolutionary clubs. Both belonged to *La Liga Patriota de Instrucción*, where Manuel served as the treasurer.

Guillermo Sorondo: Sorondo first migrated to Key West where he was very active in both politics and labor struggles. He founded the previously mentioned mutual aid society, *El Progreso*, which included Rafael Serra, Cornelio Brito, Manuel Granados, and several others who will be mentioned shortly. He co-founded the *Colegio Unificación*, which Poyo describes as "the first educational, social, and political organization for Cubans of color in Key West" (2014:27). He also was involved in Florida's Reconstruction politics and helped form a chapter of the Knights of Labor in Key West. He moved to Tampa in 1888, where he collaborated with Carlos Baliño, a white Cuban anarchist and future founder of the Cuban communist party. They left Tampa in 1892 to form a new community called Martí City near Ocala. Sorondo served on

the City Council and was leader of the *Partido Revolucionario Cubano* in the new Marti City. The PRC (the *Partido Revolucionario Cubano*, or Cuban Revolutionary Party) was the main organization for exiled independence activity. Martí City collapsed in 1897 and Sorondo and Baliño came back to Tampa, settling in Port Tampa where Morúa Delgado was living at that time. Baliño had worked as a cigar factory reader for some time in Key West, as did Cornelio Brito.[8]

Writers/*Escritores*: In the 1890s, Ybor City hosted an impressive group of Afro-Cuban writers and editors of revolutionary publications. Most grew up in slavery and/or poverty and were mainly self-taught. Their work was widely known in Key West, New York, and Tampa, and they were closely associated with Juan Gualberto Gómez, Martín Morúa Delgado, Rafael Serra, and José Martí. All were involved with *La Liga* in Tampa, as both teachers and promoters. The first we present is Francisco Segura, who was very well regarded, and who also worked as a cigar factory reader for a time in Key West, but of whom no photos could be found.

Segura was a writer and regular contributor to a newspaper called *El Tribuno del Pueblo*, edited by Carlos Baliño in Port Tampa. Like Sorondo and several others, Segura had been a director in *El Progreso* in Key West. He moved to Tampa in early 1890s. He was active in the PRC and a close collaborator with Ramón Rivero, the leader. Segura was on the editorial staff of Rivero's *La Revista de Florida*, and he edited a publication called *Cuba*, which was the official organ of the PRC. In 1895 he wrote a book entitled *Jenios olvidados: Noticias biográficas* (Forgotten Geniuses) that was published in Havana by Morúa Delgado. No copy or reproduction could be located.

Teófilo Domínguez: Domínguez was a very important figure in Ybor writing and activism, who has

[8] According to Gary R. Mormino, in "The Reader and the Worker: Los Lectores and the Culture of Cigarmaking in Cuba and Florida," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 54 (Fall 1998): 1-18, Carlos Balino, Cornelio Brito, and Francisco Segura all worked as cigar factory readers in Key West prior to moving to Tampa.

been completely left out of later accounts. He was a close associate of Gualberto Gómez and part of the

Teófilo and Rose

group that Martí gathered at the founding of *La Liga* . Between 1897 and 1899, Domínguez edited a revolutionary weekly called *El Sport* . After the war, and at the time of a racial split in Tampa's Cuban mutual aid society *(El Club Nacional Cubano*), Domínguez joined Bruno Roig and Ruperto Pedroso and 20 others in founding the new Afro-Cuban society – then called the Free Thinkers *(Los libres pensadores*) of Martí and Maceo. His stated goal for the club was to expand education, for adults of both genders, and for children. His effort was cut short by his untimely death from tuberculosis in 1902.

