Contemporary Afro-Cuban Voices in Tampa: Reclaiming Heritage in “America’s Next Greatest City”

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Contemporary Afro-Cuban Voices in Tampa: Reclaiming Heritage in
“America’s Next Greatest City”

by

Linda M. Callejas

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Keywords: identity formation, historic preservation, voluntary associations,
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DEDICATION

For Mia
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First and foremost, I wish to thank the members of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo for their generosity and time. It is quite probable that they will not agree with my depiction of their beloved organization. Nevertheless, I hope that they will accept my effort to produce an accurate representation of their collective experience as an earnest one.

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Contemporary Afro-Cuban Voices in Tampa: Reclaiming Heritage in “America’s Next Greatest City”

Linda M. Callejas

ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents findings from ethnographic research conducted with members of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo, established by segregated Black Cuban cigar workers in Ybor City in 1904. For decades, Tampa officials have initiated numerous urban revitalization projects aimed at developing a world-class tourist destination and metropolitan center. Often, these efforts have centered on highlighting the ethnic history of Ybor City, from which the participation of Black Cubans and the Martí-Maceo Society have been actively excluded or ignored. The main issues related to contemporary Afro-Cuban identity in Tampa and which will be examined in my dissertation, include the changing nature of the Afro-Cuban community in Tampa in light of increases in migration of Cubans and other Latinos of color to the area; Martí-Maceo members’ struggle to reclaim an Afro-Cuban heritage within Tampa’s larger historic preservation efforts over the past decade; and an examination of the Martí-Maceo Society as a voluntary association that appears to have outlived its usefulness in present-day Tampa despite efforts by elderly members to sustain and expand it.
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

It’s embarrassing to have to give a final report like this…Unfortunately, the majority of our members have passed, are elderly, are sick. We need a new generation of people. Having a function doesn’t mean you open the doors and the function happens. It requires a lot of legwork, a lot of phone calls, a lot of time, a lot of people. And we don’t have that many people.

(Martí-Maceo treasurer, general membership meeting, November 13, 1999).

The work here presented is based on fieldwork conducted over a decade with a historical ethnic society in Tampa, Florida. My work with the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo began in August of 1999, when I entered the doctoral program in Applied Anthropology at the University of South Florida. Having worked previously on projects examining questions of ethnic identify formation and community representation among Cubans in Miami, Florida, I’d come to Tampa to investigate racial identity among contemporary Cuban-Americans. In this dissertation, I focus on the question of identity as it relates to the efforts of current members of Sociedad La Union Martí-Maceo to reformulate their ethnic social club, which began as a mutual aid society, into a viable community organization. The question of identity emerges as a continuous theme among Martí-Maceo members as they struggle to keep their organization in existence in a
historical context vastly different from the one in which the organization developed and thrived.

The quote that opens this chapter aptly illustrates the members’ feelings and perceptions about their experiences and their organization’s future. Although the quote was recorded during a general membership meeting in 1999, similar sentiments continue to be expressed a decade later. This chapter outlines the main issues related to contemporary Afro-Cuban identity in Tampa and examined in this dissertation: the changing nature of the Afro-Cuban community in Tampa given increases in migration of Cubans and other Latinos of color to the area, efforts to reclaim an Afro-Cuban heritage within Tampa’s larger historic preservation efforts over the past decade, and an examination of the Martí-Maceo Society as a voluntary association that appears to have outlived its usefulness in contemporary Tampa despite efforts by elderly members to sustain and expand it for the past ten years.

This research aims to contribute to the anthropological literature on identity formation, memorialization, historic preservation, and voluntary associations, as well as literature in the areas of migration studies, Latina/o studies, and the African Diaspora. The dissertation expands on fieldwork conducted with the members of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo by examining the issues outlined above among contemporary Afro-Cubans in Tampa, who have, over the past half a century, experienced a generalized dispersion of their once insular and close-knit community.
Background: Establishment of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo

The historic organization known today as Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo was officially formed in Ybor City in March 1904\(^1\). Its members, mostly Black Cubans, had originally come together with White Cubans in 1899 to form an integrated mutual aid society for cigar workers involved in the Cuban independence war effort known as El Club Nacional Cubano, Octubre 10 (See Greenbaum, 2002: 104; Mirabál, 1998: 48-50). The Club Nacional Cubano had been established that year in acknowledgement of the shared struggle against Spanish rule by Cubans, Black and White. This solidarity, however, was short lived and the reason given for the ejection of Black members was not officially accounted for in the contemporary organizational documents of the organizations that eventually formed as a result of the break (Greenbaum 2002: 104-106; Mirabál 1998: 49-50). However, the enmity that this split engendered has remained for a century.

The Black Cubans who were expelled from the Club Nacional Cubano met independently, and formed *Los libres pensadores de Martí y Maceo* (Greenbaum 2002:108). Eventually, this organization merged with another Black Cuban mutual aid society and became what is now known as the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo or the Martí-Maceo Society, in English. The White Cubans that remained in the original organization subsequently adopted a new name, *El Círculo Cubano de Tampa*, which is also still in existence. Interviews with members of the historically White Cuban club and the current official version of Martí-Maceo’s inception attribute the split to segregation.

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\(^1\) Today, the Martí-Maceo Society recognizes October 26, 1900 —the date on which the Club Nacional Cubano was founded— as its original founding date. The organization has updated its by-laws and other official documents using this date to illustrate the continuous existence and participation of Black Cubans in Ybor City’s cigar industry and ethnic societies.
laws of the era, which prohibited or violently discouraged racial solidarity, and minimizes prevailing racial prejudices within the Cuban immigrant community. Interviews with contemporary members of the Martí-Maceo Society have elicited different opinions as to the causes for the split. Some of them do attribute the ejection of Black members to the prevailing laws and customs of the era, which discouraged the establishment of interracial organizations. However, others believe the split had more to do with racial prejudice on the part of White Cubans who no longer saw a need for racial fraternity given the successful conclusion of the War of Independence against Spain.\(^2\) The lack of official record makes it difficult to ascertain which of these reasons may have produced the break ultimately and in all actuality, a combination of these reasons and perhaps, other unknown forces may have been responsible.

Black Cuban cigar workers and their families comprised the smallest proportion of the immigrants that settled in Ybor City. In 1890, the census estimated a total of 1,313 Cubans in Tampa, and of these Greenbaum (2002: 98) estimates that 197 were Black Cuban. By 1910, their numbers had grown to about 900, compared to over 5,000 White Cubans, nearly 4,000 Italians, and approximately 3,700 Spaniards (Greenbaum, 2002: 98). The eventual establishment of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo by this small sub-population within the immigrant enclave underscores a number of important factors. The first is that “Martí-Maceo became a formal arbiter of color classification within the Latin community” (Greenbaum 2002: 119). Those who chose to join and those who were told they had no other option became marked racially as being distinct from the members of the Circulo Cubano and the other White ethnic populations in Ybor City. Despite their

\(^2\) For a more thorough recounting of the ejection of Black Cubans from the Club Nacional Cubano and of the establishment of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo, see Greenbaum (2002: 103-108).
relatively small numbers, however, Black Cubans were able to pool together economic, social, and cultural capital to establish an important communal center that made resources available to Black Cubans which would have otherwise been denied them. The subsequent construction of their two story social hall, which included a ballroom and cantina was a physical testament to the establishment of communal resources. However, because of its smaller membership the social hall was much less grand than the ornate buildings constructed by the other mutual aid societies in the area.

Historical research shows that racial segregation of social clubs and other facilities had been an established norm in Cuba, where slavery continued officially until 1886 (Robinson 2000; Helg 1995), and which persisted following manumission. Either way, the organization’s name appears to have been a statement on the part of Martí-Maceo Society founders invoking the two great Cuban independence heroes who called for racial solidarity in the fight for independence from Spain, José Martí and Antonio Maceo. In her work with this community Greenbaum (2002: 171) characterizes the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo as “emobod[y] the social and cultural capital held by Afro-Cubans in Tampa, functions that were highly intertwined with the economic capital that it represented.” The main function of the organization was to provide medical and death benefits for its members —primarily male cigar workers— who paid a nominal fee in return for coverage of lost wages in the event of illness and/or burial benefits in the event of death. However, the organization provided much more to its members and their families, who were very much involved in a variety of additional social and educational activities. The society held numerous programs for youth, a “ladies committee” that organized dances, picnics, and other celebrations, cultural events that celebrated their
Cuban heritage, as well as plays and other performances (Greenbaum 2002: 172). The society eventually also included a library. The organization, then, provided Tampa’s Black Cubans with a nearly all-encompassing venue for social, cultural, and other resources that, in effect, shielded them from the many privations that the prevailing racial customs may have placed on them. Moreover, as a result of their ties to the organization and the fact that they lived in Ybor City —where residential segregation was much less stringent than the rest of Tampa— they were able to avoid some of the more dehumanizing aspects of the local Jim Crow strictures of the day.

Despite purported restrictions on public organizing between Whites and Blacks in Tampa, Black Cubans worked alongside White Cubans and other White immigrants in Ybor City’s cigar factories, an anomaly given the racial norms of the time. Although they were unable to reach the more prestigious positions within the factories (Mirabál 1998: 50), Black Cubans received comparatively more pay than their African American contemporaries (who by and large did not work in the cigar factories as rollers). In addition, the benefits afforded through membership in Martí-Maceo provided them with “access to financial and organizational resources far in excess of what was available to African Americans during the Reconstruction era” (Greenbaum 1991:10). The realities of segregation, however, meant that Cubans who were Black experienced discrimination and segregation within their neighborhood, as well as in the larger public sphere outside of Ybor City (Mirabál 1998: 51-52). Nevertheless, Afro-Cubans were generally accepted as fellow immigrants, evidenced through the relatively cordial relationships they maintained as neighbors and co-workers within the Ybor City immigrant community.
Greenbaum’s research in the 1980s with members of the Martí-Maceo Society, (most now deceased) does indicate that a number of Afro-Cubans experienced the abrupt termination of friendships that had survived migration to Tampa from Cuba. In addition, some present-day members have recounted knowledge of being passed on the street by extended family members who no longer acknowledged them because they were generally identified as White within the wider immigrant enclave. Others have recounted experiencing discrimination at popular Ybor City establishments where they were expected to use back doors or small windows. As Greenbaum notes:

…white immigrants did practice active discrimination —they often reflected subtle racist attitudes in their interactions, and gained certain obvious advantages from the exclusion of blacks— because the setting both encouraged and permitted them to do so. It was part of learning to be an American, a prerogative attached to their white skin (Greenbaum 2002:108).

The Martí-Maceo Society provided members with the means by which to differentiate themselves from African Americans in the eyes of the local White racist power structure and the other White immigrants of Ybor City, despite the social status they shared with African Americans as second-class citizens. One fundamental strategy used by first, second and perhaps even, some third generation families was to maintain

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3 The fact that White immigrants, including White Cubans, practiced overt discrimination has rarely been addressed in historical accounts of immigrant life in Ybor City (See Mormino and Pozzetta 1987; Pacheco 1994). However, a number of my informants have outlined specific instances and locales within Ybor City where they were expected to accept, and in fact, did accept such practices as a matter of course.
strong ties to other Cuban families thereby cultivating friendships and marriage partners for younger generations. As one informant notes, “We were taught [by our parents] that, although we were black, we weren’t supposed to do the things that Black Americans do, because we were better than Black Americans” (Greenbaum 2002: 224). This practical strategy helped to maintain a relatively prosperous Afro-Cuban enclave in Tampa’s cigar worker community into the 1930s and evokes research with Black immigrant groups today (See Bailey 2000; Benson 2006; Butcher 1994; Waters 1990). However, the Depression and the eventual decline of the cigar factories signaled the end of Black Cuban isolation from African Americans. Following this period, Afro-Cuban ties to the African American community grew due to increased contact between the Black Cuban and American youth and young adults, intermarriage, and Black Cuban involvement in the Civil Rights Movement (Greenbaum 2002:224-302).

From 1940-1965, membership in the Martí-Maceo Society began to decrease substantially as many members migrated to New York and other Northeastern states to look for jobs following the increasing mechanization of Tampa’s factories. Urban Renewal4 in Tampa dealt a particularly harsh blow to the organization when the original Martí-Maceo Social Hall (known colloquially as the “Cuban Club Patio”) was bulldozed in 1965, along with over 50 percent of the properties and homes in Ybor City (Garcia 2006; Greenbaum 2002: 294-295). The Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo attempted the first of numerous contemporary efforts at revival in the 1970s following the purchase of

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4 The federal Urban Renewal program was established with passage of the landmark Housing Act of 1949, which allowed for “slum clearance”/land acquisition, construction of public housing projects, and redevelopment of U.S. cities. Its implementation between 1950 and 1970, at times undertaken in conjunction with the construction of interstate highways, often resulted in the disproportionate displacement of Blacks and other urban populations of color and the destruction of their neighborhoods (See Bright 2000; Gotham 2001).
an old warehouse on Ybor City’s main avenue. As members worked to revive the organization, factions emerged that emphasized ethnic and intergenerational differences among them. By this time, members who had migrated to New York had returned to Tampa and began frequenting the organization once again. However, as Greenbaum notes (2002: 298-299):

> [t]his emergent awakening was not without friction. The New Yorkers …tended to hang together because they knew each other better. Many of them married Puerto Ricans…some had married other Cubans, but very few married African Americans. Most of the Afro-Cubans who stayed in Tampa had married African Americans.

The new mixture of spouses and in-laws, whose ethnic differences aligned with the old-timer/newcomer split, also a black/Hispanic split, was another subtle distinction and a factor that unsettled the Cubanness of the club… Some of [the members] who stayed in Tampa criticized what they perceived as an air of superiority in the New Yorkers, based on these various differences, and their greater educational and employment advantages in New York. Their childhood friends, who moved away and avoided many of the problems that they had to face growing up in the South, did not seem to appreciate the battles they had fought.

Martí-Maceo’s membership has continued to wax and wane since the 1970s; the official membership roster currently enumerates over 100 members. However, monthly
general membership meetings rarely generate attendance of more than 20 members, and some meetings may only include 12 to 15 members in total. Of the members that attend general membership meetings regularly, about 15 are descendents of early members who were active in the Martí-Maceo Society prior to 1930. The cleavages Greenbaum identified in her work with the club remain among contemporary members, although they have somehow managed to co-exist, if awkwardly at times. With regard to current efforts aimed at revitalizing the club in the face of numerous challenges to their continued existence, the question of collective identity emerges as a salient one. As current members of the Martí-Maceo Society struggle to chart a course for the future, questions about identity representation, the organization’s place among contemporary Cuban clubs in Tampa, and the past they seek to “preserve,” abound. These questions follow historical trajectories developed throughout the rich and multi-layered history of Tampa’s Afro-Cuban community.

The Ybor City Historic District and Its Ethnic Mutual Aid Societies

Much of the literature focusing on the historical development of mutual aid societies emphasizes the importance of community developed among its members. Williams and Williams (1992: 26) define mutual aid societies as those organizations that exhibit the following “common characteristics”:

1. some kind of formal, institutionalized structure;
2. the exclusion of some people;
3. members with common interests or purposes; and
(4) members with a discernable sense of pride and feeling of belonging.

Although Williams and Williams (2002:4) assert that mutual aid societies “are not based on kinship or territory,” Greenbaum (1991:97) defines mutual aid as “an extension of the kinship group…a system of generalized exchange” within which members of an association take care of one another (See also Uehara 1990; Sahlins 1972). For the purposes of this discussion, I define a few terms that will help clarify the type of mutual aid that was provided by the ethnic societies established in Ybor City between 1890 and 1902.

A mutual aid association refers to voluntary exchange relationships, formal and informal, developed and maintained by individuals for the purposes of communal benefit. A prime example of a mutual aid association is a rotating credit association, used by social groups around the world to pool individual funds with a set number of participants toward the creation of an accumulated savings and credit funds, accessible to those members on a regularly recurring basis (Purcell 2000; Velez-Ibañez 1983; Geertz 1962; See also Huggins 1997; Brown 1992). Another prime example is the Jewish “family circle” chronicled by Mitchell (1978). While such associations may be highly formalized, they are often limited in size and are not highly bureaucratized. Mutual aid organizations or societies refer to formal, corporate organizations, voluntary in nature, and established specifically to provide benefits to workers and their families —most often in the event of illness or death. Mutual aid societies are much more highly bureaucratized than mutual aid associations; they have been identified by a variety of names including mutual benefit societies and benevolent societies. Examples of mutual aid societies include the Unión Mexicana in Laredo, Texas (Zamora, Orozco, and Rocha, 2000) and the Sociedad La
Unión Martí-Maceo, the focus of this dissertation. A proliferation of such organizations emerged in this country in the nineteenth century and used ethnicity and/or religion as the common point for connection among their respective members (Beito: 2000; Burnham 1997; De León 2001; Greenbaum 1991; Nolt 1998; Williams and Williams 1992). The widespread nature of these ethnic societies, despite mainstream disapproval at the time for ethnic maintenance and/or communalism, has been linked to the immigration waves that characterized much of the nineteenth century and the rise of industrialization in this country (Burnham 1997; García 1996; Soyer 1988). Although many of them incorporated native traditions of communal organization, such as European artisan guilds or the Cuban cabildo, such organizations became an important and defining feature of the American landscape (Rosenband 1999; Epstein 1998; Howard 1998; Nolt 1998; Burnham 1997; García 1996). Burnham (1997:13-14) characterizes the creation of these organizations at the turn of the 20th Century as one of a series adaptive strategies that immigrants used to create viable economic institutions and which, in turn, provided an effective mechanism for easing the process of assimilation by providing “financial security in very insecure circumstances.”

The benefits provided by mutual aid organizations included payments to sick members who could not work, payments to assist in members’ burial costs and/or other forms of financial assistance for members in need. These members were expected to pay dues —relatively small, but regular payments as a condition of membership from which benefits were generated.5 Aside from providing sick and death benefits, such organizations have been characterized as providing a sense of shared communal tie

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5 When the Sociedad La Unión Marti-Maceo was established, its members were expected to pay dues of 25 cents, each week (Greenbaum 1991: 95).
through a variety of cultural and social activities (Beito 1994; García; Soyer 1988; Williams and Williams 1992).

The first mutual aid society established in Ybor City, Florida was the Centro Español, which was formed by Spanish factory owners and their workers in 1892. The membership included Spaniards mainly from the regions of Galicia and Asturias, bringing together individuals with regional differences and conflicts in their native Spain. Along with mutual aid benefits, the society established its own hospital in 1904 (Long 1965). The Centro Español closed in the late 1950s, and its building façade forms part of the Centro Ybor shopping complex on Seventh Avenue, Ybor City’s main thoroughfare (Figure 1).

L’Unione Italiana (also known today as “The Italian Club”) was formed in 1894 by workers and merchants who were part of the cigar industry economy. As with the Centro Español, the organization brought together individuals who tended to view themselves by their regional affiliations rather than as fellow countrymen (Mormino and Pozzetta 1998:188-193). According to Mormino and Pozzetta (1998), L’Unione Italiana was modeled very closely on the Centro Español, and in addition to mutual aid benefits, the organization constructed a cemetery for its members. L’Unione Italiana is still in

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**Figure 1.** The former El Centro Español de Tampa. This building, their second, was constructed in 1912.
existence today and perhaps, boasts the largest, most active membership of the remaining ethnic societies in Ybor City. The building is owned by a non-profit corporation, The Italian Club of Tampa, Inc., which is responsible for decision-making and general upkeep of the building. Building costs are generally covered through rentals and multiple fundraising campaigns held by the members of *L’Unione Italiana* (Figure 2.).

El Club Nacional Cubano, Octubre 10 was founded in 1899 and included both White and Black Cuban cigar workers, most of whom were highly involved in supporting the independence effort against Spain. As noted earlier in this introduction, the organization split in 1900 when Black Cubans left the organization. The Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo was established by Black Cuban cigar workers in March 1904 (after merging with another Black Cuban mutual aid society), and construction of their social hall was completed in 1909. The two-story building, which included a ballroom and cantina, was located on 6th Avenue and 11th Street in Ybor City (Figure 3.). Of the remaining ethnic societies in Ybor City, the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo is the only one in which the general membership retains collective ownership over its current property and owns it outright. See Figure 4. The general membership is responsible for

![Figure 2. L’Unione Italiana located on 7th Avenue and 17th Street.](image-url)
decision-making related to upkeep and other issues pertaining to the building. As a consequence of the loss of its first social hall to the Urban Renewal program in 1965, it is also the only one of the historic societies that has not been deemed eligible for listing as a state or national historic landmark. However, the organization incorporated as a federal non-profit corporation in 2004 in hopes of securing grants and external funding to help them with efforts to improve their property.

The White Cuban members of the Club Nacional remained in the organization, but renamed it in 1902 as El Círculo Cubano and eventually erected their building on Palm Avenue and 15th Street in 1917 (Figure 5). The Círculo Cubano building is owned by a non-profit organization formed by a group of local investors, The Cuban Club Foundation, Inc. The foundation is responsible for
mortgage payments on the building, general decision-making about how the building is used, and general upkeep of the building. The building’s future has been in jeopardy in the past decade due to financial difficulties, which nearly resulted in foreclosure (Ackerman 2001). Costs are covered through aggressive building rentals and some fundraising efforts on the part of Círculo Cubano members.

*El Centro Asturiano* was founded in 1902, and it was the largest of the mutual aid societies in Tampa. The organization provided a space for immigrants from the Asturias region of Spain. However, its membership requirements were relatively relaxed and included members of various ethnic groups including Italians, White Cubans, and Spaniards from other regions (Greenbaum 2002:153-154; Mormino and Pozzetta 1998:182). In addition to the mutual aid benefits
the society provided, it established a hospital and two cemeteries for its members. The Centro Asturiano property (Figure 6) is owned by a non-profit corporation, the Centro Asturiano De Tampa, Inc. Ownership and upkeep of the building is maintained through building rentals and fundraising activities on the part of members. The Centro Asturiano membership is still active, and hosts a number of activities for its members and participates in multiple community activities in Tampa. The first floor of the building, which used to serve as its cantina, now hosts a restaurant.

Each of the organizations profiled in this section faced a decline in membership and activities, which was precipitated by the general decline in the cigar industry in Ybor City beginning in the 1930s. By the 1980s, they were all struggling not to close their doors as the Centro Español had done thirty years earlier (Greenbaum 2002:306). The research literature on mutual aid societies points to a general decline in their existence around the country, especially after the Second World War. Researchers speculate that this decline was spurred in part by: the emergence of the welfare state (Beito 1994); and the emergence of commercial insurance agencies (Nolt 1996:43). Overall, the research literature on mutual aid societies leaves the impression that such organizations have all but outlived their usefulness. For the ethnic societies of Ybor City this means that the mutual aid benefits that they once offered are no longer available to their members. However, the maintenance of social and kinship ties and an emphasis on shared cultural and social celebrations has assumed a more important role among those that remain in operation today. Although these functions were secondary to the economic benefits that were originally distributed among members of the early ethnic societies, the social
aspects of these organizations were also extremely important and provided a communal gathering place for the ethnic immigrant populations of Ybor City.

Figure 7 is a modified version of the Ybor City Historic District Map (City of Tampa 1996-2010) which highlights the location of each of the ethnic societies outlined above.

**Research Goals and Questions**

The main questions addressed through this research are:

1. What purpose does the Martí-Maceo Society serve in the lives of its current members? Does this voluntary association continue to be an adaptive mechanism for Tampa’s Afro-Cubans (see Woodard, 1987; Sassen-Koob, 1979; Kerri 1976), or is it an organization that has outlived its purpose? If so, why do members continue to struggle to maintain the Martí-Maceo in operation although the organization no longer serves large numbers of Black Cubans? (See Wacquant, 1998; Saltman, 1990.)

2. How do the current members of the Martí-Maceo Society and their relatives identified in the United States as “Black” or of African-descent) self-identify? Does their presence or experiences in this country confound theorizing in the areas of immigrant assimilation or identity formation as various authors suggest? (See Rodriguez 2000).
Figure 7. Modified version of the Ybor City Historic District Map. The full map shows the boundaries of the local and national historic districts and is one of the sources used by the city to determine whether a structure is contributing or non-contributing to the historic district (City of Tampa 1996-2010). The map shows the location of each of the historic ethnic societies in Tampa and highlights the former location of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo.
3. Does an Afro-Cuban American community exist in present-day Tampa or is this community (and associated ethnic identity) tied to the continued existence of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo in the Ybor City Historic District?

**Assigning Names/Assuming Identities: A Note on Nomenclature**

As Greenbaum (2002:27) notes, "the slippery nature of racial and ethnic categories" provide anything but "objective clarity" with regard to use of such terms especially in the case of the Black Cuban community of Tampa. The term *afrocubano* is often attributed to Fernando Ortiz, who used it in 1906 in his book *Los negros brujos*, a study purporting to link criminality with African ancestry and which has been characterized by some as ascribing a negative connotation to the term early on in the creation of the Cuban nation (Dhouti 2001; Ortiz 1995[1906]). However, archival research suggests that in this work Ortiz was consciously reinterpreting the term, which Cuban historiographers argue is more aptly attributed to Antonio de Veitía, who used it in 1847 with little popular reception (See Diaz, 2005:230; Rodríguez-Mangual, 2004:16). Despite his early negative characterization of African religions and their adherents in Cuba, Ortiz explained his use of *afrocubano*, as well as the widely cited “transculturation,” as necessary to more accurately convey the dual nature of Cuban identity and the complex creolization process which forged it. Nevertheless, although the

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*Researchers continue to go back and forth on whether Ortiz’s early bias against African religious practices in Cuba ever allowed him to accurately examine the contributions of African-descent peoples to Cuban cultural development. Rodríguez-Mangual (2004) suggests that the work of Lydia Cabrera, Ortiz’s sister-in-law, more ably placed Afro-Cubans at the center of the ethnographic enterprise in this regard.*
Afrocubanismo movement in Cuba briefly celebrated the contribution of African-influenced cultural forms during the 1920s and 30s, afrocubano did not gain wide acceptance for use among Cubans, especially those identified as Black and Mulatto, precisely because of this negative association (See Moore 1997). My research with current members of the Martí-Maceo Society suggests that this negative association persists.

On several occasions, I have been directly challenged about the continued use of the term “Afro-Cuban” on the part of “intellectuals” by Martí-Maceo Society members who claim to have "no relationship to Africa" (Callejas 2001). Members making this argument insist that identifying oneself as a hyphenated Cuban diminishes one's identity as a Cuban, first and foremost - a discussion that appears to corroborate de la Fuente's characterization of the way in which the Cuban ideology of racial democracy operates (2001:52-54). Current members vary widely with regard to self-identification preferences, as this research will show.

With regard to the title of this study, I have decided to use the term Afro-Cuban to describe communities within larger Cuban populations in this country who have historically experienced segregation, discrimination, and/or marginalization because of their ascribed or embraced "racial identity," whether in the United States or Cuba. The underlying marker of this identity is Blackness, whether defined by other Cuban migrants or the wider (White) U.S. society, which serves to tie these groups to larger groups of African-descent peoples with a not-so-distant history of slavery and/or state sanctioned segregation and discrimination. For analytical purposes, I therefore seek to link the communities to be studied to a larger African diaspora, as well as a Cuban diaspora.
However, I do this with the recognition that such nomenclature appears to go against the expressed wishes of some of the informants who have helped me to date. In deference to these considerations, I use the term "Black Cuban" more often—which seems more palatable to the majority of current Martí-Maceo members—albeit interchangeably with "Afro-Cuban." I will continue to do so in any future publication of this research.

As to the capitalization of racial categories, after much consideration and reference to the existing research literature I decided to capitalize the categories, “Black” and “White” and do so when these are paired with an ethnic label, as in “Black Cuban.” Although the anthropological discipline has been clear that race is not a biological determinant and thus, not an accurate basis upon which to classify or separate populations, the political and social realities of post-colonial nations like the United States and Cuba require more nuanced examination of the use of such labels. Scholars who study the racial labeling of African-descent peoples in this country have noted that along with struggles as to the actual terms used, capitalization of racial labels has been advocated for as a means of affording a modicum of discursive parity (superficial though it may seem to some) between the U.S. Black population and other ethnic groups (See Smith, 1992; Litwack, 1980:541; Bennett, 1970:378). Capitalization of racial categories in this work therefore in keeping with this tradition, as well as literature that suggests ongoing preference for the continuing use of the term “Black” —especially among individuals who pointedly recognize a political dimension to their racial identity (See Brown, 1999).
Reflections on the Role of the Anthropologist in this Research

When I began fieldwork with the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo and its members, I expected my “entry into the field” to be fairly smooth for a number of reasons. I had previously worked on various projects with Cuban populations in Miami, and felt that my ability to speak Spanish and my previous experiences would help me transition easily into the field and establish relationships with key informants. I was also to be Susan Greenbaum’s assistant, who had been working with the organization since the mid-1980s when members at the time asked her to research the community’s history and counteract efforts to exclude them from the “official maps and documents identifying ‘significant structures’ in the projected Ybor City historic district (1990:68). Like community residents elsewhere who had established relationships with anthropologists (e.g. Halperin, 1998), the members of the Martí-Maceo Society were mobilizing to check unrestrained development that threatened their physical location by reclaiming and celebrating their heritage.

By the time I began working with the organization and its members in 1999, Greenbaum served as the organization’s historian and as an advocate who could help the members address concerns over local redevelopment in the area. What I didn’t realize at the time was that I would be one of several students who were already working with the organization. In addition, the fact that the members were mostly elderly made establishing relationships a little more difficult than I’d anticipated. Many of them assumed that I was a young undergraduate student (as they assumed the other USF graduate students were), and although they were nice and made small talk from time to time, they were not as easy to approach as I’d initially hoped. My fluency in Spanish did
help over time in the establishment of personal relationships. However, strict rules about who could participate actively in meetings also meant that USF students (myself included) were to remain quiet and observe during meetings. My ability to speak Spanish allowed me to take copious notes fairly unobtrusively and allowed me to observe rather freely in the first six months of fieldwork.

Over time, however, the members began to rely on me more and more — especially once our initial project was completed and Greenbaum’s continual presence at the organization diminished somewhat. As I outline in subsequent chapters of this dissertation, after a year and a half of watching me take notes and provide clarification when questions arose as to events at meetings or during Martí-Maceo activities, the members asked me to help them ensure the accuracy of meeting minutes. The organization’s record-keeping was done entirely by hand, in composition books or spiral notebooks. This not only made minutes difficult to read during meetings, it made going back to verify certain votes or events a challenge, as well. At each meeting, I would bring my previous notes typed, which helped in this regard. By late 2002, I had been given the opportunity to become a dues-paying member of the organization, which I did in order to provide them with the much needed funds expected from regular members. In return, I was given the privilege of voting in meetings and to benefit from any privileges afforded to members (mostly, discounts in the cost to attend Martí-Maceo events). In 2003 when a new governing board was voted in, I was nominated to serve as Vice-Secretary.

Although I accepted the opportunity to become a dues-paying member without too much consideration, I did have serious reservations about sitting on the governing board of the organization — albeit in a very limited capacity. I questioned just how much
I would be able to continue to observe and document Martí-Maceo members’ efforts to contest efforts to exclude them from the ongoing development and historic preservation efforts in Ybor City without trying to consciously manage this process myself. My intent, in working with the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo was to engage in what Lynn-Callos and Hyatt (2003:177-178) call “engaged ethnography,” which seeks to “make visible the concrete programs and policies that have been used to create a single narrative in which poverty and inequality are made to seem the natural and inevitable upshots of evolutionary processes, rather than the conscious and planned outcomes of a very deliberate set of human interventions.” As such, I was aware that I would be approaching this work with a perspective that was sympathetic to the Martí-Maceo Society and its members. However, I was also mindful that as a member and later, an acknowledged “organizational leader,” I might become more involved than would be helpful or practical for my research. Although I wanted to be engaged, I did not envision my ethnographic endeavor as one in which I should agitate for specific outcomes in keeping with Alinsky’s (1972:98-103) radical community organizer role.

Eventually, it became more important to focus on minimizing the organization’s dependence on me. While I could help with taking notes, typing up minutes, publishing a regular newsletter, I became aware that the more of these roles that I took on, the more the organization depended on me to carry them out —without working to incorporate these as part of the organization’s day-to-day operations. While my concern over these relatively small tasks, I began to question how my eventual disengagement from the field would affect the organization. Would they be able to carry out these duties? What about other more important and ambiguous roles where I was expected to make decisions that
could affect the organization’s direction? As I began to ponder such questions, I tried to be as clear as possible with members (and others) who asked me to speak on behalf of the sociedad or to give my opinion regarding events that might lead the governing board to take one course of action over another. Midway during my fieldwork experience I also began to try to get other members involved in some of the duties that I’d assumed. My intent was to give the board and the members an opportunity to consider whether these duties were important for the organization’s eventual success and then, decide whether the organization should allocate resources for their continuation. Although some of these duties eventually fell by the wayside, I felt that it was best for the membership to determine whether or not they were critical to the organization’s success.

