

MYTHS OF RACIAL DEMOCRACY: Cuba, 1900–1912*

Alejandro de la Fuente
University of South Florida

Abstract: This article reviews the recent literature on the so-called myths of racial democracy in Latin America and challenges current critical interpretations of the social effects of these ideologies. Typically, critics stress the elitist nature of these ideologies, their demobilizing effects among racially subordinate groups, and the role they play in legitimizing the subordination of such groups. Using the establishment of the Cuban republic as a test case, this article contends that the critical approach tends to minimize or ignore altogether the opportunities that these ideologies have created for those below, the capacity of subordinate groups to use the nation-state's cultural project to their own advantage, and the fact that these social myths also restrain the political options of their own creators.

In a very real sense, nothing
can be more real than the unreal.

Ashley Montagu, *Race, Science, and Humanity*

Brazilian sociologist Florestan Fernandes called it “prejudice against prejudice”; U.S. sociologist Thomas Lynn Smith described it as “a veritable cult.” Both were referring to what has come to be known as the Brazilian myth of racial democracy.¹

In its simplest formulation, the “myth” is that all Brazilians, regardless of “race,” enjoy equal opportunities and live in a racially harmonious society. It could not be otherwise, according to the myth, because Brazil’s strength and greatness reside in the widespread racial mixture of its popu-

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1. Florestan Fernandes, *A integração do negro na sociedade de classes* (São Paulo: Dominus, 1965), 2:293; and T. Lynn Smith, *Brazil: People and Institutions* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963), 66.

lation. It therefore makes no sense to talk about blacks and whites in a country in which most citizens are some of both. "Race" in Brazilian society is constructed along a continuum moving from "black" to "white," based on phenotypical features (skin color, type of hair, facial features) and on social factors like education and financial status. Several centuries of intimate contact and miscegenation, biological and cultural, have created a new hybrid race that is authentically Brazilian.²

The notoriety of the Brazilian case has been guaranteed by the brilliance of its myth makers, foremost among them Gilberto Freyre. But it has also been sustained by two fundamental facts: no other country in the hemisphere has a numerically larger population of African descent; and no other country enslaved its black population as late as Brazil did, until 1888. A hegemonic ideology advocating some form of racial fraternity is remarkable in a country like Brazil but hardly unique. Since the late nineteenth century, particularly during the 1920s and 1930s, intellectual elites in numerous Latin American countries have articulated racial ideologies that were similar in purpose and content to the Brazilian myth. *Mestizaje* was exalted as the true American essence, a synthesis that incorporated (allegedly on equal terms) the best cultural and physical traits that the various ethnic and racial groups populating the Americas had to offer.³

Forced to cope with the troubling aspects of a North Atlantic ideology that flatly advocated the inferiority of non-Anglo-Saxon peoples and the deleterious effects of racial mixing, the elites in Latin America had to reach a compromise that would allow them to reconcile the goal of modernity with the undeniably mixed nature of their populations. During this search, the mestizo was invented as a national symbol. The result was an

2. The Brazilian ideology of racial democracy was popularized by Brazilian sociologist Gilberto Freyre, whose major works are available in English: *The Masters and the Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization* (New York: Knopf, 1946); *The Mansions and the Shanties: The Making of Modern Brazil* (New York: Knopf, 1963); and *Order and Progress: Brazil from Monarchy to Republic* (New York: Knopf, 1970). For a discussion of Brazilian racial ideologies, see Thomas Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought*, 2d ed. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993); Skidmore, "The Essay: Architects of Brazilian National Identity," in *The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature*, edited by Roberto González Echevarría and Enrique Pupo-Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3: 345–62; and Emília Viotti da Costa, "The Myth of Racial Democracy, A Legacy of the Empire," in *The Brazilian Empire: Myths and Histories* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 234–48. On Freyre, see Jeffrey D. Needell, "Identity, Race, Gender, and Modernity in the Origins of Gilberto Freyre's *Oeuvre*," *American Historical Review*, no. 100 (Feb. 1995), 51–77.

3. Magnus Mörner, *Race Mixture in the History of Latin America* (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1967); *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870–1940*, 2d ed., edited by Richard Graham (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992); Winthrop R. Wright, *Café con Leche: Race, Class, and National Image in Venezuela* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993); and Peter Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture: The Dynamics of Racial Identity in Colombia* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

ideological formulation that broke with the past while upholding it. The discourse on *mestizaje* remained prisoner of the same canon that scientific racism proclaimed as incontrovertible truths—the essentialness of race—but the discourse revolutionized social thinking by minimizing the other central tenet of the hegemonic racial gospel: biological determinism.⁴ Although race was still associated with ascribed characteristics as immutable and overpowering as those championed by genetically based racism, the emphasis was shifted to geographical, cultural, and historical factors.⁵ This is no small distinction. By placing social factors at the core of their ideological constructions, Latin American intellectuals were openly contesting the notion that their countries were doomed to failure and perpetual backwardness, while asserting (however implicitly) that social transformation was the way to reach modernity. They thus had fabricated a way out of the ideological iron cast that the North Atlantic world had manufactured by means of its high science, universities, and royal societies.

But the escape was only partial. While contesting or just ignoring the idea that racial miscegenation meant degeneration, Latin American thinkers accepted the premise that ample sectors of their populations were basically inferior and that their human stock needed to be “improved.” Such inferiority was to be explained in terms of culture, geography, or climate rather than pure genetics, but the dominant vision still presented the lighter end of the spectrum as the ideal and denigrated the darker end as primitive and uncivilized. In this formulation, whiteness still represented progress. Miscegenation was perceived as the way to “regenerate” a population unfit to perform the duties associated with a modern polity, with white immigration serving as a precondition for progress. The idea that regeneration was possible at all subverted biological determinism, but the expressed need for regeneration presupposed acceptance of the idea that “race” explained the “backwardness” of Latin American societies. Whiteness became the way to remove a surmountable, albeit formidable, obstacle on the road to modernity.⁶

4. For studies of the dominant ideas about race in the North Atlantic world, see William H. Tucker, *The Science and Politics of Racial Research* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Allan Chase, *The Legacy of Malthus: The Social Costs of the New Scientific Racism* (New York: Knopf, 1977); Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); and Elazar Barkan, *The Retreat of Scientific Racism: Changing Concepts of Race in Britain and the United States between the World Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

5. This process has been studied with great nuance by Allan Knight in “Racism, Revolution, and *Indigenismo*: Mexico, 1910–1940,” in Graham’s *The Idea of Race*, 71–113. See also Skidmore, “Racial Ideas and Social Policy in Brazil, 1870–1940,” in Graham, *The Idea of Race*, 7–36; Nancy L. Stepan, “*The Hour of Eugenics*”: *Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991); and Wade, *Blackness and Race*, 10–12.

6. On the ideal of “whitening” and the migration movement that it prompted, see Skidmore, *Black into White*, 64–69, 124–44; George Reid Andrews, *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo*,

These ideologies were created as part of Latin American nation-states' efforts to create culturally homogenous societies. Driving these efforts was the need to incorporate different regions and population groups into a single national project based on a "modern," export-oriented economy. But the process itself was contradictory: the incorporation of subordinate ethnic or racial groups into national life as salaried workers helped to reproduce the same identities that the national projects sought to erase. As John Comaroff has contended, "ethnicity has its origins in the asymmetric incorporation of structurally dissimilar groupings into a single political economy."⁷ The export-based economies of Latin America of the era before the depression did little to erase such asymmetries. Rather, race and ethnicity continued to play a central role in forming and reproducing class structures across the region.

The contradictions between these inclusive projects of cultural homogenization and the social realities of exclusion and discrimination experienced by blacks and other subordinate groups have led recent scholarship to develop a critique demolishing the so-called myths of racial democracy. Critics of this persuasion have stressed the elitist nature of these ideologies, their demobilizing effects among racially subordinate groups, and the role they play in legitimizing the subordination of those groups. This article contends instead that the critical approach has been too reductionist and has tended to minimize or ignore altogether the social and political opportunities that these ideologies have created for those below. By stressing the elitist nature of the myths of racial democracy, their critics have ignored the capacity of subordinate groups to appropriate and manipulate the nation-state's cultural project to their own advantage. Critics have also ignored the fact that once these social myths are created and accepted, they restrain considerably the political options of their own creators.

After a short discussion of the critical arguments, the second part of this article will reexamine the role played by these ideologies by using the early years of the Cuban republic as a test case. My discussion of this liter-

Brazil, 1888–1988 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 54–89; Wright, *Café con Leche*, 43–68; and Consuelo Naranjo Orovio and Armando García González, *Racismo e inmigración en Cuba en el siglo XIX* (Madrid: Doce Calles, 1996). The extreme case in that the whitening ideal was particularly successful is Argentina. See Andrews, *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires, 1800–1900* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980); and Aline Helg, "Race in Argentina and Cuba, 1880–1930: Theory, Policies, and Popular Reaction," in Graham, *The Idea of Race*, 37–96. On the European migration to Latin America, see Walter Nugent, *Crossings: The Great Transatlantic Migrations, 1870–1914* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); *Españoles hacia América: La emigración en masa, 1880–1930*, edited by Nicolás Sánchez-Albornoz (Madrid: Alianza, 1988); and Sánchez-Albornoz, *The Population of Latin America: A History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974).

7. John L. Comaroff, "Of Totemism and Ethnicity: Consciousness, Practice, and the Signs of Inequality," *Ethnos* 52 (1987):301–23.

ature is limited to this particular topic. In no sense does the present article attempt to evaluate the overall merits and contributions of this body of scholarship. Rather, it seeks to challenge the parameters that define the current scholarly debate over the myths of racial democracy and to stimulate further discussion of this issue. My analysis of these ideologies is limited to peoples of African descent and to countries where miscegenation is more advanced and blacks are more integrated into the urban economies, such as Brazil, Venezuela, and Cuba. The situation clearly differs in countries where significant sectors of the black population are geographically concentrated and remain relatively isolated from the national economy, as along the Pacific coast of Colombia and Ecuador.⁸

CRITIQUING THE CRITICS

The scholarly critique of the so-called myths of racial democracy has been elaborated around several arguments. First of all, *mestizaje* in its variants, rather than acting as an integrative force, has been characterized as a "powerful force of exclusion" articulated by predominantly white elites to keep blacks and Indians in a subordinated social position. Analysts assuming this perspective claim that the whole ideology has been constructed "at the expense" of blacks and other groups whose very existence is frequently denied, even in official and statistical records.⁹

Modern scholars have emphasized the inconsistencies and internal contradictions of this discourse as well as its demobilizing effects on ethnic

8. On Colombia, see the contributions of Jaime Arocha, "Afro-Colombia Denied," *NACLA* 25 (Feb. 1992):28–31; Arocha, "Inclusion of Afro-Colombians: Unreachable National Goal?" *Latin American Perspectives*, no. 100 (May 1998):70–89; and Jaime Arocha, "El sentipensamiento de los pueblos negros en la construcción de Colombia," in *Simposio: La construcción de las Américas*, edited by Carlos A. Uribe (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 1993), 159–73. See also Nina S. de Friedemann and Arocha, *De sol a sol: Génesis, transformación y presencia de los negros en Colombia* (Bogotá: Planeta, 1986). On Ecuador, see Norman Whitten Jr., *Black Frontiersmen: A South American Case* (New York: Schenkman, 1974); and Whitten and Diego Quiroga, "Ecuador," in *No Longer Invisible*, edited by Minority Rights Group (London: Minority Rights, 1995), 287–317.

