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To the Victors Belong the Spoils: How the United States and Cuban Elites Undermined the Ideals of the Raceless Nation and Cuba Libre (1898-1913)



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In Cuba there is no fear of a war of races. Man is more than white, more than mulatto, more than Negro. On the battlefields of Cuba, white and blacks have died and their souls risen together to heaven. In the daily life of defense, of loyalty, of brotherhood, of cunning, besides each white man, there was always a Negro.

- José Martí, “My Race.”

Writing in 1893, José Martí described Cuba as a raceless nation, devoid of racial prejudices or racial tensions. Martí asserted that Cubans had overcome their racial differences, joining together to fight a common enemy. He adopted the ideals of the raceless nation, rejected Spanish rule and associated colonialism with slavery, adopting the ideals of (free Cuba) in an effort to combat the disunity that had divided insurgents in the Ten Years’ War (1868-1878), and the Guerra Chiquita or Little War (1879-80).¹ The ideals of *Cuba Libre* also figured prominently in Martí’s vision for the nation; one in which Cuba was free from Spanish rule, dependence upon United States economic interests, and the dominance of the planter class.

Support for *Cuba Libre* emerged prior to the Second War of Independence (1895-1898) as a reaction to Spain’s manipulation of racial fears to undermine prior independence movements. The raceless nation signified different things to diverse sectors of Cuban society. Varying imaginings of what Cuban meant emerged, all justified by the rhetoric of Martí’s raceless nation.² Insurgent victory appeared certain in 1898 despite rebels’ revolutionary post-independence vision. The United States, alarmed at the prospect of losing Cuba to the insurgents, intervened in 1898, frustrating the Cuban independence movement once again.

The racial rhetoric that unfolded during the liberation movements was distinct from the racial ideas held by the intervention forces.³ Cuban intellectuals attempted to overcome racial intolerance whereas in the U.S. the “color line” became more rigid.⁴ Jim Crow Laws prevailed in the U.S at the same time Martí claimed that “In Cuba there is no fear of a war of races” and that a “man has no particular rights because he happens to belong to a particular race.”⁵ Racial classification in Cuba also differed from

racial categorization in the United States. A two-tier racial system existed in Cuba, where blacks, mulattos and whites were separated by visible characteristics, instead of the one-drop rule that existed in the U.S.⁶ Thus, in Cuba race was a fluid concept, whereas in the U.S. race was a binary construct and an individual was categorized either as “black” or white. How did the occupation of Cuba by a nation whose rigid color ideals encouraged racial segregation impact the emerging social unity and raceless rhetoric in the island? My research examines the impact of the U.S. occupation (1898-1902) on ideas of *patria* (motherland) and *Cubanidad*, (what it meant to be Cuban) by analyzing how notions of race in Cuba changed during the U.S. occupation and intervention (1906-1909). This study is guided by three questions: how did the U.S. occupation inform notions of race and nationhood; how did the U.S. imperialist ideas shape what it meant to be Cuban; and did the American racial rhetoric result in increased repression of Afro-Cubans and contribute to the racial backlash of the 1912 Race War?

Cuban sovereignty depended upon the nation’s ability to prove itself civilized and capable of protecting foreign property. However, the American Military Government (administering the island from 1898-1902) viewed most Cubans, particularly Afro-Cubans, as backward and promoted white interests. This allowed white Cuban elites to utilize the U.S. occupation and intervention in pursuit of their particular vision of *Cubanidad* in which they would occupy positions of power. They adopted American racial rhetoric to justify their notions of *Cubanidad*, which ensured the social hierarchy remained intact, undermining the ideals of the raceless nation. Cuban elites opposed all manifestations of the raceless nation and suppressed “barbaric” traditions (Afro-Cuban cultural practices), while seeking American support for their vision of modernity. The exclusion of Afro-Cubans from positions of power during the initial years following independence led to armed protest in 1912. In turn, the 1912 Race War was met with repression and violence from the Cuban army as the U.S. stood by and did nothing. American approval of white Cuban elites’ actions further marginalized Afro-Cubans who were denied access to positions of power in

order to demonstrate that the nation was capable of governing itself. The exclusion of Afro-Cubans served two purposes; it prevented lower class Cubans from coming to power and it protected the planter class, which *Cuba Libre* was intent on destroying. Elite attempts at excluding blacks were derived from the fear that if the lower classes came to power they would implement Martí's vision of *Cuba Libre*, which threatened the survival of the planter class as well as U.S. interests. Therefore, *Cuba Libre* simultaneously threatened the planter class and the United States.

The Independence Movements

The Ten Years' War was led by a small group of eastern creoles who, frustrated at the lack of Spanish political and economic reforms, invited their slaves to join them in seeking political independence.⁷ The *Grito de Yara*, proclaimed by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, liberated slaves and invited them to "conquer liberty and independence for Cuba."⁸ A manifesto from October 10, 1868 suggests that insurgent leaders did not support abolition in the early phases of the war. Rather, the manifesto declared that all men were equal, but did not incorporate abolition into the formal objectives of the movement.⁹ Such contradictions were attributed to the need to attract the support of Afro-Cubans, who were crucial for the war, and slaveholders, whose support was essential to fund the insurgency.¹⁰ The abolition policy adopted by white leaders was limited, albeit it "rai[sed] the issue of the social question and arou[sed] with their conduct the spirit of people of color."¹¹

Economic and political dissatisfaction was manifested differently in the eastern and western regions of the island. There was greater variety in the agricultural economy in the east, with sugar estates existing alongside tobacco and coffee farms.¹² Planters cultivated smaller plots of land, relied less upon slave labor, and were more likely to be affected by fluctuations in the economy than their counterparts in western Cuba. Consequently, there was greater support for the insurgency in eastern Cuba. Expansion in the nineteenth century promoted the growth of the sugar industry and *ingenios* (sugar mills) expanded across the western provinces.¹³ There was greater fear of black rebellion in the west because planters' livelihoods were tied to slave labor. A large portion of the plantation workforce in the western provinces was comprised of slaves and planters feared a slave revolt. This resulted in stronger ties to the colonial

regime and less inclination to support the insurgency.