Dissertation Organization

I begin this dissertation with a brief presentation of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo’s history to date to give some context for the complex development of Black Cuban identity in Tampa, and follow with an outline of the main issues related to this identity that will be explored further in the dissertation. Chapter Two outlines the literature related to Cuban nationalist discourse and identity, as well as a discussion on Black Cuban identity and its construction vis-à-vis this larger discourse. The literature review then moves toward discussion of racial/ethnic identity among Afro-Latinos in the United States. Chapter Three presents the research methods used in this study, as well as a brief discussion on analysis of data. Chapter Four documents my entrée into the organization and the lives of its members and presents an ethnographic profile of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo through 2003. It touches on some of the organizational
challenges the society has faced as it tries to grown beyond the limited capacity with which it closed the 1990s. Chapter Five provides additional ethnographic data on the organization with a focus on changes in leadership from 2003 to 2009, and efforts to establish regular events and activities during these years. Chapter Six examines more closely the racial discourse engaged in by Martí-Maceo members and a comparison of survey responses taken members interviewed in 1989 and in 2008-2009. Some general comparisons on reported racial/ethnic identity between sample groups, which are then used to examine how individual understandings of racial identity affect efforts to develop a collective identity for the organization. Chapter Seven examines Martí-Maceo members’ efforts at reclaiming their presence and heritage within the context of redevelopment efforts in Ybor City over the past decade. The chapter examines the ongoing exclusion of the Martí-Maceo Society and its members from the neighborhood’s ethnic history that has been elaborated for tourism purposes. Chapter Eight presents discussion of the perceived future of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo as articulated by interview respondents and key informants. It also closes the dissertation and presents conclusions related to the original research questions outlined at the outset.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores issues of nation-building, racial and ethnic identity formation, and nostalgia as they relate to the current experiences and practices of members of the historic ethnic society, the *Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo* in Ybor City. Since the celebration of the organization’s centennial in 2000, members have worked to reformulate the social club into a viable community organization. Throughout my fieldwork with the Martí-Maceo Society, members have discussed their views with regard to development of a collective vision for building the organization further. Such discussions have often been informed by members’ personal understanding and interpretations of race and ethnicity, their relationship to the larger Cuban community in Tampa, as well as individual and collective memory with regard to the history of the club —its historical relationship to Cuba, and its continued existence through the changing racial order of this country.

As noted in Greenbaum’s history of Tampa’s Afro-Cubans (2002:334), “The long history of this small community has relevance for theories of how race and ethnicity are constructed.” This chapter seeks to outline the literature that informs the historical context and shapes the discourse surrounding efforts to establish a presence and a collective identity for the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo within Tampa’s historic Ybor City neighborhood. The review that follows begins by outlining literature on the
development of Cuban national identity, as well as the role that race was accorded within this discourse on the island. It continues by examining the literature on racial and ethnic identity among Afro-Latinos in the United States, and concludes by considering the role of nostalgia and memory as part of Martí-Maceo members’ efforts to contest the official history constructed to market historic preservation efforts in the Ybor City neighborhood where immigrant cigar workers, including Black Cubans, first settled.

The issues explored in this chapter can be seen as taking place within a “national process” characterized by Williams (1991) as one surrounding the creation of postcolonial nation-states, of which a major aim is to homogenize heterogeneity. According to Williams (1990:30), “[t]his process is fashioned around assimilating elements of…heterogeneity through appropriations that devalue them or deny the source of their contribution, it establishes what Gramsci (1971:58) referred to as a transformist hegemony.” Although this process seeks to maintain the domination of a ruling group by delegitimizing cultural forms that fall outside of a proscribed mainstream (See Williams 1993:148), it allows for the inclusion of subordinate cultural forms within a larger national identity thereby securing their loyalty to the hegemonic or nation-building process.

‘Lo Cubano’: Cuban Nationalist Discourse and Race

The construction of Cuban national identity owes much to the political and intellectual contribution of its citizens in exile—including Felix Varela and José Martí—particularly in Key West, Tampa and New York (Greenbaum 2002; Perez 1993). “Cubanness’ has been defined across divergent and often contradictory positions based
on the intersections among class, ethnicity, race, gender, generation, ideology, and place of residence among other variables” (Duany 2000:17). However according to Duany (2000:35), the dominant discourse within the literature frequently overlooks the transnational nature of the Cuban diaspora, most often focusing on a fixed essence of “lo cubano” (Ortiz 1994) situated on the island, from which exiles are substantively excluded. The exclusion of this vital component of Cuban social history has served to facilitate the creation of selective popular images of the contemporary “Cuban community” in the United States. As Castro (2000:296) notes in his critique of Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way, the “emergent Cuban-American identity” popularized by Pérez-Firmat (1994) is one that “represent[s] the whitest, most urban, most middle-class, most capitalist, and most pro-American” faction of the Cuban diaspora. Moreover although the Miami exile community, which this characterization most closely represents, has achieved a great deal of “economic success and political empowerment…in a single generation, a process probably, without parallel in American history,” this success has generated a backlash from other segments of the local population, including “Anglos,” blacks, and even, other Latin American immigrants (Castro 2000:303).

The proliferation of this narrowly defined representation of the Cuban exile community is one that tends to overshadow the continuous existence of generations of Cuban exiles in other cities in Florida and in the U.S. Northeast that were decidedly less White and middle class in their composition (Castro 2000). As Greenbaum (2002) notes, however, representations of Cuban identity in Tampa have also generally been constructed to omit the presence of Afro-Cubans over the last century. This practice of
identity construction by omission may well be rooted in the race-neutral dicta of revolutionary leader José Martí (Dhouti 2001:24-29). Martí’s exhortations that all Cubans should deny the existence of race with regards to the construction of a new Cuban nation also ultimately facilitated the preservation of an atmosphere where racial prejudice and discrimination were overlooked or denied despite evidence to the contrary (Greenbaum 2002:101-103).

Within the larger discourse of Cuban national identity, discussion of race or racial discrimination has acquired a taboo status—seen as being unseemly or inappropriate for public discussion (Greenbaum 2002:301). According to de la Fuente (2001:3), this social taboo traditionally engendered a lack of serious scholarship on race relations in Cuba.

This lack of scholarship corresponds with a dominant, long-term interpretation of Cuban nationalism that posits the divisiveness and dangers involved in this discussion of a subject that might threaten national unity and Cuba’s racial fraternity. Indeed, according to this vision, it is not only dangerous and unpatriotic to inquire about race—as a white intellectual put it in 1929, “The black problem exists only when it is talked about, and that is to play with fire”—but unnecessary as well, for race has no role among true Cubans.

To discuss race in Cuba, then, was seen as disruptive to the stability of the emerging nation-state. The suppression of race as an adequate subject for discussion among Cubans has been documented by a variety of contemporary researchers focusing on the socio-
political discourse in Cuba and throughout its diaspora from the post-colonial era to the present day (Greenbaum 2002; de la Fuente 2001; Ferrer 1999; Mirabál 1998; Muñiz 1958).

The Cuban Independence effort was couched in explicit antiracist rhetoric (Ferrer 1999:195). Ferrer (1999) argues that the Independence Movement was a missed opportunity to reinvent racial relations in Cuba— given the ambivalence of Cuba’s White citizens to a multiracial vision of the future and the subsequent intrusion of segregated American armed forces. However following the U.S. invasion of the island in 1899, Cuba’s White elite were supported and favored by American troops so that, “[a] group that might have been displaced by the revolutionary coalition, was, as a result of intervention, guaranteed continued access to power” (de la Fuente 2001:24; see also Pérez 1983; Scott 1998.). The establishment of true racial solidarity in an independent Cuba could not occur in such an environment, although competing notions of Cuban national identity emerged during this time (Dhouti 2001). De la Fuente (2001:23) further notes, “Despite their differences, all these definitions had a common element: the shared belief that “race” was at the very core of the nation.” The main question within the national discourse of the time centered “on how racially inclusive and egalitarian postcolonial Cuba should be” (de la Fuente 2001:23).

As de la Fuente (2001:25) recounts the establishment of the dominant political parties of the era, he outlines the development of “an interpretation of Cuban nationalism that denied or minimized the existence of a “race problem,” avoided or condemned its public discussion as an affront to the nation, and “contributed to maintaining the status quo.” This form of Cuban nationalism, which facilitated the development of official
“whitening” policies, existed in contradiction to and alongside an ideology of racial democracy strengthened by the national celebration of Afro-Cuban war heroes and their large-scale participation in the War of Independence (de la Fuente 2001:23-53). The nationalist discourse thus contained

contending racial ideologies during the early republic…creat[ing] a range of often contradictory possibilities for social organization and political action. Under Cuba’s racial democracy, blackness was frequently denigrated as atavistic and savage, yet this ideology also called for all Cubans to be equal members of an ideal republic with all and for all (de la Fuente 2001:52).

The new nationalist ideology presented an obstacle for Cuban political elites and U.S. military leaders seeking to completely disempower Black Cubans and exclude them from the national political process because it created a discursive space in which racial discrimination could be challenged (de la Fuente 2001:53-54). Cuba’s Constitutional Convention of 1901 granted universal male suffrage, despite the objections of U.S. authorities (de la Fuente 2001:54). Paradoxically, then, universal suffrage meant that national-level politicians were dependent on widespread Black support despite their efforts to repress Cuba’s Black population through growing violence, beginning in 1906 and culminating in the brutal massacre of 1912, resulting in the death of thousands, principally in Oriente province (de la Fuente 2001:73-90; Helg 1995:120; Scott 1998:726-727; see also Guridy 2010; Bronfman 2004).
de la Fuente's (1999) examination of the racial democracy ideal in Cuba as a nationalist ideology challenges the notion that the ideal, the discourse related to it, and its implementation is simply a “myth” as it has been labeled by scholars of this key principle in Cuba and other Latin American nations, most notably Brazil (Bronfman, 2004; Guridy, personal communication; see also Helg 1995, 1990; Bailey 2004). For de la Fuente dismissing racial democracy as a myth or rhetoric used primarily to reinforce the suppression of Blacks and Mulattoes, as Helg (1995) contends, negates evidence that Afro-Cubans in the emerging Cuban nation were able to use the discourse of racial democracy to challenge discrimination and limited options for socio-political advancement. The widespread proliferation and eventual hegemonic ascendancy of this ideal also made it difficult for whites to deny Cubans of color universal suffrage and greater mobility in some public spheres such as education and political participation (de la Fuente 1999:54-60). Conversely, he argues, the racial democracy ideology also gave state sanction to the violent repression of the armed uprising led primarily by members of the Partido Independiente de Color (PIC) that culminated in the massacre of 1912.

However, the PIC program did not advocate racial separatism, pledging allegiance to the Cuban nation and advocating goals with broad popular appeal…the party’s name suggested that the organization was only for people “of

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7 As part of his argument, de la Fuente (1999: 51) highlights the fact that in articulating his vision of Cuban nationhood, José Martí emphasized “coexistence, not synthesis” among “whites, blacks, and mulattos” as opposed to other examples that emphasize mestizaje in Latin America which focus on the creation of one race, created out of the biological mixing of existing races, for instance Vasconcellos’ raza cosmica (1925).

8 See de la Fuente (1995) for a thorough explanation of how various segments within the Black Cuban population addressed the development of the emerging nation and the degree to which the PIC was able to fully participate in nation-building efforts. His position on the PIC differs markedly from Helg’s (2005).
color” who were organizing “independently,” that is, separately from whites” (de la Fuente 1999:64).

In the emerging Cuban nation, the importance of language, itself, and naming within the discourse on race and nationhood was critical and often just as important—if not more so—than the actions underlying the terms being used.

This particular episode in Cuban history can be seen as exemplifying the way in which “state routines, rituals, activities, and policies, which are themselves cultural forms, constitute and regulate the social making of meaning and subjects” (Corrigan and Sayer 1985:191). Thus, state dominance rests “not so much on the consent of its subjects but with the state’s regulative and coercive forms and agencies, which define and create certain kinds of subjects and identities while denying” others (Corrigan and Sayer 1985:102). In this case, state regulation reinforced the prevailing and sanctioned racial discourse on the island through violent means. This episode also illustrates the way in which hegemonic dominance is maintained. As Williams notes (1991:31):

Within a transformist hegemony, the marginalized citizens of the state may continue to value highly objects, to adhere to practices, and to maintain commitments to ideas that are devalued in the putatively homogenous brew. As long as they lack the political and economic power necessary to insist on a redefinition of what are ideologically defined as the core or the central ingredients of the [nation], or to insist on a
revaluation of the status of their group identities and their cultural productions, these remain outside the “mainstream.”

News from the island regarding the massacre and other critical events traveled to Tampa through cigar worker networks and factory workers listened as lectores read the latest Cuban newspapers and literature while they rolled cigars (Greenbaum 2002:130; see also Pérez 1995:73-74). In her history of Tampa’s Afro-Cuban community, Greenbaum (2002:15) calls for recognizing the population as “transnationals”9 rather than “‘immigrants’ in the conventional sense of the term” (See Zhou 1997; Portes and Rumbaut 1990; Handlin 1973). With continued travel and communication to and from the island, this Cuban exile community in Tampa, Florida, remained very much a part of the social, political and intellectual developments in Cuba at the turn of the twentieth century. Furthermore, Tampa’s Afro-Cuban exiles were in a position to affect the events in their home country through a variety of efforts, ranging from fundraising to political support (Greenbaum 2002:96-137). The early development of an Afro-Cuban community in Tampa therefore laid the foundations for the development of a sector of the Cuban diaspora very much tied to issues of national identity formation on the island, with intimate knowledge of the role that race played in Cuban national affairs. Their experience living in and raising families in Tampa forced them to rely on their understandings of this phenomenon as they carved a narrow space for themselves amidst the brutal realities of the American racial order in the South.

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9 Basch, Schiller and Blanc (1994: 7) define “transnationalism” as “the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement.”
Understanding Race in Cuba in the 19th Century

Despite the racial democracy ideal and some of the social mobility that it afforded segments of the Black Cuban population, the lived experience of Cubans of color at the close of the nineteenth century was circumscribed by discrimination and a racial order that viewed Blacks as being primitive and backward on one end of the racial spectrum and Whites as superior and the ultimate standard of culture (See Bronfman 2004; de la Fuente 1999; Helg, 1990). However, the racial system of classification in Cuba, as in other former Hispanic Caribbean colonies, has often been characterized by scholars as more fluid and understated when compared with the North American system, which emphasized the “one drop rule” and served to severely restrict upward social mobility for Black Americans (Alleyne 2002; de la Fuente 1995; Mintz 1989; Moore 1997; Tannenbaum 1992). Evidence of this fluidity is seen in the nomenclature associated with various acknowledged “races” construed to exist along a spectrum (e.g. blanco, negro, and mulato)\(^{10}\) and the multiple terms used colloquially to recognize differences in various combinations of phenotypic features such as skin color, hair texture, and facial features, coupled with more open and cordial social relations between Whites and people of color. As noted earlier, in an emerging nation premised on an ideal of racial fraternity, the rigid racial segregation found in North America was seen as antithetical to nationhood and to the shared Cuban struggle for independence from Spain, which was buoyed by Martí’s rhetoric after his death early on in the war. Yet, social mobility for Cuba’s Black and Mulatto masses was limited in a number of ways, and the prevailing racial order was a

\(^{10}\) These categories obviously do not include populations other than Black, White or a mixture of these, such as Indians, a population which Childs (2006: 52-56) asserts still existed on the Island and were eventually subsumed into the White or Free People of Color categories. The preoccupation with counting Blacks, Whites, and Mulattos primarily reflects the increased racialization of Cuba following the increase in slave importation.
complex one given Cuba’s relatively large proportion of free Blacks and Mulattoes, as well as the continuous importation of slaves well into the mid-1800s.

Although Spain began importing slaves into their Caribbean colonies in the 1500s, the importation of great numbers of slaves for plantation labor did not develop on a large scale in Cuba until the mid-1700s, reaching its peak intensity a century later just before abolition became official on the island (Alleyne 2002: 116-117; Childs 2006:46-77; Mintz 1989:69-75; Moore 1997:15-17; Schmidt-Nowara 1999; Scott 1984). Table 1 and Table 2 provide a breakdown of the Cuban population from 1755 through 1899 using Cuban census figures compiled from different sources by Childs (2006:50) and de la Fuente (1995:135). The tables vary in the categories used to classify subgroups within the population according to the original sources that were used to ascertain census figures. Despite the interruption in dates from 1817 through 1841 presented by these figures, the Cuban population exhibits a steady increase in growth and shows that from 1792 onward, Cubans of color outnumbered Whites. The sizable decline in Cuba’s population of color in 1899, shown in Table 1.2, is attributed by de la Fuente (1995:135) to the following factors: the interruption of the slave trade in in the 1860s, the increase in immigration of White Europeans, the causalities experienced by Cubans of color in the War for Independence, and relatively low birth rates among Cuban slaves.

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11 Childs (2006) and de la Fuente (1995) provide useful explanations of the difficulty in assembling accurate counts for the Cuban population. de la Fuente (1995) does include the category “Asiatics” in his table, a category that was counted following the importation of Chinese and other workers from Asia. See also Mintz (1989: 72-73); Yun (2008).

12 According to Ferrer (1999) and Helg (1995), Cubans of color made up over half the total forces fighting for independence from Spain.
Scholars have also noted that the treatment of slaves, on Cuban plantations especially, was brutal and resulted in high mortality rates that generally estimated life expectancy for slaves to be an average of no more than 10 years on a given plantation (See Childs 2006:58-60; see also Mintz 1989:68-70). Nevertheless, official policies existed that sought to curtail excessive punishments (mainly out of fear for fomenting an overthrow of the colonial government similar to that which had occurred in Saint Domingue/Haiti, 1791-1804) and that allowed for slaves to purchase their own manumission (Childs 2006:46-60). A number of scholars have also examined the influence that the various slave cultures had on the larger Cuban national culture in areas
such as music, dance, and religious practices, reflecting the process of “transculturation” that Ortiz had identified in 1906 (Bronfman 2004; Daniel 1998; Moore 1997). Ethnic differences among African slaves were also maintained through the existence of *cabildos de nación*, which organized slaves along ethnic or national lines, such as Mandinga, Carabalí, Yoruba, etc., and whose existence was supported by the colonial authorities. According to Moore (1997:16), these *cabildos* served two purposes: to help support the entry of new African slaves (or *bozales* as they were called in Cuba) and to minimize the threat of insurrection by emphasizing ethnic difference and minimizing solidarity among the slaves.

Bronfman (2004:21) cautions against conflating the *cabildos de nación* with the *sociedades de color* or voluntary mutual aid societies that primarily served free Blacks and Mulattos. While *cabildos* provided a space for members to practice religious and cultural practices brought from various African cultures, the *sociedades* were more concerned with increasing the education and civic attainment of its members, many of whom were members of Cuba’s Liberal Party and expected to reap the benefits of their engagement in Cuban nation-building and participation in the three wars leading to independence from Spain (See de la Fuente, 1999:66-68). *Sociedad* members, many of them intellectuals and war heroes, actively distanced themselves from the more “African” *cabildos* in order to emphasize their support of national unity and their positions as full citizens of the emerging Cuban nation at the dawn of the twentieth century (Bronfman 2004:21; de la Fuente 1995:66. As noted earlier, the national racial democracy ideology coupled with the occupation of U.S. forces near the end of the independence effort produced an environment where numerous contradictions touched the lives of Cuba’s
population and limited their ability for benefiting fully from the national ideal for which many, especially Blacks and Mulattos, had fought so hard.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{Constructing Identity in the United States: Black or Latino?}

According to Greenbaum (2002:58-64), Cuban migration to Florida began in earnest following the Ten Years’ War (1868-1878), the first of three liberation wars which culminated in Cuba’s independence in 1898. The ongoing conflict in Cuba provided a strong impetus for tobacco manufacturers to seek stability in order to maintain profits. In addition while U.S. tariff laws heavily taxed the importation of coveted Cuban cigars, they were not prohibitive with regard to the importation of tobacco (Greenbaum 2002:58), and Tampa became one of several Florida cities that experienced the establishment of Cuban cigar factories (Poyo 1989). The cigar worker settlement in Tampa was led by Vicente Martinez Ybor, a Spaniard who established the first cigar factory in the neighborhood that would eventually become his namesake. Although Martinez Ybor had been a supporter of Cuban independence from Spain, he did not support the radical labor leanings that many in the cigar worker community harbored or espoused and which eventually led to numerous strikes (Greenbaum 2002:62, 111-118, Pérez 1995:27). In an effort to curtail such activity, Martinez Ybor “acquired all the characteristics of a benevolent patrón” and established a self-sufficient community for his workers, which included affordable housing, available medical care, providing loans to his workers and even, serving as the godfather to many of

\textsuperscript{13} See Pérez (1983) for a discussion of the omission of the Cuban contribution to the independence struggle against Spain and the contempt and negative portrayals of Cuban independence forces espoused by Teddy Roosevelt and numerous U.S. military officers.
the local children (Pérez 1995:28). The development of Ybor City into a rather insular enclave where Spanish and Italian were spoken freely by workers also allowed Black Cubans to live in fairly integrated fashion with their co-workers, contrary to the laws and customs of the time in Tampa.\textsuperscript{14}

Prior to the end of the war with Spain, many of the Cuban cigar workers in Tampa arrived as exiles, which were waiting for an opportunity to return to an independent Cuba (Perez 1995:25-34). Upon the war’s conclusion, a number of Cubans (especially Black Cubans) tried to return but found decreased opportunities for work (Greenbaum 2002:96-97). As a result, the community established in Ybor City began to focus on more long-term settlement here, although many continued to travel back and forth to the island and maintained strong ties and communication with families and friends. It is within this context that the ethnic mutual aid societies of Ybor City, including the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo, were established and provided the opportunity for cigar workers to fraternize with their fellow countrymen and partake of the benefits of mutual aid (See p. 9-11 of Chapter One.) As noted earlier, the Martí-Maceo Society provided Tampa’s Black Cubans with a space that allowed them to enjoy numerous cultural, educational and social benefits that shielded them to a degree from the harshest aspects of segregation and the smaller personal indignities they experienced from their fellow immigrants. It also provided them with a social space that did not require social mixing with African Americans –indeed their original by-laws made Spanish the official language for the organization—thereby

\textsuperscript{14} For an extensive discussion on the development of Ybor City and the quotidian experience of its Afro-Cuban inhabitants, see Greenbaum (2002).
differentiating them as more respectable and different in the eyes of the white power structure (See Greenbaum 2002:176-77, 229).

Just three decades later, a number of significant events helped spur a growing closeness and social mixing between the descendants of Tampa’s original Afro-Cuban immigrants and local African Americans: the outmigration of large numbers of Afro-Cubans to the Northeast after the onset of the Depression, intermarriage between Afro-Cubans and African Americans, and shared struggle in the Civil Rights Movement. The out-migration of just over 50 percent of Tampa’s Afro-Cuban population following the decline of the cigar industry in the 1930s and the onset of the Depression fostered great change in the Martí-Maceo Society, as well as the other ethnic societies in Tampa. The mutual aid society was nearly forced into closing due to a drastic decrease in membership. In response, members worked together with help from the other immigrant mutual aid societies, local businesses and laborers to build a patio adjoining the club property that served as a venue to be rented for dances and parties featuring an increasing number of popular Black American acts (Greenbaum 2002:257-258).

The increased interaction between Afro-Cubans and African-Americans witnessed during Martí-Maceo dances of the era was replicated in local schools, as well as the state’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities, in the growing number of intimate relationships and marriages between the younger generations, and in joint efforts to fight racial injustice. The immigrant enclave created an environment where [generally, Afro-Cubans] “were not forced into the
dehumanizing postures imposed on African Americans and only rarely confronted situations where dignity had to be sacrificed for safety” (Greenbaum, 2002:229). However, “[w]hen it was no longer possible to maintain self-sufficient isolation, Afro-Cubans were still black” (Greenbaum 2002:231). Ironically, the additional resources and social capital in Ybor City available to Tampa’s Black Cubans, (e.g. a social hall which originally helped the first generation of immigrants to distance themselves from Black Americans but that eventually hosted some of the biggest Black musicians and acts of the day), also facilitated their children’s intermixing with African Americans. Perhaps the most concrete example of Afro-Cuban and African American shared status in Tampa was the destruction of the Martí-Maceo social hall in 1965 as a consequence of the Urban Renewal program. Martí-Maceo was the only one of Tampa’s immigrant societies to have lost its building as a consequence of this program, which combined with the construction of Interstate 275, was also responsible for the complete destruction of the African American business district (See Greenbaum and Rodriguez 1998).

Omi and Winant (1994) focus their analysis of the racial formation process on the persistence of race as a fundamental mechanism for ordering American social identity. They dismiss “the ethnicity paradigm” approach to race — which posits that race is “one of a number of determinants of ethnic group identity,” and which focuses on issues of assimilation and group contact — especially with regard to the experience of African-descent populations in the United States: “…the majority of Americans cannot tell the difference between members of various [Black ethnic] groups” (Omi and Winant 1994:22-23; see also Sanjek 1994:1-17). As the history of Tampa’s Afro-Cubans
demonstrates, the larger society – at the state policy level, as well as the individual level of daily interaction—lumps diverse groups of people with different nationalities, religious backgrounds, primary languages, etc.—into one large racial category (See Bashi and McDaniel 1997; Eriksen 1993:82). In the American South this was especially the case, as Tampa’s Afro-Cubans were fully aware.

A number of authors also contend that social scientists who focus on the African American experience in the United States also suffer from such bias (Bashi and McDaniel 1997:675-676; Harrison 1998; Lewis 1995; Pierre 2004). Traditionally, researchers have “spent considerably more energy delineating processes of racial construction than they have the complexities of identity formation” (Lewis 1995:782-783). As a result, less attention has been paid to an examination of how “racial identity informs individual identity” and “processes of community-building” (Lewis 1995:783). Berlin (1980:45) suggests that historians have also failed to ignore the ways in which larger historical processes fostered the creation of “striking diversity in Afro-American life” from its beginning. Throughout North America, the processes by which diverse ethnic groups taken from the African continent recognized themselves as African and eventually, African American vary greatly due to time and place (Lewis 1995:774; Berlin 1980:47-58). The cultural differences among African Americans have rarely been fully appreciated by historians and other researchers, and the introduction of Black immigrants further complicates this area of study (Lewis 1995:786). Pierre (2004) further contends that immigration and ethnicity researchers emphasize particular traits among Black immigrants (e.g. entrepreneurial spirit, hard-working, etc.) thereby perpetuating a culture
of poverty thesis which objectifies African American as a persistent underclass born largely of its members’ shortcomings (See also Waters, 1990).

Despite the increased interaction between their communities, the interpersonal relationships between African-Americans and Afro-Cubans sometimes reflected the differences between them, at times producing some tension (Greenbaum 2002:246-249; Grillo 2000:44). Unable to rely on their close-knit Cuban community—as their parents had—for social interaction following the migration of half of the population, Afro-Cuban youths struggled to fit in at their segregated schools and other shared social spaces by negating the use of Spanish, the Spanish pronunciations of their names, and/or their parents’ increasingly old-fashioned directives (Greenbaum 2002:247-248). For their part, African-Americans both admired and objected to their Afro-Cuban contemporaries’ bilingualism and seeming worldliness (Greenbaum 2002:248). Theoretical discussion of “Black immigrant groups in the United States have traditionally emphasized their resistance to assimilating into the African-American community” (Greenbaum 2002:227; See Osborne 2000; Waters 1994). However, the realities of life in post-WWII era Tampa facilitated a growing closeness between these local populations also calling into question theories on “segmented assimilation,” which promotes the notion that Black immigrant assimilation takes place and is oppositional in character (Portes 1995; Portes and Zhou 1993).

Segmented assimilation very generally holds that immigrants choose two main paths by which to assimilate to the “host society.” Immigrants who, because of their appearance, prior class status, and outlook, affiliate and model themselves more closely with the larger “White” society, are thought to increase their chances for successful
assimilation and overall integration (Portes 1995).\textsuperscript{15} Immigrants of color, on the other hand, are more likely to encounter discrimination and isolation, which some scholars suggest results in their developing an oppositional stance in relation to the host society. Further, the children of these immigrants are thought to be more likely to identify with their African American contemporaries, who in turn reinforce their opposition to the larger society (Ogбу 1990; Suarez-Orozco 1989). A number of authors have suggested that the general logic of segmented assimilation theory is too simplistic in its formulation (e.g. Pierre 2004; Waters, 1994; Kasinitz 1992; Rosaldo 1985), despite the persistence of race as a critical social factor that works to constrain the upward mobility of Black immigrants in particular (Freeman 2001; Harrison 1995:57-60; Sanjek 1994). Responses to these constraints may result in Black immigrant populations differentiating themselves from African Americans (Bailey 2000; Benson 2006; Greenbaum 2002; Waters 1990).

Ong critiques the work of Portes and Rumbaut (1990:96), who characterize “ethnic resilience” within immigrant populations as a “uniquely American product,” which seldom reflects the “linear continuity with the immigrants’ culture, but rather has emerged in reaction to the situation, views, and discrimination they faced on arrival.” Ong (1996:737) finds fault with this line of reasoning because, she contends, it fails to examine “the contradiction between democratic citizenship and capitalism—the opposition between abstract, universalistic rights and the inequalities engendered by market competition, race and immigration.” Moreover, she contends that such theorizing

\textsuperscript{15} Portes’ early work examining the “ethnic enclave” in Miami (Portes and Bach 1985) focused on the importance of the ethnic tie among Miami Cubans in facilitating the development of an enclave economy that was self-sufficient and allowed for successful integration and assimilation while allowing them to maintain their ethnic distinctiveness. His more recent research notes that his initial hypothesis focused primarily on White, middle- or upper-class Cubans (Portes and Shafer 2006), much as those described by Perez-Firmat (1994).
ignores “the everyday processes whereby people, especially immigrants, are made into subjects of a particular nation-state” (Ong 1996:737).

Literature on contemporary Afro-Latino groups suggests that their presence and experiences in this country confound theorizing in the area of immigrant adaptation and identity formation. Márquez (2000/2001:20) credits the presence of Afro-Latinos in the United States with fostering an increased awareness of the intricacies of racial identity, while “unmasking the more covert and courtly class and racial protocols of Latin American convention.” Ferdman and Gallegos (2001:39) go further suggesting that the general presence and growing number of Latinos in this country challenges social science theorizing of racial identity development given that “[t]he continuous systems of color classification used by Latinos do not fit well with the dichotomous system predominant in the United States” (See Duany 1998; Rodríguez and Cordero-Guzman 1992).

Rodríguez argues that Latinos perceive racial identity not only as an issue of “biological or genetic ancestry or color” but through the lens of “culture, national origin and socialization” (Rodriguez 2000). “The bipolar system of racial categorization that predominates in the United States has a great impact on Latinos, however,” at both the collective and individual level (Ferdman and Gallegos 2001:39; Denton and Massey 1989; Haney López 1998). For instance, Denton and Massey (1989) found that Latinos who identified as Black in the 1980 Census were highly segregated from “non-Hispanic whites” and often resided in or near African American neighborhoods.16 Interestingly, although Ferdman and Gallegos (2001:49-57) propose a “model for Latino identity

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16 Crowder’s (1999) research on residential patterns for Black West Indian immigrants suggests similar findings but also that West Indians tend to create residential enclaves within these areas.
development,” their framework ignores Latinos who identify as Black and Latino. (This model does, however, include an orientation labeled “White-identified.”)

Various scholars have questioned the uncritical examination of the U.S. racial system as a binary one, which leaves no room for negotiation between the dichotomous poles of Black and White, and/or negates the racialization process(es) that immigrants to this country experience and engage with (Alleyne 2002:137; Bashi and McDaniel 1997; Jaimes 1994). Bashi and McDaniel (1997:671-673) argue that immigrants have played “an important role in the development of the U.S. racial system” and have been central to “the construction of the racial hierarchy in this country.” The racial system of classification in this country has also had to accommodate the existence of non-white peoples such as Native Americans (Baca 1988; Jaimes 1994), as well as sections of the country where freed people of color of “mixed racial” parentage (Dominguez 1993). However, Sanjek (1994) and others have called for renewed attention to racism as an ideology that has served to order social classification in the Western Hemisphere, especially, following the advent of Europe’s “Age of Discovery in the 1400s (See also Bashi and McDaniel 1997; Bonilla-Silva 1997; Gilroy 1991; Omi and Winant 1994). Although the operationalization and understanding of racial identity may change based on a number of factors —historical, situational, etc.— and may serve to contest the dominant racial ideology, the racial classification system has consistently defined its poles using White at one end and Black (or Native, as the case may be) at the bottom. Moreover for individuals of African descent, the “global racial order” has served to constrain opportunities for full social inclusion and upward mobility (Sanjek 1994:10;
Rodríguez (2000:19) contends that while “Hispanics” are an ethnic group comprised of a racial plurality, the category is racialized by continued juxtaposition of Hispanics versus “non-Hispanic whites.” She continues, “Within this perspective, Hispanics are often referred to as ‘light skinned,’ not as white…[this identification] clearly restricts their ‘whiteness’ and thus makes them nonwhite” or “tan” thereby expanding the rigid boundaries of the U.S. racial order (Rodriguez 2000:19). In a critique of this basic thesis, Skerry (2001:1815) argues that Rodríguez overlooks the “basic question of whether Latinos are fundamentally challenging the United States' bipolar racial paradigm, as she seems to suggest, or whether they are gradually becoming absorbed into a new version of the old paradigm that in law and public policy treats African-Americans, Latinos, and others as similarly situated racial minorities.” Flores (2002:49) argues that the dominant contemporary popular representation of Latinos “tends to be decidedly from the lighter end of the spectrum” and that this representation has much to do with disassociating Latinos from blackness.

While the Latino concept does generally indicate otherness, “people of color” and non-white, the history of social categorization has selectively equivocated on this issue, and many media representations allow for, or foster, a sense of compatibility with whiteness…The unspoken agenda of the new Latino visibility, and of the imminent surpassing of African-Americans as the largest minority, is the ascendancy of a non-Black
minority. To mollify the fears of an invasion from south of the border is the consolation that at least their presence does not involve dealing with more souls of more Black folk (Flores 2002:48).

