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Jose Yglesias

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JOSE MARTÍ IN YBOR CITY*

by Jose Yglesias

One of the many writers who have had their say about José Martí points out that it is a stylistic habit of Martí's to present the object of his sentences ahead of the subject and verb, to give his conclusion first rather than the nominative and that part of the predicate by which the sentence arrives at its objective. Let me go a bit further with this tradition of Martí's, and state immediately, as object not of a sentence alone but of all I say tonight, without working up to it like a good orator or laying the foundation for my denouement carefully and piling up my own little insights into a statement at the end of this talk that I should hope would bring you to your feet in thundering agreement – let me say it immediately: the reason everyone comes to love José Martí is that without question he is the person we all dream of being, the man that in our moments of optimism, although the prospects may be disheartening and all common sense against us, the man we believe we will yet become. We love him because he keeps that vision of fulfillment alive in us – to be a whole man like him: a brave uncomplaining young rebel though the jailing he suffered broke his health, a loving father to his little son, a father to his nation (the very idea of Cuba being a nation seems his), a great poet, a great journalist, a superb prose stylist, an unexcelled organizer and teacher, an utterly sincere and honest and forthright friend and correspondent, one of the few major revolutionary leaders of modern times.

He is none of these things separately. They are not attributes of his. Together they are him. Take one away and the whole edifice might crumble. What's left would not be Martí. Could Martí be Martí if we did not have that enchanting Mary Cassatt double portrait of him and his son to be found in *Ismaelillo*, the poem called *Mi caballero* in which he plays with his infant son? Could we say we knew him well if we had not read his superb social and cultural reportage, from his wonderful articles on Ulysses S. Grant and Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman to those on Coney Island and the Kansas land rush? Could we take him seriously as a revolutionary if he were not the ground-breaking poet he was? That is, a poet who was a revolutionary in that field as well – the father of modernism.

I can easily go on this way, extending my metaphor to every corner of his achievements. He is indeed the person whom we dream of becoming because there is not a facet of personality that he did not bring to fruition in his own indivisible whole. Do you think I am exaggerating? Does all this sound utterly hyperbolic to you? This is a problem for anyone who tries to tell others about Martí. We all appear guilty of overstatement. At second hand any description of him sounds like, as young people say nowadays, too much. When I first read about Martí (I did not then – this was during my youth – count my family as a reliable source of serious knowledge about him – but more about that later) it bothered me then that everyone referred to him in such adoring perfervid phrases. No one took him lightly. Not a joke at his expense in all the literature on Martí, not a slightly ironic comment, either. No gibes, and you certainly couldn't do a Kitty Kelley on him. God knows, Martí is the only Cuban that Cubans do not joke about. *El choteo* stops right there with him. No one crosses that line.

*Reprinted from *José Martí in the United States: The Florida Experience*, ed. by Louis A. Pérez, Jr. (Tempe: Arizona State University Center for Latin American Studies, 1995).

I must add that when one shakes off all that reverent talk and one approaches him directly again and sees his various roles unfold, as a historical figure, as poet, as author of extraordinary essays on cultural, political and social subjects, as orator of speeches of soaring eloquence, one begins – at least I do, ineluctably, it seems – to adopt the same tone as others who have been star-struck by him. Yes, we cannot help but adore him like a saint and hope to be like him.

Yet why? It shouldn't follow. His was not what we call a happy life. He did not come to the end of a full life as a *paterfamilias* with any number of generations of his family about him, and also abundantly surrounding him, a large circle of friends who knew they were in the presence of greatness. Martí died at the age of 42 in an encampment at Dos Ríos in Oriente, killed by a band of Spanish soldiers who came upon him unknowingly, a month after he landed with a reduced, somewhat bungling expeditionary force led by Máximo Gómez. On the face of it, his was a terribly humiliating end. There is, as that great Catholic poet Cintio Vitier has said, a pervasive sadness in all his life and work, and the optimism that he never failed to project and pass on to his people and his audiences (he knew how to bring them to their feet for a thundering finale) is always tinged with his pitying knowledge of the unhappy difficulties and disappointments of humanity's struggles. One cannot fault him for it: he went through terrible years after being jailed as a teenager. Exiled, living hand to mouth in various countries, losing his son when his wife broke up their marriage and returned to Cuba, where he was legally forbidden to follow. The turbulent emotions attendant on all this is evident in *Versos libres*, the volume of poetry not published until two decades after his death, whose poems were obviously influenced by Whitman. Here he lashes out and questions the unhappy difficulties and disappointments I cited. Yet although he is openly distraught, he is always positive about existence. One could make this point with any number of the poems of this period. Here are a few lines from "*Odio al mar (I Hate the Sea)*":

Que voy muerto es claro; a nadie importa
Ni siquiera a mi: pero por bella,
Ignea, varia, inmortal amo la vida.