Afro-Cubans embraced the insurgency and some like Antonio Maceo emerged as leaders in the independence movement. In doing so, they began to view the movement differently - as one not just to achieve independence, but also to abolish slavery. The Spanish government called attention to the prominence of black leaders as proof that an independent Cuba would become another black republic, like Haiti. Afro-Cuban participation in the Liberation Army increased, augmenting white fears of a black movement that threatened the social order of Cuba.¹⁴ For these reasons, Afro-Cuban leaders like Maceo were suspected of attempting to create a black republic when he requested 500 men to invade the western region of the island. The invasion never occurred because insurgent leaders feared that Cuba would "share the fate of Haiti and Santo Domingo."¹⁵ Thus, racial fear confined the independence movement to the eastern region of the island.

Tension amongst insurgents, low morale after years of fighting, economic hardships and white fear of Afro-Cuban participation in the insurgency further fractured the liberation movement. On February 8, 1877, rebel leaders accepted the conditions of the Pact of Zanjón. However, insurgents, many of them Afro-Cuban, continued to fight for *Cuba Libre* in the eastern provinces under the leadership of Antonio Maceo, who denounced the committee's actions as "shameful," and refused to acknowledge the pact without independence and the abolition for all slaves.¹⁶ Afro-Cubans continued to wage war against the Spanish until May, when Maceo surrendered and left the island - the Ten Years' War finally came to an end.

Peace on the island was disrupted once again on August 24, 1879, when dissatisfied patriots from the Ten Years' War led a new independence movement, the *Guerra Chiquita* or the Little War. It appealed to slaves who had not taken up arms in the Ten Years' War and who viewed independence as a means to abolish slavery.¹⁷ Afro-Cubans constituted a large proportion of the rebel forces since many "former insurgents and slaves" joined the new movement, making the new insurgency "blacker" than the first.¹⁸ At the same time, many white separatists from the first war condemned the new rebellion, declaring that they opposed any "threat to liberty."¹⁹ Because it attracted

such a large proportion of Afro-Cubans, the *Guerra Chiquita* lacked the support of many white veterans who had fought in the Ten Years' War.

Spain utilized the insurgents' "blackness" to argue that the movement's goals were not to create a sovereign nation but to transform Cuba into a black republic - one whose very existence threatened Cuban society.²⁰ These fears played a part in the movement's leader Calixto García's decision to appoint a white leader instead of Maceo, who had previously led the rebel forces in Oriente province. The appointment of a white leader was a way not to "give credit to [Spanish] assumptions" that it was a race war.²¹ Nonetheless, the Spanish government sought to shape the composition of the rebellion by "remo[ving] the white element" from the rebellion and pressuring white leaders to surrender.²² In this way, the insurgency became more black and Spanish claims appeared more plausible.²³ Spanish propaganda divided insurgents by highlighting the fragmentation of the rebellion, and manipulated racial fears by depicting Afro-Cuban rebels as "men exempt from any sense of honor and humanity."²⁴ Afro-Cuban rebels were portrayed as criminals and murderers seeking to massacre whites and rape women.²⁵ Such claims brought racial fears to the forefront and prompted whites to reject the insurgency precisely because it was predominantly black.



Figure 1

(Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte)²⁶

To achieve political independence Cuba had to address the racial tensions that had divided her during the preceding independence movements. For this reason, the rhetoric of the raceless nation targeted the stereotypical depictions of Afro-Cubans used to create panic amongst white Cubans. For example, Spanish newspapers portrayed the typical insurgents as apes (Figure 1), suggesting that rebels were predominately black as well as primitive and uncivilized. These depictions of Afro-Cubans during the Ten Years' War exploited white fears of a race war, discouraging whites from joining the insurgency. In this way, the struggle for independence evoked the threat of Cuba becoming a black nation. A successful independence movement needed to refute claims of racial strife and articulate a new rhetoric that unified the island by advocating for the inclusion of all Cubans. Intellectuals, among them José Martí, emphasized that blacks were not a racial threat because they were "grateful recipients of white generosity."²⁷ The new rhetoric asserted that whites had redeemed themselves for enslaving blacks and that Afro-Cubans had overcome the legacy of this enslavement because "racial equality [was] the foundation of the new Cuban nation."²⁸ Claims such as "I am white, but before that... I am a Cuban who loves *la patria* [the motherland]" appeared in the Cuban newspaper *La Prensa*.²⁹ The rhetoric of the raceless nation argued that racial identity was not a crucial component of *Cubanidad*.³⁰ Rather, to highlight a particular racial group was unpatriotic because, according to José Martí, to be Cuban meant being "more than white, more than mulatto, more than Negro."³¹

Not only did Martí affirm that Cuba was a raceless nation, but he also articulated a vision for an independent Cuba, one in which Cuba would be free from Spanish political control and the United States' economic influence as well as free from racial discrimination. Martí's vision of a *Cuba Libre* united black and white Cubans against a common Spanish enemy. *Cuba Libre* came to mean not just independence, but also social justice and as well as a "means of redemption."³³ In this way, independence was described as "breaking the colonial chains" (Figure 2). The new rhetoric implied that Afro-Cubans had been oppressed in the same manner that the Cuban nation was subjugated to Spain. Political freedom meant both political liberty and an end to racial discrimination for all Cubans. The promise of freedom



Figure 2
(University of Miami Library)³²

appealed to blacks and many of the popular classes who joined the movement in the hopes of achieving these goals. Unity would be paramount in the Second War of Independence, which began on February 24, 1895. Its success hinged upon a successful island wide revolt. In the east, the insurrection quickly spread, meanwhile rebels targeted the western provinces where the previous revolts had failed.³⁴ By 1896, the Liberation Army advanced on Havana and threatened the survival of the planter class. The support from different sectors of Cuban society strengthened the nationalist movement allowing the Liberation Army to take control over much of the island.³⁵ By spring 1898, the rebels were on the verge of victory.