Figuras y Figuritas: Ensayos Biográficos

A lasting contribution was a small book Domínguez wrote in 1899, titled *Figuras y Figuritas* . It was published in downtown Tampa at 105 Lafayette St. It was designed to publicize both major and less well-known Afro-Cuban writers in Tampa and elsewhere during the revolution, by providing biographies and photos of these individuals, along with his own commentary about the importance of knowledge. He wanted to credit those who acquired, produced, and spread it during the struggle for Cuban independence and the Jim Crow era that was dawning.[9]

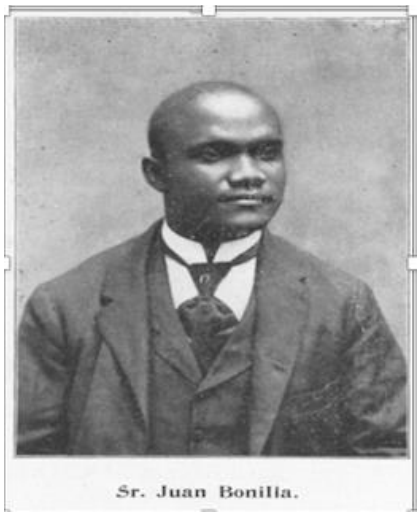
9 Florida enacted 19 Jim Crow segregation laws between 1865 and 1967. Florida also imposed some of the harshest penalties on record. Blacks or whites who entered a railroad car reserved for the other race could be sentenced to the pillory or whipped 39 times, or both. Florida also rewarded informers for reporting cases of miscegenation, who would receive half of the $1,000 fine. A law barring segregation of public facilities was passed in 1873, but was overturned by 1885. As late as 1967, the city of Sarasota passed a city ordinance requiring segregated beaches.

María de Jesús Vierna

María de Jesús Viernes, Teófilo's wife and widow, deserves recognition before we commence with the *Figuritas,* or lesser-known writers of Tampa. Teófilo made a point of supporting education and agency for women in his writing. Maria was a revolutionary activist, both before and after her marriage to Teófilo. Oral history relates that she sewed the flag that was taken into battle in 1895. A descendant reportedly located it in an obscure museum in Havana. Maria remarried and had nine more children; many of her descendants are still part of the local community. She kept a large trunk of Teófilo's writing and other memorabilia that unfortunately was lost after the death of her youngest son. But Teófilo's biographies remain, in the New York Schomburg Collection with copies at the University of Florida and University of North Carolina libraries. We highlight three authors he describes who made special contributions in Tampa.

Joaquín Granados

Joaquín Granados: As mentioned, Joaquín was born to slave parents in 1854, freed but separated from them. Slave parents were not allowed to raise free children. His adopted family could not afford his education, so he taught himself. He was very gifted and early involved in writing for Cuban publications; *La Harmonía*, *Minerva*, and *El Progreso*. He served as VP of *Directorio Central de la Raza de Color,* founded by Gualberto Gomez and very influential during the Cuban independence struggle. Granados moved to Key West in the 1880s where he worked with Morúa Delgado on *El Pueblo* and *La Revista Popular*. He and his brother Manuel moved to Tampa in the 1890s. Joaquín wrote for *Eco de Martí* (Port Tampa) and *La Pelota* , the official organ of the Ybor baseball league, directed by Julián Gonzalez, who we will describe shortly. Joaquín served as president of *La Liga* (Martí's school) and was also secretary of the Tampa PRC in 1892. As the official independence organization, the PRC represented dozens of revolutionary clubs and organizations in Ybor.



Juan Bonilla

Juan Bonilla: Born in Key West in 1869, Juan initially attended school in the San Carlos Club. His family went to New York in 1881 where he completed his education. He returned to Key West in 1885, where he worked on *El Pueblo* (Morúa) and published in *La Fraternidad* and *La Igualdad* in Havana. Bonilla was secretary of *La Liga* in Ybor. He worked with Domínguez and Emilio Planas on *El Patriota*. In 1894 he was a sub-director of Rafael Serra's *La Verdad*. He later wrote for *La Doctrina de Martí,* Serra's publication begun after Martí's death, to keep his ideas alive.