According to Sales and Bush (2000:19), this phenomenon manifests itself at the individual level among “Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, who cannot physically ‘pass’ for white,” by attempts to “hold onto their ethnic identity for longer than was the case with previous generations of European immigrants.” Duany’s research (1998) conducted with Dominican migrants in Puerto Rico and the United States in the 1990s indicates that such attitudes have as much to do with repudiating the dominant racial ideology in this country as with a “native” anti-Black discourse that has existed in the Hispanic Caribbean since the colonial era. Landale and Oropesa’s (2002) research findings suggest that although Puerto Ricans are more likely to emphasize their national and ethnic origins overall, Puerto Rican women living on the island are more likely to use accepted racial categories on the island (“negra,” “blanca,” or “trigueña”) to identify themselves. They contrast this with mainland Puerto Ricans who are more likely to identify themselves as Hispanic, Hispanic American or Latina/o and are more likely to resist U.S. racial categories altogether.

But what of Tampa’s Afro-Cubans? The literature related to this population is scarce. Contemporary studies of Afro-Latinos tend to focus primarily on Puerto Ricans and Dominicans in the Northeastern states, especially New York, where these populations have been consistently bolstered by transnational migration for nearly half a century (See Bailey 2000; Benson 2006; Rodríguez 1992; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991).
Moreover although segregation, discrimination, and racism were a reality of life up North, Afro-Latinos and African Americans were not as rigidly constrained by the brutality of the South’s segregation laws. Greenbaum (2002:238) suggests that conditions in New York were much more conducive to the nurturing of Afro-Latino identity/identities. Finally, most contemporary scholars of Afro-Latinos in this country tend to focus on more recent immigrants. With roots established in this country over a century ago, the historical experience of Tampa’s Afro-Cubans differs markedly from the Afro-Latino groups being considered in most contemporary studies. Newby and Dowling’s (2007) more recent work with Afro-Cuban immigrants in the U.S. Southwest highlights the challenges faced by these Black Spanish-speakers as they attempt to navigate a cultural terrain where their physical appearance is deemed incongruous by the local population’s understanding and use of the categories, “Black” and “Hispanic”.

**Nostalgia and Memory in Afro-Cuban Historic Preservation**

In her history of Afro-Cubans in Tampa, Greenbaum places this population within the context of a larger African diaspora (2002:10).

Afro-Cubans and African Americans in Tampa shared more than a distant common origin in West Africa…Generations unfolding from the point of their [respective] arrival[s]…were cast into parallel histories –scenarios in which captive Africans deployed strategies of resistance and survival against local circumstances that varied considerably in the details of the political existence (Greenbaum 2002:11).
Lewis (1995:786) sets forth the concept of “overlapping diasporas” as a means by which to examine the differences “within Black communities” in this country throughout its history, and urges historians to “examine the interaction between memory, race, and community formation” when conducting such analyses (Lewis 1995:782). He presents Arthur Schomburg as a useful example of the essential question future researchers must consider in this regard. Upon his arrival in the United States in 1891, Schomburg lived and worked in New York’s Puerto Rican and Cuban communities. However, his growing interest in Black fraternal organizations and the history of the African Diaspora coupled with his eventual move to an African-American neighborhood prompted speculation among his fellow Puerto Ricans that “he was trying to deny his distant homeland” (Lewis 1995:787; Vega 1984:195). According to Lewis (1995:787), “[t]he history of how Arturo became Arthur and yet remained Arturo is the challenge for the next generation of scholars.” The history of Tampa’s Afro-Cubans provides a collective example for examination of this intriguing question.

Efforts by members of Martí-Maceo to reclaim a space within the historic “Latin” community of Ybor City began in the early 1980s, following the first revival of the club after former members who had moved up North returned to Tampa and Martí-Maceo. The first part of this effort involved the chronicling of the club’s history and contribution to the history of the area. This process of Martí-Maceo’s “ethnic rediscovery” was tied to a larger urban revitalization effort occurring in Tampa’s Ybor City district. As part of this process, public officials and local business leaders and elites worked together to secure Ybor City historic status designation in 1986 (Greenbaum 2002:315). They also held
three folk festivals in the district between 1986 and 1989. The heritage that preservation representatives brought to the fore for the benefit of anticipated visitors and tourists is a sanitized version of a Latin Quarter. The idealized “Latin” cultural past sought to present an idyll in the American South where racism and ethnic rivalries were virtually absent among the immigrant cigarworkers of the last century (Greenbaum 2002:101-103; See Howard and Howard 1994; Pacheco 1994; Pizzo 1985). However, the role of Afro-Cubans in that idealized representation was effectively ignored in official histories of the area and the Martí-Maceo Society’s social hall was initially drawn out of the proposed historic district maps. Moreover, local preservation officials were hardly interested in “embracing” Afro-Cuban heritage in Ybor City, given their disdain for the increased presence of African Americans living there and in surrounding areas, which had purportedly caused investment to drop since the 1970s in the area (Greenbaum 2002:306).

With Greenbaum’s help, the Martí-Maceo society attempted to reclaim its place among the celebrated Latin groups of Ybor City (e.g. Spaniards, Italians, and Cubans). Through their efforts to participate in ongoing heritage preservation activities, Martí-Maceo members inserted themselves into this newly emerging notion of general Latin ethnicity in Ybor City, thereby challenging the accepted history of the neighborhood (Greenbaum 2002:6; see Verrey and Henley 1991). Ethnicity, therefore, was emphasized over race with regard to representation of the members’ collective identity (See Erikson 1994). An unexpected consequence of this effort was the reaction of White immigrants to Greenbaum’s work. Cubans, Italians and Spaniards who talked with Greenbaum used her research as an opportunity to make distinctions between the “hard-working and
industrious” Black immigrants and the “lazy, crime-prone” African Americans (Greenbaum 2002:309). Such perceptions served to further bolster the myth of racial democracy in Ybor City’s Latin community, where all members were said to have lived as equals.

Interestingly enough, the myth of racial democracy in Ybor City situated Martí-Maceo and its members within a racial discourse similar to the one in which earlier generations had found themselves in the last decade of the 19th Century. This circumstance brings us back to Lewis’ (1995:786) notion of “overlapping diasporas.” Throughout their history in Tampa, Afro-Cubans had been members of various diasporic communities: they constituted an important part of the historical Cuban diaspora, are members of the larger African diaspora, and members of an intra-state community of transnational migrants. The notion of a homeland is often tied to diasporas (Mendoza 2002; Bender and Winer 2001; Ledgerwood 1998), and discussion of homelands in turn, often entertains the concept of nostalgia (Skrbiš 2001:41). According to Skrbiš (2001:41), “in its original use, [nostalgia] refers to a painful condition related to the homeland (Gr. nostos means ‘to return home’ and algia, ‘a painful condition.’)” The “pain” to which Skrbiš refers in the passage above is most often related to the condition or sense of being removed from the homeland. Davis (1979:10-11) elaborates the concept further, “Whatever in our present situation evokes it, nostalgia uses the past…in specially reconstructed ways, but it is not the product thereof.” In essence, the past is recreated through the use of narrative, which serves to tie memory, collective and individual, to the past (Ricoeur 1984). This process, however, occurs in the present.
The narrative being constructed around the redevelopment of Ybor City was one that sought to exclude blacks, in general. Afro-Cubans in Tampa were relying on collective memory and nostalgia to outline a central role for their community within the larger history of Ybor City—their home as much as any of the other immigrant groups—to contest other nostalgic versions of the past that excluded them or simply avoided mention of Black Cubans except to point out that Ybor City had been a race neutral neighborhood. According to Halbwachs (1980 [1925]), “How groups remember and contend in the marketplaces of power and culture for hegemony is perhaps the central problem in the study of historical memory” (Blight 2001:52). As the historic preservation process in Ybor made clear, “memories are not merely reproduced; they are constructed in all the various cultural forms…Hence, we create and recreate narratives in response to ever-changing political and social circumstances” (Blight 2001:52). For Alonso (1994:389), it is important for researchers to closely examine “the rhetorical strategies used in the construction of authoritative memories” and how “nationalist “re-presentations of the past…appropriate and transform local and regional histories and the memories…Pasts that cannot be incorporated are privatized, particularized, consigned to the margins of the national and denied a fully public voice.”

The history of Afro-Cubans in Tampa provides an interesting arena within which to examine such processes. As noted earlier, the immigrant enclave that had developed around the cigar industry allowed Afro-Cubans to escape some of the harshest aspects of Jim Crow and to enjoy social, economic and other benefits not afforded to African Americans. However, such memories of the past are tempered not only by the larger system of official racial injustice. They exist alongside memories of families and
friendships broken along color lines—the subtle racism practiced by the immigrants themselves, at the level of daily interaction.

Despite such memories members of the Marti-Maceo society have continued to work toward keeping the organization open and expanding its membership base and mission. As Greenbaum notes (2002:333):

[The] networks of mainly kin ties reflect the structure of the [Afro-Cuban] community, the underlying connections that continue to exist among descendants of the Afro-Cubans cigarmakers. The shape and consistency of these networks have been transformed greatly, incorporating diverse elements and interacting under very different circumstances, yet maintaining a collective sense of Afro-Cuban/Tampeño identity.

The continued existence of these ties and their ability to shape this “collective sense” of Afro-Cuban identity based on a shared history appears to confirm Halbwachs’ (1925) contention that “individuals depend on other members of their own groups for independent confirmation of the content of their memories.” (Blight 2001:52). “Collective memory is [therefore] held together by the confidence derived from association” (Blight 2001:52).

Research conducted with the Marti-Maceo Society highlights the ways in which identity construction and heritage preservation occur within a larger political process, which seeks to regulate and legitimate identities within the hierarchy of the nation-state (See Alonso 1994; Bahktin 1981; Williams 1991). As in this case, subordinate cultural
groups often contest official versions of memory and nostalgia to evoke alternate
tradition(s) and versions of the past. Despite numerous attempts to write them out of the
history of Ybor City —except to highlight the lack of discrimination among Latin
immigrants— the members of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo have proven rather
insistent in opposing such efforts and in so doing, underscore the contested nature of
historical representation. For Martí-Maceo members the importance of identity in this
regard serves to question and overturn “certain suppressions in the historical record
current in our day,” much as Du Bois (1990 [1947]) endeavored over half a century ago.

The insistence on legitimization on the part of a particular cultural group— should
be viewed as “a process of personal and group identity formation taking place in the
intersection of territorial and cultural nationalism” (Williams 1991:267). Williams
(1991:267-268) further posits that when the cultural group in question is identified as a
racial group versus an ethnic one, “the reference serves to create additional ideological
barriers restricting the role this political dimension of group identity can have in
producing” diverse histories, traditions, or practices that will be acceptable to those who
control the creation and dissemination of “legitimate” notions of the past, as well as
identities. As this chapter has attempted to show, a careful examination of Black Cuban
identity over time illustrates that while prevailing hegemonic discourses may allow for
subordinate groups to contest their alterity, their efforts are “limited by hegemonic
processes of inscription and by the relations of the forces in society” (Alonso 1994:392).
This chapter outlines the research methods used during fieldwork with the Martí-Maceo Society and its members, conducted since August 1999. This research project was conceived as an exploratory ethnographic study, and early on I conducted extensive participant observation as a way of identifying key informants and establishing relationships with them, as well as documenting key groups or factions within the Martí-Maceo membership (See Schensul et al., 1999:91). My ongoing ethnographic work with the organization has allowed me to develop fairly close ties with many current and former members, and over the years, they have relied on me for such administrative club duties as the keeping of meeting minutes, updating of club by-laws, and assisting in the preparation of important applications, such as the procurement of a state liquor license and federal and state nonprofit status. As a result of these activities, members have generally shown a willingness to discuss their thoughts with me frankly and to entertain any questions that I might have with regard to conceptions of race and their identity, as well as their continued association (or lack thereof, for some) to the Martí-Maceo Society.

I began my association with the social club when I became a research assistant for Susan Greenbaum, who served at the time as co-director of a project entitled, *Cubans in Tampa: Common Histories, Common Paths*. The project focused on bringing together the
members of Tampa’s two historic Cuban social clubs – organizations that shared a common origin but which had been separated by racial divisions for nearly 100 years – to work together in celebrating their shared heritage and examining divisions between them. As part of my work, I assisted in preparation and execution of events prepared as part of the project, including assisting with publicity, editing of press releases, and documenting the efforts on the part of Martí-Maceo members who were eager to commemorate the centennial of their organization. My work in this regard allowed me to draw insight into the complexities of Afro-Cuban identity in Tampa.

Aside from extensive participant observation, I also conducted interviews and surveys with Black Cubans who are active Martí-Maceo members, relatives of these members who do not actively participate in Martí-Maceo activities (most of these respondents are children of current members), and former members who are no longer formally associated with the organization. Respondents were identified through purposeful snowball sampling (Bernard, 1995:97-98). Established participants, i.e., individuals who agreed to complete a survey or a series of in-depth interviews were asked to identify five individuals (family members, friends, or acquaintances) who also might be interested in completing an interview.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

Throughout my work with the Martí-Maceo Society, I was able to take extensive notes rather freely since members knew that I was working on a research project related to their centennial celebration. As I became more of a regular fixture at meetings and was asked to assume formal responsibilities such as recording general meeting minutes, my
notetaking simply increased. All of my fieldnotes were typed as MS Word documents for electronic storage and review and were analyzed using Atlas.ti version 5.2, qualitative data analysis software (Scientific Software Development 2006). Fieldnotes were then reviewed and coded to examine issues of racial and ethnic identity, including terms used by respondents to discuss these, whether their conceptualizations could be tied to a discernable notion of collective identity, and their perceptions regarding the larger forces that control heritage preservation in Tampa, as well as the allocation of resources to the remaining ethnic mutual aid societies in Ybor City. The themes that emerged from this coding and analysis inform the discussion that follows in this dissertation.

**In-depth Interviews**

A series of semi-structured and unstructured interviews were conducted with four key respondents to gather more detailed qualitative data on the members’ long-term association with the organization and to serve as a comparison for findings from surveys. Although the interview protocols used were relatively short, interviews often ranged from two to three hours, as questions asked generated detailed responses and ensuing conversations, and were completed over the course of three of five sessions. Key respondents were selected based on my personal relationships with them which had developed over the course of my involvement with the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo and its members. They were chosen for their insight into the organization, given their extensive participation as members of the directiva or in the planning and execution of activities between 1999 and 2009. My key informants, whose parents and/or grandparents had been members, all have multiple historical ties to the Martí-Maceo Society.
Key respondents were generally bilingual (English and Spanish), although one respondent was more fluent in Spanish than English. Interviews were conducted in the language of their preference, and although interview responses often incorporated both languages, respondents generally kept their responses within the identified language of preference. All semi-structured interviews were tape recorded; however, unstructured interviews and detailed conversations with key informants were not. In these cases, I took detailed notes when possible and otherwise followed such conversations by orally recording my observations to a digital recorder and later writing up fieldnotes from these. All interview recordings were transcribed and typed into Word documents for electronic storage and review. Interview notes and fieldnotes from conversations with key respondents were reviewed for common themes and descriptive information about the Martí-Maceo Society and Black Cuban identity using Atlas.ti version 5.2, qualitative data analysis software (Scientific Software Development 2006).

I used an oral history approach during these interviews to examine racial and ethnic identity formation processes in both Cuba (when relevant) and the United States. The interviews often began by soliciting basic demographic information including age, place of birth, household information, current and previous occupation, etc. The interviews then focused on discussion of informants’ early lives, specific recollections related to racial identity formation and perceptions on race relations in Tampa or Cuba, and reflections on migration from Cuba or within the United States at various points in their lives. Key informants were also asked extensively about their experiences as Martí-Maceo members, as well as early recollections about their parents’ and other family members’ involvement. The responses collected during these more extensive interviews
are used to elucidate certain points related to the preservation of the Marti-Maceo Society, changing relations between various ethnic groups and Ybor City stakeholders, as well as detailed recollections of significant events during the past 10 years since I began work with the organization.

According to Gmelch (1992:311), oral history is a useful method through which to gain an insider’s perspective “beneath the abstractions of migration theory.” The migration experience, for many individuals, is filled with a number of significant or life-altering events, which can often serve to heighten informants’ recall and memory of events. While the majority of respondents who participated in this study are not recent migrants, the oral history method is expected to provide insight into the contemporary history of Afro-Cubans in Tampa (See Yow 1994:143-166). As Hareven notes (1996:242), oral history provides a means by which to link individual lives with a broader historical context or “generational memory” that serves to collect and record individual family histories, “as well as more general collective memories about the past.” Within this project, the oral history method was used to provide a means through which informants can connect family and community history with contemporary social networks and associations.

The oral history method has a long and distinguished history in anthropological methodology, including the works of Ruth Landes (1969) and Nancy Lurie (1961), which focus on the lives of Native American women. A number of works in the field published over the past two decades embraced the oral history method and documented the effects and pitfalls of using reflexivity in the ethnographic process (Behar 1993; Fox

The fallibility of memory has been criticized as a main impediment to the reliability of the method as a means for securing valid and reliable data. However as Yow notes (1994:6; See also Lummis 1987), most historical documentation relies on subjective and/or selective recording and memory, including census information, surveys, and birth, marriage or death registries. Further, and perhaps more important to remember, is Haveren’s assertion that oral history is a record of perceptions, rather than a re-creation of historical events... [a]s long as one understands this, rather than assumes, as some do, that oral history is the closest to ‘unadulterated human memory’ we can approach, it can be valued for what it is and utilized creatively (1996:248).

**Surveys**

The questionnaire administered to contemporary respondents was created in 1989 and administered by Greenbaum with 45 active members of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo between 1989 and 1990. The protocol was comprised primarily of items designed to elicit demographic information, items designed to capture perceptions of individual identity, as well as items that could be combined to create variables related to Afro-Cuban identity. Most of the respondents surveyed in 1989 have died, moved away from Tampa, or are no longer affiliated with Martí-Maceo members socially, although 10 of these original respondents were members when I began working the Martí-Maceo
Society and I was acquainted with them. The surveys also include open-ended questions that allow respondents to reflect on perceived changes in inter-racial relations among Cubans, relations between African Americans and Afro-Cubans, and differences in gender relations over time.

All of the contemporary respondents self-identify as Black Cuban and/or acknowledge a Cuban heritage whereby at least one family member (most often a parent or grandparent) identified as Cuban and was an active member of the Martí-Maceo Society prior to 1965. Because of these inclusion criteria and the ongoing state of decline in which the Martí-Maceo Society has operated since the late 1960s, only 17 respondents completed surveys with me. In order to augment data collected with this small sample of respondents, I compared contemporary responses to those of the 1989 surveys. Findings from both sets of surveys were reviewed and assessed for changes in perceptions with regard to self-categorization of identity, social network affiliations, and relations between various social groups in Tampa (e.g. between Afro-Cubans and White Cubans, African Americans, etc.).

Survey responses were coded and entered into IBM SPSS Statistics Base 17.0 for Windows to generate descriptive statistics of each sample. A statistical profile for each set of respondents and general comparisons between these are presented in Chapter Six of this dissertation. Because the surveys were conducted with convenience samples, these comparisons were not tested for statistical significance and the conclusions presented related to these are not generalizable beyond the respondents who completed surveys.

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18 I was able to surmise the identity of several respondents to the 1989 survey, based on responses given at the time to a social network grid that was created. I was not able to do this for all of these respondents, however.
IRB Approval of Study

At the outset of my work with the organization as a research assistant, I was introduced formally to the membership and they were told that I would be taking notes as part of a graduate-level research project. Prior to initiating targeted data collection, (e.g. completion of interviews and surveys), I secured approval of the dissertation study proposal University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB). All study participants gave their written informed consent after the purpose of the dissertation research was explained and confidentiality was assured by the researcher. Study participants signed an informed consent form and agreed to allow their interviews to be recorded with a digital recorder.

Although a number of the Martí-Maceo members have passed away in the intervening years since I was introduced to the membership, I have tried to remain cognizant of the importance of confidentiality with regard to the members that gave so much of their time to me, and shared their words and experiences with me. Because of the unique history of Tampa’s mutual aid societies and the ethnic communities that grew up around them, it seemed disingenuous to try to obscure the geographic location. However, I have tried to respect my informants’ privacy by using pseudonyms and changing identifying characteristics without deliberately misrepresenting events or observations that could be corroborated by others. Before obtaining informed consent and initiating data collection, I explicitly explained the steps I would take to maintain each participant’s privacy.

Throughout my work with the members of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo, I was open about the fact that my constant note-taking and observations would be used as
part of my dissertation research. I also answered questions from members whenever they asked about my progress or the issues in which I was most interested. Most often, however, my informants were gracious and supportive. Rather than ask details, they’d ask “When are you going to finish your studies?” As a result, I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible, while working to maintain the integrity of the data that I collected during fieldwork.
CHAPTER FOUR
THE EVERYDAY BUSINESS OF BLACK CUBAN HERITAGE
REPRESENTATION

Cubans in Tampa: Common History, Different Trajectories

In the fall of 1999, I began working with Susan Greenbaum as her research assistant on the project entitled, *Cubans in Tampa: Common Histories, Common Paths*. “Cubans in Tampa” was co-directed by Greenbaum and Paul Dosal, then associate professor of History, and was funded by the Florida Humanities Council. According to the grant description, the project was designed to “investigate the community and civic culture of black and white Cuban Americans…explore the generational, ethnic and racial issues that have too often divided them and identify the common interests on which they will build more constructive relations between black and white Cuban Americans in the future” (Original grant proposal, 1998). A total of five events, to be held during the course of a year, was planned to celebrate the “common origins in the early Cuban community of Tampa” and to examine and better understand “the divisions that have existed between black and white Cubans” since 1900, resulting in the eventual formation of the Círculo Cubano and the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo.

The centennial celebrations of the Círculo Cubano and the Sociedad la Unión Martí-Maceo were scheduled in October 1999 and October 2000, respectively, to serve as book-ends enclosing three additional events focused on presenting the historic
contributions of Cubans in Tampa and ostensibly, on forging new relationships between these organizations. The other events held as part of the series included a panel discussion of local Cuban and Spanish academics, activists, and community historians titled, “The Social Vision of José Martí and Anotnio Maceo: A Lecture and Dialogue;” a living history presentation by members of the Círculo Cubano titled, “Cuba Libre: The Road to Cuban Independence;” and a second panel discussion that included Black and White Cubans, along with Dosal and Greenbaum, “Racial Reconciliation within the Cuban Community and Beyond.”

In 1999, Dosal served as president of the Círculo Cubano and was working with its membership to plan and organize events related to the centennial and assisting with the compilation of the Círculo Cubano’s archival records. Greenbaum, on the other hand, had been working with the members of the Martí-Maceo Society for nearly a decade, helping them to reconstruct a written history of their organization (See Greenbaum, 2002), as well as to compile family photographs to document the long history of Afro-Cubans in Ybor City’s cigar enclave. As Greenbaum’s assistant, most of my early work focused on becoming acquainted with the members of the Martí-Maceo Society and assisting with their efforts to compile archives and photographs from family papers, which allowed me to record fieldnotes rather unobtrusively. During this time Círculo Cubano maintained a historian on its governing board, who was responsible for organizing their existing archives and historical photographs and compiling these for donation to the Ybor City and West Tampa Collections Archive held by the Florida Studies Center at the University of South Florida library. By contrast, the members of the Martí-Maceo Society relied on Greenbaum and students like me to compile archives for
donation to the library and for use during the centennial project. This basic difference in
the lack of organizational capacity among Tampa’s existing social clubs was one of many
examples that became evident during my work on this project. As with the stark
differences between the organization’s current social halls, the Circulo Cubano’s
organizational infrastructure appeared to be more formalized and better-functioning.
Despite the project’s premise that Cubans in Tampa shared a common history that had
placed them on common paths as they settled their families in this country, the
contemporary realities suggested otherwise.

As noted elsewhere in this dissertation, the loss of the original Marti-Maceo
Society to the Urban Renewal program in 1965, was significant event in the
organization’s history. For many of Marti-Maceo’s members, this transgression on the
part of the city illustrated a complete disregard for their contributions to the enclave’s
development, and the decision to demolish their social hall was often suspected by
members of being racially motivated. The Marti-Maceo Social Hall was one of the only
venues in segregated Tampa that allowed Black audiences to attend events and concerts
by nationally-recognized Black artists of the day. A number of members consider this tie
to the local Black community an unspoken reason (on the part of the city) for the loss of
the original social hall. 19 Moreover, their current building (which they were able to
acquire in the late 1960s) could not compare to the grand, albeit aging three-story social
hall of the Circulo Cubano.20

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19 The property on which the original social hall stood was eventually developed into privately-owned low-
income apartments with a majority of Black residents.
20 Although the original Marti-Maceo social hall was a much larger and more attractive building than the
organization’s current hall, it was still much smaller and less grand than the structures built by the other
mutual aid societies in the area.
The Círculo Cubano is located about four blocks from the Martí-Maceo social hall and sits on the National Register of Historic Places. At the time that I began my work on the project in 1999, a number of members commented that the joint events to be held at the Círculo Cubano would be the first time for many of them would set foot in the other Cuban club. As Elena, noted during a conversation as we prepared for the first event:

I remember when we walked by, my mother told me not to even look at that place. “Don’t even look at it. Just keep walking.” I guess that’s how angry they were at the time.

Although the anger that Elena refers to may have had to do with the original expulsion from the original Club Nacional Cubano — her grandmother would have been alive at the time of the split and the subsequent founding of the all-Black mutual aid society and would have shared this knowledge with her children— it may have had more to do with the fact that some members of the Círculo Cubano were close relatives from whom they were separated because of their respective and acknowledged racial identities. (Elena would later, in fact, learn that this was indeed the case in her family.) Moreover, a number of Martí-Maceo members felt that, by and large, White immigrants in Ybor City disrespected them and their organization. For instance in early generations, although the Círculo Cubano often invited Martí-Maceo members to some of their events, particularly those that celebrated Cuban national holidays, they were not allowed to bring their wives and were required to leave once festivities (e.g. drinking and dancing) had begun. However, this “custom” was not reciprocated, as White Cubans attended Martí-Maceo
dances in groups with no women and sought to dance with the wives of members
(Greenbaum 2002:191).

Each of my informants, when discussing their life histories, made note of specific instances when their racial identity (or that of a family member) caused an extra hardship or difficulty in their lives. In some cases, the restrictions placed on Blacks in Tampa—even within Ybor City—required travel to Cuba, as Lourdes recounts in discussing her aunt’s health.

My cousin, Rafaela, was in Cuba. She went, like, when she was about 13 because her mother had a brain tumor, and you know, at that time with segregation Blacks couldn’t go into the hospitals. So they had this hospital here called Clara Frye, or something like that. So the brothers here, the family, decided to send her to Cuba, and she had the surgery. But I don’t remember how long she lived after.

The Clara Frye Negro Hospital, which Lourdes mentions, was the only hospital for Blacks in Tampa. It was established in 1915, and did not have the capacity to serve someone who needed surgery for a brain tumor (Barry 2010). Black Cubans were not accepted in the hospitals established by the Centro Asturiano and the Centro Español and so, were forced to travel for Cuba when hospitalization was necessary (Greenbaum 2002:156).

Two of my informants (aged 83 and 90 respectively) also noted that a number of immigrant-owned Ybor City restaurants and business practiced active segregation despite
present-day claims to the contrary. Below, Ernest and Humberto talk about the same establishment, where they used to buy Cuban sandwiches.

Ernest: Yeah, isn’t it funny? He’s our friend now, but you know, back then in order to buy a Cuban sandwich you had to go to this window that they had. I remember it well. It had this little hole and they had it covered up with a piece of wood that they would push out of the way to take your order. So you would have to stand there and wait on them to push that wood thing…[Laughs.] And you had to order through that little hole and then, they’d push the sandwiches through. That’s the way it was.

Humberto: Si en Ybor, allí p’ a tu comprar un sandwiche o cualquier cosa, tenías que ir por un lugar, una ventanita que ponían allí en el lado p’a venderte las cosas. (Yes, in Ybor City, if you wanted to buy a sandwich or anything like that, you had to go around to this window that they had to sell you things.)

For Bill, discussing events when he had been discriminated against was particularly difficult, and he became emotional during our conversation. Bill had served in the Army during Korea and had been wounded shortly after deployment there. After a months-long convalescence in Japan and later, Hawaii, he returned to Florida. Dressed in his uniform, he took a bus into Ybor City:
So, I got on the bus coming back. When we got onto 7th Avenue and 19th Street… the bus stopped, the bus driver turns around and he say [sic]… Now, I’m in my uniform. I’m still in the service. I’m just home on a 30-day convalescence leave. I got my crutches. The only way the doctor let me come home was if I walked from here to that table [about 10 feet] and he wrote up the order for the nurse to let me come home for 30 days. It hurt so bad, but I did it. Because I wanted to come home so bad.

[Pauses.] This bus driver… this bus driver, a lot of White folks was getting on the bus. He turns around and he says, “All you Black folks get up and let these White folks sit down. So… I got up, because I didn’t want no problems. Because if I were to rebel, you know, I knew the police was gonna [sic] come and they were gonna have to call MacDill, and I didn’t need that. Ok? So, when I get up, here comes an able-bodied White man and he takes my seat. That’s why I say I will take that to my grave with me. I will never forget that. And that was in ’51, in ’51 that that incident happened. And to this day, I always think about it.

In Bill’s case, his recollection of racial discrimination is very much tied to larger experiences of segregation that Blacks faced in other parts of the country: segregated buses and Black military personnel or veterans being treated as second-class citizens. The indignities of racial discrimination were ever-present in Ybor City for Black Cubans.

Despite my knowledge of some of these difficult experiences at the time, it was exciting for me to begin work on a project that would bring these two communities
together, which had been separated for such a long time. Far more interesting was the fact that the public events as planned did not appear to allow for much discussion and examination of the perceptions and opinions of individuals who experienced this divide for most of their lives. The first event, the centennial celebration for the Círculo Cubano, provided the opportunity for many of Martí-Maceo’s members to make that initial visit after nearly a lifetime of being unable to enter the hall. Although there were one or two members who had already attended other events at the Círculo Cubano; however, it was to be the first time that most members would be able to enjoy the historic hall’s amenities. The centennial included a number of speakers, who discussed the role of the Círculo Cubano in their family and community lives, and included music and light refreshments. Most members said they were impressed by the sheer size of the neoclassical building that they had only glimpsed from the street as they were hurried along by parents and grandparents and noted that they felt comfortable and welcomed. The events that followed were held alternately at the Martí-Maceo Society’s social hall and the Círculo Cubano between October 1999 and November 2000.

Overall, the centennial events were well-received by audiences of about 50 to 60, that had come to hear about the history of Cubans in Tampa and their contributions to Ybor City. The one exception proved to be a panel discussion that was held to discuss racial reconciliation among contemporary Cubans in Tampa, the penultimate event in the series. The panel included Greenbaum and Dosal, along with a senior member of the Círculo Cubano, a community activist who had recently published a memoir of growing up in Ybor City, and a descendent of a family with over three generations of service on
the Martí-Maceo directiva and a federal official. What began as a panel discussion with the author using his memoir as an illustration of the divisions that existed between Black and White Cubans despite their co-existence within Ybor City, quickly became a venue for angry discussion on the part of some audience members. The audience for this panel was smaller than the previous events on the centennial calendar and included perhaps 25 people sitting in the outdoor patio of the Ybor City State Museum on a sunny mid-afternoon.

Shortly after each of the panelists concluded their opening remarks, an audience member, who appeared to be in his late 40s or early 50s, raised his hand to ask a question of the panelists and stood up to provide his comments. He began by noting that his parents had been members of the Martí-Maceo Society and that he had spent much of his youth at the social hall. He then went on to address the two “White” panelists and said that he did not believe they had any intention to address the pain that Black Cubans felt at being discriminated against by their fellow immigrants. He demanded to know what the point of the event had been. He asked them if they ever thought to place themselves in his shoes. How would they react to racial discrimination? Members of the audience and the panel began speaking at once, and the discussion quickly became difficult to follow. One of the panelists, the elderly Círculo Cubano member said that he was, of course, sorry for the way things had occurred fifty years ago, but White Cubans had been unwilling to challenge the Jim Crow laws in place at the time for fear of repercussions. The audience member laughed at this response and said he was “no fool” and that this was just a cover for racism on the part of White Cubans. At this point, a member of Círculo Cubano in

21 The names of all members and centennial event participants have been changed to protect research participant privacy and confidentiality. The exception to this general rule is to use the actual names of the directors of the study, both of them USF professors.
attendance countered, “As far as I’m concerned I wasn’t there. Why should I have to pay for what people in the past did?” Once again the audience discussion became contentious, with nearly everyone speaking at once, it seemed.

Members of the panel worked to address the original speaker’s questions and comments, as well as the point that present-day members had nothing to do with the events of the past. They said that although it was painful to address these issues, the event had been intended to examine the experiences of individuals affiliated with both of Tampa’s Cuban clubs and to attempt to come to some sort of understanding and reconciliation for the future. The original speaker then replied, “There can be no reconciliation if these people are not willing to acknowledge what they did to us, to me, to my family in the past.” The audience discussion became animated once again with one individual calling out, “You see this is why we can never get past what happened. They can never get past what happened.” Following some back and forth between audience members and the panelists, the original speaker’s wife identified herself as an African American and stood up to address the discussants.