(That I seem dead is clear; no one cares,
Not even I; but because she is beautiful,
Fiery, various, immortal, I love life.)

There is, believe me, no distancing oneself from this man.



José Martí

An aside: I have always – or almost always – enjoyed *el choteo*, that scathing pitiless scorn that Cubans direct at accepted mores and values. It has to be funny to be effective, or it would otherwise often be simple cruelty. It can also be what we call off-the-wall fooling and can have the effect of belittling all subjects with what seems like mere fun, as in the style of Groucho Marx. *El choteo* is native to Cuba; the word itself gained its full meaning there. Its bitter humor clears the air: it says we are not fooled by humbug. It is a great weapon of self-defense in our world, and I daresay I am not the first to whom it has occurred that *el choteo* was born in Cuba after their revolutionary struggle for independence ended as badly as it did. For it did end badly and not simply because Martí died so early in the war. It was at the expense of that heroic movement for independence that we – the United States of America, as we call ourselves – made our debut as an imperial power. Well... if we don't count the Mexican-American war fifty years earlier. I'm also not mentioning the Philippines and Puerto Rico. Nor our treatment of native Americans. In fact, I think I shall leave this whole subject alone, this conquering interfering history of ours. End of aside.

There is another kind of humor in Martí, the kind which a newly-articulated truth most often inspires. For all his romantic élan, Martí is a close observer of the ordinary life we all lead and he sees things in their wholeness – one could almost say that his personal odyssey and struggle was a striving for wholeness – and it is because he does see all the sides of a situation or of a person that one responds with a smile of recognition. Yes, we say to ourselves, we have experienced something of the sort or known some one like that. Yes, but not as acutely, nor could we have been able to describe the whole thing so justly until we read it in Martí. There follows, then, a sense of enjoyment when we read him or read about him which comes from the gentle, unembittered irony we share with him. I think that all these elements, plus others I have not mentioned, make him the kind of figure that does earn him the title which his countrymen have given him of *El Apóstol*.

The Apostle! I was put off the first time I came upon that epithet. It had religious overtones I didn't care for, but it does not bother me now. I don't know whether I have realized that the word does generically describe what Martí did or whether I have, when it comes to religion, decided to give the other fellow the benefit of his doubt of what the real world is. Religious faith, it appears to me, is based on uncertainties, but there is none of that in Martí. He did have an unswerving, often declared faith in the power and beauty of love. He believed in love as a principle of esthetics, as a way to understand the world, as the best means of changing it: it was, perhaps, his most deeply held belief.

I approach this particular tenet of his ideology gingerly: love of everyone as programmatic politics seems to me impossible to bring into being without selfconsciousness. I didn't much care for it in Tolstoy and Ghandi, and it has echoes for me of the mindless flower children of the Sixties. Even in the case of literature, loving everyone you write about is a problem for me: did Shakespeare love Iago? But, to get back to politics, Martí was not confronting the juggernaut power of late capitalism and he was not planning to place daisies in the barrels of the Spanish army's rifles. He was not asking us to do anything more than to make love a principle of our conduct and vision, and he pierces one to the heart whenever he so pleads.

In any case, Martí was an apostle even if he was not a proselytizer for any religious sect. He certainly was not a member of any congregation, for very likely he never entered a church except for those two or three occasions when it is de rigueur for a *latino* to do so. Truthfully, I repeat, he was an apostle. He came to teach, he had the answers, he pointed the way, and he died for it. He did not seek death but he was ready for it. His letters, his poetry, his speeches tell us that.