Emilio Planas

Emilio Planas: Born in 1868 in Cuba, his family soon emigrated to Key West. He began school at

the San Carlos Club, then went to a post-reconstruction "colored" school in Jacksonville, called Goodman and Free Men, where he graduated in 1888. He arrived in Tampa in 1890 and was a founder of *El Sport* (with T. Domínguez). He contributed essays and started his own weekly in 1890, *El Patriota*, which according to Muñiz was one of two major works read in all the factories (Muñiz 1976:35). He also wrote for Cuban publications, *Minerva* and *La Fraternidad*.

Julián González

Julián Gonzalez: Born in Havana in 1871, he became a cigarmaker, where he attended night classes but was also self-taught. In Havana, he wrote essays for *La Fraternidad* and collaborated on *La Igualdad*. He came to Tampa in 1896, where he wrote for *Cuba* (owned by Ramón Rivero) and *La Contienda* (owned by Néstor Carbonell). Gonzalez directed *La Pelota* , the official newspaper of the Tampa Baseball League. It was about sports, but all proceeds were donated to the PRC. He collaborated with Planas on *El Patriota* and was a popular orator at the *Liceo Cubano*.

Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo: When the war finally ended in 1898, black veterans in Cuba found disappointment and increased racism instead of the social justice promised by Martí. Many decided to return to Florida, where at least the economy was much stronger—but so was Jim Crow racism. In 1899, black and

white Cubans had together formed a mutual aid society, *El Club Nacional Cubano* , also known as the October 10 Club. Guillermo Sorondo was one of four directors. The other three were presumably white Cubans. Although not yet technically illegal under the growing Jim Crow regime (but definitely so according to the Florida Constitution),[10] integrated socializing provoked threats of violence by white Tampa goons. The club split within a year, expelling the Afro-Cuban members, who subsequently formed their own new club at a meeting in October 1900 that was held in the Pedroso's parlor. Founders of that club also included Teófilo Domínguez, Bruno Roig, and several others mentioned earlier (but not Sorondo). Initially called the Free thinkers *(los libres pensadores)* of Martí and Maceo, it expanded in 1904, merging with a West Tampa mutual aid society called *La Unión* .

Founders of Martí-Maceo

The officers of the new organization included Bruno Roig as treasurer (at the right end of the first row). Oral history said that some white Cuban members were so opposed to the split that they joined Martí-

[10]Florida, much like other Southern states, created a 'legal' framework known as the 'black codes' and enshrined them in their 1865-66 State Constitution. Their purpose was to preserve white supremacy and access to free or cheap labor, as well as preventing miscegenation. For a thorough review of the Florida Black Codes read Joe M. Richardson's "Florida Black Codes," in *Florida Historical Quarterly* 47:4, Article 4. Available at: https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol47/iss4/4

Maceo. Oral history provided by a man in his 90s, and a child when it happened, told he had heard about it while growing up. At the interview, however, his eyesight was too dimmed to identify the people in the photo. In 1909, he was almost 14 when their new building was completed; an event he did remember well. There were meeting rooms, ballroom, upstairs concert space, near the heart of Ybor City, but also closer to the main African American neighborhood in Tampa.

Building in 1909

Although much smaller than the other immigrant societies in Ybor City, they participated in the remarkable medical benefit system the groups created there. Revenue from rentals offered the economic mainstay. Martí-Maceo became a popular venue for African American entertainers coming through Tampa. There were two ballrooms. On the first-floor Cuban musicians performed *danzones*, *sones*, *mambos*, *boleros*, and other genres; upstairs Americans played jazz, swing, rumbas, and ballads, and many young Afro-Cubans

joined them. They called them "top and bottom dances."[11]

The 1930s, however, was a time of depression and exodus. Many cigar factories shuttered, and over half of the Afro-Cuban families left, most headed to New York. The departures also drew black Cuban and black American teens and adults closer together, including marriages. Afro-Cuban families who stayed behind struggled to keep their club together. In 1941, with help from the *Círculo Cubano* and other Ybor City friends, Martí-Maceo constructed a walled-in patio that further enhanced its lure for African American events and entertainers. This upgrade, and the revenue stream it brought, allowed them to survive as an organization.