I realize that I am not part of this community, but I want to tell those of you who want my husband to “just get over it”…my husband was very hurt by a lot of the things that happened in his life, by discrimination. Can you imagine family members pretending they don’t know you? Or not being able to go somewhere because of the color of your skin? For those of you that haven’t experienced this in your life, I’m asking you to try and understand this man’s pain. That’s what this is about, pain.
Although a few members of the audience clapped when the woman concluded and sat down, the audience fell quiet to a large extent, and the panelists were able to conclude with short statements about the hope for reconciliation between present-day White and Black Cubans. Shortly thereafter, the crowd dispersed and the event ended two hours after it had begun.

This episode was instructive in a number of ways, especially in that it gave voice to the resentment that many of the Martí-Maceo members and other Black Cubans felt at being excluded from the larger Cuban community in Ybor City. Although White Cuban members of the panel noted that they had also been discriminated against by Tampa’s White power elite,\textsuperscript{22} the assertion did not appear to mollify the pain and outrage expressed by the audience members who experienced racial discrimination within Ybor City at the hands of fellow Cubans who were their neighbors and professed to harbor no racial animosity toward their Black compatriots, as well as relatives or long-standing family friends who no longer acknowledged their presence. The argument was largely dismissed by some of the Black audience members who challenged the sincerity of White Cubans’ efforts at reconciliation. However, the event also illustrated the discomfort that whites can feel when “talking about racism/white supremacy” especially in a situation that required them to “confront their role as oppressors, or at least as beneficiaries of the racial oppression of others” (Grillo and Wildman,\textsuperscript{22})

\textsuperscript{22} While Long (1971:342) affirms that “[t]he various shades of skin color among the Cubans caused the natives [i.e. whites] to lump most of them with the Negro and to adopt a similar pattern of discrimination against them,” he also notes that subtle “voluntary segregation” among middle and upper class Cubans often inured them from outright discrimination from the White power structure and even facilitated intermarriage with elite White families.
The quiet that settled on the crowd—panelists and audience alike—as White Cubans attempted to defend themselves from charges of racism, highlighted the discomfort of having to confront individual and/or collective roles in the denigration of fellow Cubans—despite the fact that a number of White Cubans in the audience explicitly stated that they did not feel any responsibility for having to do so. This incident has remained a singular one in my fieldwork experience because it was the only time that such grievances were openly directed at White Cubans in public and outside the confines of the Martí-Maceo social hall. Despite the distress experienced by audience members, Black and White, the event was in the end a success because it moved beyond the academic discussion of historical personages or literary and artistic works and addressed the lived experience of community members.

The final event in the series that year was the Martí-Maceo Centennial Celebration, which was structured as a banquet that included a seated dinner, music, dancing, a short program with a local newscaster as the evening’s emcee, and recognition of previous Martí-Maceo presidents and families with ties to the organization that spanned three and in some cases four, generations. University of South Florida students in the applied anthropology program worked with me to secure food donations as well as local and corporate sponsors, and helped with the hall’s preparation, food and drink service, and clean up after the event. The banquet, held in November 2000, was a success, with about 95 attendees who ate, drank and danced for four hours. The majority of those who attended were members of the Martí-Maceo Society and their family members, although some
members of the Círculo Cubano attended, as well. The social hall had been dressed up with additional lighting, banquet tables and chairs, and linens, and many of the members who attended commented that they had not seen the club look so festive in years. For many members, the banquet was a festive conclusion to a series of events that forced them to examine the retelling of history with regard to the racial divisions among Cubans. Privately, individual members ridiculed claims that Florida’s Jim Crow laws —and the penchant of Tampa’s White elite for upholding these— were the sole reason for the expulsion of Black Cubans from the Club Nacional Cubano and their subsequent relegation to the bottom rung in the racial and ethnic hierarchy of Ybor City cigar workers. However, the centennial events, which most often celebrated Cuban culture and Tampa’s cigar workers’ involvement in the struggle for independence from Spain, provided a public space that allowed for a brief but forceful challenge of this rhetoric on the part of Black Cubans.

Initial Impressions: “The Martí-Maceo Society Is a Private Organization”

Shortly after I started work on the centennial project, I began to attend general membership meetings held at the Martí-Maceo social hall as a guest. At the time, I was one of a number of USF anthropology graduate students who were involved with the organization in a variety of capacities. At the time, Greenbaum enlisted students from her courses to conduct class research projects and assist the organization in various capacities. Upon attending my first meeting, I noticed that the majority of official business during the meeting was conducted almost entirely
in Spanish— a practice I later learned was stipulated in the organization’s by-laws in place at the time. A typical meeting included 20 to 25 members sitting in long rows of picnic tables that were arranged next to each other and pointing toward a small, dark stage at end of the box-shaped room. The current Martí-Maceo social hall had previously been a storefront and a warehouse. By 1999, its interior had been covered in dark wood paneling and dim fluorescent lighting with red lamps along the walls, which gave the hall the look of an old Elks’ lodge. The square structure also included a small bar located at the front of the building, just to the left of the large double front doors.

During those early days, USF students were not considered to be eligible for full membership. Because we were assisting the organization in a variety of capacities, however, we were given an “honorary” membership status which allowed us to attend meetings and help gather information or publicize events but did not give us voting rights or the right to speak during meetings. Fortunately, I speak fluent Spanish and was able to follow the meetings and take notes. Most of the other student assistants often sat through meetings quietly or did not stay for meetings because they did not understand Spanish. There were also a few members at the time that were not fluent Spanish-speakers in the same predicament. The directiva president at the time, Juan, had arrived from Cuba in the 1980s and spoke little English. Meetings were led by Juan in Spanish and periodically, Valeria, the Board Secretary, stepped in to translate for English-speakers. After sitting through meetings run in this way, my overall impression of the Martí-Maceo Society was of a closed organization —very much like the
fraternal organization that it physically resembled—which required newcomers to learn its ways and accommodate to its long-standing traditions. As if to underscore this impression, the membership maintained a wooden placard built on wheels at the social hall’s entrance that read in large block letters, “The Martí-Maceo Society Is a Private Organization.” The sign is still kept near the front door and is one of the first things guests might see upon entering the building.

The actual content of these early meetings focused on the planning of events related to the centennial project, the need to raise funds for operating costs and continual repairs, and increasing concern that projected development in their vicinity might result in displacement from their current location in Ybor City. In 1999, the Ybor City Historic District was experiencing an upswing in development featuring the construction of several large-scale construction projects that would hold multiple department stores, restaurants, and a movie theater.

Unlike the grander social halls of the other mutual aid societies in Ybor City, Martí-Maceo’s social hall was not considered by the Barrio Latino Commission, which serves as the architectural review board for the district and works to ensure adherence to architectural design guidelines, to conform to the design guidelines for the historic district. Therefore due to this lack of “architectural integrity,” as identified by the commission, the building was considered to be ineligible for historic designation review. The commission’s stance caused a considerable amount of concern among members because although the city was uninterested in recognizing their building as an important
part of the historic district and a landmark in and of itself, the Martí-Maceo social hall was now located on the main avenue running through Ybor City and its property value had escalated sharply as a result of development projections. Members worried that the eventual development boom being anticipated for the neighborhood would result in forced removal. At the time, the threat seemed entirely plausible given that the building was aging and in need of considerable repair. Despite the growing excitement among Martí-Maceo members related to the centennial project, members began actively discussing the possibility of facing displacement once again during general membership meetings with increasing frequency.

As a result of these concerns, the organization – with financial support from a few key members – began to repair and remodel the building’s interior to avoid possible code violations which might encourage the city to close the organization or seize the building. Elena, a member in her 40s at the time and considered to of the “younger generation,” provided key support and resources in this regard. Her family had long-standing ties to the organization as a number of her ancestors had served on the Martí-Maceo Directiva or governing board, one of whom served as a well-respected President for many years. A city employee, Elena used her connections and increasing enthusiasm for the Martí-Maceo Society to leverage resources and donations to help with remodeling and the preparation of the centennial gala. Other members stepped in to help with the actual work and also donated funds.
In the process, the dark wood paneling came down, revealing the need for extensive electrical rewiring, and although the revelation forced additional work and cost, the membership drew a collective sigh of relief because it meant that they could avoid a major code violation should an inspection occur in the near future. Once the electrical rewiring was completed, the interior walls were rebuilt and a light gray paneling was installed. The fluorescent lighting was replaced, and more modern looking lamps were installed along the interior perimeter of the building.

**Charting a Course for the Future**

The flurry of activity which characterized the preparation and planning for the centennial project events from 1999 to 2000 seemed to spur a small increase in new and returning members, including individuals like Elena who were younger than most long-time members and had numerous connections and resources to share with the struggling organization. Members were visibly proud of the remodeling results which made the interior of their social hall seem bigger and “more presentable” as many of them characterized it. This sense of pride also arose from the growing realization that despite a challenging history of enforced segregation and the sense that their community and organization was largely excluded from the current efforts to revitalize and celebrate “Latin” heritage in Ybor City, the Martí-Maceo Society had remained in continuous operation for 100 years. As the centennial events continued, additional members began to attend regular meetings and expressed a desire “to become more involved.”
However, while increased involvement by younger members and others who had been away for some years resulted in increased activity at the organization, it also gave rise to questions related to the way the organization was being run and whether the current board was equipped to lead the organization at a time that seemed to require some knowledge and political savvy with regard to ongoing city development efforts.

Further, members began to question the wisdom of conducting meetings in Spanish, which more and more often required translation for members who were primary English speakers. By mid-year in 2000, a number of members felt comfortable enough with my presence at meetings and regular club events to express their opinions freely about the future of the Martí-Maceo Society and its current course. A few members confided that they felt new leadership was needed and that Juan and Valeria, who were often the only members of the board presiding over meetings, were not equipped to handle the growing threat of redevelopment in the area. A few of them began to discuss what they felt were “irregularities” in the administration of the organization’s business and questioned whether an increase in donations were being accurately reflected in the monthly treasury reports. However, these suspicions were only related in private conversations rather than openly expressed during meetings. There were even whispers that Juan was a palero, an adherent of what is often popularly characterized among Cubans as an offshoot of Santeria that relies on “black magic” or “dark forces” to effect desired results.23

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23 Researchers often differentiate Palo Monte or Palo Mayombe as it is also known, from Santeria, or more accurately, Regla Ocha, in basic ways concerning practices and language. Whereas the Regla Ocha is seen
Relating Juan to an African-derived religion such as *Palo Mayombe* or *Santeria* served to mark him as a suspicious Other, who did not conform to the typical make-up of Martí-Maceo members: respectable Black Cubans who were descended from individuals who helped establish the Ybor City cigar industry and founded the organization they held so dear. The majority of my respondents through the years have been reluctant to discuss their own families’ experiences with either of these religions (when this was the case), either because they dismissed them as mere superstition or because as one informant noted, “It makes them ashamed [to talk about it].” This passage reflects an ongoing theme in the discourse used by Martí-Maceo members to discuss race, Blackness, and Africa. When discussing Africa, for instance, a number of my informants will make an effort to distance themselves and/or the organization from the continent, its peoples or its cultural attributes. This differentiation was prevalent in colonial Cuba among free Blacks and Mulattos. The parents and grandparents of my elderly informants, especially, who most often reflect such views and who have consistently avoided discussion of Santeria, in particular, were members of this sector of Cuba’s population of color. ²⁴

A committee of members had been assigned by Juan to work with Greenbaum on all efforts related to the centennial project, which included Elena and another relatively young member, whose mother had long-standing family

²⁴ For an excellent treatment on official efforts to forcibly discourage the practice of African-derived religions in the early Cuban republic see Bronfman (2004).
ties to Martí-Maceo, Steven Acosta. Steven had served briefly as an interim president of the directiva prior to Juan’s term and worked at a local information technology firm. He was considered by many of the members to be a potential long-term leader in the organization. The elder members felt that he and Elena were more equipped to help the Martí-Maceo Society navigate the literally changing landscape of Ybor City and the politics of local redevelopment. As the chair of the centennial committee, Steven represented the Martí-Maceo directiva and was often involved in planning discussions with the board members of the Círculo Cubano. His competence in this role led some of the older members to begin pushing informally for Steven to challenge Juan’s position as directiva president. At the same time, a number of concerns involving the governing board had emerged with a potential for some scandal, helping to spur calls for change.

The ongoing work related to the centennial project helped to increase interest and participation in other official Martí-Maceo events and activities which led to increased revenues from sales of alcohol and entry fees. The social hall itself seemed to gain new life from the makeover and the increased attention, mirroring increasing activity in the surrounding Ybor City district. One evening in September, Steven and another member headed to the club on a weekend evening in order to prepare the hall for an upcoming event. According to Steven, when he arrived at the club the city-owned vacant lot to the west of the Martí-Maceo social hall (which was often used by members and guests with permission from the city) was full. At the time, he said he noted that this seemed odd to him because there
was not a function being held at the club. He said he then proceeded to the small parking area adjacent to the east side of the social hall and was stopped by a woman who, he said, asked him to pay five dollars to park his car.

Upon hearing this, Steven said that he asked the woman for her name and told her that she was asking him to pay to park in a private parking lot (Martí-Maceo’s land extends approximately 30 feet to the east of the building and allows for a small amount of parking) and that as a member of the Martí-Maceo Society working on behalf of the directiva, he had every right to park there for free. Steven said that the woman responded that she also worked for the Martí-Maceo Society, and that no one had told her that there would be an event at the hall requiring parking. At this point, he asked the woman to identify the individual member who had hired her and told her that he had no knowledge of such an arrangement. Steven said that she stopped answering his questions and told him to talk with the board.

Steven discussed the parking incident at the next centennial committee meeting a week later. When relating the story to the committee, he asked for advice on how best to address the issue at the general membership meeting to be held the following week. The committee members expressed a number of concerns about the incident, chief of which was the appearance that the directiva was engaging in financial improprieties which could be draining the treasury and worse, enabling one or more board members to generate unauthorized income.

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25 In 1999, despite the growing activity in Ybor City overall, Martí-Maceo’s location at the front end of Seventh Avenue placed it at some distance from the bulk of the nightlife which actually begins nearly 3 blocks away. The long dark walk from this parking location coupled with Ybor’s reputation for crime served to discourage parking near the social hall – although this is no longer the case. The city now authorizes private parking companies to rent the lot for paid parking during large-scale events.
from their position(s). All positions on the Martí-Maceo Directiva were volunteer positions and tradition (as well as by-laws, I later learned) stipulated that no board members could draw a salary from his or her position. For members of the committee, even more unsettling was the fact that none of them had any idea about the parking arrangement with Marsha Harris, the name the unknown parking attendant had given to Steven, and that such an arrangement had never been brought up in a general meeting. Overall, committee members expressed concern over the perception that such activities, should they become known, would have on new and returning members who had been drawn to the organization as a result of the centennial events.

The centennial committee was comprised of eight members, including two who had become members in the late 1980s, four with ongoing and active ties to the organization from young adulthood, and Steven and Elena. Although small in number, they represented a core group with considerable influence. The decision to address the parking issue formally during the general membership meeting was sure to raise eyebrows among the rest of the membership and could potentially cause a fracas, something I’d begun to note was generally avoided. Typically, problems or concerns on the part of individual members were not addressed during general membership meetings. Beginning with the whispers that the directiva was no longer effective and the informal calls for Steven to assume the presidency, I began to note that members most often raised grievances privately by calling their friends and family members who were also members and airing their unease about a given matter. Eventually, these concerns would reach the
directiva, but only because a member would have placed a private call to discuss what he or she had heard.

In his work with Jewish family clubs in New York, Mitchell (1978:155-196) notes the cultural nature of conflict within such close-knit organizations. Conflict can often provide an organization’s members with some excitement, although if left unchecked the resulting divisiveness may destabilize the entire organization. Although Cubans are often colloquially characterized as being very demonstrative when speaking and even excitable in their manner of verbal expression generally, members appeared to be reluctant to formally introduce controversial or problematic issues during general assembly meetings. For the most part, they appeared to go out of their way to behave cordially and avoid overt and potentially disruptive conflict. Even in instances where members might begin arguing loudly, others would try to diffuse the situation and calm everyone down. It was no surprise then, that Steven had asked the centennial committee members for their advice in handling the parking matter during the general assembly meeting. By bringing up the topic, he could be seen as accusing the directiva of stealing, at worst, and at best, pointing out that they were not adhering to the rules and regulations that governed the organization’s operation. With the support of the committee members—most of whom were in their 70s—he could avoid creating the impression that he was trying to undermine the board and take control of the organization. As a result, the committee decided that matter should be brought up as a “misunderstanding” and that the directiva needed to contact Marsha Harris immediately to stop her “unauthorized” income-generating
activities. In preparation, they drafted a cease-and-desist letter on organization letterhead that would be permitted during the meeting as the best way to handle the matter.

Despite these precautions, the general membership meeting was somewhat contentious. Valeria felt that the directiva was being unfairly accused of stealing, and the explanation for the matter was that while Marsha Harris had been given permission to oversee parking for the Martí-Maceo Society during large events (ostensibly to ensure additional revenue for the organization) she had taken it upon herself to conduct a side business without anyone’s knowledge. The membership voted to send the letter immediately and to have the board follow up with Marsha to stress that the organization was prepared to take legal action should the parking business on Martí-Maceo and city property continue. Although the immediate conflict appeared to be over, the parking incident marked the beginning of the end for Juan and Valeria’s leadership. While members said that they accepted the explanation that the parking business was being conducted without board authorization, many continued to mention the fact that no one was ever told about selling parking spaces in the first place. There were no official treasury reports that showed that a Martí-Maceo event had ever generated any income through parking.

In all fairness, the board’s explanation might have been accurate and was entirely plausible despite what members at the time believed. Part of the difficulty in determining the veracity of the multiple justifications circulated, was the fact that only two individuals were running an organization whose building had
recently undergone fairly extensive remodeling and which was experiencing an
upswing in membership attendance and a growing number of activities to oversee.
Furthermore, they were keeping all records on paper in handwritten form, using
their own filing systems (such as they were), with little to no assistance from
other members or technology. Such a situation could easily lend itself to the
feeling that the amount of work required deserved some compensation for
directiva members (approved or otherwise) and/or corruption. However, it could
just as easily create an environment rife with errors and inaccuracies in record-
keeping and reporting of official business which could allow a rogue “friend” of
the organization to profit without the board’s knowledge. In response to the
growing need for more stringent review and formalization of the Society’s
processes, the membership voted to revise the existing by-laws and asked me to
help them with the process.

Ultimately, enough of the membership felt (related through private
conversations) that they no longer trusted Juan and Valeria, and they were
convinced that Steven would be a better leader overall. Moreover, when Marsha
Harris received the letter advising her to stop her parking business or face legal
action, she left a voicemail saying that she had proof of making an arrangement
with Valeria and that she had even given the board a percentage of her profits.
This exacerbated members’ concerns considerably and many now said that they
no longer felt they could trust Valeria. However, no one was willing to step
forward at the next membership meeting to call for a special election of a new
directiva because of the perceived impropriety. To make matters worse, Valeria
had recently been involved in another incident with a local county official who had rented the Martí-Maceo Social Hall to celebrate his victory in the primary election. According to members in attendance, just as the politician was about to address his victory with the press which had assembled inside the social hall, Valeria stepped in and said that he was prohibited from discussing the primary in any way while inside the building, as stipulated in the current by-laws. Although he was clearly embarrassed, the presumptive county commissioner agreed to hold the interview outside. Isabel, a Martí-Maceo member who worked on the commissioner’s campaign called me --absolutely furious-- two days later and asked whether I had a copy of the organization’s by-laws. By this time in September 2000, I had become a fixture at the Martí-Maceo Society and was known for taking copious notes and assisting with some general office duties from time to time. I did not yet have a copy of the by-laws, and told her that I would send one to her but that it might be best to ask for a copy during the next general assembly meeting. I also suggested that members should have ready access to these in order to ensure that all organizational rules and regulations were being followed accordingly.

Once the rest of the membership found out about the second incident, there was a lot of discussion about the potential negative ramifications for the organization because of its very public nature and the involvement of the local press. Members expressed concerns that a local news outlet would circulate a story about the incident. Still other members expressed concern that such an incident could take place during a private event. Many said that they recalled the
clause which limited discussions of political or religious subjects to avoid overt conflict and outbursts but that this rule only applied during general membership meetings. Other members felt that as long as individuals who were renting the social hall were observing general health and safety requirements, their speech should not be regulated. The following week I was able to secure a copy of the by-laws, which appeared to exist only in Spanish and were dated 1965.

By the following month’s general membership meeting, calls for Juan and Valeria to step down had grown louder—although no one would agree to bring the matter up at the general membership meeting. As I arrived at the October meeting (just over a month away from the scheduled banquet), I wondered how this matter would be resolved, if at all, and whether the resulting fallout would hamper a successful conclusion to the centennial project. To make matters worse, I was running late that Sunday, causing my apprehension to grow. However, when I walked into the social hall, Juan was giving the membership his verbal resignation, which he said would be followed by a formal written letter. He addressed the members in English, in which his speech had a rather stilted quality, and said he needed to step down for health reasons and his inability to attend meetings in the future. Perhaps it was because I was flustered about being late, but it took me a while to assimilate the scene. The assembled members looked much as they had at any number of meetings I’d attended in the past year. When Juan talked about his health issues, a few of them said that they hoped he’d feel better soon so that he could continue being an active part of the organization. A few others expressed regret over his resignation.
As soon as Juan finished, though, a few members quickly noted that the directiva was now without a leader and before anyone else could take the floor, a motion was made to have Steven take Juan’s place. Although Steven abstained from voting, the motion was passed unanimously and he immediately assumed the role of president. The members clapped and welcomed Steven as their new leader and urged him to sit at the directiva’s table facing the members. At this point, the meeting took on an almost mundane quality and Valeria began reading the previous month’s minutes and a treasury report. Neither of the reports seemed complete, and because they had been handwritten it was difficult for Valeria to read them clearly.

Once the reading of the treasury report was completed, Isabel, asked that the membership address the incident involving the politician who was forbidden from addressing the press about his victory in the primary. Apparently, the county commissioner told Isabel that although he supported the organization in principle and wanted to help its members, he might refrain from working with them in the future as a result of what had transpired that evening. Isabel said that she was still embarrassed about the situation and wondered aloud if the membership realized that the support of local politicians could help, should Ybor redevelopment threaten their current location.

By this time, Juan had already taken his leave. Valeria responded to Isabel’s question by saying that Juan had made the determination to silence the commissioner and that since he was no longer there it seemed a moot point to her. Isabel responded by saying that she herself had seen Valeria approach the
commissioner and the assembled camera operators, which touched off an argument between the two women. Steven asserted his authority using a gavel that was now available to him, and asked whether a letter had been mailed to the commissioner expressing the organization’s regret over the “misunderstanding.” Valeria responded that she had no idea. A member then made a motion to draft a letter and have all of the members sign it in a show of solidarity. Once the tension related to this matter dissipated, the tone of the meeting changed and discussion turned to preparations for the final centennial event. Elena announced that she’d received enough donated paint to cover both the interior and exterior of the building. Members raised their hands to volunteer although a number of them noted that such work might be difficult for elderly members. After some back and forth, the meeting ended on a more jovial note than it had begun.

An Offer to Merge and Make History from Havana to New York

Five months before the centennial banquet, which would celebrate the centennial of Martí-Maceo’s founding, Elena made a startling discovery: she and Paul Dosal, the co-director of the centennial project, shared the same great-grandfather. The second cousins were thrilled at the news, especially since it came during a year which had been set aside specifically to examine the intertwining trajectories of Cubans in Tampa, Black and White. While their excitement was largely personal and engendered new ties in their respective families, they also hoped their discovery would play a concrete role in their respective organizations. In July of 2001, the new president of El Círculo Cubano, Carlos, approached
Steven with a request for making a presentation to the members of the Martí-Maceo Society about an interesting offer that, he said, would be of ultimate benefit to both organizations and to the entire Cuban community in Tampa. He also did not give Steven much information beyond saying that he would like for the organizations to consider the possibility of coming together in light of the successful year they’d shared together.

When Steven called the emergency meeting to allow Carlos to give his presentation, members seemed somewhat anxious but curious, as well. As noted earlier, the centennial events had generated renewed interest in the Martí-Maceo Society among previous members and younger individuals, and the events had helped to increase revenues. However, the membership was still concerned with city plans to begin revitalizing the western end of the Ybor City district (where the social hall is located), and many were interested in hearing the proposal and how it might alleviate these concerns, if at all.

On the night of the presentation, Carlos was accompanied by the Círculo Cubano governing board and brought with him a number of handouts. The one that was of most interest to members at the time was a worksheet which outlined a plan for selling the Martí-Maceo Social Hall at an estimated cost of between $700,000 and $1 million, placing those funds in an endowment or investment account to make compound interest, and using part of those funds to make monthly payments to the Círculo Cubano that would eventually total $500,000 ($50,000 to be paid over 10 years). These payments were described as a donation that would show the Martí-Maceo Society’s good faith in joining with the Círculo
Cubano. In return, the members of the Martí-Maceo would be recognized as full members of the organization, and they would be privy to all of the benefits and amenities that full membership had to offer.

The immediate response from the Martí-Maceo members present at the meeting was understated and contrasted with the excitement of the Círculo Cubano members making the proposal. They looked at the worksheet and other handouts quietly and said nothing for a few moments. At the close of the presentation, Steven thanked them for their time and told them that they had given the Martí-Maceo members a lot to think about and asked whether any of the assembled members had questions. Ernest, an active member, who had served on the centennial committee, raised his hand and asked what the deadline for a response was. He echoed Steven’s comments that there was a lot of information for his fellow members to digest and that they would need some time for discussion. Carlos responded by saying, “Of course, we don’t want to push you for a response. But we feel that this is a wonderful opportunity for both of us and with all of the work that we’ve done together this year, that this would be a great time to make such a move.” He did not give an ultimate deadline but said that they looked forward to talking with Steven and the rest of the board soon, in order to come to an accord.

Richard, who had also served on the centennial committee, asked if it would be possible to set up a meeting in the near future to begin a series of discussions in anticipation of the questions that Martí-Maceo members would have. He reminded Carlos that the general membership ultimately made decisions
about their organization’s welfare and that it might take a bit of time to address any concerns, should they arise. Carlos said that he understood and said that Steven should just call him to set up the first meeting. The official meeting was then adjourned and after a short time of socializing between both sets of members, the Círculo Cubano officers departed. After a few seconds of silence, members stared at each other and then quickly began discussing their impressions of the meeting. Someone asked aloud, “So what did you think about that?” Conversation then started in earnest, as impressions were shared, although the comment most often overheard seemed to be, “I don’t know. I’m not sure I get it.” Elena had been at the meeting and said that she thought the members should consider the offer seriously because “it could be good for both us. I’m just saying we should keep an open mind.” Luis responded, “But how can it be good for us to sell the building that we own and pay them to become members? Maybe I just don’t understand.”

This was the point that most of the members that night struggled with understanding. Although the Martí-Maceo Social Hall could not compare with the three-story Círculo Cubano building, it owned its land, free and clear. The fact that it sat at the entrance to Ybor City, where the city had expressed an interest in constructing a number of new buildings, made them rethink the value of the land on which their organization sat. Although they were concerned that the city could forcibly move them from their current location, as in 1965, they began to realize that they could demand compensation using the fair market value of the land. The proposal also made some of them realize, for the first time, just how much
property values had skyrocketed in Ybor City by mid-2001. Moreover, a number of news articles had been published within the past two months, outlining the dire financial straits in which the Círculo Cubano found itself. The building was not owned by the members but by a group of investors who had incorporated as a federal non-profit organization and had assumed control of the building. More importantly, it appeared that the Board of Directors was having trouble raising funds for the over $800,000 mortgage on the building and that they were being threatened with foreclosure. The “donation” on the part of the Martí-Maceo Society could come in quite handy during this financially precarious time for the organization.

The matter was discussed further at the next general assembly meeting a week later, but many of the members had already taken to their phones to begin talking to each other, asking questions, and making conjecture. I received a few phone calls prior to the meeting, from members asking me what I thought, and I was careful to give my opinion because my first impression of the proposal had been to question just how such an arrangement could be beneficial to the Martí-Maceo members. However, I didn’t want my opinion to sway the members, who I felt had a greater stake in the ultimate outcome, and who would have to weigh numerous factors in order to come to some accord internally, much less with the members of the Círculo Cubano. However, I did say, when asked, that I felt it important to take some time in studying all of the possible options and ramifications of the proposal and to begin outlining concrete questions to ask Carlos and the rest of the Círculo governing board, so that any concerns could be
raised and discussed openly. The members who called me were generally of the opinion that there was something “not right” with the proposal, and that they couldn’t see paying hundreds of thousands of dollars to become members of another organization. As one caller put it, “I’m better off filling out a membership application, right? I mean, really, don’t you think so?”

At the meeting, Steven asked three members to serve on a building committee with him that would be responsible for gathering as much information as possible regarding the potential merger, attend all meetings with the Círculo Cubano governing board, and relay all information gathered to the membership with recommendations, where appropriate. Steven asked me to be one of the committee members, and given my reticence in answering some of the earlier calls I received, I was somewhat reluctant to accept. However, I felt that I could be of help in the gathering information, assembling notes and learning anything I could about possible “behind the scenes” maneuvering that members had been wondering about. Joining Steven and me on the committee were Ernest and Richard. Originally, Steven had asked Elena to serve on the committee, as well. However, she said that she felt it wasn’t appropriate given her recent discovery of the relationship with Paul and her overall enthusiasm for the plan. She did say that she would be as involved as she could be and wouldn’t hesitate to share her opinions and feelings regarding the matter with us. After the general assembly meeting ended, the committee assembled for a few minutes to plan a meeting where we could discuss specific questions we might have prior to meeting with the Círculo Cubano governing board. I was asked to serve as the chair of the
committee, and take the lead in gathering information from as many different avenues as possible, work with Steven to set appointments for meetings, and to make sure that we were ready with well-informed questions. Once again, I agreed.

We scheduled a meeting two weeks later on a Thursday night, at the Círculo Cubano, to begin discussing a number of questions that the members had generated. The first and most often voiced was what the $500,000 payment was for. Did the payment guarantee part-ownership of the building, and its regular use? Other questions included learning more about how the figure was arrived at, the actual benefit to Martí-Maceo members of such an arrangement, and any future liability that the Martí-Maceo Society might incur with regard to the Círculo Cubano’s financial difficulties, which had been ongoing for over a year. Ernest and Richard had worked together to list as many questions as they could from the membership and I prepared them for Steven, with additional information on recent articles regarding the Círculo Cubano’s financial difficulties.

The meeting was held in a small enclosed office on the second story of the Círculo Cubano building, which just accommodated the eight of us that attended. It was opened by Carlos, who said he was glad that process seemed to be going ahead smoothly and that he was looking forward to working together so that we all might benefit from a merger in the near future. Steven thanked him and the rest of their board and said that he also appreciated how smoothly things were going and that he was looking forward to maintaining cordiality throughout their subsequent discussions. He then went on to say that he and the members had had some time to review the proposal and the financial worksheet and that there had
indeed been a number of questions that he hoped they would be able to answer. He started by asking how they had arrived at the figures used in the worksheet related to the estimated cost of Martí-Maceo’s property, and Carlos answered that it was simply an estimate based on its location and the impending development plans. Steven then asked how the relationship between the organizations would change. Would they remain two separate institutions in one building, or would they merge together as one organization? Carlos thought for a minute and responded that this sort of detail would have to be worked out by both clubs. However, they would both inhabit the building and have the same rights of use.

“What are the rights of use?” asked Steven.

Carlos explained that the members of the Círculo Cubano did not own the building or the property on which it stood, as did the members of the Martí-Maceo Society. However, the building was part of the members’ heritage and as such, was made available to them for all of its functions, including preparation and planning for these. He went on to say that the building is rented out by a management company that also hosts numerous community events throughout the year, including concerts, political rallies, and other large-scale activities, and that these took precedence on the event calendar because they generated a significant portion of the revenue needed for payment of the building’s mortgage and its considerable upkeep. Steven then asked whether Martí-Maceo members would be able to hold some of the annual events that they organize, especially those having to do with Cuban national holidays or observation of Cuban cultural events. To
which Carlos replied, “Of course. As long as it doesn’t conflict with the other events on the calendar that we just discussed.”

Steven left for last the question regarding the $500,000 payment from Martí-Maceo. “I gotta [sic] tell you, Carlos. This is the one thing members are still trying to figure out. What exactly would this payment cover?” Carlos responded that the Círculo Cubano corporation (which was considered to be the owner of the property) considered it to be a donation that would demonstrate “buy-in” on the part of the Martí-Maceo members. The ongoing payments were not to be considered as rent for use of the property but rather an ongoing demonstration of the commitment on the part of the members to join in fraternity with the members of the Círculo Cubano. Steven nodded and asked whether any of us had additional questions. We each smiled and said that we did not and Richard noted that we were appreciative for the governing members’ time and willingness to be forthcoming and that we were looking forward to discussing our newly gathered information with the general membership. Ernest and I nodded in agreement and thanked for their time. We then said our good-byes and left together.

We didn’t say much on our way out of the building, until we walked back to our cars, which we’d parked in the lot adjacent to the Martí-Maceo social hall. Before getting into his car, Steven said, “I don’t know. I’m not sure I get why we need to pay all of that money so that we can have no rights to ownership, no real control over the calendar or when we can have our affairs. I mean, I know they assume we’re going to be making interest off of that money if we were to sell.
But, what if things don’t work out that way?” Ernest, Richard, and I nodded in agreement. “Well, we’ll see what the members have to say,” he continued shaking his head. “But, I don’t know.” He laughed and got into his car.