I like to think that the last and the greatest period of his apostleship began – indeed, was triggered – by his first trip to Tampa, an event of a century ago which we are here to celebrate, joyously, with gladness of heart, with minds open to what he had to say to us. And with – to be true to him – a certain sadness. His encounter with the workers of Ybor City and West Tampa confirmed for him what he had been learning all his life in exile. He had now arrived at this knowledge with a full heart and his whole being and he expressed it directly. “Lo que tengo que decir, antes de que se me apague la voz y mi corazón cese de latir, es que mi patria posee todas las virtudes necesarias para la conquista y el mantenimiento de la libertad.”

This is what he reported to a meeting in New York City that he had learned in Tampa, that his people were ready to conquer liberty and to uphold it, and he embarked immediately on the unceasing work of organizing the Revolutionary Party – the famous Resolutions setting it up were drafted in Tampa and voted on before he left for New York City – and of preparing for the armed struggle by which independence was to be gained. Ybor City’s welcome sets the tone for *Pinos nuevos*, the speech he gave his second night in Ybor City in which he embraces the death of heroes: “That tree bears the best fruit that is fed by a dead man,” said this non-violent man. In three short years he himself was dead.

An inexpressible tragedy, the extent of which took years to comprehend.

I understand, but only through my readings about him, that Martí’s stature in all the fields in which he moved, and, indeed, as father of his country, was not really appreciated for what it was during thirty years or more following his death. I say that it was only through reading that I learned this surprising fact because in my family throughout the years of my growing up – from the Twenties on – Martí was a living presence. They had heard him speak, and my Cuban grandfather, Rafael Milián, had lived in New York and Key West, too, in the years that Martí had worked and lived in one and visited the other. By the time I came along Martí was already like some one, now dead, who had been a member of the family. *En paz descanse*. But he did not rest in peace: his ideas and actions had to be fought for.

In my family every aspect of the Cuban national struggle was discussed and chewed over. It was not unusual, to give an example I remember, for a long and lively discussion to ensue from my aunt Juanita saying, “Yes, but do you believe Martínez Campos was really sincere?” (Need I explain to this gathering that General Martínez Campos led the Spanish Crown’s armies during the Ten Years War and as colonial rulers go was not a bad man?) I remember too the many nights on the porch on Ybor Street when the relative merits of Maceo and Máximo Gómez were gone into at length. I was a partisan of Maceo because my grandfather was. Whether Martí should have gone to Cuba and lived the life of a guerrilla was the subject for embittered talk about the treacherousness and spite of people with political ambitions who had taunted him because of the envy that genius inspires in the mean-spirited.

I can laugh about all this, now that remembering the family of my childhood calls up my love for them and not my exasperation with their obsessive concerns. God knows, I had no idea who Martínez Campos was, except that my Cuban grandmother's string of surnames included Campos among them and I had a vague notion whenever Martínez Campos was mentioned that he must be my great grandfather. In a family such as mine Martí would, of course, have received his due, but I like to think that ours was not different from the other Cuban émigré families in West Tampa and Ybor City. Indeed, I am sure it was not. It's a telling comment on the sadness of the outcome of the struggle for Cuban independence that these workers who had gathered round Martí (as had my grandparents first in Key West and then West Tampa) – these workers who first inspired him to believe that the time was ripe for revolution did not go back to the island when, as my grandfather used to say, *el politiquero* began; that is, after the constitution with its Platt Amendment was in place and presidential elections began. Politicking, yes, that is what our brand of democracy has mostly meant to Latin Americans.

How I wish I could live that childhood again. I would not be so thoughtless as to fail to write down everything those cigarmakers said and did. Now I would be sure to ask my grandfather about the welcoming committee for Martí in Key West of which he was a member. Or the committee here in Tampa, later. At which gathering was it – in Key West or here at a picnic at Ballast Point? – that my Aunt Lila as a girl of four or five was given the honor of welcoming Martí by reciting a quatrain at the end of which she brought forward a homemade Cuban flag? The quatrain was also handmade, but probably not by her.

She last recited it to me when she was in her late seventies, sitting on the porch of her old house on Grace Street and going through the motions of hiding the small flag behind her back until she had finished the verse - and I was still so thoughtless in middle age as not to have made a copy of that quatrain. I hope someone will forgive me for not knowing even then that those cigarmakers of Ybor City and West Tampa were the significant makers of our history, not the Teddy Roosevelts and the Rough Riders and the Martínez Camposes. That what my aunt Lila recited was of the greatest importance to a truthful recreation of history.