Teens on the Martí-Maceo Patio in the 1950s

Unfortunately, the Urban Renewal program that leveled large swaths of Ybor City in the 1960s demolished their building (at 6th Ave and 11th St.). It was the only historic mutual aid society to suffer this loss. The white societies' buildings (Cuban, Spanish, Italian, and German) were left untouched. Unlike the case of the patio, an instance when immigrants helped each other, there was no resistance from *Círculo Cubano* or the other Ybor societies. Martí-Maceo received a paltry compensation with which the members

[11]The information henceforth is primarily derived from 20 years of ethnographic and applied research by Greenbaum with the members and families of Marti-Maceo. The book, *More than Black*, UF Press 2002, contains the information and analysis derived from that work..

purchased a much smaller structure, but one right on 7th Avenue, a stone's throw from Martí Park, where the Pedroso boarding house had been and where it all began.

Urban Renewal sign

Martí-Maceo second building

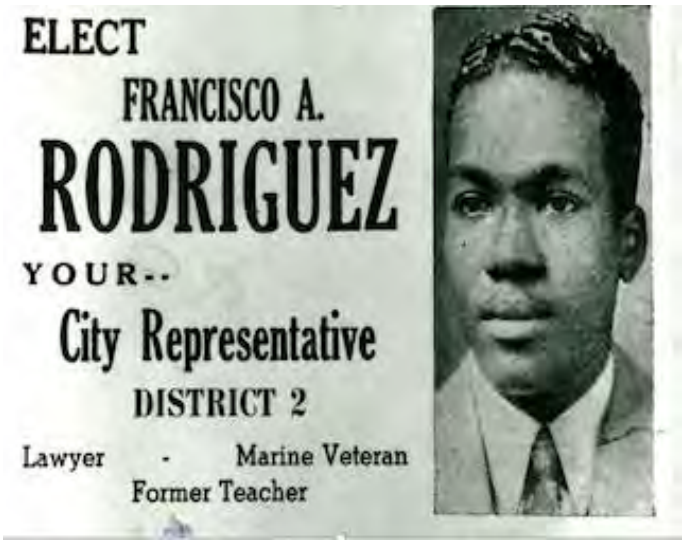
The club's members struggled to keep it together, but by the mid-1970s they were down to three active members. Manuel Alfonso, son of one of these last members who had recently died, traveled to New York and visited childhood friends who had moved there as teens and were then ready to retire. His tales of Tampa, and the growing popularity of the sunbelt, sparked a return migration that

brought home literally dozens of older adults who rejoined the club and brought it back to life. They came back to a city and a community that had changed considerably.

Francisco, Sr. in the 1960s

The Civil Rights movement was a major force in bringing the black Cubans and Americans together in Tampa. This second generation, many from mixed Cuban and American families, found continuity and inspiration in the activism of their parents during earlier struggles for Cuban independence and US labor rights. Two families from this period and forward illustrate the convergence.

Francisco Rodríguez, Sr.: As a young cigarmaker in Cuba, Francisco was involved in the independence movement. He migrated to Tampa in 1909. He was a self-taught intellectual, an eloquent orator, and a dedicated labor organizer. During the strike of 1931, he and his family were forced to leave town for a year due to threats against his life by local anti-union thugs. His three children, who we will briefly introduce, have made significant contributions that have received some formal appreciation. All three of his children were among the first in their cohort to graduate from college.



Francisco, Jr.

Francisco Jr. was a WWII veteran and a college graduate who had been a public-school teacher. Dissatisfaction with conditions facing black teachers, which did not improve after the war, led him to Howard University Law School, where he met Thurgood Marshall and other Civil Rights leaders. Upon completion, he became the NAACP lawyer in Tampa, where he worked with Bob Saunders, the NAACP State Field Director. Together, along with other courageous African American activists and several Afro-Cuban teens, they accomplished a great deal. His daughter, Cheryl, is a professor at USF and former chair of the Africana Studies department. Francisco Jr. died in 1988. He was recently memorialized on the honorary Riverwalk in downtown Tampa.