Within a week of that meeting, I received a call from Elena asking me whether I would be willing to speak with Carlos personally as the chair of the building committee. She said he had a few questions he wanted to ask me about the process and that the conversation would probably not last very long. I said that I would be willing to talk with him but that I thought it might be best for him to talk with Steven. She replied, “Oh, you know, you don’t have to make any decisions or anything like that. I think he just wants to ask you some general questions. That’s all.” I assented and waited for Carlos to call. Carlos was very friendly when he finally did call and said that he was happy I had been selected to be the committee chair then asked if I would be willing to answer a few questions regarding the ongoing discussions. I told him that I was indeed willing and that I would try to answer his questions to the best of my ability. Carlos then asked when the committee might be moving toward making a decision with regard to a merger. I told him that the committee had not been developed as a decision-making body and that its sole purpose was to inform the general membership of all the information that we had gathered to date so that they could discuss it and vote on a final outcome. He said that he’d not been aware about the decision-making process and wanted to know if there was anything else he might share that would help either the committee or the membership in reaching a final decision. I told him that it would take at least another week for the scheduled general
assembly meeting, during which discussion of the merger would be the first order of business. I also asked if there a deadline had been set by him or the Círculo Cubano Board that we should know about. He said there was not, and that he wanted to stay in touch in order to answer any questions or help in any way that he could. I thanked him and told him that I would call him in the event his assistance was needed. When I hung up, I could not help but feel that the friendly call had been meant to extract a decision from me, rather than wait for the full vote from the general membership.

The following week, the general assembly was asked to meet again ahead of the general membership meeting to give the members of the Círculo Cubano an opportunity to clarify “additional questions” that the membership might have had. During this meeting, the members were more willing to question the Círculo Cubano governing board members in attendance about the terms of the proposed payments, which they characterized as a “lease agreement,” its perceived advantages and disadvantages. They also asked more specific questions about how the merger would affect their identity as Martí-Maceo members. Would they be expected to give up the collective decision-making process that they had maintained for a century? Would they give up being Martí-Maceo members?

After a few of the Martí-Maceo members took turns speaking, the president of the Círculo Cubano rose to speak. He thanked them for the questions and said that he could see that there still did not seem to be consensus among the members as to how they would decide. He then said, “I would just like to remind you all that Círculo Cubano does not really need Martí-Maceo or its members. We
were just trying to help you and to keep our communities from being separated any longer.” At this point, one of the members said, “Well, that’s what we’re trying to find out from you. How does this help us?” As the members began talking amongst each other attempting to digest what Carlos had just said, another member of the Círculo Cubano board rose and said, “You know, it’s really disappointing to hear you question us about this, in this manner. This is a historically significant opportunity for you, for us, and it seems like you all are not really interested in being a part of that.” At this point, Steven stood and said, “Well folks, as you can see, we still have a lot to discuss and think about.” Shortly thereafter, the Círculo Cubano members rose to leave and said they looked forward to hearing the membership’s final response.

The discussion at the following general assembly meeting was lively, and members returned to the question of the proposed payment plan to the Círculo Cubano, as well as the real benefit to the Martí-Maceo Society, if they would have no real say over events or the calendar. Once again, they wondered about how much they would be expected to give up with regard to the collective decision-making practices that they had practiced for so long. A number of them also brought up the fact that if the Círculo Cubano Board thought that their property was worth so much money, what was to keep them from selling it outright to the highest bidder and find a new location with larger building that would accommodate more members and would allow for building a full bar and ballroom? Could they negotiate a fair price with the city and avoid paying the Círculo Cubano what they increasingly characterized as “rental fees”? The end of
the meeting saw no resolution to the question of the merger, itself, but ended with
plans to scout potential locations that would be affordable, given the estimated
price range, as well as a request to set another meeting with the Círculo Cubano
governing board.

Three days later, I returned home from one of my courses and received a
call from a reporter with one of the local newspapers. She told me that my name
had been given to her as the chair of the Martí-Maceo building committee and that
she wanted to ask me a few questions about the discussed merger between the two
historic Cuban organizations. Once I agreed, the first question that she asked was
what I thought of the upcoming merger. I told her that we’d just started reviewing
the proposal and that we were all examining the information we had received to
make a more informed decision. She then asked whether I had made a decision as
to the proposed merger, and I explained that I was not in charge of making the
decision. The question of whether the merger would take place rested with the
Martí-Maceo membership. She then asked how many members there were. I told
her that there were 85 dues paying members and according to our by-laws, in
matters concerning potential dissolution of the organization or its communal
property, which was held in common by the active membership, it would be
required to get as many of these individuals involved in the voting process as
possible.

The reporter finished by asking, “Well can I ask you what you think about
the proposed merger?” I replied that we were taking the view that it was an offer,
a first offer, and that as such, we needed to review it carefully rather than to just
agree to it. I said that although the membership knew that the possibility of a move was impending, given the ongoing development plans in the area, the organization itself was financially solvent and had no need to sell quickly and move. She thanked me for my time and gave me her email in case I wanted to contact her with any additional information. I asked when the article would be published and she said she thought it should appear in about 2 days.

The article, made much of the personal relationship reestablished between Elena and Paul and tied the possibility of a merger to their hopes that all Cubans will eventually set aside their differences. Once again, I could not help but feel that the decision to publish an article on a proposal that had not yet been fully discussed was meant to place pressure on us to make a decision in favor of joining the two organizations. It made me uncomfortable because I kept being asked to make decisions or give pronouncements that I did not feel were for me to do, and they also made me worry that the members might rush to judgment and take a course of action that could jeopardize the future of the organization entirely.

Following the article’s publication, I spoke with Elena and she mentioned that she was concerned about having to contact 84 members for a final vote. I told her that while I understood how difficult the process might be, that we had to honor our by-laws and make decisions accordingly. “But don’t you think that you should be making the decision with the directiva? I mean, you’re the chair of the committee.” I told her that I really did not want to be in such a position and that I did not feel it was in any way my decision to make.
In the end, the merger did not go through. At the next general assembly meeting, when the question of the merger was once again raised Elena said, “We might as well forget it. You all have taken so long to make a decision that they are going to rescind the offer.” Ernest countered, “But they said they didn’t have a firm deadline. They should have told us whether we had to respond by a certain date.” To which Elena responded, “Ernest, it’s been nearly two months since they made that proposal. Why does it have to take so long?” Humberto responded in a mixture of Spanish and English, “Pero, if we still have to try to sell the building and all that, why the rush? ¿Por que? They say they don’t need the money, so what is the rush?” Elena let the matter drop. Within a few days, Carlos had formally contacted Steven to tell him that the Círculo Cubano governing board had decided to rescind the offer but that he hoped that the organizations would maintain the friendly relationship that they had established as a consequence of the centennial project. Steven shared the conversation with general membership through a series of phone calls, and the matter was considered to be closed. The attention turned to preparations for the final event of the series, the banquet to celebrate the Martí-Maceo Society’s 100th anniversary.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Valeria was still serving on the directiva during this time and did not always appear to be helping Steven in reviewing organizational records or preparing for the upcoming celebration. Steven complained that was now faced with a number of responsibilities that had not been addressed during Juan’s tenure. In preparation for the
final centennial event, a permit to sell alcohol still needed to be secured from the city and financial records needed to be reviewed in order to ensure that all of the purchases required for hosting a successful event could be made. Steven also was in charge of overseeing revision of the Martí-Maceo by-laws, which I was asked to lead shortly after Isabel’s call. Using various examples of more recent by-laws and a copy loaned to us from one of the other mutual aid societies, I updated the document in English and Spanish in preparation for distribution to the membership. An emergency meeting was held two weeks later to ratify the new by-laws, and during this time, the centennial committee continued to meet on a weekly basis to finalize details for the centennial banquet.

Throughout this time, Steven noted a number of small confrontations that he had experienced as he tried to work with Valeria. On one Saturday in particular, the centennial committee was scheduled to meet at the social hall. When we arrived, Valeria had already opened up the building and was listening to music. However, she stopped the group and told Steven that no one had informed her that an “official” meeting was taking place. Although her demeanor was quite agreeable, Valeria did not stand aside for the committee to enter. As a result, Steven decided that we should meet elsewhere, and the committee made its way to a local restaurant two blocks from the social hall. Once again, the dynamics of interaction between members were interesting to watch because on the surface, it was difficult to discern tension between the actors involved. The conversation between Steven and Valeria when we arrived seemed friendly, and there was even laughter shared between them. However, the committee members did not enter the
building that day. No one asked Valeria why she had opened the building that day and what she was doing there, much less why she refused to let the committee members enter.

These sorts of encounters continued throughout Valeria’s service on the directiva, which ended shortly after the centennial project did. In keeping with the new by-laws, the membership elected a new board in December of that year that included Elena as the vice-president and Marion, a long-standing member, as the treasurer. As noted earlier, the success of the celebratory events and the recent remodeling had increased the amount of local attention paid to the Society, resulting in increased rentals and events planned by members. The strain on the directiva also increased, and six months into the new year Steven was having trouble keeping up with his responsibilities. In our conversations during this period, he noted that his wife was not supportive of his work for the organization because it took so much of his family time, and as the year progressed, he began to miss meetings.

Six months into the following year, Steven had not attended two meetings in a row. Although a specific provision had not been set with regard to required attendance of directiva members, members no longer felt confident that Steven should continue in his role as president. As vice-president, Elena had been presiding over meetings and attending to ongoing concerns related to the increase in rental activity. As a city employee, Elena had a number of contacts in various departments and offices and was often privy to information that could prove useful to the organization. Within the two month period in which Steven had not attended, a letter received by the directiva indicated that the organization would no longer be authorized to secure special city permits under Wet Zoning provisions allowing them to serve alcohol at public functions.
According to what Elena was able to piece together through her contacts, the Martí-Maceo Society was eligible to register for three special permits per year to allow them to host events open to the public where alcohol could be sold. The number of events that the organization hosted during 2000-2001 appeared to exceed the limit and therefore placed the organization at risk of being non-compliant with city regulations. Further, Elena’s contact noted that if the organization was going to continue to operate as it had in the previous year, it would need to secure a liquor license from the state in order to continue to serve alcohol to its patrons.

The procurement of the liquor license at this point in time became a preoccupation for the directiva and the membership and was important for a few reasons. The ability to sell alcoholic drinks was seen as a way to increase revenues, especially during dances and local festivals such as the Gasparilla Pirate Festival parade\textsuperscript{26}, the Guavaween parade, and other events where they could see beverages to the public. In addition, having a liquor license meant that the organization could retain bar proceeds that were generated during rentals. As it stood, individuals renting the social hall could serve alcohol that they themselves provided, but they could not sell it to their guests, nor use the Martí-Maceo’s inventory. The enthusiasm spurred by the successful centennial events, particularly the final banquet, increased the desire on the part of the members to throw more events –especially those open to the public. The Gasparilla and St. Patrick’s Day events held to coincide with the parades down 7th Avenue, where the Martí-Maceo Social Hall is located, served over 300 patrons and generated over $1000 in bar revenue.

\textsuperscript{26} The Gasparilla Carnival is a yearly festival and parade that celebrates the legend of pirate José Gaspar and which has been held nearly continuously since 1904 (See http://www.gasparillafest.com.) Guavaween is billed as “Latin-syle” Halloween celebration held in Ybor City (See http://www.cc-events.org.) Both of these events have been fashioned after the Mardi Gras carnival held yearly in New Orleans, including floats designed by local krewes and the throwing of beads to assembled revelers.
each time. In addition, the hosting of social events to generate needed revenue had become a primary function of the former mutual aid society—as with all of the remaining ethnic societies in Ybor City (See Chapter One, page 7). Perhaps more significantly, the planning and execution of numerous and elaborate social events, dances, and other festivities had a long tradition in the Martí-Maceo Society, and was mainly the province of a “Ladies Committee” (Greenbaum 2002:197).

Procurement of the liquor license was the first in a number of watershed events that required the organization to formalize its operations. At the following general membership meeting, the members voted to have Elena assume the presidency since Steven still had not returned and attainment of the liquor license became the next big project for the organization. I agreed to meet with a county official, along with two members, as part of a liquor license committee designated by Elena to learn more about the application process. Once we received all of the materials and information that would be needed, we realized that it would take a great deal of work and funds, which the treasury did not have at the time. It would also require the organization to go through a series of health, plumbing, and fire inspections to determine whether the premises could serve beverages and food (which they already served) in a clean and safe environment. Each inspection required a separate fee and the amount of work that needed to be done would necessitate additional funds—a total of over $4,000. Under Elena’s leadership, the membership once again pulled together to try to cover costs through donated services and funds from the Ybor City Round Table.27 The liquor license was secured after about eight months of concerted effort on the part of a number of members.

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27 The Ybor City Round Table is a recognized nonprofit organization in the state of Florida that was founded in 1986 as an organizing body for Ybor City’s mutual aid societies and other organizations with a
This episode aptly captures the way in which the members of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo have weathered numerous challenges over the past decade. Although the organization had in this case been able to secure the funds needed to cover all of the costs associated with the liquor license application, procurement of the license would require establishing formal processes to ensure that rules and regulations associated with selling alcohol to the public would be followed. Some of the activities required in this regard include establishing a system for maintaining an accurate product inventory, improved record-keeping for tax purposes, and introducing computers, cash registers, and other office machines to avoid relying on handwritten notes and singular copies of files that could easily be lost (and often have been). Ideally, a staff of members with outlined jobs or duties that could undertake such work would have been identified at this point and introduced to the membership. In this case, they were not. While members did voluntarily assume responsibilities—often it seemed based on gender (two men took on the responsibility for ordering alcohol and maintaining liquor inventories) and/or custom (a female member who had served as bartender previously on most occasions continued in this position). The remaining jobs have been assumed by elderly members in their 70s or older. The fact that these jobs were informally assumed does not suggest that the individuals undertaking the necessary duties were incompetent. However, by simply accepting the status quo and failing to formalize duties and set parameters for needed positions and supervisory protocols, the directiva placed itself in a position where it could be difficult to make changes to personnel in the future if it needed to.

long-standing presence in the neighborhood. Although the Round Table has provided funding to the Martí-Maceo Society since its founding, it does not officially recognize the organization as one of the “official” historic mutual aid societies in the district because it has yet to be recognized at the National Register of Historic Places.
As this episode also demonstrates, the members of the Martí-Maceo Society came together and accessed resources available to them just when it seemed that the organization’s capacity to move forward had been reached, thus helping to ensure continued organizational operation. However although the organization often overcomes temporary crises, this situation underscores the lack of reflection on the part of the directiva and the failure to establish formal positions within the organization, as well as improved accounting and reporting procedures. Overall, this manner of operating has had the effect of reinforcing the sense that the organization operates on an ad-hoc basis and has made it more difficult for the members to successfully develop beyond an informal pooling of resources into a successful community organization, a goal they have consistently identified during individual conversations, as well as in collective discussions during general membership meetings.

Between 1999 through 2002, the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo experienced a growth in its membership, resulting from its successful participation in the joint centennial events with the Círculo Cubano. The organization’s participation in these events also allowed members to reflect on the divisions between Tampa’s Black and White Cubans and how these divisions affected them as individuals and as a larger community. Although the growth in membership was positive, it also highlighted a number of shortcomings that the Martí-Maceo Society must address organizationally, if it can continue to grow, as members hope it will. While members (most of them elderly) continue to volunteer for positions on the governing board or to work in a variety of capacities in the day-to-day running of the organization, this volunteer workforce can
barely meet the current needs of the sociedad, much less expand its presence within the community.
CHAPTER FIVE

WHILE WE REMEMBER OUR PAST, LET US NOT FORGET THE FUTURE

It is Vital that We Update Our Image, Goals, and Expectations

After an eventful four years (1999-2002) which included facing renewed fears of dislocation, as well as the successful conclusion of the centennial celebrations, the membership appeared to have a renewed sense of purpose as to the future of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo. Although Elena had expressed disappointment with the failed merger between the two historic Cuban societies in Ybor, she remained as the directiva president and assumed leadership following Steven’s abrupt departure. There were, to be sure, some whispers from members who said that she might still be interested in “giving” Martí-Maceo to the Círculo Cubano, but overall, the members trusted her. She was related to a number of them through multiple family ties, and a number of her relatives had served on the directiva throughout the organization’s history. As a result, most seemed to feel that she could be trusted and that her long family ties to the organization would keep her from betraying the organization. By all indications, she proved them correct and went on to serve as directiva President for two years.

In order to comply with the by-laws, which had been recently revised, the organization held a formal election to fill all of the positions within the directiva, which had only been operating with a president, vice president, and treasurer until Steven assumed leadership. The full slate presented to the membership for consideration
included Elena as president, positions for vice-president, secretary, treasurer, vice treasurer, and vice secretary, a parliamentarian, to minimize discord during meetings, and a “director,” who was responsible for overseeing rental of the social hall. The vice treasurer and secretary positions had been included in the original by-laws and were designed to assist with treasury and secretarial duties. I was nominated to the vice-secretary position, and agreed to hold the post as long as there were no important decision-making duties, in order to avoid the sort of dilemma I’d faced during discussions on the proposed merger with the Círculo Cubano.28 The position itself required assisting the secretary in any capacity that might be needed, especially with regard to the reviewing and reading of official correspondence during meetings. I was also asked most times, because of my ongoing note-taking, to enhance the meeting minutes each month.

One of my other duties was to design a newsletter for dissemination to all dues-paying members and eventually, for distribution via email. Using a basic template, I began developing a layout that the directiva presented to the membership with a request for feedback on all aspects of its development. Although the template was completed and a few short articles were generated, the newsletter was not formally distributed until early 2003 due to a lack of article submissions. (This remained the only issue distributed until 2006, when three full issues were disseminated.) However, one of Elena’s first official acts was to prepare a “Goals and Projections Statement” for inclusion in the newsletter, which was directed to the general membership, a portion of which is excerpted here:

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28 Following successful completion of the centennial project, it was decided by a nearly unanimous vote on the part of members to allow me to become a “full” dues-paying member, with voting privileges after a year of being recognized as an honorary member.
Martí-Maceo has long been a vital part of the Ybor City community. In the past, the goal of Martí-Maceo was to aid members in health and social issues, and to provide a social outlet for members and their families. Today…it is vital that we update our image, goals and expectations. Our primary goal is to meet the needs of our members and community. One of our needs is to provide a place of socialization and to outreach with the community by assisting the underprivileged…

Our Heritage [sic] and contributions to Ybor City and the Tampa community will be recognized by our community and civic involvement. With continued dedication and loyalty of our members we will achieve our goals for 2002.

While We Remember the Past, Let Us Not Forget the Future.

Clearly, Elena’s statement emphasized her intent to focus the organization’s efforts on current and future goals and activities, rather than on past achievements and/or grievances. The first major event that the organization hosted would challenge Elena’s plans, however.

In mid 2002, the Martí-Maceo governing board entered into a partnership with a local artist and an elementary school arts program for the creation and painting of a mural on one of the club's external walls. Discussions regarding the mural and an accompanying community event that had the potential for attracting a large-scale local community presence began with Steven, but with his departure, Elena was left with the task of overseeing these activities. The mural, designed and painted by a professional
muralist, incorporates scenes identified by the artist as exhibiting important aspects of Afro-Cuban heritage. Portraits of Jose Martí and Antonio Maceo are juxtaposed with iconic scenes of cigar workers in a factory, a lector, images of Ybor City in the early 1900s, the Cuban landscape and young black children, among others. The mural's development and completion served as a morale booster for members following the failed merger talks with the Círculo Cubano and uncertainty over the viability of developing the organization beyond current efforts to simply keep it afloat. Discussions about the mural at general membership meetings elicited a great deal of enthusiasm on the part of members. Despite this excitement, the mural also engendered a great deal of controversy.

The muralist (a White American) had decided to incorporate cowrie shells within the piece, as well as an image of shackled Black hands breaking free of their manacles. When Elena saw the mural, she argued forcefully that the shells should not have been incorporated into the piece because they represent Africa and not Cubans. In a discussion with the muralist, she said, "Those shells are African. We are Cubans. We have nothing to do with Africa. There will be members who will be offended by those shells." In response, the artist argued that the cowrie shell\(^{29}\) has a long history of significance in Cuban history and culture, which he said was based on his study of the nation’s history and periodic travel to the island.

While members did not generally express offense to me or discuss the matter officially during regular meetings, there were a number of personal conversations that I was able to participate in which questioned the organization's ultimate relationship to Africa or lack thereof. Frustrated, Elena noted in conversations with some members about the mural that, "There is always has to be an emphasis on Blackness. Everything has to

\(^{29}\) Cowrie shells are used in various ritual practices within the Santeria religion.
be about being Black. That’s not the only thing this organization is about.” Interestingly, these conversations never really addressed the issue that the artist did not first share his “vision” with the directiva or the membership and then, incorporate their suggestions into his final product. Although the mural was created free of charge and the muralist was a rather well-known local artist, the directiva could have asserted more control over the content of the piece, which is rather prominently displayed on the social hall’s western wall, at the entrance of Ybor City on Seventh Avenue. However, Elena did not bring the matter up until it was too late to do anything but paint it over, and members were divided as to what the best course of action would be. Should they make the artist paint over the offending shells? Some members felt that this would be impolite, given that he had almost completed the piece, which had been painted free of charge, and as they put it, “for the club’s benefit.”

The question as to who, in particular, it might offend was left unanswered ultimately, and the mural still stands. Aside from saying that she did not want the mural’s imagery “to offend anyone,” Elena did not discuss the issue further with me. Her reaction may have been a response to her personal disappointment in the failed merger with the Círculo Cubano, and she may have been consciously trying to guide the Martí-Maceo Society toward highlighting a more overtly Cuban or “Latin” heritage in a bid to counteract the ongoing concerns that the organization could still face removal in the event of renewed city construction in the area. In any case, while it was true that the Martí-Maceo had never had any overt or discernable relationship with Africa or Africans throughout its history, the public use of symbols alluding to slavery, Santeria, and
ultimately, the African continent had become a matter of concern for Elena and a few other members. However, she let the matter drop.

Following completion of the mural, the Martí-Maceo Society hosted a community event which invited current and former members, their family and friends to participate in painting tiles that would be used to frame the mural. The event was co-sponsored by a local art gallery that had facilitated the connection with the muralist and which helped to organize the participation of local schoolchildren, some of whom performed on steel pan drums and sang songs for the audience assembled. The event included about 100 participants, many of whom participated in painting tiles with images and words paying homage to their families and their longstanding ties to the Martí-Maceo Society. The sale of refreshments helped to raise much-needed funds, and the event, itself, lasted for nearly seven hours. To date, it remains one of the most successful community events that the organization has had because it included a large number of local community members, as well as enthusiastic current and former members who spent most of the day participating in the festivities.

Elena’s next major initiative was the reestablishment of a “youth group” that she said had been active in the 1970s called, “the Coquis.” The coquí is a toad that is native to Puerto Rico and is often evoked as a symbol of unique aspects of Puerto Rican culture because it is said to thrive only on the island.30 It was interesting to make note of the overt celebration of a unique Puerto Rican cultural symbol through the proposed development of this group, although no one commented or seemed to think it was “out of place” or foreign to the larger Martí-Maceo identity. As noted earlier, a number of

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30 Coqui frogs have also proliferated in Hawaii and have been considered to be an invasive species that threatens a variety of native invertebrate species native to Hawaii (See Beard and Pitt 2005).
members (including Elena) were also of Puerto Rican descent and still others had intermarried with Puerto Ricans. Aside from a note to myself in my fieldnotes of the time, no one ever made a comment about the Coquis in this regard.

According to Elena, the Coquis were a group for younger men – older adolescents and adults in their 20s – who performed a variety of service projects for the organization, such as clearing trash near the social hall’s perimeter, painting, and other jobs as needed. They were also said to plan and hold their own events, which were designed to attract younger members and patrons, and featured music, food, themes of their choice. A number of the older members said that they remembered the original Coquis and felt that it was a good idea and were willing to support it. One of Elena’s younger cousins was willing to serve as the leader of the Coquis and said that he had a group of about five friends who were willing to help him get it started. The membership agreed and the first activity planned for the Coquis was to lead a clean up of garbage that had accumulated behind the social hall. A number of members participated in the clean-up, with elderly men and women hauling trash alongside the young Coquis. Despite the initial enthusiasm that greeted the formation of the Coquis, the group did not last more than about six months. They held one dance that was fairly successful two months after the first activity but their momentum slowed and eventually they stopped meeting. The young men, all in their mid-20s said that it was difficult to attract younger members because the organization lacked activities and the kinds of amenities that the young people wanted. They gave as examples the small size of the social hall with little room for a dance floor, the aged furniture, and the lack of a sound system or funds to hire a DJ.
After the Coquis group faded away, the directiva turned to a new idea that they felt would strengthen them as an organization. They asked me to help research the process of applying for federal nonprofit status and to help them begin the application process. The membership felt that securing tax-exempt status would provide them with more legitimacy in the eyes of city and local developers with whom they expected to negotiate on proposed plans for redevelopment along Seventh Avenue. Although redevelopment of Ybor City had been slowing down and city plans for the west entrance of Seventh Avenue, where the social hall is located, kept changing, the membership was still mindful of a potential threat to their building. I began researching the filing process in August of 2003 and gave regular updates to the general membership, as I worked to fill out the application. One of the earliest challenges was to decide whether to incorporate as a foundation, a charitable organization, or a community service organization. Although use of the term “foundation” is fairly broad among the nonprofits, the directiva wanted to make sure to successfully outline a roster of activities that would justify the organizational type identified in the application. In the end, the organization was defined as a community service organization that hosted a number of events, including periodic health fairs and Cuban cultural events.

The application process forced the membership to generate responses to a number of additional questions about the organization. Specifically, they voted to update the organization’s mission statement and outline strategic goals for the organization that could be included in the application. The Martí-Maceo Mission Statement that was crafted at that time reads as follows:
The Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo was formed in 1904 in Ybor City, Florida. It was established by Cuban cigarmakers who emigrated to Tampa during the war for Cuban independence. Contemporary goals of the organization include preserving the history and heritage of Tampa’s Cuban community, joining with other groups to help preserve the cultural resources of Ybor City, and providing service to the larger community that will foster opportunities and promote human rights. Although we honor our Cuban heritage, members of all nationalities are welcome, and we offer assistance to Spanish-speaking individuals seeking help and opportunities to socialize in their own language. (Fieldnotes, April 14, 2002).

The most immediately striking feature of this mission statement is that there is no mention of race or Blackness; all references to history, heritage and identity focus only on Tampa’s Cuban community. The final part of the statement emphasizes support for human rights, multiethnic diversity, and promoting support to Spanish-speaking immigrants. This statement, which was reproduced on a number of flyers and circulated in a limited fashion at the time, emphasizes a generalized Cuban heritage, a commitment to human rights, and a pledge to help limited-English speaking populations (presumably immigrants, which by 2000 had begun to make up a significant portion of the city’s Latino population). The emphasis on human rights suggests an effort to honor the progressive history of the organization and its original membership, in a move similar to
the one Forester (2004:396) recounts in her work where Blackness is tied to progressivism.

Although this mission statement was devised to help advance the nonprofit application, it is not one that is widely known or recognized by the members, and beyond the flyers that were originally created, it has not been distributed widely within the community or among the wider membership, which has changed considerably over time. Despite a core group of about ten members, who may have participated in the crafting of the mission, the lack of operationalization has kept members from fully assimilating the mission as a guiding statement for their organization. Like many activities and efforts in the past decade, it was created, voted on and then, set aside without much thought. As a result, this mission statement has not provided the impetus for the development of activities or programs designed to assist recently arrived Spanish-speaking immigrants. Similarly, the organization has not allied itself with entities that promote human rights to help develop activities or events that support this cause.

With regard to Cuban heritage, beyond decorating the organization with portraits of the Cuban Independence heroes that serve as its namesakes, the organization hosts very few activities that are specifically focused on Cuban national identity or celebration of this heritage. Of the yearly calendar of regular events that are held, only one celebrates a day of Cuban national significance—the commemoration of the death in battle of Antonio Maceo. The other yearly event that could be counted as upholding Tampa’s Cuban heritage would be the annual banquet that is held to recognize the founding of the Martí-Maceo Society, which became a regularly scheduled event after the centennial celebration in 2000. Intermittent efforts have been made since 2002 to host events
specifically aimed at celebrating Black Cuban heritage, including lectures on Black Cuban baseball players in the Negro leagues and the legacy of Antonio Maceo outside of Cuba, a screening by Black Cuban filmmaker Gloria Rolando, and the installation of a portrait of Antonio Maceo donated to the sociedad. Yet, these events have not been held regularly.

Although I was not able to help the directiva complete the nonprofit application, they did completed and submitted it with the help of a local businessman. It was approved in 2004. Procurement of federal nonprofit status and the liquor license were expected to serve as a boon to the Martí-Maceo treasury by increasing the opportunities for income, tax-deductible donations, and grants to further the development of the organization. However, these formal designations have also increased the operating costs of the club in a number of ways: yearly fees associated with the liquor license, including yearly health inspections and requirements for purchasing alcoholic beverages from wholesale vendors. They have also continued to highlight the need for formalization of jobs and organizational procedures noted in the previous chapter. Since 2004, volunteers have been relied upon for a number of jobs, including opening and closing of the social hall for rental engagements, bartending during community events and private functions, bookkeeping, and other office duties. Regular cleaning and maintenance of the social hall’s interior is most often done by those volunteers opening or closing the hall. Jobs that require more effort and/or expertise, such as janitorial work, formal bookkeeping and accounting, or legal services, have been procured when allowed for by the treasury. During times when the treasury has not allowed for payment of outstanding bills or
maintenance costs, members have regularly covered them through personal donations collected during general membership meetings.

The resulting bureaucracy that is often engendered through formalization of operational processes in an organization can add an additional strain to its well-being if structures are not implemented to address growing organizational needs (See Prahalad and Home 1998). Although the active membership has remained rather steady at about 25 individuals since 2004, only a core group of about 8 have remained since then. The remaining 12 to 13 members have changed in the latter half of the decade. This has made it more challenging to establish a sense of continuity and organizational memory where established processes are passed on to successive board members and even members of the general membership who assist with specific functions (see Spender 1996). As the membership has worked to overcome ongoing challenges and to establish a stronger presence within the local community, which they hope will be viewed as benefiting the larger Ybor City historic district, pressure is placed on the aging Martí-Maceo members, since the overall membership has failed to consistently grow. This pressure often makes it difficult for the organization to launch the number of community events on a large enough scale per year to increase revenues beyond the additional costs they began incurring following procurement of the license and nonprofit status.

Participating in Ybor City Cultural Events: Local Festivals and Parades

Between 2003 and 2004, the membership focused on hosting large-scale events that coincided with parades and festivals in Ybor City. During such occasions, as with the Gasparilla day festivities, they often generated revenues of nearly $2000, which was
more than what they generated through rentals. As a result, these events became part of
the regular Martí-Maceo calendar in 2003. The Gasparilla Festival takes place in the
spring and includes a parade composed of local krewes that evoke historic personages or
pirates, in keeping with the larger theme of the parade. The Círculo Cubano participates
in the parade through its Krewe of Mambí, in which members dress as the Cuban
independence era fighters. During discussions regarding the merger, the possibility of
having Martí-Maceo members join the Mambí Krewe was often presented as one of the
benefits to joining with the Círculo Cubano. At the time of the merger discussions, a few
Martí-Maceo members noted that it was ironic that the Círculo Cubano— the historically
White Cuban organization— had taken up the mantle of the Mambís, who were made up
largely of Black and Mulatto Cubans31 and using it to entice them to give up their Black
organization. For the 2004 festivities, Elena invited the Mambís to attend the party at
Martí-Maceo, which begins at noon with the sale of roast pork sandwiches and
beverages. They did attend and among their members that year were some of the Coquis
who had helped with clean-up the previous year. Although Margarita quipped when she
saw them, “¡Mira donde andan los Coquis ahora!” (Look at where the Coquis are now!),
most of the members made no mention of it. During the parade that year, the Mambís
stopped in front of the Martí-Maceo Social Hall and saluted the Martí-Maceo Social Hall.

In addition to hosting parties during these large-scale community events, the
Martí-Maceo Society holds a yearly event to commemorate the death of Antonio Maceo,
known popularly as the “Titan of Bronze,” in December. During this event, Milagros,
who is herself descended from an important Independence War hero, undertakes most of
the planning for the commemoration and asks the some of the elderly women to help with

31 See Ferrer (1999).
organization and execution. For this event, Milagros relies on her contacts within a
different population of Tampa Cubans, who generally live in the western section of the
county, with a diverse population of more recent Hispanic migrants. Milagros’ contacts
more closely resemble the Miami-based Cuban exile population in their political
persuasions and demographic make-up. During this yearly event, the Martí-Maceo Social
Hall is usually filled to capacity and after a program with speakers outlining the
numerous contributions of Antonio Maceo to the Cuban nation, there are usually
speeches given that draw a direct line from Maceo’s martyrdom in the fight against
Spanish tyranny and the present-day tyranny of Fidel Castro’s regime. During this event,
which no doubt would have raised the ire of earlier members (like Valeria) for its overtly
political nature, Martí-Maceo members generally keep to the periphery or help to make
sure that the event is carried out successfully, without mingling too much with guests.32
Despite the relative lack of active participation on the part of Martí-Maceo members in
this yearly event (aside from the opening remarks welcoming guests and helping with set
up, serving, and cleaning), the membership has always supported its continuation.