Another aside: Maceo, the great revolutionary general, the Hero of Bronze as Cubans called this black giant, was not and is not known by Americans – but he was known by blacks in the terrible Reconstruction years, particularly by Southern blacks who had few safe opportunities to express their pride in themselves. They named their boys Maceo and gave it the American pronunciation: May-see-oh. This was a secret pleasure and there are American blacks today who do not know how they have come to be named Maceo.

Martí never made the mistake of ignoring or misapprehending or denigrating the role of the poor, for he was not looking at them like a reporter or scholar or artist – though he was all of these – but as a revolutionary gauging carefully the forces that could liberate his nation. You could say that he could not afford mistakes that others so airily commit. Life was too serious, also, to toss off opinions simply for effect or to work off momentary irritations. His appreciation of the working class, however, went deeper than calculation. By the time he came to Tampa he was totally concerned with what had to be done for Cuba: he had quit the jobs that he held as consul for some South American nations, he had accepted the fact that he had lost his family, he was devoting all his time to the making of the revolution. He had gone through his crucible.

He had acted and observed and pondered – and grown – all through that battering decade of the eighties. He had made difficult decisions – remember that he had refused then to join in the military venture that the generals had proposed because he thought the time was not ripe and he was worried about Máximo Gómez’s stand. As a result of those years he arrived at his mature vision of life so exquisitely displayed in *Versos sencillos*, published not too long before he answered the Agramonte invitation to come to Tampa. Gone is the Whitmanesque turbulence of *Versos libres*. In *Versos sencillos*, simple only in their accessibility, all is classical composure. He was assured in what he said and sang.