The other son, Miguel (Mike) Rodriguez, was a talented musician who played with Ray Charles in the 1940s. He earned a B.A. from FAMU and an M.A. from the University of Michigan. He was a much-loved band leader at Middleton HS, where over 50 years he mentored dozens of students who went on to college. He died in 1994. Their sister Myrtle also attended college at Bethune Cookman. She was the first Afro-Cuban woman in Tampa to do that and she inspired others to believe that girls could also go to college. One of these was Sylvia Griñán, who will be introduced shortly for the many contributions that she made.

Sylvia Rodríguez Kimbell

Sylvia Rodriguez Kimbell, daughter of Mike, was also a teacher in Tampa, rising to be an administrator, and finally in 1990, the first black woman to be elected to the County Commission. During her short time as Commissioner, she accomplished a great deal, earning praise for her hard work and good ideas. She was easily re-elected in 1992, but already suffering from cancer, passed away shortly into her second term. The Kimbell Elementary School is named for her and she is included in the Florida Black Heritage Trail.

Evelio Grillo/Sylvia Grillo Griñán: Two members of the Grillo family who came to Tampa in the teens are second-generation Afro-Cubans who also deserve attention. Their father died of tuberculosis soon after arriving in Tampa, leaving a wife and five small children. Evelio, the youngest boy, became a well-known political activist in Oakland, California after serving in WWII. In 2000, he published a memoir titled *Black Cuban, Black American*. Published by Arte Público Press, it is a fascinating account of negotiating blackness and *cubanidad* during tumultuous times and places, including Ybor City.[12]

[12] Evelio Grillo, *Black Cuban, Black American*: A Memoir (Houston, TX: Arté Público Press, 2000).

Evelio left Tampa as a young man. His sister Sylvia remained for the rest of her life and left a strong but largely unheralded imprint. Despite many obstacles, and at the urging of Myrtle Rodríguez, she was able to go to college at Bethune Cookman. She completed her B.A. at USF in 1955 and later earned an M.A. She became a teacher in Tampa prior to desegregation. In 1964, Sylvia became the first black teacher assigned to an all white school: Ybor School was the site. She experienced many challenges in that post. For example, the white teachers would not sit next to her at lunch or in meetings. During this same period, her daughter Carmen was part of a successful sit-in in downtown Tampa organized in part by Francisco Rodriguez, Jr.

Sylvia for School Board

In 1967, Sylvia was the first black woman to run for county school board; she lost. A few years later, she became the first black member of the local League of Women Voters. She also remained a member of Martí-Maceo. In mid 1980s, officials directing Ybor City redevelopment and the proposed historic district were ignoring Martí-Maceo's existence, provoking new fears about displacement. Sylvia sought help from Greenbaum, a professor at USF who had done similar work in Kansas City. Together, and with other members, they recruited oral historians, gathered family photos, and donated the records of La Unión Martí-Maceo to Special Collections in the USF Library.

Historic marker

Over the years there have been some successes in obtaining recognition for this part of Ybor City heritage, but it has remained a bitter struggle up to this day. Afro-Cubans are still not welcome in the marketing of Ybor City (Greenbaum 1990). The various walking tours do not include the site, despite its proximity to Martí Park. News articles about the historic mutual aid societies typically leave them out.

The journey of the club's historic marker tells part of that story. Greenbaum was commissioned to write the inscription in the early 2000s by the head of the local historic preservation group. It was installed and stayed up for a few years, and then one night it mysteriously disappeared. The large solid steel pole that held it had been sawed off at the base.

Ybor arch with Martí-Maceo in background

The disappearance occurred shortly after the erection of a large metal arch, just west of the Martí-Maceo building on 7th Avenue. Like Paulina's plaque in the 1950s, the marker was later found hidden in a City garage. With minimal fanfare, the club officers managed to get the City to re-install it, but got no explanation or apology. The theft of the marker as well as its peculiar resurrection say a lot about how things have not changed that much here in Tampa over the past century.