9. See Norman Whitten Jr. and Arlene Torres, "Blackness in the Americas," *NACLA* 25 (Feb. 1992):16–22; John Burdick, "The Myth of Racial Democracy," *NACLA* 25 (Feb. 1992):40–44; Wright, *Café con Leche*, 2; Michael George Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil, 1945–1988* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994); Carl N. Degler, *Neither Black nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States*, 2d ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1986); Mauricio Solaún and Sidney Kronus, *Discrimination without Violence: Miscegenation and Racial Conflict in Latin America* (New York: Wiley, 1973); Jaime Arocha, "Afro-Colombia Denied" and "Cultura Afrocolombiana, entorno y derechos territoriales," in *La política social en los 90*, edited by the Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1994), 87–105; and Whitten, *Black Frontiersmen*.

or racial groups. Although these scholars have rightly emphasized black struggles against racial discrimination, they have paid little or no attention to the opportunities for mobilization and advancement created by these ideologies. Rather, as Michael George Hanchard observed in his provocative study of Brazil, the myths are presented as a force resulting in “the non-politization of race and the discouragement of group identification among blacks.” In his view, the “most profound consequence of racial democracy” is that Afro-Brazilians “have been locked in an elliptical pattern of racial oppression” that they can hardly escape.¹⁰ According to this perspective, the ideology of *mestizaje* sets racial and ethnic minorities on a dead-end road. When they try to organize and voice the uniqueness of their situation, these minorities are labeled as “racists” who undermine national unity and endanger the existence of their racially harmonious societies. But if they accept the validity of the myth, then they legitimize the social order that keeps them at the bottom of the social ladder. In the last scenario, blacks and Indians become protagonists in their own exclusion.

The main criticism has been directed against the incongruence between an ideology resting on the alleged fraternity and equality of all racial groups on the one hand and the persistence of gross inequalities associated with race on the other. According to Hanchard, “Within the economy of racial democracy . . . , blacks and mulattos are being excluded from employment and educational opportunities reserved for whites, and relegated largely to positions of inferior economic and social status. Thus, the myths of racial exceptionalism and democracy proclaim the existence of racial egalitarianism in Brazil . . . while producing racially discriminatory belief systems and practices at the same time.”¹¹ Advocates of racial democracy frequently emphasize the mild character of race relations in Latin America, particularly in comparison with those in the United States, but the reality “is not so pretty,” to cite John Burdick.¹² Thus since the 1950s, when several

10. See Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power*, 57. For additional views on the “demobilization” argument, see Degler, *Neither Black Nor White*, 176–85; Pierre-Michel Fontaine, “Transnational Relations and Racial Mobilization: Emerging Black Movements in Brazil,” in *Ethnic Identities in a Transnational World*, edited by John F. Stack Jr. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1981), 141–62; Fontaine, “Blacks and the Search for Power in Brazil,” in Fontaine, *Race, Class, and Power in Brazil* (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California, Los Angeles, 1985), 56–72; Anani Dzidzienyo, *The Position of Blacks in Brazilian Society* (London: Minority Rights, 1971); Leslie B. Rout Jr., *The African Experience in Spanish America, 1520 to the Present Day* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 320–21; and Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886–1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

11. Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power*, 74.

12. Burdick, “The Myth of Racial Democracy,” 40; Whitten, *Black Frontiersmen*, 199; Rout, *The African Experience*, 318; and Carlos Hasenbalg, “Race and Socioeconomic Inequalities in Brazil” and Nelson do Valle Silva, “Updating the Cost of Not Being White in Brazil,” both in Fontaine’s *Race, Class, and Power*, 25–41, 42–55.

studies sponsored by UNESCO demonstrated that Brazil was not the racial paradise that many believed it to be, the perception that racial democracy was a myth began to gain credibility.¹³ The conviction that these myths had been designed to hide the harsh realities of fundamentally racist societies grew with each piece of scholarship documenting the persistence of racial inequality, particularly in Brazil.¹⁴ Afro-Brazilian activist Abdias do Nascimento has gone so far as to claim that Brazil resembles South Africa without apartheid.¹⁵

There is no doubt that race continues to play a significant role in the identification and life chances of Latin American populations. Moreover, dominant racial ideologies of *mestizaje* have obscured and at times marginalized the existence of important racial and ethnic groups in the region. As scholars critical of the myths of racial democracy have convincingly established, racial discrimination pervades most Latin American societies today, affecting opportunities for social mobility. Although Latin Americans frequently explain these differences in life chances in terms of class (education, income, family structure) rather than race, recent studies have shown that even when these factors are controlled, inequalities according to race persist in areas like employment and life expectancy.¹⁶

But while social realities are not so pretty, the Latin American paradigms of racially mixed and integrated nations are not so ugly. Modern scholars' criticism has tended to overlook the fact that these ideologies were formulated against significant odds, contradicting the dominant sci-

13. For a brief discussion of the UNESCO studies and their influence, see Skidmore, "Race and Class in Brazil: Historical Perspectives," in Fontaine, *Race, Class, and Power*, 11–24; and Skidmore, "Bi-Racial U.S.A. vs. Multi-Racial Brazil: Is the Contrast Still Valid?" *Journal of Latin American Studies* 25, pt. 2 (May 1993):373–86. On the UNESCO statement on race problems, see Ashley Montagu, *Statement on Race* (New York: Schuman, 1951).

14. Fernandes, *A integração do negro*; an abridged version was published in English as *The Negro in Brazilian Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969). See also Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Octavio Ianni, *Côr e mobilidade social em Florianópolis* (São Paulo: Editora Nacional, 1960); Pierre L. Van den Berghe, *Race and Racism: A Comparative Perspective* (New York: Wiley, 1967); Hasenbalg, *Discriminação e desigualdades raciais no Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1979); Charles H. Wood and José Alberto Magno de Carvalho, *The Demography of Inequality in Brazil* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); *Desigualdade racial no Brasil contemporâneo*, edited by Peggy A. Lovell (Belo Horizonte: CEDEPLAR, 1991); and Andrews, "Racial Inequality in Brazil and the United States: A Statistical Comparison," *Journal of Social History* 26 (Winter 1992):229–63.

15. Abdias do Nascimento, *O genocídio do negro brasileiro: Processo de um racismo mascarado* (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1978), quoted by Andrews in *Blacks and Whites*, 4.

16. Silva, "Updating the Cost"; Hasenbalg, "Race and Socioeconomic Inequalities"; and Wood and Lovell, "Racial Inequality and Child Mortality in Brazil," *Social Forces*, no. 70 (Mar. 1992):703–24. Lovell has explored further the impact of race on wage disparities in two recent articles: "The Geography of Economic Development and Racial Discrimination in Brazil," *Development and Change* 24 (1993):83–101; and "Race, Gender, and Development in Brazil," *LARR* 29, no. 3 (1994):7–35.

entifically based racism manufactured in the North Atlantic world. There is nothing surprising, despite the contentions of some scholars, in the assimilation of these ideas by the cultural, private, and public elites of Latin America.¹⁷ Rather, as Thomas Skidmore has pointed out, what is remarkable is that they did not incorporate those ideas uncritically.¹⁸ At a rhetorical level at least, the exaltation of *mestizaje* meant that inclusion, not exclusion, would be the dominant motif in constructing nationhood in most of Latin America. José Vasconcelos's *raza cósmica*, Freyre's Luso-tropical civilization, José Martí's *mi raza*, and Andrés Bello's *café con leche* represented more than elite-made tools of domination and exclusion.¹⁹ They were also doors that could be opened by subordinate racial groups in order to participate in what those dominant ideologies portrayed as their own national cultures. At the least, they allowed for some individual mobility.²⁰ When Venezuelan poet Rafael Castro proclaimed, "I am white, I am Indian, I am black, I am American," he was affirming that Americans were the offspring of whites, blacks, and Indians but also that each of the components had a place in this concept of Americanness.²¹ Thus throughout the region, it became un-American (un-Venezuelan, un-Brazilian, un-Cuban) to discriminate openly against those perceived by the dominant sectors as racially inferior groups.

As a result, these myths have placed considerable limitations on Latin American elites. Prisoners of their own ideological creation, the white elites in the region lacked the capacity to structure a system in which blacks and other subordinate groups would be openly excluded from various areas of national life. The myths become real enough when no formal segregation can be even imagined to exist south of the Rio Grande. It might be argued that this makes little difference in practice, but it is not, as Reid Andrews claimed, "a trivial distinction."²² In systems in which racial differences are not rigidly codified and enforced, such as in Latin America under its myths of racial democracy, it is at least possible to ascend the social ladder and enter the dominant group.

By portraying the ideologies of racial democracy as forces operating

17. Helg, "Race in Argentina and Cuba," 59.

18. Skidmore, "Racial Ideas," 11–12. For a similar argument, see Mórner, *Race Mixture*, 140–42.

19. José Vasconcelos, *La raza cósmica: Misión de la raza iberoamericana* (Paris: Agencia Mundial de Librería, 1925); Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves*; and José Martí, "My Race," in *Our America by José Martí: Writings on Latin America and the Struggle for Cuban Independence*, edited by Philip S. Foner (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977), 311–14. Blanco's statement is quoted in Wright, *Café con leche*, 1.