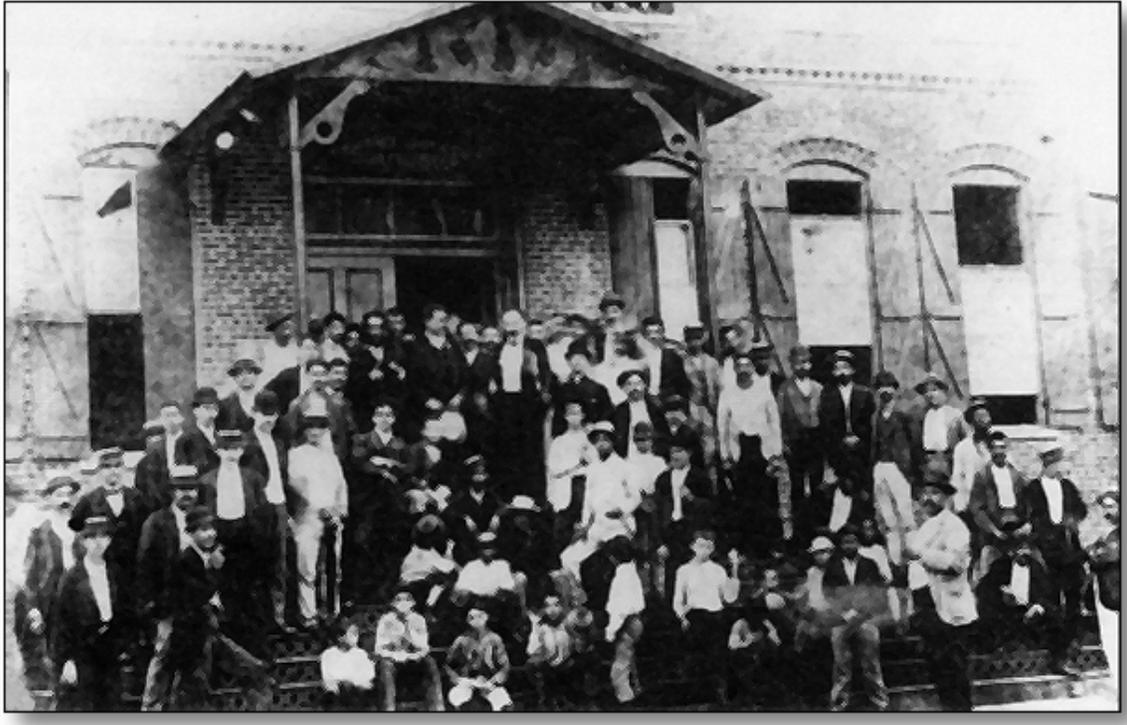


Antonio Maceo

He was not one who denigrated any group – he would not yield on the *wrongfulness* of hating the Spaniards – *and*, as his article on the memorial meeting at Cooper Union on Karl Marx makes clear, he did not believe in violence to effect economic reform, much as he admired Marx. He looked beyond the ruling ideologies of his time to a society just to all and devoted to ends quite different than those he saw about him. *Con todos y pares el bien de todos* is the title and theme of his first speech here in Tampa, exemplifying the thrust of all his work – *With Everyone and For the Good of Everyone* – a unifying work bringing people together and leading them to common action. Like *Versos sencillos* it is a leap of major proportions.

And yet the Martí who came to Tampa was the one who, having known and appreciated all the social and class components of Cuban society, had finally concluded with the serenity that characterizes all of *Versos sencillos*, that *con los pobres de la tierra quiero yo mi suerte echar*. And in his very moving eulogy to the student martyrs – *Pinos nuevos* – delivered on his second night in Ybor City he enthroned death as life when it comes in the fight for liberty. The speech reminds me of Martin Luther King saying that if you are not afraid to die you can do anything. Taking the side of one class and praising death seem alien to Martí’s whole outlook but they co-exist in his thinking with his classless non-violent ideals, despite the seeming contradiction. A Marxist – or a Hegelian, if you prefer – would understand that dialectical unity.

Martí was ripe, as I said, for the workers of Ybor City. And, God knows, they were ready for him. He knew with his heart and mind that their eventual loving, comradely response was a possibility, but when it took place that first night at the Liceo, it came as an epiphany for him. He wrote to others about these cigarmakers and said immediately afterwards at the meeting in New York reporting on his trip that his time in Tampa were “three days of immaculate moral beauty,” and he reiterated these deep feelings when a month later he went to Key West and again came to



José Martí (top center) on the steps of the Ybor cigar factory in 1892.

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.

Tampa. He was always to refer to the latino community of Tampa as “the eagle,” to the invitation that brought him here as “the call of the eagle.”

A year later, after another trip here, he was to write to a colleague from Ocala: “I don’t think I have told you about the grand emotions of my last day in Tampa, when in front of the Liceo which had flowed out into the street to hear us, a procession of Spaniards, hundreds of them, paraded in favor of Cuban independence. Extraordinary times are getting nearer. They paraded in the shade with their white banners. There were all sorts of dangers in the act, due to excessive trade unionism and allusions to local matters and anarchist slogans. I spoke the truth, boldly and treating everyone equally, and I was acclaimed. A magnificent night! Thousands of souls; the occasion a most solemn one, of the few that can shake the human soul to its roots.”

In a year these Spaniards in Ybor City were being fired for their views, and the Cuban cigarmakers went on sympathy strike. In another year Key West asked the Spanish government to let them import Spaniards to replace the Cuban revolutionaries the manufacturers were firing. I know some young writer will one day come along to write a dramatic account of Martí’s adventures with these workers of Tampa and Key West. Perhaps, a novel. Better, a film script. It has all the elements of a great movie, visually, romantically, ideologically – plus contemporary relevance.

The special role that Tampa played in Martí's life and in that of Cuban history has not been entirely ignored by historians. (We are here because of that, after all.) Perhaps I give it more emphasis than most, but the god that looks out for the destiny of my forefathers will forgive me. Still, I am obliged to point out that I learned the details of it from my reading, intuited the rest from my family. I remember my start of pleasure many years ago when revising the translation of Miguel Barnet's *Cimarron, the History of a Runaway Slave* I came upon the century-old Cuban slave, Esteban Montejo, who is the hero and narrator of Barnet's extraordinary book, referring to Martí as "*el pro feta de Tampa.*" And he did not get that from any reading whatsoever.