The United States Intervention

With victory in sight, the ideals of *Cuba Libre* loomed in the horizon. Aware that Spain was "too feeble to hold them," as an editorial cartoon in the *The Washington Post* declared in 1896, and not willing to allow the island to become sovereign, President William McKinley began negotiations with Spain to acquire the island.³⁶ However, Spain had no intention of transferring Cuba to the United States and it soon became clear that the island was in danger of falling into Afro-Cuban hands. There were two options: U.S. intervention or Cuban independence.³⁷

A free Cuba challenged American

economic and political interests; therefore, the U.S. administration sought ways to stall the Cuban triumph. According to U.S. officials, "Cuba was far too important to be turned over to the Cubans."³⁸ In March 1898, the U.S. minister to Spain declared that the insurgency was "confined almost entirely of negroes," then warned that Cuban independence would result in a "second Santo Domingo."³⁹ In April 1898, President McKinley requested permission from Congress to intervene and stop hostilities between Spain and Cuba.⁴⁰ The United States went to war in May and by December 1898, Spain had surrendered to the United States after ceding Cuba to U.S. troops.

The image of the Cuban rebel and of Cubans changed after the intervention, from the valiant oppressed insurgent to one "absolutely devoid of honor or gratitude."⁴¹ Before the intervention, newspapers and magazines in the U.S. portrayed Cuban insurgents as (typically white) heroes fighting against an oppressive Spain.⁴² In 1898, a Los Angeles newspaper *The Herald* described the Cuban insurgent as "the type of southern gentleman before the war- brave, courteous... proud of pure Spanish blood in their veins" and who was now growing "impatient of restraint, to gain the fullest freedom."⁴³ After the intervention, Cuban insurgents were described by U.S. military officers as "turbulent and illiterate negroes needing the government of a stronger race."⁴⁴ The well-known Afro-Cuban insurgent leader, Antonio Maceo, was described by *The Herald* as the "only one of the Cuban generals who had negro blood in his veins," but emphasized that he was "well educated and quite a scholar."⁴⁵ A new narrative of the Cuban independence wars was needed to justify continued U.S. occupation of the island, one that highlighted Cubans' inherent racial shortcomings.



Figure 3:
(Library of Congress)⁴⁶

Before the U.S. intervention, Cubans were depicted as honorable (white) men, and after, as ungrateful blacks who needed better qualified men to govern the island. In part, this was because insurgents were much darker than the U.S. had anticipated the U.S. sought ways to minimize their role in the war. Their ragged appearance and their support for *Cuba Libre* justified the marginalization of the Liberation Army's rank and file (Afro-Cuban) soldiers. The prevalent belief was that blacks were uncivilized barbarians who should not participate in, much less govern, Cuba. For this reason, the U.S. troops prevented rebel soldiers from entering Santiago after the surrender of the city, since they could not be trusted not to attack whites or to "plunder" and "pillage" the city.⁴⁷ The army was accused of not "[appearing even capable of helping themselves when others try to help them]" as well as of having a "native character" marked by "innate duplicity."⁴⁸ After the intervention, propaganda depicting Cuba as a white woman begging Uncle Sam to rescue her from the "famine," "war," and "revolt" disappeared (Figure 3). Instead, U.S. newspapers began to emphasize how Cuba's racial composition made it suitable for political independence.

Intervention was justified in terms of ensuring the triumph of *Cuba Libre*, whereas before it had been necessary as a way to stop the Spanish from oppressing Cubans. In this context, the U.S. occupation "became a selfless service for the cause of humanity," and Cuban insurgents should be grateful of the sacrifices made by the U.S. forces to liberate them.⁴⁹ Insurgent leaders received the occupation forces with "distrust and doubt" rather than the enthusiasm Americans had expected.⁵⁰ Stephen Crane remarked "The American soldier thinks of himself as a disinterested benefactor. . .he does not want to be thanked, and yet the total absence of anything like gratitude makes him furious."⁵¹ Cubans were portrayed as "shirkers and slackers" and the rebels as ungrateful for the help provided in securing independence, which Cubans had been unable to achieve on their own.⁵² The liberation movement was accused of "being possessed but with one idea- the idea that we [Americans] had come to Cuba to free them and to feed them. They had therefore, nothing else to do."⁵³ American soldiers asserted that a minority of rebel soldiers fought valiantly alongside the U.S. troops but that most Cuban insurgents "[did] as little fighting as they could."⁵⁴ The idea that

the U.S. had liberated Cuba was further proof that Americans should take control of the island. After all, to the victor belong the spoils.



Figure 4:

(Library of Congress)⁵⁵

Cuba's racial dynamics became a determining factor in the island's independence, since the U.S. perceived Cubans to be unable to protect U.S. interests. Afro-Cubans could not be trusted to govern the nation and protect U.S. interests, thus Cuba's sovereignty was not recognized by the U.S. administration after the Second War of Independence.⁵⁶ The U.S. first needed to pacify the island and second assure that the right Cubans were elected into office before they would leave. Cuba required saving not only from "Spanish misrule" but also from anarchy (Figure 4). This idea that Cuba needed protection from herself, particularly from its black population, from Spanish tyranny, and from bad government guided U.S. policies on the island. American authorities hoped to promote a political atmosphere in which real Cubans (white elite pro-American Cubans) would take leading roles in the new republic.⁵⁷ According to Governor General Leonard Wood, "only the 'ignorant masses,' the 'unruly rabble,' and 'trouble makers,'" advocated for independence and opposed intervention.⁵⁸ Real Cubans had not articulated their visions for the Cuban nation; when they did so, they would support American annexation.⁵⁹ The U.S. concluded that it was their duty to restrain the masses from participating in the government, ensuring that "real Cubans" could implement their vision for the nation.