20. This point is emphasized by Emília Viotti da Costa in "The Myth of Racial Democracy," 239–40.

21. Quoted in Wright, *Café con Leche*, 8.

22. Andrews, *Blacks and Whites*, 4.

unidirectionally in favor of subordination and demobilization, the critics have also downplayed the capacity of blacks and other groups to appropriate these myths and use them to their advantage. To begin with, the formulation of these ideas has frequently been studied through the writings of a few selected intellectuals, not as a contested process in which peoples of African descent have any voice of their own.²³ Although these voices have lacked the audibility and prestige enjoyed by leading intellectuals, that situation does not mean that blacks were simply passive objects of cultural representation. As Michael Taussig contended, "From the represented shall come that which overturns the representation."²⁴ The critics' fatalistic vision explains why some have significant difficulties accommodating in their narratives whatever presence blacks have enjoyed in leadership positions in Latin America, a process they frequently explain in terms of the co-optation of a few select leaders.²⁵

Ideologies of racial democracy have made mobilization along racial lines difficult but have also opened opportunities for other forms of social action.²⁶ The assumption that racial mobilization is the only legitimate way to struggle for racial equality makes it possible to analyze these myths as purely demobilizing forces. This assumption was born out of the same North Atlantic ideologies that the critics have ultimately attacked (such as the essentialness of race) and is based on the peculiar historical experience of racial segregation in the United States. The result is little understanding of why, for instance, black workers in Brazil affiliate with multiracial organizations and seldom identify themselves primarily in racial terms.²⁷

23. Wright, *Café con leche*; and Helg, "Race in Argentina and Cuba," 39. This problem is acknowledged by Skidmore in "Racial Ideas," 29. He comments, "non-elite thought and behavior urgently need study," despite the fact that elites made and administered social policy and influenced non-elite ideas and behavior. The need to study the formulation of *mestizaje* ideologies as a contested process is emphasized by Knight in "Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo," 71; and by Wade in *Blackness and Race*, 19–20. For a study that incorporates black voices in the process, see Helg, *Our Rightful Share*.

24. Michael T. Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wildman: A Study in Healing and Terror* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 135.

25. Wright, for instance, contends that Venezuelan elites "demonstrated an amazing propensity to assimilate miscegenated individuals," given that since independence, blacks and *pardos* (mixed) "held powerful positions in regional and national elites." See Wright, *Café con leche*, 7–9. In other instances, black mobility is explained as a function of their cultural "whitening," that is, their distancing from "blackness." See Wade, *Blackness and Race*, 5–6; and on Cuba, Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 121–22.

26. In particular, ideologies of racial democracy have facilitated cross-racial mobilization in the organized labor movement throughout the region, although labor studies have paid scant attention to these issues. For a recent summary, see Andrews, "Black Workers in the Export Years: Latin America, 1880–1930," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 51 (Spring 1997):7–29, esp. 20–22. For a few specific examples concerning Cuba, see note 96.

27. On the narrow social base of the Afro-Brazilian movement, particularly the *Movimento Negro Unificado* (MNU), see Burdick, "Brazil's Black Consciousness Movement," *NACLA* 25

Finally, the question remains of whether the gap between the ideal (racial democracy) and the reality (racial inequality) truly transforms these ideologies into mere myths. A fundamental methodological problem exists with this correlation. If racial inequality invalidates the ideal of racial democracy, other forms of social inequality should have the same effect on the general notion of political democracy as well. According to the critics' reasoning, there is no democracy in the world today. Furthermore, the regimes closer to the ideal of racial equality have usually been defined as authoritarian and undemocratic governments that have reduced income and educational disparities through massive programs of redistribution of resources.²⁸ In Western thought, democracy is not identified with equality of results.

Using the establishment of the Cuban Republic (1900–1912) as a test case, this article proposes an alternative interpretation of the myths of racial democracy. Cuba is an appropriate choice for several reasons. First, it offers one of the most important yet least studied cases of racially inclusive nation building in the Americas.²⁹ According to census figures, by 1899 no less than a third of the Cuban population on the island had some visible African characteristics (as “blacks” and “mulattos” or “mixed”).³⁰ Second, Spanish colonialism had been defeated by a cross-racial alliance in which Afro-Cubans were well represented as officers and soldiers, but the republic was born under the direct economic, political, and ideological influence of the

(Feb. 1992), 23–27. In the early 1980s, scholars perceived the MNU as a growing political force, but its electoral performance proved to be disappointing. For instance, an electoral survey conducted in São Paulo in 1986 showed that three-quarters of the nonwhite respondents opposed any form of racially separate mobilization. See Hasenbalg and Silva, “Notas sobre desigualdade racial e política no Brasil,” *Estudos Afro-Asiáticos* 25 (Dec. 1993):141–59. On Afro-Brazilian political mobilization and the MNU, see Lélia Gonzalez, “The Unified Black Movement: A New Stage in Black Political Mobilization,” in Fontaine, *Race, Class, and Power*, 120–34; and Andrews, “Black Political Protest in São Paulo, 1888–1988,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 24, pt. 1 (1992):147–71. A particularly optimistic account of the MNU's potential is Dee Brown, “Black Consciousness vs. Racism in Brazil,” *The Black Scholar* (Jan.–Feb. 1980):59–70.

28. This would be the case of post-revolutionary Cuba, where several important indicators of inequality associated with race declined significantly. See my article “Race and Inequality in Cuba, 1899–1981,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 25 (1995):131–68.

29. This process has been recently studied with great nuance by Ada Ferrer. See “To Make a Free Nation: Race and the Struggle for Independence in Cuba, 1868–1898,” Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1995. For a more traditional approach, see Jorge Ibarra, *Ideología mambisa* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1967).

30. U.S. War Department, Office Director, Census of Cuba, *Report on the Census of Cuba, 1899* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900). Needless to say, when U.S. officials and visitors applied their own racial constructs to Cuba, the proportion of “blacks” on the island was much higher. For instance, one U.S. military officer asserted in 1920 that according to his “standards,” no more than 5 percent of the Cuban population was white. See Paul Beck, Office Memoranda, Havana, 15 Apr. 1920, U.S. National Archives (hereafter USNA), Records of the War Department General and Special Staff (hereafter RG 165)/2056–196.

United States, the least likely scenario for a myth of racial democracy to exist and operate.³¹ Third, just ten years after the establishment of the republic in 1902, the island witnessed one of the bloodiest racist massacres in the hemisphere during the twentieth century, the so-called Race War of 1912.³² In such an environment, one would expect no ideology of racial fraternity to exist, much less one operating to the advantage of blacks. Last, recent scholarship has criticized Cuban ideologies of racial democracy on grounds similar to those found elsewhere in Latin America.³³ This article will focus on politics because it is in the political process that ideas are turned into governing principles, thus acquiring hegemonic status.

CUBAN "RACIAL DEMOCRACY"

As elsewhere in Latin America, an ideology of racial inclusiveness developed in Cuba from specific political needs. Cuban white elites were troubled by the visible racial diversity of the island's population. Moreover, it became clear that they could not achieve political independence from Spain without forming a multiracial nationalist alliance, with all the unforeseeable consequences that such a process might generate. Cautiously, the white leadership of the first war for independence—the Ten Years War (1868–1878)—moved from an opportunistic defense of slavery to open abolitionism. After 1871, when the last ordinance approved by the revolutionary authorities concerning freedmen was annulled, abolition and raceless equality became dominant themes in the nationalist rhetoric. Even before, the first constitution of Cuba Libre in 1869 had stipulated that all the in-

31. Louis A. Pérez Jr. set black participation in the army at 40 percent among officers. See *Cuba between Empires, 1878–1902* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh, 1983), 106. Jorge Ibarra mentioned 60 percent, including soldiers and officers, in *Cuba, 1898–1921: Política y clases sociales* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1992), 187. Rafael Fermoselle asserted that 40 percent of the generals and colonels in the army were black in *Política y color en Cuba: La guerrilla de 1912* (Montevideo: Géminis, 1974), 26.

32. The literature on the so-called Race War of 1912 is abundant. Some scholars have emphasized white racism in their analyses. The most recent and best-documented study along these lines is Helg, *Our Rightful Share*. See also Tomás Fernández Robaina, *El negro en Cuba, 1902–1958: Apuntes para la historia de la lucha contra la discriminación racial* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1990); and Serafín Portuondo Linares, *Los independientes de color: Historia del Partido Independiente de Color* (Havana: Ministerio de Educación, 1950). Other interpretations have stressed the revolt and the limited popular appeal of the party. Pérez has emphasized the underlying structural conditions that made the revolt possible in "Politics, Peasants, and People of Color: The 1912 'Race War' in Cuba Reconsidered," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 66, no. 3 (Aug. 1986):509–39. See also Thomas T. Orum, "The Politics of Color: The Racial Dimension of Cuban Politics during the Early Republican Years, 1900–1912," Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1975; and Fermoselle, *Política y color en Cuba*.

33. See Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 6–7, 16–17, 106. A similar critique of Cuban racial ideologies has been developed for a later period by Vera Kutzinski in *Sugar's Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993).

habitants of the republic were free and equal. Moreover, the war experience, the presence of blacks in the military, and their eventual ascension to positions of leadership within the army reinforced the image that independent Cuba would have to be egalitarian and inclusive.³⁴

In order to attract blacks to the pro-independence camp, an ideology advocating racial fraternity was further elaborated and systematized. Leading these efforts was nationalist intellectual and activist José Martí, whose militant campaign for “una república cordial” “con todos y para todos” became a gospel of Cuban nationalist ideology. Martí elaborated, “Always to dwell on the divisions or differences between the races, in people who are sufficiently divided already, is to raise barriers to the attainment of both national and individual well-being, for these two goals are reached by bringing together as closely as possible the various components that form the nation. . . . A man is more than white, black, or mulatto. A Cuban is more than mulatto, black, or white.” Martí condemned any attempt to classify or separate men according to races as “a sin against humanity” and an offense against “Nature.”³⁵ In “Our America” (1891), he even challenged the legitimacy of the concept itself: “There can be no racial animosity, because there are no races. The theorists and feeble thinkers string together and warm over the bookshelf races which the well-disposed observer and the fair-minded traveler vainly seek in the justice of Nature where man’s universal identity springs forth.”³⁶

After his death in 1895, Martí quickly became the “apostle of Cuban independence” and his creed the cornerstone of Cuban nationalism. But his thinking on race (as well as on other issues) was open to contending interpretations, all of which enjoyed some degree of ideological legitimacy. To minimize racial fears within the nationalist coalition and counteract the colonialist propaganda depicting the war as a black effort to create another Haiti, Martí also emphasized blacks’ “gratefulness” toward the white rev-

34. The interaction between race, the formation of a nationalist coalition, and the abolition of slavery have been studied by several scholars. See Rebecca J. Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860–1899* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985); Raúl Cepero Bonilla, *Azúcar y abolición* (Barcelona: Crítica, 1976); Ada Ferrer, “Social Aspects of Cuban Nationalism: Race, Slavery, and the Guerra Chiquita, 1879–1880,” *Cuban Studies* 21 (1991):37–56; Ferrer, “To Make a Free Nation”; and Ferrer, “Esclavitud, ciudadanía y los límites de la nacionalidad cubana: La guerra de los diez años, 1868–1878,” *Historia Social* 22 (1995):101–25. On the war, see Ramiro Guerra y Sánchez, *La guerra de los diez años, 1868–1878*, 2 vols. (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1972).