Some of those who do comment on the transfiguring rapport between Martí and his Ybor City audience call those cigarmakers *los humildes* and invariably quote a Cuban black as saying, "We don't understand him, but we are ready to die for him." These writers are good-hearted, they are on the side of the angels, there is no question about that. They mean to show that people of humble social position can see the political destiny of Cuba more clearly than the colonials back on the island who at that time were in the main for autonomy, a status for Cuba as a nation as castrating as the one we Americans have held Puerto Rico to throughout this century. But I suspect that if indeed some Cuban black in Ybor City or Key West said "We don't understand him, but we are ready to die for him," he was trying to please some one outside his class or his caste, just as American blacks for years kept out of trouble by telling whites what they wanted to hear.

It is true that Ybor City as a community was not quite six years old when Martí came here, but those cigarmakers were not born yesterday, they were already well organized and they had not only their native intelligence and experience of life with which to judge a speech of Martí's – they had also the experience of listening to their readers in the factories for four hours of each working day, a phenomenon I must always talk about when my hometown is mentioned. What they learned from listening to the *lectores* read to them from newspapers and books went hand in hand with the lessons that working for a living gives a worker. (Think how cultivated our middle class would be today if it devoted four hours each day to reading.) And those *lectores* were not a class or a caste apart but persons the cigarmakers elected and employed and lived in community with. If we are able to talk with confidence about what Martí said during those two nights in Ybor City that are now history, it is because a *lector* named Francisco María González took down his speeches in shorthand.

My great uncle, Francisco Milián, was a *lector*, too. Perhaps the best lector West Tampa ever had, if popularity is the criterion. He was deported to Cuba forcibly by the leaders of the Tampa community disguised as the Ku Klux Klan for his part in what was then called "labor unrest," but he returned to a tumultuous welcome at Port Tampa to become eventually mayor of West Tampa. You can read the whole story in Gary Mormino's book on the immigrant world of Ybor City and more about such deprivations against latino workers in Robert Ingalls' book on vigilantism. It is my belief that West Tampa was incorporated into Tampa in order to prevent any other men like Panchito, as my mother called him, becoming its mayor. He was one of seven or eight children of a cigarmaker from the Canary Islands who (via Matanzas) moved to Key West as soon as the Civil War was over. All those children were brought up there as my grandfather



A reader in one of Ybor City's early cigar factories.

was. And you can imagine how many institutions of higher learning Key West must have had then.

Los humildes, indeed. They are not to be patronized, not even by friends.

Certainly when Martí traveled to Ybor City he did not lodge somewhere away from the community like a visiting politician, but lived right in its midst as he did with the émigré community in New York, struggling to make a living like everyone else, without ceasing his many activities. We have all heard that he stayed with the Pedrosos in the house on Eighth Avenue across from the Martínez Ybor factory, where now that tacky white plaster statue of him stands. Only in the last couple of decades has it been emphasized that the Pedrosos were black, the point apparently being that blacks too played their part in backing Cuban independence, a seemingly generous ideological concession. It is, however, what I call a contribution to the obvious, for that struggle cannot be divorced from the struggle to end slavery, and there are still differences among historians about whether the revolutionary armies were forty or sixty percent black.

To me, the significance of Martí's close relationship with blacks such as the Pedrosos lies in Martí's opposition not only to slavery but to all prejudice that would keep him at any distance from friends such as they. He had first met them in Key West and then again here, for they were active in the independence movement in both places. When in a 1893 visit to Tampa Martí was poisoned, Paulina and her husband insisted on taking him into their home. They kept boarders

and they argued that he would be safer there. At night, Señor Pedroso guarded Martí by sleeping on the floor at the door to his room.

I am not certain whether it was on this trip that having heard that there was tension between Cuban blacks and some whites, he immediately upon his arrival gave Paulina his arm and insisted on their walking up and down the streets of Ybor City together to greet his friends. He was making sure everyone knew where he stood. He never compromised on matters of human equality – and specifically on the rights of Cuban blacks – and he made his point in ways that aroused no anger in anyone. I may be stretching a point here on his not ruffling any feathers – he did get poisoned in Ybor City. Somebody must not have been enchanted with him. In any case, I like to think that Martí believed in affirmative action.