U.S. officials supported white Cubans' position at the apex of the political hierarchy, which gave elite Cubans access to the structures of power. At the same time, the independence wars resulted in economic ruin for many planters in Cuba. The economic and political standing of

many Cubans was in the hands of U.S. officials and Cubans of the "better classes" were in no position to advocate for Afro-Cuban interests.⁶⁰ U.S. policies benefited Cuban elites politically and economically; therefore, elite Cubans who may have advocated for Afro-Cubans' interests did not do so. It was not in the best interest for white Cubans to support Afro-Cubans' demands for racial equality or to support the ideals of the raceless nation.⁶¹

Undermining the Raceless Nation

The independence wars did not culminate in an "independent, socially egalitarian, and racially inclusive" Cuba as many Cubans had hoped.⁶² Instead, members of the Liberation Army were dismissed with only seventy-five pesos to travel back to their homes, and whites who had supported the Spanish government continued to be employed in the same positions they had occupied prior to independence. After the war, some Afro-Cubans accused white elites of "[taking] over the business, factories, and public jobs, that [blacks] had just brought to independence."⁶³ Afro-Cubans insinuated that they had the right to these positions because they had taken arms in the name of racial equality. U.S. interests were also protected by giving property rights to foreigners.⁶⁴ The military government implemented discriminatory policies targeting Afro-Cubans at a time when they had the opportunity to attack the racial inequalities inherent in post-independence Cuba.⁶⁵

The American occupation undermined the ideals of the raceless nation by favoring white Cubans in employment and politics. U.S. policies openly discriminated against Afro-Cubans, and the most prestigious jobs were closed to non-whites.⁶⁶ For example, only 7 percent of jobs in central, provincial and municipal administrations were given to Afro-Cubans. Likewise, of the 8,238 policemen registered 21 percent were Afro-Cuban, of 5,964 teachers, 439 were Afro-Cuban and of 205 government officials, 9 were Afro-Cuban.⁶⁷ Blacks also faced discrimination by the adoption of suffrage laws requiring voters be literate, own property worth \$250 or more, or have served in the Liberation Army. As a result, only 19 percent of Afro-Cuban males voted in 1901 despite making up 37 percent of the male citizens.⁶⁸ Secretary of War Elihu Root explained that the suffrage laws were to exclude the "mass of ignorant and incompetent" so that a "conservative and thoughtful control of Cuba by Cubans" may

be promoted. Candidates running for the municipal elections that had been endorsed by the U.S. were not elected, which was seen as a demonstration of Cubans' flawed judgement in that they could not be trusted to choose "the best men."⁶⁹

Cuban cultural traditions were also under U.S. scrutiny during the intervention and occupation of the island. Cultural expressions, particularly Afro-Cuban traditions that appeared "barbaric or uncivilized" such as cockfighting or dancing *el danzón*, attested to the "characteristic" and "degenerate" nature of Afro-Cuban culture.⁷¹ Suppressing Cuban cultural practices that appeared backward were necessary so that the military government would deem that Cubans were educated, modern "citizens" who were also "deserving of their own government."⁷² This understanding of civilized behavior vilified Afro-Cuban cultural expressions. Cubans were depicted in newspapers as black children forced to abandon their uncivilized ways (Figure 5 shows how Americans imposed modernization through the forceful disinfected of the nation). Those who engaged in these primitive behaviors risked showing the occupation forces that Cuba was not ready to take her place among other modern nations. Thus, Cuban elites utilized the U.S. fear of a separate Afro-Cuban movement to curb their demands for the implementation of the rights implicit in the ideals of the raceless nation.



IF GENERAL WOOD IS UNPOPULAR WITH CUBA, WE CAN GUESS THE REASON. —The Minneapolis Tribune.

Figure 5

(cited in Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share*)⁷⁰

Dissatisfaction was high among Afro-Cubans, especially among those who had fought in the war. Participation

in the liberation movement had given Afro-Cubans new expectations derived from the rhetoric of the raceless nation and *Cuba Libre*.⁷³ The expectations were unrealized but Afro-Cubans were unwilling to demand their rights because to do so would result in accusations of undermining the ideals the raceless nation. There was little improvement in education or job opportunities for Afro-Cubans after independence. Only 26 percent of Afro-Cubans over the age of 10 could read in 1899, as opposed to 44 percent of whites.⁷⁴ Some teachers prevented Afro-Cubans from entering their classrooms despite official integration of the educational system and universities did not allow black students to enroll.⁷⁵ Darker-skinned Cubans lacked the educational foundation to participate in more prestigious or remunerative occupations. These inequalities were evident in that, for example, the same percent of Afro-Cuban women worked in low-skilled jobs such as laundresses, servants, peasants, and dressmakers in 1907 as in 1899.⁷⁶ Discontent increased amongst Afro-Cubans over the discrepancy between the claims of the raceless nation and reality. Cuban elites were oblivious to the plight of Afro-Cubans and used the U.S. occupation as a way to silence their protests against the inequalities that persisted after independence. Afro-Cubans who lost their jobs embraced the white-led rebellion that occurred as a result of the Moderate party's antics in 1906.⁷⁷ By September 1906, as many as 25,000 Afro-Cuban veterans had joined the Liberal's movement, known as the August Revolution, in trying to overthrow the Moderate party from power.⁷⁸

The August Revolution prompted the second U.S. intervention (1906-1909). American journals and magazines portrayed blacks in the insurgency as a threat to the future of the nation. In 1906, the *Minneapolis Journal* declared that the rebellion was made up of men "whose trade is revolution. Stable government does not satisfy them" and therefore "the preservation of Cuban independence even if a temporary occupation of the island by American troops is necessary."⁷⁹ The *Washington Times* suggested that insurgency was unavoidable since "patriots denied there was any danger of a race question" but "secretly they realized an impending evil, an inexplicable danger from the black man."⁸⁰ It also warned that the "black man" entering the capital "in a startling military uniform of his own creation, lacking only the white plumes to give him

the appearance of a Haitian general" was out to "overwhelm the pure white race."⁸¹ The specter of the threatening Afro-Cuban, and the prospect of a black republic was once again brought forth to instill fear in white Cubans. Moreover, the threat posed by Afro-Cubans also justified a second intervention, since the Platt Amendment gave the U.S. rights to intervene to protect U.S. property and businesses. To quiet the masses, the provisional government gave white veterans public jobs and General José Miguel Gómez promised that Afro-Cubans would be favored if he were elected president.⁸²