35. Martí, “My Race.”

36. Martí, “Our America,” in *Our America by José Martí*, 84–94. A good compilation of Martí’s writings on race is *La cuestión racial* (Havana: Lex, 1959). For analyses of his ideas, see Fernando Ortiz, “Martí and the Race Problem,” *Phylon* 3 (1942):253–76; Martin S. Stabb, “Martí and the Racists,” *Hispania* 40 (Dec. 1957):434–39; and Ramón de Armas, “Jose Martí: La verdadera y única abolición de la esclavitud,” *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* 43 (1986):333–51.

olutionaries who had fought for their freedom. He insisted that Afro-Cubans had participated in previous wars for independence in "an orderly fashion," without subverting white elites' notions of proper order. Clearly exaggerating, he claimed that the insurgents had never spoken in terms of whites and blacks since the first constitution of Cuba Libre and asserted that neither whites nor blacks should identify themselves in racial terms.³⁷

Although this construction of nationhood left little room for racial identities, the very existence of racial groups was not denied. Because Martí refrained from creating a hypothetical racial type to characterize Cubanness, it was coexistence, not synthesis, that defined his vision of nationhood. "Whites," "blacks," and "mulattos" would all participate equally as Cubans in his imagined republic. Martí's discourse assumed the existence of different races but stressed that national identity should be placed above race. An ideology advocating the emergence of a mixed "Cuban race" resulting from several centuries of cultural and biological contact and miscegenation was not fully articulated until the cultural and scientific renaissance of the 1920s. By this time, Cuban intellectuals had created, in the image of a mulatto nation, their own version of the Latin American *mestizo*.³⁸

Martí's foundational discourse could be appropriated and manipulated by different groups and for diverse purposes. Those seeking to maintain the status quo and keep race out of public discourse could safely argue, quoting Martí, that to speak about racial differences was meaningless and a "sin against humanity." Any Afro-Cuban attempt to demand racial equality could be branded as "racist" and un-national. Finally, it could also be emphasized that Cuban racial fraternity had been forged during the struggle for independence and that blacks should be thankful for their freedom. As an editorial in *La Discusión* proclaimed, "There is no country where the white has done as much for the black. For blacks to be free . . . , many prominent whites struggled and died. . . . Blacks by themselves would never have become free."³⁹ White veteran and politician Manuel Sanguily elaborated:

37. Martí, "My Race."

38. The expression "the Cuban race" was used infrequently. For one example, see Angel C. Arce, *La raza cubana* (Havana: n.p., 1935). The construction of a mulatto national identity in literary and artistic works has been studied by many. For recent contributions, see in addition to Kutzinski's polemic but imaginative *Sugar's Secrets*, Gustavo Pérez Firmat, *The Cuban Condition: Translation and Identity in Modern Cuban Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Juan A. Martínez, *Cuban Art and National Identity: The Vanguardia Painters 1927–1950* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994); Robin Moore, "Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920–1935," Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, 1995; Nancy Morejón, *Nación y mestizaje en Nicolás Guillén* (Havana: UNEAC, 1982); and Salvador Bueno, "La canción del bongó: Sobre la cultura mulata de Cuba," *Cuadernos Americanos*, no. 106 (1976):89–106.

39. "La nota del día," *La Discusión*, 23 Sept. 1908.

"We pauperized and ruined ourselves on their [blacks'] account . . . ; we suffered as they did, indeed more than they did, and bravely fought for our own liberty and for [their] manumission." One newspaper claimed bluntly that white Cubans were entitled to "some gratitude, at least."⁴⁰

Following the general trend critical of myths of racial democracy in Latin America, recent scholarship has interpreted this discourse as an elite construction that presented Afro-Cubans with an "unsolvable dilemma." Blacks allegedly had only one of two alternatives. If they accepted the myth, they had to renounce in the name of national unity the right to mobilize, press for their particular demands, and obtain their "rightful share" in republican society. Blacks who opposed the myth would be labeled as "racists" who put their own particular interests above those of the entire country.⁴¹

Yet as those who criticize the myth of racial equality have demonstrated, Cuban blacks did find a solution to the "unsolvable dilemma" posed by this nationalist ideology: they appropriated the myth and reinterpreted it to their own advantage. They presented Martí's racially fraternal republic as a goal to be fulfilled, rather than an achievement.⁴² Following Martí, they claimed as Cubans the unqualified right to participate in all areas of national life. Otherwise, the discourse of "Cuba with all and for all" would be just a *cantilena* devoid of any real content. Writing in 1929, a black woman named Inocencia Alvarez articulated this view coherently: "We speak and work practically so that the ideal of the Apostle of our freedoms, José Martí, who dreamed and wanted a cordial Republic 'with all and for all,' may be a reality and not a myth."⁴³ Newspapers such as *El Nuevo Criollo* (1904–1906), edited by black intellectual and patriot Rafael Serra, devoted a regular column to reprinting and analyzing the writings of Martí. Blacks challenged the elite notion that freedom was a product of white generosity and presented it as a "conquest" of black insurgents. As black colonel Lino D'Ou asserted, "To give back is not to cede." Afro-Cubans deserved equal participation in the republic because it was largely their own creation.⁴⁴

40. Sanguily's words are reproduced in the *Chargé d' Affaires* to the Secretary of State, Havana, 23 Feb. 1910, USNA, General Records of the Department of State (hereafter RG 59) /837.00 /1284; and "Lo que era la esclavitud en Cuba," *La Discusión*, 13 Nov. 1908. See also "Unidad de razas," *La Lucha*, 3 Sept. 1907.

41. Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 7.

42. See Fernández Robaina's discussion of the Partido Independiente de Color's appropriation of Martí's ideals as expressed in his *El negro en Cuba*, 104–9; also Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 153.

43. Juan de Dios Cepeda, "Manifiesto impreso del Partido Independiente de Color dirigido a todos los hombres de color," 20 Oct. 1909. Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Havana (hereafter ANC), Fondo Especial, Leg. fuera, 9–22; and Inocencia Alvarez, "Lo que somos," *Diario de la Marina*, 10 Feb. 1929.

44. Lino D'Ou, "Restituir no es ceder," *Labor Nueva* 1, no. 4 (12 Mar. 1916), 6.

Historians have amply documented Afro-Cuban struggles for full equality and their efforts to generate a counterdiscourse stressing their contribution to independence, but scholars have also emphasized Afro-Cubans' "surprisingly narrow margin of social action."⁴⁵ I argue instead that the discourse of a racially fraternal nation could and did operate in either direction: as a force of exclusion and subordination, or as a legitimizer of Afro-Cuban inclusion and participation in society. Insofar as it provided blacks with rhetorical tools to claim full membership in the nation, this discourse opened opportunities for legitimate mobilization and demands. And insofar as it claimed that all Cubans were equal, this ideology limited the political choices of white elites, however racist they may have been. These limitations became obvious when the elites gathered at the Constitutional Convention of 1901 faced the specific task of defining citizenship in the Cuban Republic. It was time to elucidate what a "republic with all and for all" would truly mean.

DEFINING CITIZENS

The convention was called by the U.S. government of occupation (1899–1902).⁴⁶ Military Governor General Leonard Wood maneuvered intensely to assure that the assembly would be composed of what he defined as "the best people" on the island. He was at least partially successful. Although the former revolutionaries were well represented in the convention, only two nonwhites, Juan Gualberto Gómez and Martín Morúa Delgado, participated in the meeting.⁴⁷

The U.S. authorities openly opposed any definition of citizenship that gave electoral rights to "the illiterate mass of people," a group they defined as the "sons and daughters of Africans imported into the island as slaves."⁴⁸ "We are dealing with a race," Wood wrote to McKinley, "that has steadily been going down for a hundred years and into which we have got to infuse new life, new principles and new methods of doing things." This

45. Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 7.

46. Previous studies of the convention have concentrated on the discussion of the Platt Amendment and U.S.-Cuba relations. The best surveys of the Convention's activities are those of Pérez in *Cuba between Empires*, 316–27, and in *Cuba under the Platt Amendment* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), 37–55. Orum's discussion centered on the racial implications of the Platt Amendment. See Orum, "The Politics of Color," 76–82.

47. "Asuntos varios: La convención," *Diario de la Marina*, 15 Aug. 1900. Among the elected "substitutes" was at least one other black, General Agustín Cebreco from Oriente. See Rafael Martínez Ortiz, *Cuba: Los primeros años de independencia* (Paris: Le Livre Libre, 1929), 1:179.

48. Leonard Wood to Elihu Root, Havana, 8 Feb. 1900; and Wood to Root, Havana, 8 Feb. 1901, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Leonard Wood Papers (hereafter Wood Papers), boxes 28 and 29. See also Pérez, *Cuba between Empires*, 303–14.

view basically coincided with the belief entertained by some U.S. soldiers that they had found in Cuba "a race of ignorant savages."⁴⁹

Savages do not vote. In a meeting with "the most important people in Cuban politics," Wood defended the need to deprive illiterates of political rights. Cubans themselves were divided over the issue. Members of the traditional elite sided with the military governor, whereas veterans like General Bartolomé Masó, former president of Cuba Libre, contended that anything short of universal (male) suffrage was unacceptable to the revolutionaries. A firm consensus emerged, however, that members of the Liberation Army should enjoy electoral rights without qualification, a concession that Wood considered an unavoidable evil.⁵⁰

The first municipal elections in 1900, as well as those for the Constitutional Convention, took place under the electoral law approved by the U.S. military government. It stipulated that only men possessing the following qualifications could vote: twenty-one years of age or older; natives or Spaniards who had not explicitly declared their allegiance to the Spanish Crown, and residents of a municipality for at least thirty days. In addition, voters had to meet one of the following prerequisites: be able to read, or own property worth \$250.00 (in American gold), or have performed honorable service in the Cuban Army prior to 18 July 1898.⁵¹ In the opinion of Secretary of War Elihu Root, this restrictive law had the advantage of excluding from the political process in Cuba a "great . . . proportion of the elements that have brought ruin to Haiti and Santo Domingo."⁵²

Yet such exclusion was hardly compatible with what the nationalist press labeled as "democratic principles" and "traditions" of the Cuban people.⁵³ It was thus up to the almost all-white Constitutional Convention to restore these principles, despite the opposition of U.S. authorities. A broad statement of equality was unanimously approved without any discussion: "All Cubans will be equal before the law."⁵⁴ But the suffrage issue

49. Wood to William McKinley, Havana, 12 Apr. 1900, Wood Papers, 28. See also "The Questions of the Day," *La Lucha*, 7 Sept. 1899.