In the spring of 2004, Elena suggested that the organization participate in the
Puerto Rican Cultural Parade and Festival. This event would mark the first time that
Martí-Maceo members would enter a float in a local parade. The large-scale parades such
as Gasparilla and Guavaween require formal, elaborately decorated floats and a hefty
participation fee. In this case, the members were able to join the parade by riding on a
rather large trailer hitched to a large pickup truck. The directiva printed t-shirts with

32 Within the original Ybor City exile community such displays would have been frowned upon as well,
given the radical leanings of many in the cigar worker community. In fact, Fidel Castro visited Tampa in
1955 in support of his revolutionary efforts to overthrow the Batista regime and made a visit and speech at
the Círculo Cubano. Martí-Maceo members were more divided over Castro, with some supporting
Fulgencio Batista, who knew a number of Afro-Cubans (See Greenbaum 270-279).
Cuba’s national coat of arms and the organization’s name for the 20 members who participated and rode in the trailer, tossing beaded necklaces (that are a mainstay of Ybor City parades) to the crowds that lined Seventh Avenue.

**A Change in Leadership**

Elena decided to step down from the directiva in late 2004 because she felt that there was a lack of support in efforts to continue to make significant improvements to the organization. Her departure, much like Steven’s, was gradual and consisted of her missing a number of meetings toward the end. The Vice President at the time, who ended up assuming leadership of the directiva, was Doug Strong, an executive with a local company, a member of the Círculo Cubano, and a White American, who spoke no Spanish. When I first met Doug during a visit to the Círculo Cubano shortly after beginning work on the centennial project in 1999, I’d introduced myself as graduate student at the University of South Florida working on a project with both of the Cuban organizations in Ybor City. At the time, he said, “What do you mean ‘both’? I’ve never heard of another Cuban club in Ybor City.” I took him out to the patio and showed him where the Martí-Maceo Social Hall was located. He just shook his head. When we came inside, he asked a fellow Círculo Cubano member, “Hey, did you know there was another Cuban club here in Ybor?” To which his friend responded simply by shaking his head. To be fair, Doug had moved to Tampa just a few years earlier from Texas, and he may not have had any idea about the existence of the Martí-Maceo Society – although at the time I noted that given the start of the project, it seemed as though the Círculo Cubano had not advised its members about the joint project that they were about to embark upon.
Nevertheless by 2003, Doug was dues-paying member of the Martí-Maceo Society and in November 2004, he assumed its leadership.

Martí-Maceo members were not quite sure what to make of Doug’s ascension to the presidency. The questions about whether the organization would somehow be asked to merge with the Círculo Cubano circulated again, although they were never verbalized during the general assembly meetings. A number of members did tell me that they thought Doug was buena gente (good people) and they hoped that his connections and interest in historic preservation, which he shared with members when he thanked them for trusting him with leading the directiva, might help the organization pick up steam once again. Although Doug worked with the other directiva members to continue holding regular meetings and events as possible, the membership slowly started to shrink until mid-2005 when the number of members attending meetings had dwindled to between eight and ten members. The number of events and the hall rentals had also decreased considerably. By this time, the fears of dislocation as a consequence of redevelopment had largely dissipated. The economy and funds for continued expansion in Ybor City were no longer available, it seemed, and as a result, the organization was safe. However, the membership appeared to be giving up on the organization. During that time, I spoke with Margarita, who told me, “I don’t know what it is. It just feels different. It’s not anything that he’s doing or not doing really. But we don’t have that drive anymore. I don’t see things picking up. I really don’t.”

In August of that year, Doug announced that he was leaving Tampa and moving back to his home state and would be unable to continue his duties as directiva president. The membership was once again left with a directiva that would not finish out its term.
After an emergency election, it was decided that Richard, who had joined the organization in the 1980s, would replace Doug. A new slate of governing officers was also voted in to serve with him. Richard had previously served as the Parliamentarian for succeeding directivas, following the revision of the by-laws in 2001. The position, which had not previously been actively filled, was revived because of a tendency for general membership meetings to go on for over two hours, on many occasions, and to avoid small squabbles that erupted at times when members disagreed with each other or spoke over one another. Richard would be the first African American president of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo, and like Doug, spoke no Spanish. At the time of the election, most members said that they were happy to vote Richard in as president and felt that his calm, quiet presence would be a boon to the organization.

When Richard addressed the membership after being elected president, he thanked the membership for the honor and said that he felt it was his now his duty to work with them to help get the organization “back on track.” He asked them to help him get the word out to family members and friends who had not been to the social hall in a long time, and ask them to join. He also said that he was very much interested in investigating the procurement of historic status for the building so that “Martí-Maceo would get the respect that it deserves in Ybor City and from the city.” The members clapped and appeared to be genuinely happy about the election and the possibilities for the future.

Richard and the new directiva set about planning a calendar of activities and events for the year. In addition to reestablishing the events to coincide with large-scale local festivals that had been so successful in previous years, Richard encouraged the
members to think about smaller events that they might hold, such as Happy Hours or dinners and luncheons that would promote social gathering among members and their families, as well as generate revenue. One of the first things that the directiva began investigating was the submission of an application for local historic status from the City of Tampa. Richard and the directiva vice president, Ernest, met with officials in the city’s Historic Preservation Commission to discuss the possibility for securing local landmark status as a way to stave off future efforts to the move the organization from its current property. The ultimate goal was to eventually use the Martí-Maceo Society’s 501c (3) status and any gains made related to securing historic landmark status to find grants and other public funding that might help the organization significantly renovate its building. The directiva also asked me to help them revive the newsletter to help publicize all of the activities that were being undertaken.

The renewed energy of the directiva seemed to generate excitement among members who were supportive of the activities being planned. Richard and Ernest both had experience in working with organizations. Richard and Ernest were both in their churches, a local African Methodist Episcopalian Church, and an historic Episcopalian church, respectively. Ernest had previously worked with a committee to put together a historical review of the church and its community, complete with a high quality pictorial booklet. In addition, they had numerous contacts within the community; both were active in the local Democratic Party and in a number of organizations, including Black fraternities, and other community organizations.

The rest of the year was a busy one, and the membership started to grow once more. A number of individuals joined who said they wanted to help the organization
grow and had ideas for events, and Richard welcomed them and asked the membership to welcome them. A local couple of Spanish descent, who were friends of Richard and Ernest, Agustín and Rosaura, began attending meetings regularly. They were very involved in the community and had been members of the Centro Asturiano, and had numerous contacts, as well. As members of the Board of the Hillsborough Community College in Ybor City, they helped the organization secure a sponsorship slot in the Ybor Festival of the Moving Image and the Martí-Maceo Society was recognized as one of the hosts of the festival’s finale with over 100 guests, featuring Spanish tapas and sangria. As part of the event, Agustín and Rosaura assembled a gallery of photographs taken in Spain for sale to patrons of the event, with all proceeds going to the Martí-Maceo Society. The event was a success and the members who attended said that they were impressed by the event, overall. Many said they were happy to see their organization involved in a local cultural event that was so well-attended.

However, the increase in membership was not always positive. There were quite a few incidents involving new members who had proposed activities or ventures that were presented as opportunities to help raise funds for the society. However, these proposals often turned out to be schemes intended to raise funds for the initiator of the idea with very little revenues generated for Martí-Maceo treasury. One event, in particular, proved costly for the organization and left the membership upset with the outcome. Another couple that joined the organization, Karon and Randy, were introduced as local musicians and when Karon introduced herself to the membership, she said she had longstanding ties to the Ybor City community as her grandmother had been a midwife for Black families. Karon and Randy also said that they had numerous contacts that could help the Martí-
Maceo Society grow by helping to promote events and provide live music and DJ for events as part of this effort. Karon did play and sing slow jazz music at a few events that year including the annual centennial luncheon in 2007. One of the first events they set about planning was a pageant that had been held before in the 1950s, the Miss Martí-Maceo Pageant. One of the current members, Carmen, had been crowned Miss Martí-Maceo as a teenager and had won a small stipend and a trip to Cuba. The members, especially the women, became excited about the idea and readily volunteered to help but Karon assumed the lead in organizing and planning.

The pageant involved identifying a roster of adolescent girls, aged 13 to 17, who would perform a dance, song, or otherwise conduct a presentation in front of the members and discuss her ambitions for high school and why she should be selected as Miss Martí-Maceo. Each contestant was to be supported by a group of members who would be responsible for raising the funds to support the young woman’s entry into the pageant and would eventually be used to supply a $1000 scholarship to the winner and cover some of the costs of the event. The rest of the funds would go to the Martí-Maceo Treasury. The winner would be selected by a vote of all pageant attendees.

The pageant took nearly six months to plan. Although members, including Carmen, had offered to help by explaining how the process was conducted when she was a contestant, Karon told them not worry and continued to plan and organize largely by herself. In the meantime, the members busied themselves with finding contestants and helping them to develop their entries, presentations, etc. During the pageant, voting was conducted by a secret ballot, which Karon counted. The winner that Karon selected turned out to be the girlfriend of one of Karon’s sons, but according to members,
Margarita, who had offered to help the count the votes, was sure that the winner had been one of the other contestants. In addition to this apparent irregularity, the scholarship award that was announced at the pageant exceeded the original amount. The winner, in fact, received nearly $3000. The event was a success in that it attracted a large number of attendees (about 125), many of them family members and children that did not usually attend Martí-Maceo functions. However, at the end of it all, the treasurer received only $86.00, and the members present said that they did not feel right about asking for the additional $2000 that was given to the winner.

In the weeks that followed the pageant, a number of members became angry about the way things had turned out and called Richard and Ernest demanding that they investigate what had happened. At the following general assembly meeting, which Karon did not attend, Ernest reported what he had learned. According to the bank where Martí-Maceo kept its corporate accounts, a second account had been opened in Karon’s name as the lead signer but with a note that it was part of the Martí-Maceo corporate accounts. Apparently when Ernest inquired further, he was told that Karon had brought in a copy of the 501c (3) certification and a letter giving her permission to open the account. The final account balance before it was closed was nearly $4000 but it had been closed in the week following the pageant. Ernest informed the bank that the Martí-Maceo Society had not actually authorized the transactions but with the paperwork that Karon had provided (with backup copies provided by the bank), he chose to let the matter rest. The membership was understandably angry and asked me to investigate whether they could press charges for theft, etc. The main problem was the fact that Karon had been given a copy of the nonprofit status certificate to secure donations from vendors who supplied
food and drink. No one admitted writing the letter for her, and they assumed that she had forged it. A number of the older members said that they were so angry with the whole affair that they were thinking about quitting the organization unless something was done. In light of the fact that Karon had provided the bank with all of the requisite paperwork, there was very little chance that she would be prosecuted for theft. The organization could choose to sue her personally for the nearly $3000 that they felt was wrongfully appropriated, but that would require expending more energy or funds than the treasury would allow. As a result, Ernest decided to call Karon and ask her about the situation and allow her to explain her side of the story.

When he reported back to the membership, he said that Karon told him firmly that there had been no wrong doing on her part and that she simply gave the extra money to the winning contestant because she deserved it and because the funds had been raised to cover those costs. Moreover, she said that the rest of the funding had gone to cover the costs of the event itself, which she said had been considerable. The members were not happy with this explanation, but felt unable to do anything about it. No one quit but they said they didn’t want to see Karon at another meeting. She and her family obliged did not return to another meeting or event. Aside from the question of unsubstantiated theft, the other main concern that this incident raised was the apparent laxity with which important transactions were handled, especially those that involved representation of the Martí-Maceo Society. It seemed relatively easy for a member to attain a copy of the Society’s incorporation certificate and use it against the organization. A quick web search of Karon and her husband also made it easy to find a number of websites using the Martí-Maceo name but showcasing Karon and her family’s musical services. Up until that time, the
Martí-Maceo Society had not developed its own website despite the proliferation of various independent sites that mention the organization, its history, or its activities.\textsuperscript{33} It became apparent that the organization needed to assert more control over its identity, as well as its business affairs. However, the Martí-Maceo Society’s limited infrastructure and technology has made it difficult for the directiva to keep track of all of the transactions that go into the planning and execution of its events.

Despite some of the difficulties associated with the growing membership, Richard and Ernest met with Dennis Fernandez, administrator for the Historic Preservation Commission of Tampa, to discuss securing historic landmark status for the Martí-Maceo building. They explained the history of their organization, the demolition of their original social hall, and the conundrum in which this placed the Martí-Maceo Society with regard to the ongoing redevelopment of Ybor City. Given that the Ybor City Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) guidelines had been extended in 2003 for at least another decade, the membership continued to worry about the possibility that future development on the western entrance of Ybor City would threaten their location. Fernandez was sympathetic to the position in which the organization found itself considering that construction had already begun on Martí-Maceo’s block, which had reduced the on-site parking for the club. He agreed to help prepare and submit the application for local landmark designation on behalf of the organization and asked Richard and Ernest to help him collect information on the organization’s local history and significance.

On January 8, 2008, Fernandez recommended that the Martí-Maceo building be recognized as a local landmark at a public hearing of the commission. A small group of

\textsuperscript{33} The only website the organization had authorized until then was one created by USF students in 1989, as part of a class project, which also included the development of a calendar with historic pictures and an informational tri-fold. In early 2010, the organization developed an official website, http://martimaceo.org/.
members, Susan Greenbaum and I, were there to witness this momentous occasion in the organization’s decades-long experience with heritage preservation and redevelopment in Ybor City. The commission unanimously agreed to submit the recommendation to the City Council later that year. In June, the Tampa City Council voted to recognize official designation of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo as a local landmark. Once again, the Martí-Maceo Society seemed to have overcome a significant hurdle that might have threatened its existence in Ybor City. The local designation helped ease immediate fears that the Martí-Maceo property could be seized by the city at some point in the future.

In the months that followed, new members joined and formerly inactive members returned. As the membership grew, incorporating younger generations of Black Cubans and a diverse group of new faces, tensions began to arise over the organization’s identity, as in years past. Although the membership was quite excited at the start of Richard’s tenure as directiva president, a number of members began to question his resolve that the organization should embrace its history of collective struggle and the unique quality of its members historically, in order to support their efforts to make a case for inclusion of the sociedad on the National Register. A number of members began to question whether Richard wanted to truly honor the Cuban heritage of the organization or whether he was trying to turn it into a “Black club.” However, this was not the only point of contention regarding the ongoing struggles over the Martí-Maceo Society’s collective identity and the representation of its heritage in the larger Ybor City community.

In mid 2009, a struggle arose over the continued display of various portraits that hang inside the social hall. The portraits in question have hung in the building for at least ten years and include black and white reproductions of José Martí, Antonio Maceo, the
Cuban coat of arms, and the original founders of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo. During preparations for one of these rentals, Jessica suggested that the portraits should come down while the building was being rented out for private occasions. She said that the old pictures might not seem “attractive” to some renters and she wanted to avoid any conflicts that could cost the organizations to lose much-needed revenue.

The older members who were helping to prepare the hall for the upcoming rental were not keen on the idea. Ernest asked how she could even think to take down those pictures, which represent “our organization.” He said he would not support any effort to remove the portraits and that such a suggestion disrespected its history and the memory of all of the people who worked so hard to establish it. Jessica said that she thought the pictures made the hall look “old” and could not understand why they couldn’t be removed for each rental and then, returned to their place. This brief encounter threatened to become a large-scale conflict within the membership.

The issue was discussed at length at the following general assembly meeting, and ultimately the membership decided against removing the portraits to please renters. Elderly members said that the photographs had been in the social hall for as long as they could remember and would not support their removal for any reason. (The portraits had in fact been hung and arranged during preparations for the centennial event in 2000 and had replaced rather large, fairly gaudy paintings that depicted tropical beach themes.) For Ernest and his supporters on this matter, the portraits represented a key source of legitimacy and a longstanding tie to the ideals of the organization’s founders. Removing them would mean that they were failing to honor their collective heritage, ultimately negating the organization’s significance. The portraits did not come down; but the
discussion did not lead to more extensive dialogue on the significance of these cultural symbols vis-à-vis the organization’s collective identity and how this representation would be used within the Ybor City historic district to challenge previous hegemonic characterizations of the Black Cuban community in Tampa.

Unfortunately, although the threat of dislocation from Ybor City became less of an issue of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo and its members for most of the 2000 decade, the organization has been able to refocus its mission and goals to strengthen its infrastructure and internal processes, and establish a collective vision for the future. Key to this vision must be the development of a shared identity that can be used to create a more visible presence within Ybor City and as one of the district’s original ethnic societies. The lack of knowledge and disregard for Martí-Maceo’s continued physical and discursive presence within the narrative frame of Tampa’s immigrant heritage, which continues into the present day, requires a collective effort. However, internal conflict over competing visions may prevent the organization from achieving the very goal its members continue to espouse.
CHAPTER SIX
BLACK CUBAN IDENTITY IN TAMPA

We Are Cubans First, Black or White

During fieldwork with the members of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo, I collected numerous examples of the ways in which individuals discussed issues of racial and ethnic identity. Within the small group of active Black Cuban members, there are clear divisions as to how members see themselves and what “kind” of organization they feel that the Martí-Maceo Society is. As examples in the previous chapter show, symbolic representation(s) of the organization (including the contents of the mural or the portraits that hang prominently in the social hall) have caused conflict among groups of members who disagree about the degree of prominence such symbols should have and more importantly, what they convey about the organization’s identity, overall. Even when discussing their ties to the Martí-Maceo Society and why they continue to belong, members invariably invoke the topic of race in very different ways. Marina and Milagros represent two very different examples.

When asked why she continues to belong to Martí-Maceo, Marina cites her experiences with racism as a very important factor in her continued membership.

My White Cuban friends, to me, they’re in denial about my Blackness.

“You’re not Black to me.” They say that to me! [She laughs.] Can you
believe that? Even though…I grew up in a very racist environment. Ybor City was a racist environment….When I was a little girl in elementary school, okay; I drew a picture of myself. The nun asked us to draw ourselves; so I did, and I made the girl light. Like a very tan color. Well, when I showed it to the nun, she told me that I hadn’t done it correctly and she colored over my picture with a brown crayon. I was shocked, even at that age. Why did she do that? Anyway, I’ve had some discriminatory experiences in my life. Like this one, I just told you about. That’s what draws me to the club —that history of struggle against racism and being separate. I feel that we still need to honor that history and not just pretend like these things never happened to us.

Milagros’ response to this question also highlighted the issue of race but in a much different way:

Mira, yo se que yo soy negra. Yo puedo mirarme en el espejo y yo veo lo negra que yo soy. Sí. ¿Pero que tiene que ver eso con África? Yo soy Cubana, no Africana. Nosotros somos Cubanos, siendo blancos o negros pero Cubanos y por eso yo soy miembro de esta sociedad. El nombre de Martí-Maceo se conocía en Cuba desde que yo era muy joven. Mis padres me contaron de esta sociedad histórica que fue fundada para celebrar la historia de la comunidad Cubana en Tampa. Por eso yo mantengo mi membresía en esta organización. (Look, I know I’m Black. I can look in
the mirror and see just how Black I am. But what does that have to do with Africa? I am Cuban, not African. We are Cubans first, whether White or Black, and that’s why I’m a member of this society. The name Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo was well-known in Cuba, even when I was a young woman. My parents told me about this historic society that was founded to celebrate the history of Cubans in Tampa. That’s why I continue my membership in this organization.

As their responses suggest, these women have very different outlooks on their individual identities, as well as what the Martí-Maceo Society stands for and its purpose. Beyond their responses, these individuals are different in a number of other ways. Marina, 67 years of age, was born in Tampa and lived in New York for much of her adult life before returning to Tampa in the late 1970s. She is bilingual and speaks, reads, and writes English and Spanish equally well. Marina can be described as having a light complexion and might be considered *trigueña* (“wheat-colored” or golden brown) in Cuba. Milagros was born in Santiago, Cuba in 1923, making her 87 years old. She arrived in the United States in 1968, settling in the Midwest for 14 years before moving to Tampa in 1984. Despite the many years lived in this country, Milagros speaks Spanish primarily. As she notes in the passage above, she is dark-skinned and would be identified by most people in this country as Black. Beyond their individual differences, the excerpted portion of their respective narratives highlights two poles that represent competing notions for shaping the collective identity of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo. One is a racial identity,
which emphasizes the Blackness of the society’s members and their shared struggle against discrimination versus a Cuban national identity or “Cubanidad.”

Milagros’ statement certainly evokes the Cuban ideology of racial democracy and as the descendent of an important war hero of color, it is almost expected that she would espouse the perspective that Cuban national identity supersedes race. In Cuba, this family lineage and the fact that Milagros received a Master’s degree before leaving the island might also serve to “whiten” her somewhat, thereby allowing her to assume a more elevated status in Cuban society than “the average” Black individual. Milagros is also an immigrant, as opposed to the majority of Martí-Maceo members today, who like Marina may be second, third or even fourth generation Black Cubans born in the United States. As such, she also espouses views about African Americans that are similar to those examined by scholars who work with Black immigrant groups. For instance, when asked what she though the differences between Black Cubans and African Americans were, Milagros responded:

*Yo creo que el negro Americano es un poquito celoso del negro Hispano.*

*LC:* ¿Por que piensa usted eso?

*Milagros:* Bueno, porque nosotros no tenemos esa manera de mirarnos a sí mismo y echarnos de menos. Tú sabes, yo fui maestra y trabajé en las escuelas por mucho tiempo. Trabaje en una “high school” como maestra de español. Y yo era bien estricta con mis estudiantes. Yo esperaba solo lo mejor de ellos, y yo no aceptaba que se comportaran de mala manera en mi salón. Yo era muy amable, pero seria con ellos. Y bueno tu sabes, un
día una de las maestras que era amigable con migo me dijo que los estudiantes decían que yo me manejaba como si yo sentía ser mejor que todas las demás [maestras]. —Pero— me dijo, —ellos te escuchan y te hacen caso. ¿Cuál es tu secreto?— Y yo le dije, —bueno, lo que pasa es que yo espero que ellos me respeten, cada uno de ellos. Yo soy la maestra y van a hacer lo que yo les digo. Y si no, pueden dejar esa clase. — Pero tú sabes, lo que yo le estaba explicando es que yo me doy a respetar. Sin tener que pedir ese respeto. De una manera callada, pero firme. Yo no voy a dejar nunca que me digan que yo soy menos porque yo soy negra o lo que sea. Y yo creo que la mayoría de los negros Hispanos se sienten de esa manera.

(I think that the Black American is a little bit envious of the Hispanic Black.

LC: Why do you think that this is the case?

Milagros: Well, because we don’t have that way of looking at ourselves, as being less than. You know, I was a teacher and I worked in the schools for a very long time. I worked in a high school as a Spanish teacher. And I was very strict with my students. I expected only the best from them and I really didn’t take any nonsense from them. I was nice to them, but I was firm. And you know, one day a teacher that I was friendly with said to me, “The students think that you are different, that you think you are better than everyone else.” But they respond to you and they do what you say.

What is your secret? “Well,” I told her, “I expect to be respected by them,
by all of them. I’m the teacher and they will do as I say, or else they can fail the class.” But you know, what I was telling her was that I command respect— quietly but firmly. I’m not going to let anyone tell me that I am less than because I am Black or whatever. And I think that most Black Hispanics are like that as well.)

When Marina was asked to identify what she thought the differences between Black Cubans and African Americans were, she responded:

When I lived in New York City, most of my friends were Black Americans and Puerto Ricans. We never had any problems and there was no issue. When I moved back here, the Blacks shied away from us. They wouldn’t come to events [at Martí-Maceo]. Tenían complejo que no los iban a tratar bien. (They had a complex; they felt that they weren’t going to be treated well, so they wouldn’t go.) I think it’s changed and that there is more of a mix at the club now. But that was the way it used to be.

When asked about whether she maintained friendships with African Americans, Marina indicated that she did and estimated that about a quarter of her friends were African American. Milagros, on the other hand, indicated that she had very few African American friends, aside from Marti-Maceo members.
In recounting the story about African American students, Milagros evokes research with Black immigrants that identifies a belief that African Americans bear some individual responsibility for “feeling” or being treated as though they are of inferior status (See Waters 1999; Rogers 2006). When I asked Milagros whether she felt that conditions in the United States might affect how people see themselves, she responded, “Bueno, si es verdad que han tenido que pasar muchas cosas en este país. Pero también hay que tratar de levantarse uno mismo.” (Well, yes, they have had to go through a lot of things in this country. But one also has to try to lift oneself up.”) According to Harrison (1995:58), Black immigrants’ identities, particularly those from the Caribbean, “have often been shaped based in part on positive evaluations of Blackness (See also Foner 1987; Kasinitz 1992; Rogers 2006; Sutton and Makiesky-Barrow 1987; Waters 1999). However as examination of the Cuban ideology of racial democracy has shown, racial identity in Cuba and its articulation among the members of its diaspora has often had a contradictory and antagonistic relationship with Blackness.

Marina’s response also suggests that she believes that African Americans in Tampa might be the ones with an inferiority “complex.” As a result of this “feeling,” they did not feel welcome or comfortable attending events at the Martí-Maceo Society. However, when I asked Marina whether she thought that this was the case for all African Americans she said that she had not noticed this in New York. Rather, this may have been the case in Tampa for a number of reasons, including differences between Northern African Americans, who felt more comfortable socializing with different cultural groups, versus individuals in the South. Despite this perception, Marina did feel that this situation had changed quite a bit, and she pointed to the fact that a number of Martí-Maceo
members were African American (including the president at the time of our interview). She also indicated that in recent years, events and activities at the Martí-Maceo Society often attracted a number of African American participants and/or audience members.

In each of their narratives, Milagros and Marina evoke research with Black immigrants that indicates a belief that African Americans bear some individual responsibility for “feeling” or being treated as though they are of inferior status although Marina’s is tempered somewhat (See Waters 1999; Rogers 2006). When I asked Milagros whether she felt that conditions in the United States might affect how people see themselves, she responded, “Bueno, si es verdad que han tenido que pasar muchas cosas en este país. Pero también hay que tratar de levantarse uno mismo.” (Well, yes, they have had to go through a lot of things in this country. But one also has to try to lift oneself up.”) According to Harrison (1995:58), Black immigrants’ identities, particularly those from the Caribbean, “have often been shaped based in part on positive evaluations of Blackness (See also Foner 1987; Kasinitz 1992; Rogers 2006; Sutton and Makiesky-Barrow 1987; Waters 1999). However as examination of the Cuban ideology of racial democracy has shown, racial identity in Cuba and its articulation among the members of its diaspora has often had a contradictory and antagonistic relationship with Blackness.

In a study that examines whether country of origin or skin color play a greater role in shaping the racial identities of diverse Black immigrants, Benson (2006) concludes that for most of the study participants, skin color appears to play a stronger role in the development of a shared group racial consciousness that includes African Americans. According to Benson (2006:243), the effects of discrimination over time can cause Black migrants from Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and various countries in the
West Indies, Africa, and Central America to view their skin color as a critical factor in shaping how they are treated in this country—despite any initial hostility or prejudice they may express against African Americans (See also Waters 1999.)

The only group for whom this was not the case was Puerto Rican immigrants. Benson (2006) theorizes that because the Puerto Ricans in her sample were “lighter” than most of the other immigrants surveyed, this lead them to perceive multiple opportunities for using different modes of identifying themselves—i.e., as Hispanic or by maintaining an ethnic identity for a longer period of time. She goes on to say that specific life domains in which discrimination may be experienced appear to differ by immigrant group (i.e. Africans may encounter less discrimination in housing as opposed to Haitians, who report experiencing more) subsequently leads to a complex incorporation into U.S. society based on segmented assimilation model that is mediated by these experiences. In addition, the effect of skin color on racial identity among these migrants appears to be tempered by the skills and ideology that migrants bring from their home countries.

Although studies on the racial identification of Black Cubans are rather limited, it is interesting to examine Milagros’ and Marina’s cases in light of these and other findings related to Puerto Ricans.34 With regard to skin color, Milagros is actually darker than many of the current Black Cuban members of the Martí-Maceo Society, who could be described as being trigueño, rather than dark brown. However as noted earlier, a number of demographic factors suggest that Milagros conforms to the Puerto Ricans in Benson’s

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34 Although there are significant differences between the histories of Puerto Rico and Cuba, especially with regard to the intensity and duration of slavery and the way in which racial consciousness and identity may have developed in these islands as a consequence (See Mintz 1989), they share the fact that they held among the longest ties to their colonial master, Spain, which ended at roughly the same time and led to the development of strong post-colonial ties to the United States.
study, despite the question of her darker skin tone. Marina, on the other hand, is much lighter than Milagros and is among the third generation in her family to have been born in the United States. She noted that most of her friends as a young adult were African American and Puerto Rican, and she is fluent in English and Spanish. Although she does not suggest that identifying oneself as Black (and/or one who has struggled against racial discrimination), as Milagros’ suggests, Marina’s narrative suggests that African Americans (in Tampa) often assume that they will be treated as inferiors despite what she perceives as a lack of evidence in this regard.

Comparing the responses given by Marina and Milagros to the categories they use to identify themselves may shed some light on their perceptions regarding African Americans. Both Marina and Milagros completed surveys that were administered to all contemporary Black Cuban members of the Martí-Maceo Society and were designed to elicit information about diverse aspects of respondents’ lives, including factors that might be used to generate markers related to racial and ethnic identity. Despite the differences between Marina and Milagros with regard to demographics and specific life experiences, their responses related to the categories that they preferred to use when describing themselves and their identities, respectively, were similar in that neither selected a racialized category to describe herself. Marina identified herself as a Hispanic first, and then, as an American. Milagros, on the other hand, identified herself as Cuban, first, and if forced to make another choice, as Cuban-American, to reflect the fact that she has lived in this country for over 40 years. Despite Marina’s view that the Martí-Maceo Society represents a shared history of struggle against discrimination, neither of the categories

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35 See Bailey’s (2000) study with second generation Dominican youth, which suggests that Spanish language maintenance is used to resist “hegemonic social characterization.”
that she selected reflect a racialized or a Cuban identity. While the way in which these women identify as individuals is interesting to consider, for the purposes of this research it is important to try to ascertain how such perceptions about individual identity link to their (and other members’) ideas about the collective identity of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo and the community it purports to represent in present-day Tampa.

In order to try to answer this question, I examined responses to surveys with current Black Cuban members to explore others’ individual conceptualizations about identity. How do these compare with the examples provided above using Marina’s and Milagros’ cases? I also compared the contemporary survey responses with a data set collected with members in 1989 to determine how self-reports on identity may have changed in the past two decades, whether a general trend might be observed in this regard, and more importantly, how this relates to ongoing negotiation of a larger collective identity among members of the Martí-Maceo Society. Survey findings are outlined and summarized in the section that follows.

**Individual Perceptions of Racial and Ethnic Identity: Survey Results**

The graphs that follow provide a demographic overview of two samples of Martí-Maceo members that completed surveys in 1989 and in 2008-2009. Figure 8 shows the language in which the survey was completed and the gender distribution of respondents. Although the majority of respondents in both data sets elected to complete their interviews in English, the contemporary sample included more individuals who elected to conduct the survey in Spanish.
As Figure 9 shows, the majority of respondents in both survey samples were born in Tampa and Cuba.

As expected, survey respondents in the contemporary sample were generally younger than those members interviewed in 1989. See Figure 10.
Overall, the majority of respondents in both survey samples reported that at least one parent had been born in Cuba. See Figure X.4. As might be expected, the contemporary sample of respondents reported more often that at least one of their parents was born in Tampa (or another city/state in this country).
In general, the contemporary sample reported higher rates of educational attainment than did the 1989 sample of respondents. (Figure X.4) This corresponds with higher rates of adolescents and young adults entering the cigar industry in the early part of the 20th Century as noted in Greenbaum’s history (2002) of the Black Cuban community in Tampa.

Comparison of Responses Related to Identity

A number of items in the survey were designed to elicit markers of Afro-Cuban identity, including questions that asked respondents to indicate how they identified themselves ethnically, the primary language spoken in their homes, consumption of certain foods, media outlets favored, etc. First, respondents were asked to report how they identify using one of the following categories provided: Cuban; Cuban American; Black Cuban; Afro-Cuban; Afro-Cuban American; American; and African-American. Table 12 shows the category selected as the primary identifier used by respondents. The original
categories provided in the 1989 interviews and were the same ones used in the contemporary survey aside from “Afro-American,” which was changed to African-American. The more recent interview also included “Black Cuban,” which my ethnographic research has indicated is preferred by some members over the term “Afro-Cuban.” The terms included in the questionnaire were developed following Greenbaum’s ethnographic work with members of Martí-Maceo during the 1980s and reflect terms
used colloquially at the time (i.e. “Afro-American”). Respondents were also given the opportunity to select the category “Other,” and if they selected this response, were asked to provide their own descriptive category. They were also given the opportunity to select as many categories as they wanted and which they considered to be accurate representations of their identity. After making these selections, they were asked to rank these by order of preference.

Despite the degree of difference in sample sizes between generations of respondents, patterns of similarity and divergence were noted in responses. A fairly high proportion of respondents in both samples identified “Cuban” or “Cuban-American” as the category that best represents their ethnic identity. In 1989, the combination of these two categories accounted for 35% of responses, whereas in the contemporary sample, it accounted for about 41% of responses. Respondents in 1989 respondents were more apt to identify “American” as the category that accurately identified their ethnic identity whereas only one contemporary respondent selected this category. Very few of the respondents in 1989 selected the “Afro-Cuban” or “Afro-Cuban American” categories as indicative of their ethnic identity. Although the actual number of respondents who selected these categories in the contemporary sample was nearly identical, these respondents accounted for a larger proportion of contemporary respondents. Very few respondents in either sample identified “Afro-American” or “African American” as their primary identity. Interestingly, three respondents in 1989 identified themselves as Puerto Rican.