It was clear by 1906 that the Liberal party would not fulfil their promises to Afro-Cubans. The idea of a black party advocating for Afro-Cuban representation gained momentum by 1907, since Liberals had "betrayed" Afro-Cubans during the second intervention by failing to recommend blacks for public jobs as they had promised, and by telling U.S. officials that Afro-Cubans were "extreme radicals."⁸³ Afro-Cubans turned their attention to gaining access to public jobs through the creation of a black political party. This resulted in Evaristo Estenoz and Gregorio Surín forming the *Partido Independiente de Color*, or Independent Party of Color (PIC) on August 7, 1908. Although the PIC demanded equal political rights for blacks and their integration into society, it also appealed to mulattos and a small segment of whites.⁸⁴ In an effort to quell whites' anxiety over black mobilization, *Previsión*, the party's newspaper, addressed the most common fears – the creation of another Haiti, and the depiction of Afro-Cubans as uncivilized.⁸⁵ *Previsión* refuted the claims that Afro-Cubans were attempting to construct a black republic by highlighting the need for a black party. According to the party platform, blacks needed representation because Cuba was discriminating against blacks in the same way the United States did.⁸⁶ The PIC asserted that political parties attempted to "[discredit] the black masses" by depicting Afro-Cubans as uncivilized in the eyes of the provisional government.⁸⁷ They also insisted that Afro-Cuban stigmatization was meant to serve as encouragement for anti-black policies from the U.S. provisional government.⁸⁸

Independientes (PIC supporters), promoted a positive Afro-Cuban racial consciousness by encouraging black pride. While this did not directly challenge the rhetoric of the raceless nation, it did encourage blacks to

celebrate cultural and political expressions that were exclusively Afro-Cuban.⁸⁹ The PIC modified Martí's raceless nation by going beyond the idea that the island was "for whites and blacks" and claiming that to be Cuban could also mean being black.⁹⁰ Letters written to *Previsión* thanked Estenoz for creating a newspaper solely for Afro-Cubans, something that was "ours, without mixing or blending with foreign bodies," while other letters claimed it was "time that you show what you are as a black and Cuban woman."⁹¹ For these Afro-Cubans, *Cubanidad* meant taking pride in being black and taking part in the republic as a Cuban citizen who had earned equal rights.

The PIC also renounced claims that Cuba had achieved racial equality after the wars of independence as a way to attract supporters and defend the party's goals and demands. The Party's newspaper challenged the depiction of the "typical" Cuban (represented by the cartoon character Liborio) by creating a black cartoon character (José Rosario) who refuted the claims of Liborio.⁹² José Rosario described how Liborio betrayed the pact the two had sworn when Liborio, out of fear of the other man, allied with the United States at the end of the war.⁹³ The cartoon illustrated how white Cubans betrayed the promises made during the independence wars and how as a result racial equality did not exist after independence. Therefore, Afro-Cubans had the right to mobilize and assert their interests through the PIC.

Afro-Cuban participation in the August Revolution, combined with the PIC demands for equal rights for Afro-Cubans threatened the political equilibrium on the island. Cuban elites responded to this danger by adopting a series of measures to undermine Afro-Cuban mobilization, which included labeling the PIC a racist movement.⁹⁴ They spread rumors that the Partido Independiente de Color was anti-white, anti-Cuban, and unpatriotic as a way to undermine the party.⁹⁵ The PIC was a threat to the ideals of the raceless nation because it advocated for the interest of a single racial group. A Cuban pamphlet described the August Revolution as having been started by the "butchers of Africa" who hoped to take revenge on whites.⁹⁶ Afro-Cubans were accused in *The Washington Post* of "[looking] upon the white man as his natural enemy."⁹⁷ Based on these accusations the Liberal party drafted a proposal in congress to disband the PIC on the grounds that it was racist. The Morúa

Amendment argued that the PIC promoted the interests of Afro-Cubans and that it marginalized whites. Nonetheless, Estenoz continued to refute allegations by claiming to be driven by "concern for peace and equality" for all Cubans.⁹⁸

The Cuban government accused PIC members of organizing against whites in an effort to disband the party and to weaken their support. Yet, no substantial proof was presented in the trials of PIC members in 1910 and the witnesses questioned did not admit to hearing any conspiracies against white Cubans.⁹⁹ The threat of black mobilization led by the PIC served several purposes, one of which was to create alarm in Washington and subsequently prompt another U.S. intervention.¹⁰⁰ Some Cubans privately complained to U.S. officials about the ineffectiveness of the Cuban government and warned of possible threats to U.S. interests on the island.¹⁰¹ Such threats to American property obligated the Cuban government to take action or risk another intervention.¹⁰²

Cuban newspapers played a crucial role in how the PIC was perceived by other Cubans and the United States. Panic spread across the island in 1910 as newspapers depicted rural towns and white women as susceptible to "warlike mobilization" by both the PIC and Afro-Cubans.¹⁰³ Newspapers printed stories in which dangerous blacks roamed the countryside targeting whites, much like the Spanish had depicted the black rebel insurgents during the Ten Years' War. By 1912, headlines such as "The Racist Revolution" and the "Racist Uprising" were being printed by major newspapers on the island.¹⁰⁴ This state of panic gave the government the opportunity to mobilize popular opinion against the Partido Independiente de Color and to discredit Afro-Cuban demands for positions in the government. The government targeted the party and used racial stereotypes to instill greater fear in the population, expediting whites' fear of a black-led rebellion.¹⁰⁵ At the same time, U.S. newspapers warned that "Cuba [was] still on trial before the world...If it convicts itself of incapacity for self-rule once more and compels against its fate hereafter should independence be finally be taken away from it."¹⁰⁶ The exaggerated stories printed by the press swayed public opinion against the PIC, whereas in the U.S. the PIC and claims of a race war were tantamount to Cuba's inability to maintain a stable government without foreign intervention.