50. "En palacio," *La Unión Española*, 3 Jan. 1900, evening ed.; Martínez Ortiz, *Cuba*, 1:113–14; and Wood to Root, Havana, 23 Feb. 1900, Wood Papers, 28.

51. Wood to Root, Havana, 8 Feb. 1900, Wood Papers, 28; and Martínez Ortiz, *Cuba*, 1:130. The electoral law was published as *Ley electoral municipal adicionada con el censo de población y la ley de perjurio* (Havana: Imprenta de la Gaceta Oficial, 1900).

52. Root to Wood, Washington, D.C., 20 June 1900, Wood Papers, 28; and "Asuntos varios: Conferencia," *Diario de la Marina*, 25 Jan. 1900, evening ed.

53. "La prensa," *Diario de la Marina*, 12 Jan. 1900, morning ed. Protests against limited suffrage were also voiced by several town councils and by the Círculo de Veteranos. See "Asuntos varios: El sufragio universal," *Diario de la Marina*, 21 Mar. 1900, morning ed.; and 23 Mar. 1900, evening ed.; Telegram of Severino Oviedo, mayor of Cartagena, to Wood, 23 Feb. 1900, Wood Papers, 28.

54. Cuba, Convención Constituyente, *Diario de Sesiones* vol. 18, 27 Jan. 1901, p. 206.

divided Cubans among themselves. The evening session of 29 January 1901 was devoted entirely to discussing this issue.⁵⁵

The difficulty in reaching a consensus on how inclusive Cuban citizenship should be became obvious when the commission in charge of preparing the constitutional project could not agree on a formula to submit to the assembly. Yet the four competing proposals circulating on the floor all adhered to the principle of universal suffrage and disagreed only in aspects of secondary importance. General José Alemán, author of one proposal, articulated the dominant revolutionary position in arguing that this was an “acquired right,” a popular “conquest” that could not be ignored by a body elected to represent the Cuban people. He also challenged the preparatory commission for not including universal (male) suffrage in their proposal: “Do they fear that the Cuban people might make a wrongful use of this right? . . . I say to the commission that their fears are childish.”

The power of the nationalist discourse limited considerably the opportunities for challenging this “patriotic notion.” It was virtually impossible to reconcile the ideal of an inclusive republic with all and for all with the notion that “the people,” whatever their color, were not ready to exercise the rights for which they had fought so long. Democracy and popular participation had become key elements in the revolutionary imagery, not least because of their inclusion in the programmatic and legal documents of Cuba Libre. No delegate dared openly oppose the principle of universal suffrage. Rather, opponents focused on whether it was convenient or appropriate to include such a provision in the constitutional text. For instance, one of the most eloquent opponents of the principle felt compelled to assure the convention—and the public—that he “did not fear universal suffrage,” nor was he “concerned with the exercise of such right by the Cuban people.” A different kind of opposition was voiced by Miguel Gener, elected from the province of Havana, who claimed that the convention was discussing a false universal suffrage because it did not include women.

In response, Manuel Sanguily demanded to know, “If no one here opposes universal suffrage, then what is the issue?” He argued that the real debate was whether illiterates should be allowed to vote. Those against universal suffrage, he claimed, feared that it would open the doors of the government to the masses and the ignorant. Sanguily argued that except for a few illustrious individuals, neither the middle class nor the remaining aristocracy were worthier than the Cuban people. He supported General Alemán’s argument that the right to vote had been previously recognized by both revolutionary authorities and even the Spanish colonial

55. The following discussion is based on Cuba, Convención Constituyente, *Diario de Sesiones* vol. 20, 30 Jan. 1901, pp. 272–86. For the view of a contemporary opposed to universal suffrage, see Martínez Ortiz, *Cuba*, 1:204–6.

government. To restrict electoral rights, Sanguily concluded, was to introduce a “repugnant privilege.” In the end, the convention approved the inclusion of universal suffrage in the constitutional text, with only three votes against it.

The same “democratic principles” were invoked when Wood attempted to create an all-white artillery corps on the island. Representing the Council of Veterans, two white officers visited the military governor to complain that the exclusion of blacks was contrary to “justice” and to “the democratic and revolutionary traditions” of the Cuban people.⁵⁶ The veterans emphasized that blacks and whites had fought together for independence, frequently under the leadership of “colored chiefs,” and they argued that a blatant contradiction existed between those “traditions” and the segregationist practices that the U.S. Government of Occupation was trying to implement on the island.⁵⁷

The establishment of universal suffrage added new strength and visibility to the integrationist discourse and opened some avenues for Afro-Cuban participation in republican politics. As *La Lucha* stated, “in a country with universal suffrage, it is not possible to disregard popular feelings.”⁵⁸ Electoral candidates had to pledge in their campaigns constant allegiance to Martí’s inclusionary republic with all and for all, and they frequently attacked each other for not paying proper attention to Afro-Cuban issues.⁵⁹

All the presidential campaigns during the first decade of the Republic (in 1901, 1905, and 1908) were fought largely over which candidate truly represented an inclusive Cubanness. During the first campaign, candidate Bartolomé Masó underscored the need to attract, with “consideration and respect,” the “class of color,” which he labeled as a “family of heroes,” an “essential factor of our social existence” that should have the “participation it deserves in our political character.” He opposed any privilege that contradicted the combined legacy of Martí and Antonio Maceo, a prominent Afro-Cuban general, and called for all Cubans to unite in times of peace as well as war. Arriving at Havana in late October, Masó first visited the black society Centro de Cocineros, where his own campaign com-

56. “La Prensa,” *Diario de la Marina*, 11 Oct. 1901, morning ed.; and 17 Oct. 1901, morning ed.; also “El Centro de Veteranos y Wood,” *El Mundo*, 16 Oct. 1901.

57. Protests against the exclusion came also from newspapers and ayuntamientos. See Orum, “The Politics of Color,” 62. Wood’s solution was to create a separate company for blacks within the corp. See “Asuntos varios: La artillería cubana,” *Diario de la Marina*, 19 Jan. 1902, morning ed.; and Cuba, Military Governor, *Civil Report of the Military Governor, 1902* (Havana: n.p., 1903), 1:191.

58. “El programa conservador,” *La Lucha*, 29 Aug. 1907.

59. In this aspect, my work follows Orum’s pioneering study of race in electoral politics during the early republic, “The Politics of Color.” For a study that goes beyond 1912, see my “With All and for All’: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Cuba, 1900–1930,” Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1996.

mittee was established.⁶⁰ On Masó's side were some of the most prominent black public figures of the period, such as patriot Juan Gualberto Gómez and veterans Quintín Bandera, Silverio Sánchez Figueras, and Generoso Campos Marquetti. As members of the Masó Campaign Committee, Gómez and Sánchez Figueras spoke at numerous demonstrations, visited black societies, and explicitly called for Afro-Cubans to vote for their candidate in the spirit of the republic with all and for all envisioned by Martí.⁶¹ Moreover, they reminded black voters that the opposing candidate, Tomás Estrada Palma, had lived in the United States for a long time and predicted that under his government, blacks would be treated "as the American Negro is."⁶² Several newspapers anticipated that "the entire colored vote" would go to Masó.⁶³

But Estrada Palma and his followers reacted to this campaign by stressing their support for the same nationalist discourse that was being used to attack them. Rather than challenging the terms of the debate, they claimed that their candidate did not distinguish between blacks and whites, that all Cubans belonged to the "same family," and that their candidate would be the one to build the "cordial republic with all" envisioned by Martí. They even contended that Estrada Palma, not Masó, was the legitimate heir of Martí.⁶⁴

This political debate was repeated in subsequent elections, always within the parameters defined by a racially inclusive notion of nationhood. In the campaign of 1905, the Liberal Party accused Estrada Palma and his Partido Moderado of being anti-black. In electoral meetings throughout the island, Juan Gualberto Gómez remarked that the incumbent candidate "despised" blacks, while a number of Afro-Cuban Liberals published a letter asserting that President Estrada Palma did "not even want blacks to clean

60. "Asuntos varios: Por Masó," *Diario de la Marina*, 29 Oct. 1901, morning ed.; "La llegada del General Masó," *La Discusión*, 28 Oct. 1901; Bartolomé Masó, "Al país," *Diario de la Marina*, 31 Oct. 1901, evening ed.; and "El programa de Masó," *La Discusión*, 30 July 1901. According to the *Havana Post*, Masó's manifesto was actually written by Afro-Cuban patriot Juan Gualberto Gómez; see "Masó Throws Down the Gauntlet," 2 Nov. 1901.

61. See the following articles in *Diario de la Marina*: "Asuntos varios: El General Bandera," 24 Oct. 1901; "Llegada del General Masó," 28 Oct. 1901, evening ed.; "Asuntos varios: Por Masó," 29 Oct. 1901; and "Asuntos varios: Los partidarios de Masó en Cárdenas," 12 Dec. 1901, morning ed. On the support of black societies, see "La prensa," *Diario de la Marina*, 14 Nov. 1901; and "Asuntos varios: Mitin en Guanabacoa," 28 Nov. 1901, morning ed.

62. "Mitin en Guanabacoa," *Diario de la Marina*, 28 Nov. 1901, morning ed.; "Americans Are Attacked at Masó Meeting," *The Havana Post*, 19 Nov. 1901; and "La prensa," *Diario de la Marina*, 24 Nov. 1901, morning ed.

63. "Game of Politics Becoming Mixed," *The Havana Post*, 2 Nov. 1901; and "La prensa," *Diario de la Marina*, 7 Nov. 1901, morning ed.