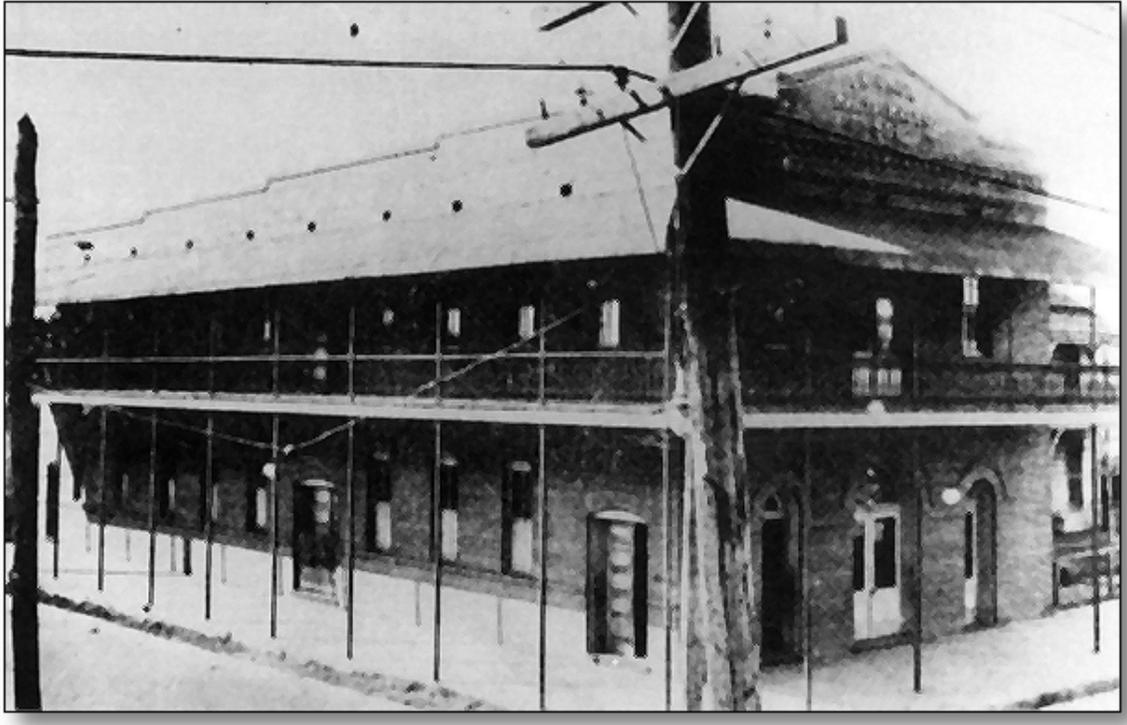
We must make the effort to see this egalitarian stance of his in the context of the time. What courage it must have taken to insist on racial equality in the years of the failed Reconstruction in the United States, a time of intensified persecution for blacks rather than restitution for centuries of exploitation. Parenthetically, it must be said that colonials who were won over to autonomy for Cuba within the Spanish system had two fears – of annexation by the United States and of their own blacks' possible power in a republican form of government. But it was, in a sense, more dangerous to hold Martí's views in the United States than in Cuba. The Jim Crow laws were in effect and violence was the order of the day for white supremacists. It could not, for example, have been legal for a white man to live with blacks, no more than it was legal for blacks and whites to marry. Especially in the South where you invited lynch mobs by the slightest variation in white-black relations.

Indeed, I believe Martí's leadership of the Cuban revolutionary party delayed the infiltration in Ybor City and West Tampa of American racist views and ways of living. The colony here was young, there had not been time perhaps to take on mores that were not natural to Cubans, racist though their own society on the island was. The subject of this last is a large one, for there are many differences between American racism and that in Latin America; but my point here has only to do with the effect of American racist laws and beliefs on a working class community not yet infected with our own native, more fearful, more irrational racism.

In time, all Cubans could not meet together at the Liceo, as they did for Martí. In time, black Cubans were forced to form the Martí-Maceo Society because the Cuban clubs here could not allow them membership that was not surreptitious and humiliating. In time, only the old-timers among Cuban blacks still worked elbow to elbow with whites in the cigar factories. They were the first to be fired, and no new apprentices were taken on from the Cuban black families: they were pushed down to the level of native-born American blacks. In time, finally, the cigarmaker's children took on the racism of the crackers. I shall apologize for the use of that reprehensible term for poor whites when a black becomes governor of Florida with a smashing majority, not simply the mayor of a large urban center who has squeaked into office because the city is being abandoned by middle-class whites.