The Cuban government adopted a three-step strategy to undermine the PIC and Afro-Cuban demands for greater political participation. The provincial governors in Cuba were directed to question *independientes* partaking in any "unusual movements."¹⁰⁷ In April 1912, the government dispatched troops to Santa Clara and Oriente because these provinces were allegedly at higher risk of rebellion.¹⁰⁸ Afro-Cubans suspected of being PIC members were arrested at the end of April and beginning of May.¹⁰⁹ These actions gave credence to the rumors circulating of blacks attacking whites and heightened whites' fears. Meanwhile, newspapers claimed that Cuba was becoming a black nation.

The party remained outlawed despite *independientes'* efforts to revoke the Morúa Amendment in time for the November 1912 elections.¹¹⁰ *Independientes* warned that they would take action if the Cuban Congress or the United States did not recognize the PIC by April 22, 1912.¹¹¹ In the last weeks of May, PIC supporters threatened foreign interests on the island, and on May 31 and June 1 they protested by burning buildings.¹¹² Newspapers claimed *independientes'* actions were part of a race war allegedly carried out by the PIC. According to the Cuban newspaper *El Día*, it was "an uprising of blacks, in other words, an enormous danger and a common danger" that would result in "*the free and beautiful America defending herself against a clawing scratch from Africa.*"¹¹³ The protest preyed upon preconceived racial fears of blacks as barbarians whose goal was to control the island. Fear of another Haitian Revolution, this time in Cuba, also gave credence to claims that the PIC's armed protest was in fact a race war.¹¹⁴ Some American newspapers even claimed that Haitians and Jamaicans were active participants in the armed protest, basing their allegations on the foreign sounding names of some PIC leaders.¹¹⁵ Newspapers in the U.S. described Evaristo Estenoz as "the same vainglorious negro" who had led the earlier insurrection and whose followers were "extorting tribute from peaceful merchants and traders."¹¹⁶ The PIC was denounced as racist by Cuban and American newspapers for taking action and demanding that the ideals of the raceless nation be implemented.

Many of the troops dispatched to Oriente in response to the fear spreading across the island were white.¹¹⁷ The Cuban

government encouraged the formation of voluntary militias (*voluntarios*), who along with the Army, persecuted Afro-Cubans in Oriente, and often “[did not] respect at all the people of color and threaten them insolently without thinking of the serious conflict that their behavior could produce.”¹¹⁸ Afro-Cubans with no affiliation to the PIC were targeted because of their skin color when *voluntarios*, the Cuban army, and U.S. officials did not distinguish between Afro-Cubans and *independientes*.¹¹⁹ Such an incident occurred in May 31 when General Carlos Mendieta attacked a group of Afro-Cubans living in La Maya, killing 150 Cuban peasants with no ties to the PIC.¹²⁰ *Independientes* burned houses, the post office and the railway station in La Maya in reprisal.¹²¹ Rumors spread that PIC supporters had burned down the entire area and repression against all blacks increased.¹²²

Rumors of black mobilization and the possibility that Afro-Cubans might attack U.S. property reached the American government in June.¹²³ Approximately 1,000 Marines were sent to protect U.S. property and mines, and three more warships joined the three ships already anchored in Santiago and Guantánamo to protect railroads and foreign property.¹²⁴ The presence of U.S. military personnel contributed to the violence that spread across the region by allowing *voluntarios* and the Army to focus on repressing the PIC members, rather than protecting U.S. lives and property.¹²⁵ It also pressured the Cuban government to take additional measures asserting control of the situation. This was necessary to ensure another intervention would not occur. Greater repression against Afro-Cubans was justified because of the perceived threat to U.S. lives and property.¹²⁶ A New York newspaper, *The Sun*, for example, stated “if the young republic does not rapidly put down the negro insurrection... and demonstrates that the lives and property of Americans and other foreigners are safe throughout the island, Uncle Sam will do it for her.”¹²⁷ The possibility of Afro-Cuban mobilization justified the U.S. involvement and served as an opportunity for the Cuban government to eliminate the PIC.

Newspapers in the U.S. had assured readers that no intervention was forthcoming “unless a state of anarchy is threatened” on the island.¹²⁸ By June, rumors of blacks threatening property and “sugar mills... flaming in eastern Cuba” ran rampant in the U.S. and Cuba.¹²⁹ Yet, some newspapers

warned that many of the stories in the Cuban press were over-exaggerated. The *Nation* denied that the uprising was racially motivated, instead affirming that it was “mainly political, the negroes desiring to form a party of their own, and to run an independent candidate for the presidency.” Blacks were “persuaded” to protest because they have “not been sufficiently considered in the distribution of offices.”¹³⁰ The newspaper also informed readers that the uprising was led by Haitian and Jamaican immigrant workers taking advantage of labor shortages on the island.¹³¹

Military personnel in Cuba believed all Afro-Cubans to be potential PIC supporters.¹³² For this reason, Afro-Cubans were treated without mercy regardless of whether there was proof of their affiliations with *independientes*.¹³³ The U.S. consul admitted that in Santiago “many innocent and defenseless negroes in the country [were] being butchered.”¹³⁴ Moreover, the French consul accused *voluntarios* and the Cuban army of arbitrarily killing blacks not because they were suspects but because “they want a war. They want targets,” and they will massacre “poor very peaceful wretches whose only crime will be not being born white.”¹³⁵ Newspapers described corpses being left in the open and rebels being “bound hand and foot and tied together with a big rope” before being taken by the police.¹³⁶ In response to the brutality, PIC supporters attempted to garner U.S. support by contacting officials and denouncing the slaughter of innocent Afro-Cubans. For example, Evaristo Estenoz demanded that the U.S. send representatives to the region who could directly report the atrocities committed by the Cuban army against innocent people of color.¹³⁷ His message was ignored by the U.S., despite the protection of “property, life and liberty” guaranteed by the Platt Amendment.