64. "La presidencia de la república: El programa de Estrada Palma," *La Discusión*, 23 Sept. 1901; "Las elecciones," *La Unión Española*, 18 June 1900, evening ed.; "Los partidarios de Estrada Palma," *Diario de la Marina*, 25 Nov. 1901; "La nota del día," *Diario de la Marina*, 27 Nov. 1901, evening ed.; and "Algo más sobre razas," *La Discusión*, 23 Nov. 1901.

his shoes.”⁶⁵ To further attract the black vote, the Liberals even campaigned using Afro-Cuban rhythms and dances and attended social and funeral functions of the *congos libres*, a cultural and mutual-aid association of former slaves of Congo origin and their descendants.⁶⁶

In 1908 the Liberals accused the Partido Conservador, the heir of Estrada Palma’s Moderados, of attempting to introduce “caste divisions” in Cuban society by opposing universal suffrage. Black voters were reminded that vice-presidential candidate Rafael Montoro, a former leading member of the pro-colonial Partido Liberal Autonomista, had refused to work for the benefit of Afro-Cubans while he was a representative to the Spanish Parliament in the 1880s. Black Liberals stressed also that Montoro had publicly congratulated Spanish Military Governor Valeriano Weyler on the death of Afro-Cuban general Antonio Maceo in 1897.⁶⁷ Both Moderados and Conservadores resorted to the usual argument that they truly represented the ideal of a racially integrated republic, while accusing the Liberals of fostering racial hate among the population. These groups argued in opposing Liberal propaganda, “Those who try to exploit the colored race . . . should know that they are, before all, Cubans; that blacks and whites, together, created . . . this Republic.”⁶⁸ In 1908 they repeated that the Partido Conservador recognized “no races, no colors, no hierarchies,” rejecting the charge that they were trying to introduce “odious privileges” in republican politics through limitations on suffrage.⁶⁹ In the opening ceremony of the presidential campaign at the Teatro Nacional, Montoro was asked to embrace Afro-Cuban General Jesús Rabí in public. The hug, hailed by the conservative press as the consummation of Martí’s dream of a republic with all and for all, was intended to show that black veterans of the highest military rank were siding with the Partido Conservador. Those presiding at the meeting included other prominent Afro-Cuban generals in addition to Rabí: Pedro Díaz, Higinio Vázquez, Florencio Salcedo, Prudencio

65. “El mitin de Remedios,” *La Lucha*, 31 July 1905; and “En tierra camagueyana,” *La Lucha*, 7 Aug. 1905; “Lo de Guantánamo,” *El Cubano Libre*, 4 Sept. 1905; and “La propaganda del insulto, en Baracoa,” *El Cubano Libre*, 15 Sept. 1905. See also Castillo, Roja, Failde, Vázquez, and Sánchez to Jorge Valera, 18 May 1906, ANC, Fondo Especial, leg. 7, no. 114.

66. “La Concha me dio licencia,” *El Nuevo Criollo*, 11 Mar. 1905; and “Las claves” and “Apunta pueblo,” both in *El Nuevo Criollo*, 27 May 1905.

67. “El porqué de la necesidad,” *La Lucha*, 16 Oct. 1908; “‘War or Free Nation’: Intervention Must End,” *Havana Post*, 19 Nov. 1906; Julián Betancourt, “Réplica a mis adversarios,” *El Mundo*, 11 Sept. 1908; and “Los veteranos y Montoro,” *El Mundo*, 25 Sept. 1908; “¡Alerta raza de color!” *El Triunfo*, 20 Sept. 1908; and “De Colón,” *La Lucha*, 9 Sept. 1908.

68. Eligio Hernández, “A la raza de color,” *La Discusión*, 12 Sept. 1905; “Ecos de Banés,” *La Discusión*, 15 Sept. 1905; “Movimiento político en la isla,” *La Discusión*, 16 Sept. 1905; and “La obra del engaño,” *El Nuevo Criollo*, 30 Sept. 1905.

69. “Movimiento conservador,” *El Cubano Libre*, 20 July 1907; “Digamos la verdad,” *El Cubano Libre*, 9 Sept. 1908; and Mario García Menocal, “Manifiesto al país,” *La Lucha*, 23 Oct. 1908.

Martínez, and Juan Eligio Ducasse. Agustín Cebreco was unable to attend but also endorsed the Conservative ticket.⁷⁰

At a rhetorical level, this fierce political competition for the black vote reinforced the notion of a racially inclusive nationhood. But at a practical level, it created opportunities for Afro-Cuban participation in national politics. Political parties could not totally ignore the demands and needs of their black followers and were forced to dispense some patronage in exchange for black support. Particularly during elections, which black journalist Pedro Portuondo Calás dubbed “this hour of political wheedling,” candidates of all parties had to make countless promises to attract black electoral support. D’Ou commented during the presidential campaign of 1916, “it is our turn to be flattered and to receive tributes, it is the electoral period.”⁷¹ Electoral competition also opened doors for Afro-Cuban professionals and public figures to advance socially and politically, which in turn allowed some of their clients and supporters to enter the administration, the rural guard, and the army.⁷² By 1931 black and mulatto representation in public-sector jobs, including the army and the police, was approaching their proportion in the total population. By the same year, the literacy gap between whites and nonwhites had declined to 4 percent, and the participation of blacks and mulattos in the liberal professions had doubled since 1907.⁷³ Even detractors and critics of the Cuban political system had to admit that competition for the Afro-Cuban vote had forced political parties to make concessions to their black constituents and to include black leaders among their candidates.⁷⁴ As one U.S. military officer observed, “the blacks see in the Republican form of government an opportunity to advance and are taking advantage of it.”⁷⁵ In an anti-black pamphlet published in 1912,

70. For an idea of the press campaign around the Montoro-Rabí hug, see the following: “Los reconquistadores de la república,” *La Discusión*, 11 Sept. 1908; “La campaña presidencial conservadora,” *El Cubano Libre*, 11 Sept. 1908; “Los conservadores en el Nacional,” *El Mundo*, 11 Sept. 1908; and “La semana,” *Avisador Comercial*, 12 Sept. 1908. On the presence of Afro-Cuban generals in the Partido Conservador, see also “Los veteranos de la independencia con el Partido Conservador,” *El Cubano Libre*, 9 Sept. 1908.

71. Pedro Portuondo Calás, “Palabras,” *Renovación*, 20 Mar. 1932; and D’Ou, “A iguales esfuerzos iguales consecuencias,” *Labor Nueva* 1, no. 26 (20 Aug. 1916), p. 4.

72. For specific examples of patronage administered by black politicians, see “Cartas dirigidas a Juan Gualberto Gómez por el Centro Juan G. Gómez de Regla, 1899–1928,” ANC, Adquisiciones, leg. 53, nos. 4076, 4089.

73. See de la Fuente, “Race and Inequality in Cuba,” 149–56.

74. For instance, an Afro-Cuban Communist recognized in the early 1930s that “the Cuban bourgeois are obliged to make concessions to their Negro and half-caste followers, in order to deceive the masses.” See M. A. Pérez-Medina, “The Situation of the Negro in Cuba,” in *Negro: An Anthology*, edited by Nancy Cunard (New York: F. Ungar, 1970), 294–98. The issue also surfaced in literature: Alfonso Hernández Catá, “La piel,” in *Los frutos ácidos y otros cuentos* (Madrid: Mundo Latino, 1953); and Jesús Masdeu, *La raza triste*, 2d ed. (Havana: Imprenta Obrapia, 1943), 173–75.

75. Paul Beck, Memoranda, Havana, 20 Apr. 1920, USNA, RG 165/2056–196. Similar testi-

the author recognized that certain “undeniable truths” could be spoken only by those who did not ask for votes. In other words, Cuban politicians could not afford to be openly racist.⁷⁶

As a result, black participation in the national government tended to increase during the first decade of the republic, although at a rate well below their percentage of the voting population. Only four out of sixty-three representatives to the House were black in 1905,⁷⁷ but at least fourteen blacks and mulattos were elected to Congress in 1908. Thus the proportion of black Congressmen (including the Senate and House of Representatives) was somewhere between 13 and 15 percent of the total.⁷⁸ Blacks were still underrepresented in the legislative body, but this total more than doubled their 6 percent after the partial elections of 1904. According to Lino D’Ou, himself a representative from Oriente province, 46 percent of provincial councilors, 9 percent of municipal mayors, and 40 percent of all town councilors on the island were also black.⁷⁹

To guarantee Afro-Cuban representation in Congress, political parties even reserved a number of slots in their slate for the black candidates. In Oriente the provincial assembly of the Partido Conservador discussed only fourteen of the eighteen possible nominations in 1908 because the remaining four had already been set aside for black candidates. Although this system guaranteed a minimum of Afro-Cuban participation among the candidates—a sort of affirmative action program—it did not necessarily work to the advantage of black candidates. Nor was it based on the principle of raceless equality advocated by all parties. Afro-Cuban candidates were forced to compete among themselves for these few positions, and thus their total number among the elected officials would never exceed certain margins previously defined by the provincial assemblies. D’Ou was right in complaining that this practice was not congruent with the ideals of “justice” and “cordiality” on which the Cuban republic allegedly was based.⁸⁰

Two examples illustrate further the kinds of opportunities that this competition opened for black candidates. When the Partido Moderado excluded Juan Felipe Risquet, a mulatto representative from Matanzas, in the

mony about blacks increasing their demands “before every election” is provided by Henry Watterson in “The Illogical Cuban,” *The Cuba News* 4, no. 4, 27 Feb. 1915, pp. 1, 4–5.

76. Gustavo E. Mustelier, *La extinción del negro: Apuntes político sociales* (Havana: Imprenta de Rambla, Bouza, 1912), 30.

77. Mario Riera, *Cuba política, 1899–1955* (Havana: Impresora Modelo, 1955), 57–66, 78–81; and Simeón Poveda, “Sobre la raza de color,” *El Nuevo Criollo*, 18 Nov. 1905.

78. “Palpitaciones de la raza de color: Duro y a la cabeza,” *La Prensa*, 12 Nov. 1915; “Iniciativa plausible,” *La Lucha*, 19 Apr. 1910; and Lino D’Ou, “La evolución de la raza de color en Cuba,” *Libro de Cuba* (Havana: n.p., 1930), 333–37.

79. D’Ou, “La evolución de la raza de color,” *ibid.*

80. D’Ou, “Sobre dos puntos,” *La Prensa*, 15 Aug. 1915; and “No más denominaciones,” *La Prensa*, 11 Jan. 1916. For an excellent description of this practice, see also Masdeu, *La raza triste*, 173–75.

congressional elections of 1905, the Liberals immediately attacked. In a public manifesto addressed to Afro-Cuban voters, they characterized as “wicked” the “act of robbing the colored element of the meager representation” they had in the national government. The Liberals also seized the occasion to offer to support any valuable black candidate for the government of “the Republic dreamed by Martí: with all and for all.”⁸¹ Black Moderados, in turn, took advantage of this environment to pressure their own party. In a telegram to the head of the party in Matanzas, black voters from Cárdenas asserted “the need to have adequate representation in the parliament, as a full demonstration that the party does not disregard them, refusing in practice the constant assertions” made by the Liberals. They also threatened to launch Risquet’s candidacy as an independent. The Partido Conservador, heir of the Moderados, learned its lesson: the conservatives took Risquet back to Congress in 1908.⁸²

Meanwhile, blacks in Oriente were also asking for proportional representation in the positions and nominations of the party.⁸³ In a similar incident, when Juan Gualberto Gómez withdrew from the senatorial race in 1908, the Partido Conservador expediently offered him a senator’s seat, which he refused.⁸⁴ It is precisely because of the opportunities opened by universal suffrage that several attempts were made to restrict electoral rights. The debate over contending notions of citizenship reemerged immediately after the Constitutional Convention of 1901, with several conservative political leaders advocating restriction of the voting rights. Instead of depriving illiterates of their right to vote, what they proposed was to move away from the principle of one man, one vote and to award multiple votes on the bases of literacy and property—the so-called plural vote.⁸⁵ This system pledged formal allegiance to the idea of an inclusive citizenship, while minimizing in practice the electoral power of those referred to in the convention as “the Cuban people.”

