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José Martí and the Cuban Immigrant Communities of Florida in Cuban
Independence and the Dawn of the American Century
University of Tampa

Research and Teaching Proposal

“José Martí and Catarino Garza: Imagining the ideal Mexican and
Cuban Nations in the American Borderlands”

Research and Significance

Historians of late nineteenth century immigrant flows to the U.S. have traditionally focused on European immigrant communities established in New York and Midwestern cities. Less attention has been given to smaller communities of Mexican and Cuban immigrants located in Texas and Florida. These immigrant communities provide a fascinating lens into grassroots efforts to construct ideal, nineteenth century nations in both Mexico and Cuba, respectively. Leaders such as Catarino Garza in the U.-Mexico border region and José Martí in New York, Tampa and Key West, Florida drafted the contours of democratic Mexico and an independent Cuban nation.

An analysis of 1890s Mexican and Cuban communities in the U.S. reveals the transnational dimension of everyday life of immigrant and exiles in U.S. borderland enclaves such as El Paso, Texas and New York-Tampa-Key West, Florida triangle. This project reveals the ways in which nineteenth-century Mexicans and Cubans in the US understood conceptions of *patria* or homeland, citizenship, identity, democracy, republicanism, and freedom informed the plans of Garza and Martí. Juxtaposing Garza and Martí’s efforts to liberate their respective homelands from the tyranny of Porfirio Díaz and imperial Spain, respectively; places

Martí and Garza as architects of the Mexican and Cuban nations before signature historical moments, such as the Spanish American War of 1898 and the Mexican Revolution of 1910.

The transnational scope of Garza and Martí's liberation and/or nation-building projects for their respective home nations expands our understanding of these two leading figures and the immigrant communities that supported them in boom towns in the U.S-Mexico border and the Tampa-Key West-New York-Cuba triangle. Garza and Martí's work demonstrate the ties that bind nineteenth century U.S. history, Mexican and Cuban immigration experience, and the development of the Mexican state and Cuban independence struggle. This project's multi-layered focus contributes to historiographical debates on nineteenth-century Mexican and Cuban immigrant communities in the United States, nation-building projects forged by oft-neglected or unknown leaders such as Garza and Martí. The imagined communities outlined by these two leaders weave United States, Texas, New York, Florida with Mexican, Cuban and Latin American history, writ large, in complex ways. It is not enough to know the characteristics of the ideal nations imagined by Garza and Martí but it is crucial to understand the immigrant communities that produced and supported these leaders in border cities such as El Paso and Tampa-Key West region.

Methodology and Sources

An examination of 1890s Mexican and Cuban immigrant communities through the writings and newspaper coverage of their respective leaders, Garza and Martí, offers a number of possibilities for research and pedagogical projects alike. There exists abundant newspaper coverage of Catarino Garza's war against the Mexican dictator Porfirio Díaz was documented by Texan newspapers and Mexican dailies. Similarly, the writings of José Martí appeared in American newspapers from New York, Florida, and various Latin American countries. Martí's works and Garza's

writings represent a treasure trove for researchers and students on their shared concerns on nationhood, citizenship, identity, and the role of the United States as an hemispheric power.

Primary sources penned by Garza and Martí lend a first-hand glimpse into the complexities of imagining and organizing efforts to build free and democratic Mexican and Cuban nations on U.S.-Mexico and U.S-Cuban border regions. In addition, a robust historiographical production both in English and in Spanish on the Garza's war and mainly on Martí's political work demonstrate the feasibility and relevance of this project for historians, political scientists, sociologists, and literary scholars.

I plan on introducing Garza and Martí's imaginings of the ideal Mexican and Cuban nations in my 300-level course entitled Rise of Modern America, 1877-1930 because it allows me and my students to interrogate definitions of key concepts of this course, such as borderlands, nationhood, identity and citizenship among immigrant groups in nineteenth –century American borderlands. An in-depth analysis of unknown and oft-neglected figures such as Garza and Martí along with the immigrant communities that supported them to imagine distinct Mexican and Cuban nations challenges students' perceptions of nation-building processes advanced in border regions in the U.S.-Mexico and Florida/New York-Cuba. It subverts stereotypical images of politically powerless immigrants uprooted from their home countries. It presents the image of immigrant and exiled communities led by journalists, utopian, republican, revolutionary figures seeking change in their homeland with the salaries of Cuban and Mexican workers.

To model the mental moves made by historians in the analysis of primary sources. I plan to use simple word visualization applications such as [Voyant](#) to show students another way to skim or visualize a primary source. Looking at the world cloud, frequency of words, correlation of terms depicted in a word cloud and on a graph allows me to describe out loud the process of skimming for date, place, key words, and spontaneous questions and comments produced by the skimming

exercise. Then I proceed to a closer reading of the selected text and in groups of 2, I ask students to follow the same steps in analyzing one of the following texts of Martí's "A Vindication of Cuba," "Our America," "Montecristi Manifiesto" and "Jose Martí Speech in Tampa (1891)," "My Race," "To Cuba!," "Letter to Manuel Mercado. and briefly present to class their word cloud or graph and their initial reading of the assigned text.

Assessment

In addition to in-class presentations on mapping Martí's writings on wordle or voyant, students will carry out a number of library assignments to locate additional newspaper sources as well as books and peer-reviewed journals to write a 5-7 page research proposal on topic related to Jose Martí and the Cuban communities in Tampa, Key West, or New York. Their term paper will be a 10-15-page paper based on the research and library assignments done so far. This paper should have an original thesis; explain the significance of primary sources for helping to understand some aspect of Jose Martí's ideas about nation, revolution, independence, citizenship, or identity.

Dissemination

This project has the potential to be presented at academic conferences and as a pedagogical unit in classes on Latino/a, immigration, nineteenth century U.S. and/or Latin American history.

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