The Cuban government augmented the fear of blacks and slaughtered innocent Afro-Cubans. *The New York Times* stated that on July 2, 1912 a “special cable” was sent to the newspaper assuring Americans that “the negro uprising [was] definitely put down” and guaranteeing that the rural guards and guerillas would continue to seek insurgents until the “last rebel hiding in the mountains was either captured or killed.”¹³⁸ Any Afro-Cuban could be accused of being a “rebel” because it was difficult to distinguish between PIC members and innocent Afro-Cubans. Leaders of the rebellion, amongst them Estenoz, and

Pedro Ivonnet, were killed for allegedly attempting to escape arrest.¹³⁹ Other blacks were accused of “conspiring against the republic” and were transported to Havana for trial.¹⁴⁰ Approximately 5,000 to 6,000 rebels were killed in 1912, although reliable numbers are not available. In contrast, a total of 16 members of the Cuban armed forces were killed.¹⁴¹ Thousands of Afro-Cubans were murdered during the 1912 Race War for claiming the rights they were entitled to in the raceless nation.

Most people on the island were aware of the atrocities committed against Afro-Cubans in 1912, yet did nothing to stop innocent blacks from being targeted.¹⁴² For many Cubans, the indiscriminate killings and repression against blacks were far removed events that did not affect their everyday life. Some U.S. citizens living in Cuba were not only aware of the repression, but also approved of the repressive tactics used. A U.S. citizen in Oriente declared that “the army and the volunteers have lopped the heads of probably some six thousand negroes in the province and the rest as whole have had the fear of God drilled into their souls. I believe the remedy was necessary and effective.”¹⁴³ While another admitted that “some innocent heads may have fallen, in the main there have been few sacrificed at a loss to the country-and the effect has been salutary.”¹⁴⁴ Newspapers criticized the Cuban government’s use of the rebellion to further political goals, but none objected to the massacre of Afro-Cubans.¹⁴⁵

The U.S. administration also received reports from the consul in Santiago describing the events that occurred in the region. Descriptions of the “race war” sent by the U.S. consul communicated that Afro-Cubans were being targeted because of their skin color and not because they were mobilizing against whites.¹⁴⁶ The problem of the *independientes* was best solved by the death of PIC leaders and their supporters, despite the U.S. consul acknowledging that PIC goals were not to “take up arms against the government” but “to secure a redress of their grievances or repeal of the Morúa Law through concerted action in demonstration of revolutionary character.”¹⁴⁷ *The Day Book* commented in regard to the 1912 rebellion that “Cuba’s got to be a conservative republic even if we have to shoot her full of radial holes.”¹⁴⁸ Newspapers and magazines in the U.S. and Cuba openly discussed the atrocities committed against Afro-Cubans

establishing that the U.S. government was aware of the repression occurring in the island.

Cubans had come together to fight for a raceless nation, but were divided by the policies implemented after independence. The U.S. occupation and intervention failed to bring about the implementation of *Cuba Libre*. Afro-Cubans, acting upon the rights presumably they had earned during the liberation movement, protested their lack of political rights. Having risen up in armed rebellion, they made themselves vulnerable to racial accusations. The fear of blacks attacking whites was augmented by political pressure from the U.S., who threatened another intervention to ensure the protection of foreign property. White Cubans, urged by self-interest, further increased fear of blacks in 1912 to justify the repression of a black-only political party. This allowed them to eliminate political competition and to undermine Afro-Cuban demands to positions of power.

Racial Inequality and the U.S. Intervention

The elite eastern planters who led the Ten Years' War in 1868 promised slaves equality and insinuated that they would be emancipated if they took up arms in support of a free Cuba. Afro-Cubans who fought in the Ten Years' War adopted the claim that Cubans were equal, regardless of race, to demand emancipation as one of the movement's goals. Although vaguely promised, the prospect of eventual emancipation drew large numbers of Afro-Cubans into the Liberation Army, giving rise to the perception that the insurgency was predominantly black. Anxiety over blacks taking part in an armed protest, particularly in western regions of the island where a large percent of the work force was enslaved, spread amongst white Cubans. The Spanish government was able to utilize the fear of a black republic and the threat posed by Afro-Cubans to undermine the rebels' objectives. Division amongst black and white insurgents resulted in negotiations with Spain in 1878 to end the war, but Afro-Cubans in the eastern regions continued to fight for *Cuba Libre*. Dissatisfied patriots from the Ten Years' War also led a new rebellion in 1879. Afro-Cuban participation in the *Guerra Chiquita* surpassed that of whites, since many white veterans failed to support the Little War. Therefore, the insurgency was blacker than the Ten Years' War, which

allowed the Spanish government to portray it as a threat to Cuban society and to the entire nation. This made it possible for the Spanish government to suppress the insurgency in less than a year.

Independence leaders fashioned a new image for black insurgents prior to the outbreak of the Second War of Independence in 1895. Afro-Cubans were portrayed as submissive and beholden to whites for granting them their freedom. In formulating the concept of the raceless nation, Cuban independence leaders were counteracting the racial tensions exploited by the Spanish government in the Ten Years' War by reassuring white Cubans that blacks posed no threat. According to José Martí, racial integration had been achieved in the Ten Years' War when blacks and whites, fighting together, had died for Cuban independence. By 1898, many sectors of society supported the ideal that Cubans, regardless of their racial or social class, could cooperate with one another to create a nation free of foreign influence and racial injustice.

This rhetoric alarmed the U.S. and the Cuban planter class because the implementation of *Cuba Libre* threatened Cuban elites as well as U.S. hegemony. Therefore, the United States followed the near triumph of the liberation movement in Cuba with alarm. Spain's inability to control the insurgency, her refusal to allow the U.S. to purchase Cuba, and the imminent triumph of *Cuba Libre* left the U.S. administration with two choices: intervention or independence. However, American involvement needed to be justified. Intervention was deemed necessary so that Americans could aid the unjustly oppressed (white) Cubans.