Is it any wonder that remembering Martí is full of sadness?

Is it fair to ask if Martí could have made a difference if he had lived?



The original building of La Unión Martí-Maceo, Ybor City's Afro-Cuban social club.

Photograph courtesy of USF Special Collections.

Racism is the great issue in American life, the traumatic shame of our national psyche, the great road block to realizing the equality our Declaration of Independence says is our inalienable right. Sometimes when it surfaces to its most insane peak, it seems we shall never be able to end racism's degrading life. If we overcome it, Martí's hope for the world might become a reality.

Let me tell you another anecdote about my great uncle Francisco Milián, the kind that seldom gets into the history books, only into novels. One of Francisco Milián's wives was a black Cuban woman – I don't think he could have married her unless they had sneaked back to Cuba, as a few did, gotten married and then sneaked back – and with her he had two sons to whom he gave his surname. In time, he left her and remarried, but my mother and aunts never ceased to treat her as their aunt. Her sons were members of the *Círculo Cubano*, and one night when they were young men and accustomed to attending the wonderful Saturday night dances of the club, one of them was turned back and not allowed to enter. It was a time, again, of "labor unrest" and the club was fearful that the authorities who were keeping a close watch those days might take action. They were fearful of that, or using it as an excuse. In my family this event was discussed in hushed tones, not as passionately as Cuban independence and not on the porch; but the wound went deep.

Is it any wonder that the descendants of Ybor City should be among those who now carry the infection as virulently as those whom my family called "the barbarians on the other side of Nebraska Avenue." They worry these days just like the worst of white Americans of other

backgrounds that blacks want everything, that they are taking over – when it is obvious that their situation worsens everywhere. One century after Martí walked the Ybor City streets with Paulina Pedroso – one hundred years and blacks are no more integrated in American life than they were then. Maybe less?

Perhaps Martí could have made a difference here had he lived, here, right here, where he first found a community to support him in his revolutionary call. Perhaps racism would have been totally eradicated in his own Cuba. Perhaps there would have existed for at least as long as my parents' generation lived an island of equality in Florida. Perhaps there would have been many to extend an arm to my great uncle's sons and accompany them all the way up the stairs to the ballroom of the Cuban Club – and perhaps there would have been many to walk arm in arm with all the blacks of the region to show where they stood.

That's the trouble with reading Martí and thinking about what he wrote – you not only take on his style, you begin to dream as he did. Let us try to give our dreams life. How can we use Martí? Sartre asked that question about Jean Genet towards the end of his brilliant book on him and Genet was then a male hustler and thief who had published disturbing works that attacked most of France's values. We may surely then ask this utilitarian question about a saintly man and his works, and feel, as he himself did about everything he wrote and spoke about, that we do not do violence to his sensibilities – or to literature – by putting them to use.

(I have not touched on a subject that Martí's poetry and literary criticism immediately places in the foreground – the indivisibility of art and life. We have our own critics to do battle against those who try to convince us that literature is merely words, and art only formal relationships, but sometimes, as has happened in the academy in the decades after the second world war, the philistines are in the ascendancy. We need Martí because it is not only his writing but his very life that refutes them.)

Let us use his ideals as a measure for our society. Let us come to feel as he did in the lines in *Odio al mar* that follow on the ones I quoted earlier:

Lo que me duele no es vivir; me duele,
Vivir sin hacer bien.
(It is not living that pains me; it pains
Me to live without doing good.)

Let us begin, then, by officially incorporating him into American history. He is already there – there's nothing we can do about that – but he is a man whose time among us must be better known by Americans. He spent more than a third of his life with us, the most productive and creative period of his life, and he paid us attention of the best kind, incorporating into his work elements of our national and local life. The major intellectual influences in his life were, I think, Emerson and Whitman.

I also like to think that he got the central metaphor of *Pinos nuevos* during his trip here two days before he gave his speech. The image of seedling pines growing among the fallen ones in the acid soil they prefer is much more typical of Florida than of Cuba. Did he look out the window of his train and see such a sight before he got to Union Station? Perhaps in North Tampa

where the University of South Florida now stands, a university that has done the most to give him and Ybor City back to us. I like to think this is so, because like him I mean to be an optimist: I want Martí's life and Ybor City's history to be all fortuitous happy endings.