White intellectual Enrique José Varona, later president of the Partido Conservador, opposed universal suffrage on the grounds that a society that had emerged from “a plantation colony” could not possibly be transformed overnight into a real democracy. In a debate sponsored in 1905 by the Ate-

81. Ulises de Croacia, “A los electores de la raza de color,” *El Nuevo Criollo*, 7 Oct. 1905.

82. “Es natural y lógico,” *El Nuevo Criollo*, 7 Oct. 1905; “El Sr. Risquet,” *El Nuevo Criollo*, 28 Oct. 1905; and “La reelección de Risquet,” *La Discusión*, 6 Oct. 1905.

83. “Desde Santiago,” *El Nuevo Criollo*, 2 Sept. 1905; and “Todo con los Nacionales,” *El Nuevo Criollo*, 22 Oct. 1905.

84. “La fusión de los liberales,” *El Mundo*, 3 Sept. 1908; “Juan Gualberto Gómez,” *La Discusión*, 5 Sept. 1908; “Después de la coalición,” *El Cubano Libre*, 12 Sept. 1908; and “Juan Gualberto siempre liberal,” *La Lucha*, 30 Oct. 1908.

85. “¡No hubo quórum!” *La Discusión*, 8 July 1901; and “Los enemigos de la independencia,” *El Mundo*, 27 Apr. 1901. A similar attack on universal suffrage and the “barbarism of number” was being staged in the United States by various scientists in the eugenics movement. For an excellent discussion, see Tucker, *Racial Research*, 70, 91, 102–6.

neo, Havana's most prominent cultural circle, he asked whether after four hundred years of colonial rule, the Cuban people "composed of perfectly heterogeneous elements" could suddenly exercise their electoral rights to provide the republic with an appropriate government. In Varona's view, suffrage was not a "right" but a "responsibility" to be exercised only by those who had the necessary "moral and intellectual conditions."⁸⁶ Rafael Montoro defended a similar position before the Consultative Commission that drafted a new electoral law during the second U.S. government of intervention (1906–1909). Montoro argued that the plural vote was a "means of compensating the inconveniences of universal suffrage" and mentioned that in the U.S. South, especially in those states that were closer to Cuba in terms of "social structure" and "historical conditions," suffrage had been effectively limited in several ways. In his view, citizens with higher education, property holders, and those who were legally married should be entitled to more than one vote.⁸⁷

But the idea did not prosper and was skillfully exploited by the Liberals to discredit their political opponents. In a response to Varona in the Ateneo debate, Liberal leader Alfredo Zayas underlined the links between the nationalist ideology and the notion of popular participation in the political life of the country. Zayas argued that the revolution must transform everything, especially politics, and that suffrage was a "right," not the "function" that Varona presented. Acknowledging that several decades of cross-racial popular mobilization could not be easily reversed, he pointed out, "[I]n our fatherland it is not possible, without grave and serious consequences, to restrict suffrage." The revolution had not been achieved exclusively by those with noble titles or real estate but by an "enormous mass" who had no assets and did not know how to read and write. Suffrage, Zayas concluded, was "the right of every citizen."⁸⁸

This position was endorsed by black intellectuals as well. Although none who argued against universal suffrage referred explicitly to race, it was indeed a major factor in their fears. Varona's claim that unqualified citizenship was not viable in Cuba given its "heterogeneous elements" and Montoro's reference to the U.S. South both clearly alluded to race. In the pages of *El Nuevo Criollo*, edited by black intellectual Rafael Serra, Varona was attacked for seeking to establish "feudalism" and "an aristocratic republic" in Cuba.⁸⁹

86. "La prensa," *Diario de la Marina*, 17 Mar. 1900, morning ed.; and "Los debates del 'Ateneo,'" *La Discusión*, 19 Nov. 1905.

87. The debate in the Comisión Consultiva can be followed in Cuba, Comisión Consultiva, *Diario de Sesiones* 1:14–16, 5–8 Mar. 1907.

88. "Los debates del Ateneo: Discurso pronunciado por el doctor Alfredo Zayas," *La Discusión*, 20 Nov. 1905.

89. These quotations are taken from the following articles in *El Nuevo Criollo*: Enrique

In the Consultative Commission, Juan Gualberto Gómez replied to Montoro that in Cuba, unlike the U.S. South, abolition and independence had been accomplished by the joint efforts of whites and blacks.⁹⁰ Despite efforts to restrict electoral rights, universal suffrage remained a central tenet of republican politics.

CONCLUSION: THE OTHER LIMITS OF RACIAL DEMOCRACY

Inclusiveness not only limited Cuban elites' attempts to eliminate popular participation in the Republic, it also delegitimized any form of racially based mobilization as un-Cuban and a threat to national unity. The racist repression of the Partido Independiente de Color (PIC) in 1912, rather than being a subversion of this ideological principle, was possible precisely because a racially defined political party was incompatible with the dominant discourse of a raceless Cubanness. The wave of anti-black feelings that accompanied the repression of the Independientes did not demonstrate that Cuban racial democracy was nothing but a myth. To the contrary, it exemplified the strength and the limitations that the ideology of racial democracy placed on racially separate mobilization.

The Partido Independiente de Color had been founded in 1908 by a number of Afro-Cuban veterans, most of them former Liberals who, despite their patriotic merits, had been overlooked by the dominant parties in the distribution of patronage. Recent scholarship has emphasized the popular composition of the PIC.⁹¹ But the argument that the party leadership had been ignored in the distribution of patronage and that the party tended to represent the interests and aspirations of displaced Afro-Cuban politicians rests on solid evidence.⁹² In their programmatic documents, the Independientes made it clear that they had organized to obtain full participation "in all the governments of the Cuban Republic, so that we are well

Ponce Herrera, "El señor Varona," 18 Nov. 1905; "Será derrotada," 18 Nov. 1905; "Aunque se vista de seda," 18 Nov. 1905; Serra, "Sobra de información," 25 Nov. 1905; and "La Sociedad Jurídica y 'La Doctrina de Martí,'" 25 Nov. 1905. See also Serra, "La brasa a su sardina," *La Discusión*, 13 May 1904.

90. Cuba, Comisión Consultiva, *Diario de Sesiones* 1:14 (5 Mar. 1907), also 1:12–15.

91. Both Fernández Robaina and Helg have studied the social composition of the party and stressed its popular character. See Fernández Robaina, *El negro en Cuba*, 95–103; and Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 157.

92. This position is endorsed by Orum in "The Politics of Color," 218–19; and by Pérez in "Politics, Peasants, and the People of Color," 529. It is also the position adopted in the Cuban Marxist historiography, including the work of black scholar Pedro Serviat, "Independientes de Color," *Cuba Internacional*, no. 121 (Dec. 1979):33–35. He states that although the party was a "popular masses organization," it represented the "aspirations of some sectors of the black petite bourgeoisie." See also Sergio Aguirre, "El cincuentenario de un gran crimen," in his *Eco de caminos* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1974), 337–53.

governed.”⁹³ Some goals were not racially specific—an eight-hour work-day, free immigration for all races, distribution of land among veterans. But they also demanded black representation in the diplomatic service, the army, and the different branches of the government. The PIC program did not advocate racial separatism, pledging allegiance to the Cuban nation and advocating goals with broad popular appeal. Yet the party’s name suggested that the organization was only for people “of color” who were organizing “independently,” that is, separately from whites.⁹⁴

The PIC participated in the national elections of 1908 with a complete list of candidates for congress in the provinces of Havana and Las Villas, but the results can only be described as catastrophic. In Havana the Independiente candidate with the largest number of votes was Agapito Rodríguez, who received 116 votes. Each Liberal candidate received more than forty-seven thousand votes, and no Conservative aspirant got fewer than twenty-three thousand. PIC leader Evaristo Estenoz attracted only ninety-five votes, sixth among the candidates of his own party.⁹⁵ Although the party had organized shortly before the elections, this fact alone cannot explain its electoral failure. The PIC platform addressed mainly the needs of a small number of urban veterans and black Liberals who had not been included in the distribution of office and patronage. Their power to attract voters was seriously undermined by the opportunities for social ascent that mainstream political parties could offer, as well as by the parties’ active efforts to lure Afro-Cubans into their ranks. Furthermore, the 1908 presidential elections had brought a relatively large number of Afro-Cubans to positions of power and prestige within the country, challenging the notion that Afro-Cubans were not well represented in Cuban political life.

Legal action against the Independientes was not brought until 1910, a year of partial congressional elections. To consolidate their hold over black voters, both Conservatives and Liberals had tried unsuccessfully to attract Estenoz and his followers to their ranks. At this point, Morúa Delgado, the leading black figure among the followers of President José Miguel Gómez, introduced a bill in the Senate establishing that any group composed of individuals of a single race or color would not be considered

93. The program of the Independientes has been analyzed by Portuondo Linares in *Los Independientes de Color*, 19–21; Fernández Robaina, *El negro en Cuba*, 64–66; and Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 147–49. See also “Informe relativo a los propósitos de la Agrupación Independiente de Color, 1908,” ANC, Secretaría de la Presidencia, leg. 22, no. 33.

94. It is interesting that President José Miguel Gómez promised to support the Independientes in 1912 if they dropped “de color” from their name. This report came from the American chargé d’affaires in Havana: Beaupré to the Secretary of State, Havana, 19 Feb. 1912, USNA, RG 59/837.00/571. The contradictions among the party’s name, its program, and some of its political practices are underlined by Portuondo Linares in *Los Independientes de Color*, 279–81. His book is otherwise clearly sympathetic with the PIC.

95. “Provincia de la Habana: Votación total,” *La Lucha*, 19 Nov. 1908.

a political party. Morúa argued that he opposed any racially exclusive political group because Cubans should not get used to the idea of being separated according to their race. He further claimed that a black political organization would automatically generate its opposite, an all-white organization, precisely “the conflict” that the bill attempted to prevent. Morúa warned that these trends, if unchecked, could end up “drowning us all” and stressed that all parties had tried to attract the largest possible number of black voters.⁹⁶ His bill passed with little opposition.