The racial composition of the Liberation Army was not what the U.S. forces had expected. American soldiers were confronted by ragged Afro-Cuban insurgents, rather than the army of white Cubans they had imagined. Afro-Cubans were deemed incapable or unable of governing an independent Cuba, necessitating the construction of a new narrative – the ungrateful and incompetent Cuban soldier incapable of achieving independence without outside assistance. Cubans were no longer depicted as heroic men and women, but as lazy blacks devoid of honor and incapable of self-government. Their racial identity was linked to American preconceptions of African-Americans. The racialized portrayal of Cubans allowed

the U.S. administration to discredit the independence movement since a large proportion of the rebels were black. Afro-Cuban rebels would not be allowed to take control of the island and Cubans, who were backwards, uncivilized and whose blood was intermixed with blacks, needed U.S. help in governing the nation.

Policies implemented by the U.S. military government assisted white Cubans in securing political power and ensured that Afro-Cubans were denied positions of power. Suffrage laws, Afro-Cuban cultural repression, and U.S. endorsement of white Cubans safeguarded the social hierarchy the raceless nation claimed to have been fighting against. Afro-Cuban cultural traditions, deemed too uncivilized for modern times, were also dismissed as unpatriotic. The Second War of Independence did not culminate in a nation free from racial segregation or foreign interest. Instead, racial inequalities persisted in educational and job opportunities. Frustrations increased at the lack of opportunities for Afro-Cubans who had fought in the liberation movement, yet had earned few rights after independence. In 1905, Afro-Cubans joined whites in the August Revolution, protesting the loss of public jobs and political power at the hand of the Moderate party. This new insurgency triggered the second U.S. intervention from 1906 to 1909. U.S. newspapers described the revolution as a race war and Afro-Cubans as threats to the island. Once again, blacks were depicted as a menace to the nation and as standing in the way of progress.

It was clear by 1905 that Afro-Cubans would not be awarded the rights the independence movement claimed they had achieved, despite claims asserting otherwise. Therefore, they formed the Partido Independiente de Color (PIC) as a way to organize and demanded improved educational opportunities for Afro-Cubans and better access to jobs in the government - rights the raceless nation declared they had earned. Rumors spread across the island that the movement was racist and unpatriotic since it attempted to divide Cubans by skin color. Newspapers accused PIC supporters of mobilizing against whites, and the Cuban government outlawed the party on the basis that it was racist. The party remained outlawed despite *independientes'* efforts to revoke the Morúa Law. As a result, PIC supporters gave the Cuban government until April 22, 1912 to allow the PIC to participate in politics

on the island. *Independientes* threatened U.S. interests in Cuba and burned several buildings when their ultimatum was ignored, which led to newspapers accusing blacks of commencing a race war targeting whites. The Cuban government, acting upon the fear of black insurgents running through the countryside assaulting whites, dispatched troops to Oriente. Violence against blacks escalated from then on, since the Cuban army and *voluntarios* treated all Afro-Cubans as potential PIC supporters.

Rumors and allegations of blacks targeting foreign property reached the U.S. in June, resulting in the dispatch of the Marines to ensure American economic interests were protected. The presence of American forces in Cuba pressured the Cuban administration to take more drastic measures. For this reason, the repression of the Afro-Cuban revolt was crucial to expedite the U.S. departure from the island. Intervention and the threat of a third occupation triggered even more repression towards Afro-Cubans. What commenced as the Liberal party's plan to impede blacks from participating in Cuban politics culminated in U.S. involvement. The repression against Afro-Cubans and the allegations against blacks, which were manipulated by the Cuban authorities to undermine the PIC's claim to positions of power, concerned Americans. Thus, the suppression of Afro-Cuban demands acquired new meaning during 1912 since Cuba now had to assure Americans that it could effectively repress the rebellion.

Afro-Cubans were killed as American military personnel stood by protecting U.S. interests. U.S. officials were aware of the indiscriminate killings of Afro-Cubans, but they concluded that the simplest method of resolving the political and social tensions was to allow events to run their course. Therefore, the U.S. did not condemn the brutal massacre of approximately 5,000 to 6,000 Afro-Cubans. Blacks could not criticize the death of Afro-Cubans for fear that they too would be targeted because they had little political support from the government and were excluded from positions of power. When Afro-Cubans protested their lack of rights, they were depicted as unpatriotic. Cuban elites had government support as well as foreign aid, allowing them to subdue the black insurgency they claimed threatened Cubans. At the same time, white Cubans' access to power was protected by U.S. support. Elite whites ensured darker-skin Cubans remained subjugated both by

accusing them of racial discrimination and by depicting blacks as a threat to the raceless nation.

The United States intervention provided elite Cubans with the opportunity to undermine the ideals of the raceless nation and *Cuba Libre* by adopting U.S. racial rhetoric to marginalize Afro-Cubans. White Cubans could argue that Afro-Cubans should silence their demands for the sake of not extending the U.S. intervention. They also prevented Afro-Cubans and lower-class Cubans from taking positions of power as a way to forestall the implementation of Martí's vision for Cuba. Anyone who subscribed to the notion of the raceless nation was a potential threat to U.S. interests and the elite planter class. For this reason, Afro-Cubans were marginalized and their demands for equality undermined. The U.S. intervention provided Cuban elites with the opportunity to solidify their position at the top of the political hierarchy. Black marginalization contributed to the claim that Cubans were not worthy of independence because they had not fought to liberate their own nation. Afro-Cubans had sacrificed little for their nation, so it was not their place to demand rights. Rather, U.S. forces alone had fought and died to give Cuba its independence. This justified the United States' efforts to undermine the ideals of the raceless nation and *Cuba Libre*; after all, to the victor belong the spoils.

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