Table 13 outlines responses related to the ethnic identity of a respondent’s (current or most recent) spouse. The question related to spouse’s ethnic identity was
structured as an open-ended item and categories were created following a review of the total responses. The categories used in the previous question were used whenever possible.

Table 4. Ethnic Identity of Current/Most Recent Spouse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spouse’s Ethnic Identity</th>
<th>1989 Sample</th>
<th>2008-09 Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cuban</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afro-Cuban</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afro-Cuban American</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afro-American/African American/Black</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Cuban</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puerto Rican</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Cuban</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White American</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

About half of the contemporary sample of respondents identified their current or most recent spouse (e.g. deceased or divorced) as African American or Black. Not one of the respondents surveyed in 2008-2009 used the following categories to identify their spouse: “Afro-Cuban,” “Afro-Cuban American,” or “Black Cuban,” suggesting that the
contemporary sample of respondents was not very likely to look within its own community for marriage partners. The remaining responses for this sample were fairly evenly distributed and identified as “Puerto Rican,” “Hispanic,” and “American.” Three of these respondents did not identify a spouse.

Responses taken in 1989 and shown in Table 13 were more evenly distributed among a longer list of categories. Thirteen respondents identified their spouses as “Afro-American or Black American,” while another 12 respondents used the categories, “Afro-Cuban American,” “Afro-Cuban,” or “Black Cuban.” This is particularly interesting, given that very few of these respondents used a racialized Cuban category to identify themselves (See Table 12). Ten respondents identified their spouses as “Cuban,” without specifying race – although most often it appears, given other responses, that the spouse was a member of the Martí-Maceo Society and a descendent of one of the original founding members. (This claim, however, cannot be definitively made because these surveys did not include names or identifying characteristics of respondents.) Two respondents did, however, specifically identify their spouse as “White” when providing their response (e.g. “White Cuban” or “White American”).

Table 14 presents information on the use of Spanish by respondents, as well as whether Spanish has been passed on to children and grandchildren. When asked directly whether they spoke Spanish, there were differences in the pattern of response between samples. In 1989, the majority of respondents indicated that they spoke Spanish and did so most of the time in their homes.\(^{36}\) Another 11 respondents reported that they spoke

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\(^{36}\) The original survey asked individuals whether they spoke Spanish and to indicate how often they did so. The contemporary version of the survey asked respondents to identify the primary language spoken in their homes. The response categories listed were developed to allow for comparison between samples.
Spanish and English about equally and only 10 listed English as their primary language or one that they spoke more than half of the time. In 2008-2009, the majority of respondents identified English as the language they spoke primarily within their homes. Another five respondents reported speaking English and Spanish equally within their homes, while only three individuals identified Spanish as their primary language. There

Table 5. Use of Spanish Language and Transmission within Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1989 Sample (n=45)</th>
<th>2008-09 Sample (n=17)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary Language Spoken (Self)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Children Speak Spanish</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grandchildren Speak Spanish</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
were also differences between samples related to whether respondents’ children spoke Spanish. In 1989, the majority of respondents indicated that their children did indeed speak Spanish. Among contemporary respondents, an equal number indicated that their children spoke Spanish and English. (In both samples, respondents often qualified their responses by stating that their children spoke “a little,” spoke “a few words,” or “understood but didn’t speak” Spanish. These responses were categorized as “No” responses.) The majority of respondents for whom this question was relevant in both of the survey periods indicated that their grandchildren did not speak Spanish.

Respondents were asked how often they ate Cuban food as another indicator of an attachment to Cuban culture. In 1989, the majority of respondents reported that they ate Cuban food on a daily basis. In 2008-2009, just over half of the respondents indicated that they ate Cuban food a few times a week, followed by respondents who said they ate Cuban food daily. (Table 15)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eat Cuban Food:</th>
<th>1989</th>
<th>2008-09</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a week</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a month</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardly ever</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. How Often Eat Cuban Food
Table 16 highlights responses from a variety of questions designed to elicit information about preferred media outlets, seeking information especially about Spanish-language media and those targeting the local African-American population. When asked whether they watched Spanish language television channels, the majority of respondents in 1989 indicated that they watched them on a daily basis. By contrast, the largest number of respondents in the contemporary sample was divided between those who reported

Table 7. Preferred Media Outlets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1989 Sample (n=45)</th>
<th>2008-09 Sample (n=17)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spanish Language TV</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a week</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few times a month</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardly ever</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Radio Stations</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish Radio</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WTMP (Traditional Urban Station)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Newspapers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Gaceta/Other Spanish Newspaper</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida Sentinel Bulletin</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
watching Spanish-language television on a daily basis and those who said they “hardly ever” watched programming on these channels.

Respondents were also asked to identify the radio stations that they listened to regularly. The original survey asked respondents specifically whether they listened to Spanish-language radio and/or 1150 AM WTMP, traditionally the only Black and locally-owned station targeting Tampa’s African-American community with an “Urban Contemporary” music format and community-focused talk shows. Contemporary surveys asked respondents to identify all of the radio stations that they listened to on a regular basis, although Table 16 only presents figures for the original responses provided. In 1989, the majority of respondents indicated that they listened to Spanish radio, compared with 35 percent of the contemporary sample who said that they did. Almost half of the respondents in 1989 said that they listened to AM 1150 WTMP, as compared to nearly a quarter of contemporary respondents. The majority of contemporary respondents reported listening to a wide variety of stations with diverse programming formats and music genre, including classical/jazz music, Adult Contemporary, and sports radio.

Similar differences were noted related to the newspapers that members said they read on a regular basis. As with previous questions, the original survey asked respondents whether they read the following newspapers: La Gaceta, founded in Ybor City in 1922 and the only tri-lingual newspaper in the nation which publishes stories in English, Spanish, and Italian, and the Florida Sentinel Bulletin, founded in 1959 to provide news to Tampa’s African-American community. The contemporary sample of respondents were asked to identify all of the newspapers that they read on a regular basis and were probed for whether they read one of three Spanish-language newspapers, including La
In 1989, less than half of respondents indicated that they read *La Gaceta*, while almost half reported that they read the *Florida Sentinel Bulletin*. In 2008-2009, about 65 percent of respondents indicated that they read the *Sentinel Bulletin* or a Spanish-language newspaper regularly.

When comparing responses from both samples, a number of differences were identified. Specific differences noted in contemporary respondents include being less likely to use Spanish as a primary language, eating Cuban food slightly less often, and relying on Spanish media (television, radio, and newspapers) less than did respondents 20 years ago. Interestingly, higher proportions of respondents in 1989 reported relying on WTMP and the Florida Sentinel Bulletin as primary media outlets. One of the most striking differences between the survey samples relates to self-reported ethnic identity and the ethnic identity of spouses. In 1989, just over 20 percent of members identified the category “American” as the preferred representation of their ethnic identity. In contrast, only one respondent in the contemporary sample selected this category (See Table 12, page 50). Because of the nature of the survey and my inability to identify the respondents to the earlier data set, it was impossible to gather additional qualitative data related to the preference for this category. According to the sole contemporary respondent, Fernando, who selected this category, this preference was reflected in this manner:

*I am an American. I am a U.S. citizen, I’ve served in the Armed Forces and I am a mix of all of these different things. Yes, I have Cuban roots and yes, I’m Black, but I am an American.*
Fernando, an elderly man, was a long-standing member of the Martí-Maceo Directiva and is considered by many to have been an effective leader. He no longer participates actively as a Martí-Maceo member, but he pays his dues faithfully. He also speaks fluent Spanish, although he was born in Tampa. In reflecting on Fernando’s extended response to the identity question in the survey, I got the sense that he was trying to claim a space within a wider “American” identity, much in the same way that Afro-Cubans in the late colonial era did. The questions about ethnic difference and preference appeared to have struck a nerve. Although this gentleman had attended segregated schools, he had attained a postgraduate degree at a historically Black college, and had a successful career with a good degree of local recognition. His comment resonated with me because it raised the following questions: what is the nature of North American identity (i.e. U.S. identity), who gets to claim a space within that space, and what are the implications for the descendants of an immigrant community that was forced to negotiate identity in an era and geographic space where the dominant ideology was often violently intolerant of difference.

In casual conversations with elderly members, I have also noted that the term “American” was most often used when referring to Blacks or African-Americans.37 The context surrounding these discussions centers on the shared space between Tampa’s Black Cubans and Americans and as such, generally omits the racial identifiers. This may explain why so many of Greenbaum’s survey respondents chose this category to identify themselves. However, this is simply an assumption, and as the highlighted response suggests “American” can also connote a creolized and arguably, idealized identity that

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37 It is interesting to note that this colloquial usage among this population of Cubans in Tampa contrasts with its use by Cubans in Miami, by which the speakers usually mean White Americans.
allows for a mixing of diverse identities and does not marginalize the individual as a consequence of her or his ethnic and racial identity. This logic conforms to the Cuban discourse on national identity which minimizes race and emphasizes the tie between the individual and the nation.

Just about 40 percent of respondents in both samples selected the categories “Cuban” and “Cuban-American” as the primary category used to identify themselves, suggesting that a strong tie to a Cuban identity still remains. However, a larger proportion of contemporary respondents were more likely to identify primarily as “Afro-Cuban,” “Afro-Cuban American” or “Black Cuban,” suggesting perhaps that a racialized Cuban identity is more acceptable today than it had been in the past. When these responses were compared to examine whether year of birth made a difference in selection of these categories, it did not.

When identifying their spouses’ identities, the categories elicited were somewhat different than those that were used in the previous item partly because this question was structured as an open-ended one. However, the question related to spouse’s identity directly follows the one which asks respondents to self-report using specific categories resulting in interesting differences between respondent groups. For instance, despite the juxtaposition of these questions, not one respondent in 1989 identified his or her spouse as being simply, “American.” Further, just over 20 percent of respondents indicated that their spouse was “Cuban” but did not specify race or whether they were American-born (See Table 13, page 51). Very few contemporary respondents identified their spouses as “Cuban.” Perhaps more interesting is the fact that although respondents in 1989 were not very likely to identify themselves as “Afro-Cuban,” “Afro-Cuban American” or “Black
Cuban,” a higher proportion of them identified their spouses using one of these categories. None of the contemporary respondents used these categories to identify their spouses. In both of the samples, the largest proportion of respondents identified their spouses as “Afro-American” (used only in the 1989 survey), “African American,” or “Black American.”

Overall, a number of similarities exist between respondents surveyed in different decades and during different circumstances. However, the demographic findings suggest that today’s members and their relatives are more likely to be (or have been) married to an African American, less likely to speak Spanish and as a result, rely less on Spanish language media for their news or entertainment. (However, they also reported being less likely to rely on media targeting African Americans.) Further, the contemporary sample of respondents appears to be more comfortable attaching a racial category to their ethnic identity (e.g. using “Afro-” or “Black” with Cuban) as evidenced by nearly half of the sample selecting categories using such descriptors. Yet, just about an equal number of contemporary respondents did not use a racial marker when identifying themselves as “Cuban” or “Cuban-American.” Although the conclusions arrived at with this limited data set can not be generalized to the wider Black Cuban population in Tampa, the findings suggest that although the use of Spanish has decreased among contemporary members of the Martí-Maceo Society, there is still a desire to identify as “Cuban” among members and their relatives, which may be related to their continued association to the organization. (Although four respondents are not currently active members, they have each attended events and in some cases, general assembly meetings at the Martí-Maceo social hall during the past decade.)
It is impossible to draw a causal inference related to membership in the organization and perceived identity based on the available data (i.e. membership in the Martí-Maceo Society reinforces a “Cuban” identity or a strong Cuban identity increases the likelihood of joining). However, it seems that for the current members, continued participation in the organization is very much tied to honoring their personal and communal traditions and heritage. As one of the youngest members noted,

I joined because this was something that was important to my family. I grew up hearing about it and was there from the time I was very young. My aunt asked me to join to help them and I’m going to do everything that I can because it’s important to us. It’s our heritage.

The current findings suggest that these members of Tampa’s Black Cuban community continue to recognize a sense of “Cuban-ness” or Cubanidad, despite increased intermarriage with African Americans (or having one parent identified as African American in a number of cases), which they view as making them somehow different from African Americans. This appears to be the case for individuals who can be identified as being third generation. In their research on the social mobility of immigrants, Palmer and Waldinger’s (1996) suggest that the high rates of intermarriage among third generation populations can produce multi-faceted identities among third generation populations that may ultimately play a role in their social mobility or that of their children. While the socioeconomic integration of Black Cubans is not a focus of this dissertation, it is curious to note that among contemporary study participants there is still
an attachment to identifying as Cuban, despite acknowledgement of a racialized or Black identity.

Research by Waters (1999) and by Benson (2006) with diverse Black immigrants identifies complex processes whereby recent immigrants may reject a U.S.-based model of Blackness because of personal stereotypes or negative beliefs they may have about African Americans. However, over time immigrants (Benson 2006) or their children (Waters 1999) may reject these initial impressions because of discrimination they encounter in their day-to-day lives, which lead them to develop a shared race consciousness with African Americans. Waters’ work with immigrant or second generation children further suggests that this process may involve rejecting the immigrant parents’ values and ideas about how best to succeed in this new country (1999:307). This was especially the case with adolescents that Waters identified as being “American-identified” and who were seen as having generally developed an oppositional stance toward the wider (White) values and mores of this country (See also Fordham and Ogbu 1986). She contrasts this phenomenon with that of “ethnic identified” adolescents who are more likely to reject “underclass black identity” and often use their ethnicity to distance themselves from Black Americans especially when interacting with Whites (Waters 1999:323; See also Anderson, 1990).

Despite Milagros’ narrative, which conforms to research on Black immigrants, the majority of Martí-Maceo members actually exhibit a number of key differences when compared to the subjects of such research. The first difference is that the majority of current Black Cuban members of the Martí-Maceo Society are second, third, and in some cases, fourth generation. More importantly, they are adults, who came of age in a very
different context than did the subjects of Waters’ (1990) or Benson’s (2006) research. While the first wave of Black Cuban immigrants did seek to differentiate their families and their children from the local Black population, subsequent generations found themselves becoming more familiar with their African American peers as a consequence of segregation and changing socioeconomic conditions within the cigar industry, which resulted in the out-migration of Black Cubans from Tampa to northeastern states in search of employment. However, increasing interaction between Black Cubans and Black Americans did not generally result in the development of an oppositional identity among Black Cubans. In fact, the majority of these individuals went on to achieve higher rates of educational attainment than did their parents.

Overall, contemporary Black Cubans report a general decrease in the use of the customs and practices of their parents and grandparents. However, this has not generally resulted in a rejection of a Cuban identity among contemporary members. In other words, despite a general decline in the use of cultural practices (including Spanish-language use) which could serve to differentiate them from African Americans and increased intermarriage with African Americans, the findings suggest a growing ability to accommodate Blackness with a continuing desire to highlight a Cuban identity. Perhaps with regard to this population—at least for those in the second and third generation who are middle-aged and/or elderly—the desire to maintain an ethnic tie has more to do with the context in which they came of age in this country\[38\]. The children and grandchildren of Black immigrants who arrived at the turn of the last century and who were able to pool

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38 Contemporary researchers of immigration to this country generally tend to focus on the “new immigrants” or “new second generation,” whose arrival in this country is part of a later wave beginning in the 1960s and whose experiences are contrasted with those of earlier immigrant waves, particularly those that occurred from the late 1800s into the early 1900s (See Lamphere 1992; Massey 1995; Portes and Zhou 1993; Waters 1999; Zhou 1997).
their resources and create a close-knit community, despite numerous challenges confronted within the immigrant enclave and in the wider Tampa community. Many of them were able to maintain ties with their families in Cuba and to travel back and forth until the 1960s when political relations between the countries became strained. Moreover as the recollections of informants has shown, despite the fact that Ybor City was integrated and allowed for Black Cubans to live and work alongside their White immigrant counterparts, discrimination did indeed exist. It may not have been expressed violently within the enclave, but it was ugly and painful nonetheless. Finally, the Tampa Bay area has experienced a dramatic increase in the arrival of large numbers of migrants from various Latin American countries since the 1980s, including Cuban refugees. While these individuals have not generally become affiliated to the Martí-Maceo Society as Elena had hoped, they have changed the character of several neighborhoods within the local county where billboards and storefronts advertise in Spanish, and where Spanish can be heard as frequently as English. This recent migration stream may also provide a new cultural or ethnic frame of reference for contemporary Black Cubans seeking to explore this aspect of their heritage.

In her research on generational differences in identity and cultural orientation of Japanese Americans, Yanagisako (1985) argues that the examination of changes over time in kinship ties and the relationships must be viewed in light of the meanings that individuals and kinship groups attach to their interactions within the family, how they position themselves within those relationships, and how the define others as a consequence of these. Further, she argues that the practices used to refine those relationships over time —i.e. the ways in which individuals negotiate these relationships
in their quotidian lives—are constantly being shaped and redefined in response to conditions in the present, which may be starkly different for members of each generation. While her work focuses more on the meanings attached to symbols and concepts, like “family” among Japanese immigrant families, her work is here instructive because it reminds us that making sense of the past, even at the level of family involves reinterpreting the past in light of the present and our perceived position and choices within it.

The persistence of kinship ties within the Martí-Maceo Society, which reflects the remnants of an insular community of Black Cubans with close-knit families, may also play a role in the maintenance of a continuing Cuban identity among my informants despite individual accommodations or acceptance of Blackness. The organization can be seen as providing a physical space in which these intersecting relationships can be formally expressed and reinforced through ongoing meetings and events. Absent the Martí-Maceo Society, these individuals might not generally have occasion to socialize with each other aside from the occasional milestone event, such as a wedding or a funeral. Therefore, the ongoing desire highlight a Cuban identity at the individual level on the part of contemporary members appears to be related to continuing participation in the Martí-Maceo Society. However, it is not clear whether participation in the organization encourages continued reinforcement of Cubanidad among members or if individuals who are feel this connection to a Cuban heritage are attracted to the organization.
Forging a Collective Identity

As noted in Chapters Four and Five, encroaching Ybor City redevelopment was considered by Martí-Maceo members as a serious threat to the organization’s very existence. During those years, the membership became concerned about being able to set a fair market price for their property that could help them negotiate a favorable outcome with the city should relocation become a necessity. The offer to merge with the Círculo Cubano in 2001 heightened members’ awareness as to their property’s true value, and following this episode, the directiva expressed a desire to use this knowledge and the resources available to the organization to negotiate any additional offers from a position of strength.

It was within this context that Martí-Maceo’s members began to formally and informally re-evaluate external representations of a collective identity for the organization as a whole. During these years, a number of members periodically took the floor at general assembly meetings and reminded the group that theirs was the only mutual aid society to have lost its building during Urban Renewal, and that Tampa’s White establishment did not distinguish ethnic differences among Tampa’s Black communities. As one member put it during a meeting in 2002, “We can’t let this happen to us again. If we do, then everything that our parents and grandparents worked for will have been for nothing.” Such rhetoric then, served to tie the organization’s heritage to a shared history of struggle and isolation brought about by the realities of living within the strict racial order of this country. The discourse around collective struggle against racial discrimination as a key component in Black Cuban identity is also expressed when members discuss their individual identities, as noted earlier in this chapter.
By 2003, discussions concerning redevelopment efforts and their threats to the organization’s continued existence were shaped by an explicit desire on the part of executive board members to avoid discussing "what the city had done to us in the past," which they viewed as being characterized by a sense of victimization – as opposed to active struggle. As Elena noted at a meeting in February 2003 addressing the city's most recent announcements about Ybor City redevelopment plans, "We need to stop worrying about what they did to us in the past. And stop saying that they're doing this to us again and look at how we're going to deal with this."

Such examples underscore the complex issue of shaping a collective or institutional identity within an organization that exists in a historical period different from the one in which it was originally developed and thrived. Although legal segregation no longer forces members of Tampa’s Afro-Cuban community to isolate themselves geographically within a small section of the city, the current condition and location of their building can be construed as a consequence of their racial identity. Many of Martí-Maceo’s members and their families have become incorporated into Tampa’s Black middle class, while others rebuilt ties to the White Cuban community or forged relationships with communities formed by more recently arrived Latino migrants of various racial backgrounds. Different socio-historical conditions may therefore have created an opportunity for new forms of identification among Black Cubans, who were previously relegated to a rather discrete social category characterized by racial identification and ethnic isolation. Today, Afro-Cubans can legally assume multiple social classifications, as we have seen, including “Hispanic or Latino,” “Black,” and even, “African American” to a lesser degree. While individuals are able to negotiate
simultaneous identities within their daily lives, the establishment of a collective identity has proven more difficult within this environment.

As is often the case when talking about identity with individual members of any cultural group, respondents in both samples indicated a personal willingness and propensity for incorporation of multiple understandings related to race, ethnicity, and culture. Identity has been recognized as fluid and is often negotiated and renegotiated depending on context, circumstance, and setting (Chan 1998; Kibria 2000; Nagel 1994). This has also been reflected in discussions about the organizational or collective identity of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo. In periodic and ongoing discussions about the future of the organization, members argue about the heritage and the larger identity the society ultimately represents. During these moments, some members will call for more explicit celebration of the community’s Cuban heritage, insisting that this historic national tie surpasses all other racial and class-based considerations and is the basis upon which the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo was founded. Others call for members to recognize the club as an “American” institution that actively seeks to increase its membership regardless of the racial or ethnic makeup of its constituency. Still, others call for more explicit recognition of the community’s unique history within the Ybor City immigrant enclave.

Polletta and Jasper (2001) define collective identity as an “individual’s cognitive, moral and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice or institution. It is a perception of shared social status… and it is distinct from personal identities, although it may form a part of personal identity.” Further, according to Taylor and Whittier (1992) collective identity and by extension, “solidarity” is developed
through the creation of “boundary-setting rituals and institutions that separate challengers from those in power” and as part of an ongoing process of negotiation and construction (See also Cohen, 1985; Friedman and McAdam, 1992; Melucci 1989). One could argue that a collective Black Cuban identity was forged when the Martí-Maceo Society was founded—at the turn of the 20th Century under the strictures of enforced segregation. The period during the 1980s and 1990s when Black Cubans determined to document their community history and contest efforts to exclude them from the historic narrative being created for the Ybor City district presented another opportunity for such identity negotiation to take place. However, examination of the organization and its operations from 1999 to 2009 suggests that the membership and its leaders are having some trouble coming to accord as to how best to communicate the “boundary-setting rituals and institutions” that Taylor and Whittier characterize as the building blocks of collective identity beyond its internal membership. A number of episodes within this time frame (documented in Chapters Four and Five) highlight the conflicts associated with attempts to make such determinations and build upon them.

Controversy among members over the use of cowrie shells in the mural that was painted on the exterior of the social hall and the periodic use of the term “Afro-Cuban” on organizational documents such as letterhead and newsletters, reflect a concern with external representations of the organization and the reception that such symbols may receive—not simply by members who may be offended, as Elena suggests on page 121—on the part of other groups within the larger Ybor City community. One of the main concerns about the use of symbols that serve to emphasize the organization’s overt or suggested celebration of Blackness or Africa, not often mentioned publicly, is that it
reinforces the organization’s difference among the other ethnic societies in the historic district. Under ideal circumstances, emphasis of the unique qualities of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo would serve to bolster Ybor City’s distinctiveness in Tampa history. However, this would also require acknowledgement of racial discrimination on the part of White Cubans and other immigrants, which complicates the narrative and ultimately, Ybor City heritage as a commodity for consumption by tourists.

According to Gamson (1996:235) collective identities are “… continually filtered and reproduced through organizational bodies…within which identity boundaries are shaped by and shift through organizational activity, which itself responds to features of the institutional environment”. Therefore, organizations are central to the examination of collective identities because they provide a space in which the ongoing construction and negotiation of collective meanings is shaped by larger institutional and environmental challenges that provide the context for those identities are shaped in the first place (Powell and Friedkin 1987; Swidler 1995). However, according to Scott and Mayer (1991:123) it is important to note that organizations respond to the “institutional environments” in which they operate and as such, develop protocols for acting in accordance with the “rules and requirements” of these environments, and to which they must adjust in order to receive “support and legitimacy.”

The lack of consensus regarding a shared collective identity on the part of Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo members is therefore not a consequence of the internal conflicts that continue to take place over time, regarding competing notions of racial, ethnic, cultural, and/or national identity (or any combination of these). Such internal conflicts often provide the source for continual reevaluation and renegotiation of
organizational identity (Gamson 1996). However, the current institutional environment only privileges certain tropes regarding the history of Black Cubans in Tampa. This environment does not appear to support the celebration of a shared history of struggle and triumph over racial discrimination. We live in a nation that has yet to come to terms with the history and legacy of state-sanctioned racial segregation and the dark and disturbing means by which this social order was maintained. The sale of history and heritage as a consumer experience is most often packaged to reflect present-day realities as local elites would have us see them, which rarely allows for the experiences of marginalized populations to be shared (Cassia 1999). At both the national and the local levels, the dominant ideology is one that celebrates diversity or heterogeneity – the United State is a nation of immigrants and Ybor City was a microcosm of that “reality.” A narrative that includes the realities of racial discrimination within Ybor City threatens to disrupt the hegemonic order, supported by the accepted histories of Tampa’s Latin Quarter, which emphasize harmony among its various immigrant groups. Therefore in the existing landscape of heritage preservation in Tampa, such a discourse would be less likely to garner the support of local preservation officials and key stakeholders and would probably continue to limit the resources made available to the organization (e.g. public funds for upkeep of the social hall, support for recognition as a historic landmark at the state level, etc.)

It might, in this context, make sense for the organization and its members to emphasize the society’s Cuban heritage exclusively. However, this frame is not necessarily without some controversy. After all if members were to focus solely on celebrating the contributions of their ancestors to the Ybor City enclave, how would this
differ from the Círculo Cubano’s efforts to celebrate the Cuban community’s heritage? Further, elites could argue—as the Círculo Cubano governing board did when they proposed that Martí-Maceo merge with them—that two Cuban organizations are no longer necessary in the present day. Because this narrative frame minimizes the role of race and racial discrimination in Ybor City, it suggests that Jim Crow laws were the only reason for the division of Tampa’s Cuban community and the subsequent development of separate mutual aid societies. Since this hostile climate no longer exists, it would logically follow under this version of Ybor history that two Cuban organizations are no longer necessary—the very argument that Círculo Cubano leaders used when suggesting that Martí-Maceo sell its property and agree to be subsumed by the locally recognized, albeit financially struggling organization.

Within both of these scenarios, the Martí-Maceo membership is faced with opposition to their continued existence as an independent entity creating a scenario that Lyon-Callo and Hyatt (2003:177) describe as “the material and ideological effects of neoliberalism, not as abstractions but as a very real set of interventions into local settings…limiting the spectrum of possibilities” available to communities. Lyon-Callo and Hyatt (2003:176) would further argue that the current discursive conditions faced by Martí-Maceo have resulted from globalization and neoliberalism: social and economic conditions that “have fundamentally altered the social and political landscape of cities in the United States and around the world.” These large-scale processes, although most often viewed as operating at the macro level, “have produced significant changes in localities, as well,” (Lyon-Callo and Hyatt 2003:176) such as the demolition of
significant portions of Ybor City structures, including the original Martí-Maceo social hall.

Despite an expressed desire on the part of some members that the sociedad forego efforts to emphasize race and collective struggle as an important factor that shapes the organization’s (and by extension, the community’s) collective identity, the forces that led to the organization’s displacement have helped to shape the current reality significantly, making such an outcome more likely given the larger sociopolitical environment of heritage preservation in Ybor City. The small size of the existing membership and the lack of a solid organizational infrastructure have made it difficult for the organization to navigate this landscape in the decades following Urban Renewal, and in the present-day have contributed to the continued struggle to define a collective identity for the organization that can be used effectively to contest its marginalized status within Ybor City heritage preservation efforts. Unless the members of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo agree (however loosely) on a shared identity for their organization, it will more than likely become a casualty of the hegemonic processes that continue to shape local heritage preservation efforts.
CHAPTER SEVEN

RECLAIMING AN AFRO-CUBAN HERITAGE IN

“AMERICA’S NEXT GREATEST CITY”

“In the early 1980s with Tampa’s first Super Bowl on the horizon, the Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce coined the phrase “America’s Next Great City” to refer to a city whose time, they were sure, had come. The Super Bowl, they calculated, would spur renewed development in their small southern city whose heyday had peaked nearly a century earlier. To be sure, efforts to attract large-scale sporting events have not abated. Since Super Bowl XVIII, Tampa has hosted three additional Super Bowls (1991, 2001, and 2009), although it lost a bid to host the 2012 Olympic Summer Games. Nearly 30 years after the local chamber of commerce dared to dream, the hopeful moniker still fits. Greatness, it seems, is just around the corner, expected to arrive at any moment. While a number of urban redevelopment projects have been completed since 1984, Tampa has yet to develop into the world-class tourist destination its elites have so long planned for.

Development efforts hatched in the spotlight cast in the wake of large-scale sporting events often focused on the revitalization of Ybor City, the hub of cigar-making at the turn of the 20th Century that had been left to ruin at century’s end. By the 1950s, Ybor City had been largely abandoned by the ethnic immigrant cigar makers and factory
owners, who had moved out of the area looking for prosperity following the mechanization of the industry and the closing of most factories. As noted earlier, Urban Renewal resulted in the demolition of about 50 percent of the properties in the once thriving neighborhood. The Ybor City that was left in the early 1990s was a neighborhood in decline with a population that was largely African American and poor (Greenbaum, 1990). Revitalization efforts in the area centered around highlighting the area’s “Latin” immigrant roots —a term that encompasses the Spanish, Cuban, and Italian ancestry of the cigar rollers who built Tampa’s first great industry— creating a historic quarter that would pay homage to its previous identity as Cigar City, U.S.A. and more importantly, would cater to tourists.

However, the ethnic history that was to be celebrated ignored critical aspects of the area’s history: the radical leanings of many in the cigar worker community, widespread labor unrest within the cigar factories, and the presence of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo and its members, who contributed to Tampa’s rise as an early cigar mecca. A more nuanced reading of Ybor City history overturns the prevailing local histories that present a harmonious ethnic enclave (Mormino and Pozzetta 1987) and uncovers the subtle (and often, not so subtle) attempts to exclude Black people from the frame of Tampa history that was being established. Heritage preservation efforts in Ybor City also reflected efforts to exclude African Americans from the narrative frame of the local history being established. As Greenbaum (1990:59) notes in an article reflecting on historic preservation efforts that were just beginning in Ybor City, the African Americans who lived in and around the neighborhood were associated with poverty and crime – elements that developers felt would inhibit tourists from visiting. Documented and
personal histories of Ybor City often elide the complex internal race relations between
the Spanish and Italian immigrants, White Cubans and Black Cubans as noted earlier in
this dissertation.

The Politics of Historic Preservation in Tampa

The ongoing situation in which the Martí-Maceo Society has found itself since the
initial plans of historic preservation were outlined for Ybor City has highlighted a
number of interesting theoretical concerns with regard to the representation and
commodification of Tampa’s past for consumer consumption. Examination of the
relationship between the past, memory and history, and how groups identify and define
themselves in the present day has long been an interest in anthropology (See Appadurai,
1981). Since publication of Hobsbawm and Rangers’ (1983) groundbreaking work, a
number of anthropologists have highlighted the constructed nature of tradition, history,
and heritage as constructions rooted in the present, often for presentation and display to
others (Khalaf, 2000; Olwig, 1999; Adams, 1997; Gable & Handler, 1996; Friedman,
1992). Olwig (1999:370) contends that the past in its various reconstructions is
negotiated “within specific historical contexts characterized by particular systems of
power and authority that deem only certain forms of heritage credible.” Further, heritage
is often constructed and marketed by dominant groups that seek to shape the past to
legitimize their current positionality thereby excluding and/or marginalizing other groups,
a process which has been theorized as a nationalist endeavor (Cassia, 1999; Gupta and
Ferguson, 1992; Williams, 1991).
The rise of the “heritage industry” has engendered a need for “custodianship” or management of historic sites or other heritage constructs (Cassia, 1999; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1995:370) notes,

[T]he heritage industry is a new mode of cultural production and it produces something new. There is no turning back. If heritage as we know it from the industry were sustainable, it would not require protection. The process of protection, of ‘adding value,’ speaks in and to the present, even if it does so in terms of the past.

The impetus to “protect” the past from oblivion and perhaps, contemporary realities underlies the process of historic preservation and provides the rationale for legislation to do so. Historic preservation plans in Ybor City, initially conceived as an effort to reclaim a heralded position for Tampa on the national landscape, as well as to omit the “unsavory” issues of race and class so clear in the present, illustrate how the process of “adding value” to the past is often managed by local elites (See Cassia, 1999).

The Ybor City Development Corporation (YCDC) was incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 1988 and is a division of Tampa’s Economic and Urban Development Department. As such, it is charged with overseeing the “development, redevelopment, economic revitalization, and general improvement” of the historic district in Ybor City. An additional Community Redevelopment Area identified in 2003 was delineated to further extend the boundaries of the original historic district, and “the surrounding community” (City of Tampa, 1996-2008). The YCDC relies on another
entity, the Barrio Latino Commission, to serve as the architectural review board for the
district, its identified purpose being “the review and approval of exterior alterations to
existing buildings and also the same authority with respect to new construction” (City of
Tampa, 1996-2008). The early members of these organizations were (and still are)
composed of local planners and officials, some of whom were members of or represented
the immigrant communities of Ybor City. However, neither of these organizations
included Afro-Cuban representatives or supporters of this community’s contribution to
the history of the neighborhood.