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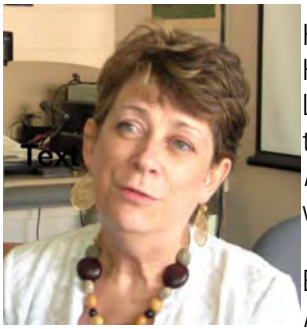
Susan D. Greenbaum (PhD Kansas University 1981); professor emerita of Anthropology, University of South Florida. Author of two books *More than Black* (UF Press, 2002) and *Blaming the Poor: The Long Shadow of the Moynihan Report on Cruel Images of Poverty* (Rutgers University Press, 2015). *More than Black* won three major awards in 2003 (Saloutos Memorial Book Prize; Harry T & Harriet V. Moore Award; American Library Assn. Choice Award). During the three decades of her tenure at USF, she conducted a prolonged ethnohistory of the Afro-Cuban community in Tampa Florida, combined with a collaborative project with current descendants to make their story part of official heritage of the Ybor City historic district. Poverty and racism formed a concurrent and ongoing research interest, resulting in a book and many articles and editorials. She is president of the Board of Directors of the Sociological Initiative Foundation that funds community-based research and policy development projects aimed at securing social justice and equity. She co-edited (with Glenn Jacobs and Prentice Zinn) a collection of articles based on funded projects: *Collaborating for Change: A Participatory Action Research Casebook* (Rutgers University Press, 2020).



Kenya C. Dworkin y Méndez, PhD (U.C. Berkeley 1994) is an Associate Professor of Hispanic Studies at Carnegie Mellon University. Her interests include Cuban and U.S. Latinx literary & cultural studies. She received an NEH Fellowship for AY 2022-2023 to complete her book *Staging 'Whiteness': Racial Impersonation, Performance, and Nostalgia in Cuban Immigrant Theater* (in progress] and is also currently co-editing with Sampson Vera Tudela a Cambridge University Press volume, *Latinx Literature in Translation: 1444-1886* (2024). Her other books include *Spanish and Empire* [with Echávez Solano] (Vanderbilt UP, 2007); *Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage Project V* [with Lugo-Ortiz] (Arte Público Press, 2006); *En otra voz: Antología de la literatura hispana de los Estados Unidos* [with Kanellos et al] (Arte Público Press, 2002), and *Herencia: The Anthology of U.S. Latino Literature in the United States* [with Kanellos et al] (Oxford UP, 2001). Among her most recent articles/chapters are "When Words Are Not Enough: José Martí, Race, and Writing/Righting the Imagined Nation" (*Latinx Literature in Transition Vol. 1* (Cambridge UP, 2024 [forthcoming]), "Performing Blackness, Enacting Whiteness: The Conundrum of Race in José Martí's Campaign for the Cuban Independence Project"(Ed. Laura Lomas) *José Martí in Context* (Cambridge UP [in progress]), "Racism and Erasure: Black Cubans in and beyond the Cuban Independence Struggle" [with Greenbaum] (University of Tampa Center for José Martí Studies Affiliate) [forthcoming]; ("Latin Place Making in the Late 19th & Early 20th Centuries: Cuban Émigrés and their Transnational Impact in Tampa, FL," in *ELN: Latinx Lives in a Hemispheric Context* (Spring 2018): 124-142; "Los retos del foto-activismo y su traslado, traducción e interpretación: Una mirada privilegiada hacia Cuba Profunda con Juan Antonio Madrazo," in Voces del Caribe 10: 1 (2018): 539-588; and "Tablas sin fronteras: 'leyendo a Cuba' en el teatro cubano de Tampa en los 1920," in *Leer a Cuba: Discurso literaria y geografía transcultural* (Valencia, España: Editorial Aduana Vieja, 2018): 235-250.