The revolt of the Independientes in May 1912 was thus easily construed as an attempt to break the fragile boundaries of Cuban racial democracy and a threat to the existence of the republic. As one editorial opined, “those who follow Estenoz are evil because they prefer to be blacks rather than Cubans.”⁹⁷ The PIC and its leaders were labeled “racist”—meaning a group that placed race above national identity. The fact that the Independientes constantly asked for the recognition and mediation of the U.S. government reinforced this image.⁹⁸ Even more vexing, they declared that given the way blacks had been treated by white Cubans, it was preferable to be governed by foreigners.⁹⁹

Once the restraining walls represented by an inclusive Cubanness had been broken, white racism was allowed to operate almost freely. The mainstream press greatly exaggerated and distorted the actions of the In-

96. See “El congreso,” *La Lucha*, 12 and 15 Feb. 1910; and “El Señor Morúa Delgado y el Partido Independiente de Color,” *La Lucha*, 13 Feb. 1910; and Martín Morúa Delgado, *Integración cubana y otros ensayos* (Havana: Impresora Nosotros, 1957), 239–45. The final version of the amendment can be found in *Gaceta Oficial*, 14 May 1910.

97. “La raza de color y los racistas,” *La Lucha*, 7 June 1912.

98. Fermoselle, *Política y color en Cuba*, 182–87. Portuondo Linares emphasized the “anti-imperialism” of the PIC, but since 1910 the party had tried to obtain official U.S. recognition and support, based on the Platt Amendment. See Portuondo Linares, *Los Independientes de Color*, 173–76. See also Domingo Acosta Lizama to the President of the United States, Cienfuegos, 21 Apr. 1910, USNA, RG 59/837.00/1943; Jackson to the Secretary of State, Havana, 22 Apr. 1910, USNA, RG 59/837.00/1943/374; the Provincial Executive Committee of the Colored Independent Party to the President of the U.S., Santiago de Cuba, 18 Oct. 1910, USNA, RG 59/837.00/431; Acosta to the President of the U.S., Cienfuegos, 23 Dec. 1910, USNA, RG 59/837.00/4513; Beupré to the Secretary of State, Havana, 26 Jan. 1912, USNA, RG 59/837.00/561; Alejandro Lima Boyz and Vicente Cubilla to Beupré, Havana, 11 Mar. 1912, USNA, RG 59/837.00/577; and Estenoz to the Secretary of State [Oriente], 15 June 1912, USNA, RG 59/837.00/860.

99. Holaday to the Secretary of State, Santiago de Cuba, 18 June 1912, USNA, RG 59/837.00/796; and “Cablegramas de la lucha: Estenoz explica los motivos del actual alzamiento,” *La Lucha*, 8 June 1912. This position had been endorsed earlier by Juan de Dios Cepeda in his manifesto “A los hombres de color,” *Placetas*, 20 Oct. 1909, ANC, Fondo Especial, Leg. fuera, no. 9–22. U.S. authorities never showed any sympathy toward the Independientes and replied that neither the president nor any other official could make a declaration on the subject. See H. Wilson to Acosta Lizama, Washington, 20 May 1910, USNA, RG 59/837.00/1943/390; the Secretary of War to the Secretary of State, Washington, 16 May 1910, USNA, RG 59/837.00/1943/390; and “La prensa de la mañana,” *Cuba*, 5 Feb. 1913.

dependientes, thus fueling white fears, helping to consolidate their sense of racial solidarity, and legitimizing the slaughter of innocent blacks.¹⁰⁰ Racist repression had become politically possible. Indeed, it was presented as an act of patriotism. Still, only reluctantly and under great pressure from the U.S. government and the opposition did President Gómez launch a full military operation against the Independientes. As one U.S. reporter pointed out, a president who had made “political capital out of his patriotic, anti-American attitude” could not afford the humiliation of a military intervention, particularly in an election year.¹⁰¹ Yet even amid the racist hysteria that swept Cuba, some efforts were made to restore the peaceful racial co-existence advocated by the hegemonic national discourse. President Gómez himself warned that abuses against peaceful blacks would not be tolerated, a pronouncement that was echoed by other authorities across the island.¹⁰²

Despite the significant attention that the PIC has received from scholars, the party remained a rather minor actor in Cuban politics, one that was opposed by most Afro-Cubans. Black Liberals condemned the movement and its leaders as an affront to national unity. A manifesto issued in Cárdenas proclaimed, “we belong to a race that is called Cubans.”¹⁰³ Also critical were most Afro-Cuban veterans,¹⁰⁴ black clubs and societies,¹⁰⁵ and black congressmen, who issued a public condemnation of the Independientes in the strongest possible terms.¹⁰⁶ Although some of these statements

100. Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 173–77, 194–97.

101. “Relations Strained: The Week’s Developments,” *The Cuba News*, 1 June 1912. A good summary of all the diplomatic correspondence surrounding the U.S. intervention in 1912 can be found in P. C. J., “Memo on the Platt Amendment,” Havana, 20 Aug. 1930, USNA, Foreign Service Post Records (hereafter RG 84)/801/388. See also Knox to the American Legation in Havana, Washington, 23 May 1912, USNA, RG 59/837.00/598; and William Taft to José Miguel Gómez, 27 May 1912, USNA, RG 59/837.00/614.

102. “El movimiento racista: Consejos oportunos” and “Alocución al elemento tranquilo de color del barrio del Pilar,” both in *Diario de la Marina*, 11 June 1912, morning ed. See also “El movimiento racista: Alocución del alcalde de Matanzas,” *Diario de la Marina*, 12 June 1912, evening ed.; Vidaurreta a Menocal, Santa Clara, 11 June 1912, and Fiscal de la Audiencia de Oriente al Secretario de Justicia, Santiago de Cuba, 30 May 1912, both in ANC, Secretaría de la Presidencia, leg. 110, no. 2.

103. “La agitación en Güines: Manifiesto al país,” *La Lucha*, 26 Apr. 1910; and Julio Franco, “Réplica a la raza de color de Cárdenas,” Jan. 1910, ANC, Fondo Especial, leg. 4, no. 135.

104. “Un almuerzo a Rabí,” *La Lucha*, 13 Sept. 1908; “El General Pedro Díaz,” *La Última Hora*, 11 June 1912; and “Contra el racismo: Manifiesto patriótico,” *La Lucha*, 15 May 1910.

105. “La cuestión racista: Manifiesto de las sociedades de color,” *La Lucha*, 3 May 1910; and “Contra el racismo: Dos manifiestos,” *La Lucha*, 5 May 1910; “Telegramas oficiales: Protesta,” “Manifiesto,” and “Protesta,” all in *Diario de la Marina*, 2 June 1912. See also Recortes de prensa, 1910, ANC, Fondo Especial, leg. fuera, no. 9–29; “A la raza de color de Cárdenas,” 1912, ANC, Fondo Especial, leg. fuera, no. 4–22; and “Los actuales sucesos: Importante asamblea de la raza de color,” *La Lucha*, 10 June 1912.

106. “Iniciativa plausible,” *La Lucha*, 19 Apr. 1910; and “El movimiento racista: Un manifiesto,” *Diario de la Marina*, 4 June 1912, morning edition.

might have been produced out of fear and “to avoid victimization,”¹⁰⁷ they also reflected the limited appeal of the PIC and the dominant consensus against racially separate mobilization as a threat to the nation. As Thomas Orum has argued, the party “was only marginally accepted by Cuba’s Negro community.”¹⁰⁸ In fact, opposition to the party started when it was created, well before repression could have played any role. Public manifestos condemning the creation of a black political party were published by Afro-Cuban Liberals from Regla, Havana, Sancti Spíritus, San Juan de las Yeras, and Manzanillo as early as 1908.¹⁰⁹

The failure of the PIC to attract a large Afro-Cuban following attests to the strength of a national construction with little room for racially based political organizations. Rather, cross-racial mobilization characterized Cuban political life and the emerging labor movement.¹¹⁰ Under the dominant rhetoric of inclusion, blacks could not be openly excluded from some of the most important sectors of republican life, particularly those sponsored by the state and defined as public. Otherwise, it would be difficult to understand the advancement experienced by Afro-Cubans in areas like education and access to white-collar jobs during the early republic. This ideology created opportunities that Afro-Cubans were able to use to their advantage. Regardless of how racist many Cuban whites were, it was difficult for them to translate their anti-black prejudices into openly discriminatory practices. That is the reason, according to one witness, why a large number of blacks graduated every year from the public Institute of Santiago de Cuba, “despite the obstacles” that the white racist principal put in their way.¹¹¹ The myth of racial democracy was real enough that the principal was “forced” to award degrees to deserving Afro-Cuban students.

As the Cuban case shows, the perception that the ideologies of racial democracy are mere “myths” masking unpleasant social realities is too reductionist. As Emilia Viotti da Costa has pointed out, social myths are “an

107. This is the position of Helg in *Our Rightful Share*, 170–71, 207.

108. Orum, “The Politics of Color,” 212–13; see also Fermoselle, *Política y color en Cuba*, 161–64.

109. “A la raza de color,” *El Triunfo*, 17 Feb. 1908; Tomás Aguilar, “Al General Evaristo Estenoz,” *El Triunfo*, 27 Sept. 1908; Tirso Calderón Barrera, “A la raza de color,” *El Triunfo*, 30 Sept. 1908; “De Manzanillo,” *La Lucha*, 26 Sept. 1908; and “Tribuna Libre: El partido de la raza de color,” *Diario de la Marina*, 20 Sept. 1908.

110. The study of cross-racial mobilization in the labor movement in Cuba has been undertaken by several scholars: Scott in “Relaciones de clase e ideologías raciales: Acción rural colectiva en Louisiana y Cuba, 1865–1912,” *Historia Social* 22 (1995):127–50; de la Fuente, “Two Dangers, One Solution: Immigration, Race, and Labor in Cuba, 1900–1930,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 51 (Spring 1997):30–49; and John Dumoulin, “El primer desarrollo del movimiento obrero y la formación del proletariado en el sector azucarero: Cruces, 1886–1902,” *Islas*, no. 48 (1974):3–66.

111. Andre de Graux to the Military Attaché, Havana, 30 Aug. 1919, USNA, RG 59/837.00/1573.

integral part of social reality.”¹¹² However much these myths misrepresent reality, they embody a set of socially acceptable ideals that can be turned into opportunities for participation and advancement by those at the bottom of the socio-racial hierarchy. Once these ideals acquire hegemonic status, they cannot be manipulated freely, not even by their own creators. These ideologies restrict the political options of the white elites, and they can be manipulated from below as well. Subordinate racial groups can appropriate these myths and legitimately demand full participation in a country that these ideologies proclaim to be inclusive. Like the concept of race itself, the ideals of racial democracy are social inventions. But just as race can have a genuine meaning in social relations, so these myths can define what is politically possible in a very real sense.

112. Costa, “The Myth of Racial Democracy,” 235.

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