Greenbaum’s discussion of her work on behalf of the Martí-Maceo Society
membership during the early drafting of plans to designate Ybor City as a National
Historic District (ca. 1984), underscores the degree to which Ybor City’s Afro-Cubans
were excluded from the nomination process: “[t]hey were missing from the inventory of
Ybor City’s cultural resources” (2002:306). Most pointedly, the organization was
excluded from the map prepared for the historic designation application, despite its
location at the western entrance of Ybor City’s main avenue and its continued operation
nearly 100 years after its founding (See Greenbaum, 2002:315). Members at the time
wondered whether their obvious exclusion in all of the documents being amassed to
establish the neighborhood’s historic character was deliberate and further, whether the
city’s ultimate goal was to remove the organization and its building from Ybor City
altogether (Greenbaum, 2002:306). Their fears at the time were well-founded, given that
the Ybor City Redevelopment Plan that was eventually adopted in 1988 made provisions
for elimination of “existing conditions of blight and to create a condition for continued
private reinvestment” in the area (Greater Tampa Chamber of Commerce, 2006). In the
eyes of local planners and city representatives, their social hall was located in a building not considered to be a “contributing structure” to the historic district, and one that although not “historic” was aged and in need of considerable upkeep.

Figure X.X. shows the Ybor City Historic District map, which outlines the boundaries of the local and national historic districts and is one of the sources used by the city to determine whether a structure is contributing or non-contributing to the historic district (City of Tampa 1996-2010). Location of the current Martí-Maceo social hall is highlighted to show its exclusion from two areas: 1) the “National Historic Landmark Boundaries,” identified in 1974, which was not drawn in a contiguous fashion and allowed for incorporation of structures outside of central Ybor City; and 2) “National Register District,” i.e. the area of the district that contains the structures eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Landmarks.

Reclamation of the past, however, is not exclusive to elites. Subaltern groups have also used historic preservation as a means to reclaim their presence in historical times and spaces as a means of counteracting efforts to further marginalize them (Greenbaum, 2002; Olwig, 1999; Adams, 1997; Bruner, 1996). The work on the part of Martí-Maceo members to interject their presence in the “official” history of Ybor City forced attention to the situation and attracted unexpected allies. For instance, the Park Service historian who reviewed the historic district application was quite concerned about the organization’s exclusion from the original district map. After receiving candid admissions from the local historic district applicants regarding their concerns about the adjacent Black neighborhoods and their efforts to distance the future district from these areas, the historian recommended that the district guidelines be revised to include the
Martí-Maceo Society as a “supporting structure” (See Greenbaum, 2002:316-317).

Inclusion in the district, however, did not dampen the membership’s worries about the potential for dislocation, as the social hall had yet to be recognized as a supporting structure within the district thereby limiting the possibility of future demolition. As a recognized part of the Ybor City historic district, the building and land on which it was located became subject to the district guidelines. The aging social hall could still be cited for a code violation, if the members were not stringent about its upkeep. More importantly, if planners deemed the parcel on which the hall sat necessary for building of a new structure, there would be little to prevent the city from seizing the structure and its land. The fact that it stood just inside the main entrance to Ybor City served only to fuel the worries of its members and spur efforts to resist this potential reality. See Figure X.X. to view the Ybor City Historic District Map, which is used by the city in making determinations as to the contributory nature of structures in the district. The map includes the colors assigned to the four ethnic mutual aid societies in Figure X.X. (Chapter 1) to highlight their location within the district boundaries. The Sociedad La Martí-Maceo, although identified, is not highlighted to show that it has been defined as a non-contributing structure. The symbol that identifies the building is white, while contributing structures were rendered gray on the map.

Notwithstanding the recognition afforded by the redrawn boundaries, the precarious position in which the Martí-Maceo Society found itself at the dawn of the 1990s was very much related to the demolition of its original social hall. Moreover, local planners and officials did not seem further interested in addressing this unfair disadvantage. Like many other Black businesses and organizations in this country, the
Figure 13. A full rendition of the Ybor City Historic District Map.
Martí-Maceo Society had been subjected to “a gradual but seemingly inevitable deterioration of [its] most formidable social symbols” as a result of silence in the historical record regarding the community’s achievements, as well as unequal treatment that was not visited on the other immigrant communities in Ybor City (See Rodriguez 1998:6). One important and immediate disadvantage to having been displaced from their original social hall is Martí-Maceo’s inability to apply for up to $50,000 in historic preservation grants from the state of Florida that are available to help offset the costs of repairing and remodeling historic structures. However despite these threats, the Martí-Maceo Society was able to attract the attention of Jim Hargrett, a local state representative at the time, who introduced a bill in the Florida legislature to grant the organization and its building a special status that would prevent its destruction (See Greenbaum, 2002:318). Although the bill (HB 899) was passed in April 1989, whether this legislation will benefit the organization is still in question.

The regulation of historic preservation occurs at multiple levels: federal, state, and local. Ybor City is one of four sites in the state of Florida to be recognized as a National Historic Landmark District, marking it as a significant site within the state (National Parks Service, 2008). At the state level, the Bureau of Historic Preservation within the Florida Division of Historical Resources provides a number of services to communities within the state, including architectural technical assistance, review of applications to the national historic register, compliance review of designated structures and communities, a number of grant programs, and a state folklife program. Ideally, these services and the state laws which govern historic preservation give residents a measure of power over development in their communities. Historic preservation uses the language of community
heritage as an impetus for salvaging or reconstruction of physical structures with an aim toward protecting “a portion of this country’s history for future generations, to provide continuity between past, present, and future, and to preserve a significant part of the cultural past or future scientific research” (Verrey and Henley 1991:76). Indeed, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA), which established federal preservation policy and was amended in 2000, provides for owner participation in the nomination process and in the event of future development (National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended through 2000 [With annotations]). Overall, the NHPA provides for the identification and review processes for structures and districts, and the protection of identified structures. However, it is at the local level where the relationships of power are most often negotiated. As this case shows, the issue of historic representation can become a source for conflict as meanings and identities are questioned and contested (Olwig, 1999; Bruner, 1996; Verrey and Henley, 1991).

Ultimately, communities may reject historic preservation efforts because of costs involved in required upkeep or a lack of clear benefits to individual property owners compared to the loss of autonomy over personal property (Verrey and Henley 1991:91-96). Howell (1994:150) cautions researchers about the ethics and “intellectual dangers” associated with the development of preservation projects as a basis for heritage tourism. In such cases, community residents may resist preservation efforts as attempts to co-opt or commodify history to attract visitors. In addition, there is the question of who receives the benefits, monetary or otherwise, with regard to such projects. Although the Martí-Maceo membership was not against preservation efforts in the 1990s, they were indeed actively challenging the representation of Ybor City that ignored their presence and could
have displaced their organization from the area for a second time in their history. Relying on numerous contacts and the relationship that they developed with Greenbaum, they were able to mobilize some support for their inclusion in the emerging historic district.

The attempts to ignore the Afro-Cuban presence in Ybor City, historic and contemporary, can be seen as part of a larger effort in the historic preservation movement in the United States. According to Page and Mason (2004:15),

…preservationists need to confront undesirable aspects of the movement’s own history – in perpetuating limited notions of American identity, in keeping the history of immigrants and African Americans off the National Register for so many years, in using history to perpetuate white racial supremacy. To this day, you can go long and far throughout the South, into cities and plantations, and learn very little about slavery, segregation, or racial violence. Preservationists have played their part in the cover-up...

It is important to add that there is also a dearth of information with regard to the positive aspects of the Black experience in this country, including thriving business districts, important schools, and other significant institutions that have not been noted within the National Register of Historical Landmarks. In this case, the silencing of the Black experience in Ybor City was part of a larger effort to highlight the important contributions of an immigrant community to the city, the state, and indeed, the nation, as a whole. Part of the rationale given for promoting the Ybor City district for inclusion on the national register is the contribution of immigrants to this country, as well as to the
development of the successful cigar industry of the 1890s (National Parks Service, 2008a). However, the narrative of inclusiveness and ethnic harmony was constructed in a way that systematically excluded the presence of Black Cubans who lived and worked within the current boundaries of the historic district and effectively silenced their contribution to the development of the historic community.

The exclusion of Black Cubans and African Americans from the historic preservation narrative being created for the Ybor City district is rooted in material changes to local communities resulting from state and market forces which have disproportionally marginalized and segregated poor and Black communities in this country, resulting in what has been called “American residential apartheid” (Low 1996:389). Examples of practices that have helped to create these current conditions include discriminatory lending practices promoting disinvestment in urban centers and “white flight” to suburban neighborhoods (Lyon-Callo and Hyatt 2003:179-180), housing abandonment in Black neighborhoods (Greenbaum 1993) and gentrification (Williams 1996). Ultimately, these and other practices have resulted in the displacement of entire communities and help to perpetuate popular notions about crumbling inner cities and the lazy poor through decisions and policies undertaken by elites.

**Marketing Ybor City Heritage**

Despite initial concerns that early redevelopment plans would result in displacement from Ybor City in the late 1980s and early 1990s, this outcome did not materialize. However, threats to the organization’s continued presence in Ybor City continued. Overcoming internal challenges to their leadership and a diminishing
membership roster, the organization was still operating and holding monthly meetings, 10 years after historic district designation was established. Shortly after the successful conclusion of the centennial project, plans for a new hotel and a trolley depot were announced for the block on which the Martí-Maceo building stands at the newly established archway to the historic district (Greenbaum, 2002:332). At a meeting with Martí-Maceo members and other local stakeholders in early 2001, YCDC representatives announced that the social hall was slated for demolition in 2003 to allow for the construction of complex of new storefronts, office buildings, and the hotel. However, YCDC representatives said that they were willing to negotiate a new space for the Martí-Maceo Society in another location. At this point, the threat of dislocation seemed even more palpable than it had a few years earlier. Although interest in the organization generated during the centennial project events had briefly resulted in an increased membership roster, the active number of members attending meetings rarely exceeded 25. In addition, the social hall, old but not old enough to be considered historic, was run down and needed a lot of work, including extensive electrical rewiring and constant problems with plumbing and the air conditioning system. The threat of a code violation became a near-constant theme during general membership meetings and in private conversations.

Once again, however, the concerns over the organization’s long-term well-being did not bear out. Although the trolley depot and the hotel were constructed in 2003, as planned, they were located across the street from the social hall, leaving the block on which the Martí-Maceo social hall continues to stand untouched. Martí-Maceo members began to attend public meetings concerning redevelopment in the historic district.
following the announcement projecting demolition of their social hall. Their presence, coupled with advocacy from Greenbaum with local officials more than likely showed heritage preservation officials that a second displacement of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo would not be an easy to enforce given the membership’s active participation in local meetings. The plans that had once seemed so menacing to Martí-Maceo’s future had failed to materialize entirely.

In the decade since historic designation status was conferred on Ybor City, a number of redevelopment projects were implemented in the district, including the rehabilitation of one of the old cigar factories (Ybor Square) as a small shopping and business office complex, a number of high priced condominiums at the northeast end of the district, and the Centro Ybor, a multi-million dollar shopping mall with movie theaters, and restaurants that was built on the site of the defunct Centro Español and which opened in 2000. Yet despite these large-scale construction projects, Ybor City redevelopment did not result in a thriving tourist destination. Perhaps the most significant feature associated with redevelopment in the district was the establishment of relaxed wet zoning laws designed to attract visitors and encourage the opening of bars and restaurants. In their efforts to create an “entertainment district,” city officials effectively created a district of bars and nightclubs that attracted rowdy crowds at night and kept most storefronts closed during daylight hours (Civic Design Associates and PMG Associates, 2005). While Centro Ybor was built, in part, to attract clientele to the area during regular business hours, reports of crime associated especially with drunken revelers did not bring the crowds that developers had expected (Garcia, 2008; Cridlin, 2005). Ybor Square, which was located two blocks behind the Martí-Maceo building,
also failed to materialize great enthusiasm on the part of shoppers, and in 2004 was refurbished a second time to increase the office space in the building. Ironically, the Martí-Maceo Society’s location on the far west end of the district, at least three blocks away from the action associated with the nightclubs and bars on Seventh Avenue proved to be an advantage for the organization which was largely left alone following construction of the hotel and depot nearby.

In their critical review of the history of the historic preservation movement in the United States, Page and Mason (2005) discuss the contradictions inherent to the marketing of heritage. They note that preservation efforts often emerge in opposition to the market (whether moralistic or political) [and these have] been a mainstay of preservation theory and action. Developers seek private gain; preservationists are interested in the public good. On the other hand, preservationists have often entered into a marriage with developers, bending over backward not to be against development. In the process of garnering a bit of the market’s power, they often promote the very real policies and forces that destroy the historic fabric of a place (Page and Mason, 2005:16).

Indeed, despite initial concerns about the effects that poor communities of color surrounding Ybor City would have on its success as a tourist destination, it appears that the very laws enacted to enhance the district’s appeal were keeping tourists away. Further, the lack of large-scale interest in the area was blamed for loss in revenue and a
concomitant accumulation of a million dollars in debt on the part of Centro Ybor owners, made further development in the area less attractive to potential business owners (St. Petersburg Times Editorial, 2004).

Despite the respite provided by the wane in Ybor City development, the members of the Martí-Maceo Society were not completely at ease. By 2005, the organization’s membership had further decreased. Although the organization was able to sustain itself by renting out its social hall and selling food and beverages during local festivals and parades that attracted huge crowds to the area, the costs of maintaining the building including property insurance, taxes, and general upkeep expenses, prohibited the organization from saving enough capital to fully renovate the building and limited the amount of funds they could spend on community events. Although the failed development plans had saved their building and most likely, the organization itself, the fact that it was located so far from all of the “action” on Seventh Avenue meant that very few visitors to the district walked past the social hall to peek in or read the historic maker that had been erected by the state Division of Historic Resources.

Even through the Martí-Maceo Society was recognized officially as a historic landmark by the city of Tampa in May 2008, it is still not clear whether the organization will ever be able to secure a place on the National Register of Historic Landmarks (NRHL) because of the criteria used in the designation process. According to the NRHL website (2009), properties submitted for consideration must meet the following:

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures,
and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

A. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or

B. That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or

C. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or

D. That have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Although an argument could be made that the Martí-Maceo Society meets NRHL criteria A, B, and D, the organization’s hall is not considered to possess architectural integrity (i.e. design, materials and workmanship associated with the structure) that would warrant its inclusion on the National Register. In addition, the NRHL specifically excludes from consideration structures that “have been moved from their original locations” unless they meet specific exceptions, most of which do not apply to the Martí-Maceo Society. The organization has twice attempted to submit an application to the state Division of Historic Resources for consideration of inclusion on the National Register, both of which have been rejected.
Local landmark designation has not necessarily allayed concerns regarding the potential for dislocation in the future should the economy and redevelopment efforts pick up given the social hall’s lack of architectural integrity. In fact, continued efforts to apply for national designation may bring renewed scrutiny to the quality of the organization’s building, potentially highlighting violations of historic district guidelines. The current financial condition in which the organization finds itself prohibits any large-scale rehabilitation of the building without the assistance of a grant writer and sympathetic stakeholders in the community.

Morgan, Morgan and Barrett (2006:706) contend that “the way preservation legislation is enacted in daily practice, often preferences properties whose contemporary stewards are relatively prosperous and well educated.” Although the current Martí-Maceo Society Directiva includes individuals with knowledge of how heritage preservation works and who helped to craft a successful application for landmark recognition at the local level, it lacks key allies or contacts that could advocate for their inclusion on the National Register at the state level. Further, while cultural resource legislation calls for local community involvement in the identification of significant places, the actual process of identification and determination may ultimately undermine stakeholder involvement (Morgan et al. 2006:710). The National Register, therefore, “is a very select list of properties that a very narrow segment of the U.S. public chose or had the wherewithal and interest to honor” (Morgan et al. 2006:710). As a result, spaces like the Marti-Maceo social hall, which embody a unique history and cultural perspective, and which is considered to be a significant marker by its members are often excluded from the prestige and material benefits accorded to the properties deemed to be of social significance.
The redevelopment of Ybor City continues, albeit slowly. Despite some legal wrangling between the city and developers, taxpayer funds were used to bail the Centro Ybor out of its multi-million dollar debt, and the shopping mall has been slated for a makeover that will add more business offices in spaces that now sit empty (Zick, 2007). Residents have moved into the condominiums, despite a significant drop in market prices announced for what were originally advertised as a “luxury” housing development. The Martí-Maceo Society has even been included to some degree in the ongoing march pressing for redevelopment. A snapshot of the iconic Cuban general, Antonio Maceo, taken from the mural on the west side of the Martí-Maceo social hall adorns marketing posters and billboards designed to attract tourism to the area (YCDC, 2008). Yet, even the city acknowledges that Ybor City redevelopment has not materialized into the booming tourist destination and community that would once again (as it had nearly a century ago) catapult Tampa to greatness. In 2005, the YCDC commissioned a group of design consultants to prepare a report on progress and challenges related to the redevelopment of Ybor City. The report culminated in a five year plan and recommended a number of physical changes, revision of the lax wet zoning ordinances, and more stringent administration of redevelopment in the area (Civic Design Associates and PMG Associates, 2005). Some of these changes, like construction of much needed parking garages, have already been completed. However, the ongoing redevelopment of Ybor City will require substantial funds, many of which will likely come from taxpayers (Zink 2004).

It is not clear whether the Martí-Maceo Society will ultimately benefit from ongoing redevelopment in the Ybor City Historic District. Their efforts to secure historic
landmark designation at the state and federal levels have been dismissed out of hand because of the loss of their social hall. As noted earlier, the socioeconomic forces that led to the demolition of the original Martí-Maceo building were part of the larger process of neoliberalism and globalization, which have physically altered local communities in ways that have often further marginalized subordinate groups, especially populations of color and poor communities (Lyon-Callo and Hyatt 2003; Rodriguez 1998). While the threats of displacement have currently abated, some members continue to press for landmark designation at the federal level.

For Ernest, inclusion of the organization on the National Register would be a culmination of all previous efforts to formalize the organization. In response to why he continues to support this effort, he responded:

We’ve accomplished since the short time that I’ve been with the organization. We got a 501(c) 3 status that, you know, we’d been working on for years. We got our liquor license that we got in trouble with before. We got the city historic status [from the city], you know? So, I think we, we wouldn’t want to lose all of that because all that we’ve worked for would be all in vain. So, I think…and the objective now and I feel strongly feel about this, we need to get the state and national designation. Historical designation. [sic]

That would give us some credibility, at least. At least with the Round Table…and that’s what we should have. That’s what bothers me
that they don’t consider us historical [sic] on a simple technicality of the building. It doesn’t make any sense. We’re just as old as the other clubs.

Historic designation at the national level would, in Ernest’s opinion, provide the Martí-Maceo Society with credibility or legitimacy in the eyes of heritage officials and the other ethnic societies, which he feels the organization lacks and which currently restricts access to funds could help them renovate and maintain the Martí-Maceo social hall. For Ernest, this would place the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo on par with the other societies in Ybor City —thereby overturning the hegemonic order that has marginalized Tampa’s Black Cuban community in various ways throughout the history of Ybor City. Given the organization’s current reality, however, this goal may remain unfulfilled.
CHAPTER EIGHT
WITH AN EYE TOWARD THE NEXT 100 YEARS

“We Need To Do Something”: Recommendations from Members

Although the Martí-Maceo Directiva has played an important role in the organization’s continued existence, the general membership actively guides overall decision-making. Tradition holds that all important decisions must be voted on by the general membership—a practice that is also outlined in the Martí-Maceo by-laws. Although this practice has been lamented by directiva members occasionally due to the time often given to discussions preceding votes, it continues. Robust discussion and shared decision-making formed the cornerstone upon which the mutual aid society depended to encourage active participation on the part of members who stood to gain from the communal benefits such an organization afforded. In recent years, however, continuous and at times, contentious discussion of how best to proceed in establishing a stronger presence in the Ybor City historic district and establishing more formal operational procedures, has often led to inaction or open conflict among sub-groups within the membership. Often, these factions are divided along family lines and disagreements are rarely resolved as part of an overall problem-solving and strategizing plan related to the organization’s future.

Despite such friction, the Black Cuban members who continue to attend meetings and events at the Martí-Maceo Society generally feel that it is important to continue to
support the organization and to work toward making it a strong and viable one that will
thrive in the coming decades. When asked, many of the members with ties to the society
spanning nearly a century say they feel it’s important for the organization to endure.
Ernest, who has served on the directiva various times in the past decade, articulates this
shared sentiment well:

It’s important because it’s our history. The work that all of our ancestors
did, our parents and grandparents. They worked hard so that we could
have a place that we could be proud of. We can’t let [the organization] go.
That would be a tremendous loss if we were to let…if Martí-Maceo were
to fall. I see it as my legacy to keep it going.

Ernest’s sentiments were echoed by Jessica, who is considered to be one of the “younger
members” since she is in her mid-50s. She cited the importance of long-term family
involvement over generations and heritage in her continued participation.

We [her siblings] grew up going there. We went to so many events there,
even if it was just people playing dominoes, you know? There were
always people there we knew – we knew everybody. And it was really
nice because the whole family was there and you knew all of them. And
you knew they had been going there forever. It was like one big family,
and all those people had a history there…I think it’s important to keep that
alive, that’s why I keep coming back.
For Jessica and some of the other younger members, whose ages range from the early 30s to their mid 50s, the memories associated with “Martí-Maceo” as it is most often referred to by members, have very little to do with the cigar industry and the mutual aid strategies that enabled their ancestors to achieve a measure of upward mobility in segregated Tampa. Rather, her comments and those of a number of other members in this age range also evince the notion that the Martí-Maceo Society is an important institution in their lives and one whose presence could be counted on from childhood through adulthood. While not the “cradle to grave” assistance that the mutual aid society traditionally offered, this sense of belonging to a larger community was often recalled as “important” and was often followed by an expressed desire to recreate those moments and to entice former members to return.

However, a number of members felt that in general the younger generation “just wasn’t interested” in the organization anymore for a number of reasons. For Humberto, those reasons had more to do with a lack of activities for individuals under 50 years of age.

*No hay ambiente. Yo se que lo han arreglado y que han cambiado muchas cosas. El salón está muy bonito. Pero no hay nada que hacer allí para los jóvenes. Cuando llegan mis sobrinas, mi nieto, se sientan allí aburridos.*

*Nosotros ya estamos en la esquina pa’ doblar. Así. Tu sabes. [Se rie.]*

(The environment is no good for younger people. I know that they’ve made a lot of changes and they’ve fixed it up very nicely, but there is
nothing to do there for these young people. When my nieces, my grandson
go there, they’re bored. We [older members] are already on our way out.
You know what I mean. [Laughs.]

Admittedly, of the 17 active Black Cuban members that agreed to respond to
surveys only five were aged 30 to 60. In my 10 years of fieldwork, the organization has
had a difficult time attracting individuals in their 20s and 30s to their events and
meetings. Although some of the members interviewed expressed comments that were
similar to Humberto’s, they also felt that an organization like Martí-Maceo just doesn’t
appeal to younger generations of Black Cubans. For Bill, this lack of interest had much to
do with the end of segregation.

The younger kids today, they can go anywhere. You know? They’re not
limited like we were. They don’t have to worry about what color they are
or what part of town they’re going to. So there are all these places that are
open to them now. How are we going to compete with that?

The other three members who shared Bill’s sentiments were generally much older (mid-
70s to mid-80s) men who had lived through segregation and/or participated in activities
supporting the Civil Rights Movement. Interestingly enough, many of these respondents
also reported feeling that today’s youth were less concerned about color or race and that
as a result, didn’t feel that they had to socialize within a closed (Black) community.
However, these individuals also generally reported that they felt it important to make sure
the younger generation knows and understands the history of shared struggle for civil
rights and that perhaps, continued participation in the organization could help in this
regard.

Three respondents, including one former member and two active members,
reported feeling discouraged about the organization’s future and said they felt that the
organization was “dying” or that it would eventually “fade away.” They felt that although
considerable effort was once again being placed into a more recent renovation of the
social hall’s interior (completed in 2009 and which had resulted in increased rentals), the
organization was not able to maintain a steady roster of active members.

Lourdes: I tell you honestly. I’m not sure what’s going to happen. I don’t
like to say it, you know. But it just seems like no matter what we do, we
can’t get people to come in and stay for the good of the club. To help us
grow it more. I mean, it’s sad when you think about it. We spent a lot of
time and money there but we just can’t seem to get it together. And I
really don’t know what’s going to happen.

Despite such gloomy pronouncements, all of the respondents provided
recommendations or suggestions for how to help the Martí-Maceo Society become a
viable and self-sustaining organization. Many of them were concerned with attracting a
younger crowd for events and eventually, as members. Suggestions included hosting
happy hour events targeted at younger age groups with popular music and working with
the Círculo Cubano to include members of the Martí-Maceo Society as part of their
Krewe of Mambi, which participates in the yearly Gasparilla Night Parade. A few members noted that their children or other relatives had chosen to join the Círculo Cubano instead of the Marti-Maceo Society to participate in this and other activities that tend to attract a younger crowd.

A number of members talked about having to make personal donations for more than a decade to help the struggling organization make payments on utilities or to ensure that events were held as planned. Those that gave most often (as noted in general membership meeting minutes) were members who were retired and lived on fixed incomes. A few of them shared privately that donating on a regular basis was a hardship for them but that they did so out of a sense of obligation and duty. As a result, a majority of respondents noted that it was important to begin establishing steady revenue streams and were quick to point out that the recent upswing in hall rentals were helping to some extent. However, a number of members also noted that activities such as regular domino nights or other social functions aimed at members, as well as the larger community might also help.

A few members noted that the organization’s federal nonprofit status was not being used to secure grants or donations from corporate entities. This would also require developing activities and events to benefit the wider community and demonstrate a charitable purpose. As Ernest noted:

We need to investigate funding that is available to us as a nonprofit organization. We should do things that are charitable that attract people and organizations that want to work together to help the community. No
one is going to donate to us if we don’t show that we are working toward something. We should have scholarships and give money to children in high school and provide mentorship. We need to start activities for the elderly members to help improve their quality of life. We just can’t be satisfied with where we are because we’re not doing that much.

One former member also suggested that the organization research ways to seek compensation from the city or the state for the demolition of its original social hall. Still other members noted that it was important to publicize events with advance notice in wider media outlets rather than relying on word of mouth, which has not often resulted in high attendance rates at events.

These very practical recommendations offered by members touch upon the need for increased structure and formalization within the organization, if such suggestions are to be successfully implemented. Within industrial psychology and management literature, organizational structure has been defined as the formal distribution of operational functions (especially when referring to particular work positions) that work together to ensure attainment of an organization’s goals (Porras and Robertson 1992). Formalization refers to “clear role definition, written guidelines regarding duties and responsibilities of board members, and written procedures” (Bar-Mor & Iecovich 2006:10). Implementation of these larger organizational functions is often thought to provide order and ultimately, predictability and control of events within a given organization to achieve stated goals and objectives, and most often such concepts are applied in research that investigates work or corporate environments (See Sutton and Kahn 1987). Although this study does
not aim to assess the organizational effectiveness (See Rojas 2000) of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo, the use of such concepts may be helpful in outlining additional recommendations to help this ethnic society strengthen its current viability and expand beyond what often operates as an informal and rather small grouping of like-minded individuals. Much of the basic infrastructure is already in place: general membership meetings have been held at the same time on a recurring monthly basis for over 10 years, and despite occasional crises within the directiva in the last five years, a functioning governing board continues to preside over the organization.

Literature on organizational effectiveness and the role of nonprofits and the degree to which they are formalized may also provide some insight into the ways that the Martí-Maceo Society can work to strengthen its infrastructure in order to expand its membership and yearly calendar of activities (See Kushner and Poole 1996; Meyer, Tsui, and Hinings 1993; Bradshaw, Murray & Wolpin 1992). Much of this literature is focused on larger organizations with a formal Board of Directors, which oversees and supports the work of a paid manager (e.g. Executive Director or Chief Executive Officer) and additional staff. In contrast, the Marti-Maceo governing board is made up of a small group of volunteer members who are responsible for overseeing the successful completion of necessary operational tasks. Kushner and Poole’s (1996) research on the relationship between structure and effectiveness in nonprofit organizations—some of which rely on substantial numbers of volunteers and are identified as being “grassroots” in character—indicates that an organization’s structural configuration (related to the division of labor and the degree to which organizational members participate in decision-making39) does not predict higher measures of effectiveness. Rather, they found that a “failure to adopt a configuration”

39 Kushner and Poole (1996:126) define the various configurations related to strategic decision-making within an organization as “diffusion of influence.”
(emphasis mine) which formally outlines and actively implements specific labor and decision-making roles resulted in poor effectiveness ratings and increased difficulty for such organizations to maintain operational viability (Kushner and Poole 1996:132). Literature on grassroots social movements also suggests that formalization can be beneficial to organizations despite critiques contending that formalization and expansion of grassroots social movements tend to stifle protest (See Piven and Cloward 1977).

The research literature on small voluntary associations/nonprofit organizations much like the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo is fairly limited. Smith and Shen (2006) argue that assumptions in the literature about nonprofit effectiveness have been developed largely on research with larger organizations that depend on paid managerial staff. Most studies about nonprofit effectiveness, they argue, can’t adequately assess how well smaller volunteer nonprofits might operate. Although Smith and Shen (2006:286) actually measure “reputational effectiveness” or perceptions of effectiveness reported by leaders of other voluntary nonprofits within a given community, they generate a list of recommendations for smaller organizations: increase formalization and operational existence, serve a public benefit, and standardize governing officers, committees, and boards of directors, when possible. While their study may not highlight causal factors that can enhance organizational effectiveness, the perception of effectiveness on the part of other nonprofit leaders and stakeholders within a given community may be relevant to the Martí-Maceo Society given the context in which it finds itself today.

For an organization that is interested in establishing a larger presence within a historic district and eventually securing national historic landmark status, the ability to project itself as an “effective organization” with a stable membership working toward an identified mission may prove beneficial when seeking support from community
stakeholders and local historic preservation officials. Of more immediate importance for the Martí-Maceo Society, which includes a number of members who feel strongly about increasing its current viability, efforts to increase structure and formalization can help facilitate its day-to-day operations. Leaving aside the question of whether they can successfully attain recognition as a historic landmark at the national level, improvement of their current operational procedures could help the organization work in a more efficient manner and establish a foundation upon which to build a larger and more stable membership roster. Moreover as noted in Chapter 4, the organization has the rudimentary elements of infrastructure in place. The earliest set of by-laws (or Reglamento, which was developed and circulated in Spanish only) that I was able to review as I worked to help them revise a new set were dated to the 1920s. These by-laws had been revised in the 1960s (and were circulated in English and Spanish) and were in place until the organization updated them again in 2001. The Martí-Maceo Society has also maintained throughout its history a stable body of governing officers, which at minimum has included a president, secretary and treasurer. According to organizational documents and members’ recollections, a vice-president has also been an active part of the directiva for the better part of the 20th Century. Given these characteristics, the Martí-Maceo Society provides example of an organization that uses grassroots decision-making within Kushner and Poole’s (1996) organizational configuration framework,

While the basic elements suggested by the management literature appear to be in place, what appears to be lacking is the effective implementation of the operational tools afforded by the existence of such functions. For instance although formal by-laws have been continuously updated and in place for at least 80 years, the average member could
not produce a copy of one of the previous sets when they were revised in 2001. Procedures for revision of the by-laws were followed according to the by-laws in effect at the time, and culminated in the distribution of completed copies to the entire membership. However, by 2008 when a new effort to revise the by-laws was agreed upon, only a very small number members who had been active during the 2001-2002 period still had copies of the by-laws for review. Finally, as illustrated in Chapters Four and Five, the degree of work and responsibility that falls on the directiva president can often present a challenge, resulting in an abrupt change before a term ends or lack of continuity from one governing board to the next.

**Collective Identity and Organizational Memory**

Perhaps the most important feature lacking when examining the organizational aspects of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo is an articulated identity, which is also reflected in mission and vision statements and which members have accepted and can relate to others. Although the formal development of an organizational identity with concomitant mission and vision statements are relevant to discussions of formalization, the articulation of a collective identity or lack thereof appears to reflect the racial dynamics and contested discourse on identity at work within the particular organization. Forester’s work (2004) with a majority Black and immigrant labor union investigates organizational practices such as promotion of a distinct collective identity which relies on a narrative frame that emphasizes a progressive history and the collective struggle for civil rights.
This narrative is shaped by recollections of a strike led by progressive union members (mainly Jewish and Black social service workers) in the 1960s who eventually secured an historic collective bargaining agreement with the city. This defining episode in the history of the union has been established as an “organizational memory” that is used by union leadership to mobilize its constituents, as well as to promote cohesion and a sense of belonging to the organization (Forester 2004:391-392). Interestingly, this organizational memory has also helped leaders to redefine Blackness related to the union’s constituency. Whereas previously the union identified primarily as a Black organization (i.e. Black or African American, following an increase in these members and a general decrease in the number of Jewish members), an influx of immigrants from various parts of the world, particularly from Africa and the Caribbean, required the development of a new discourse that allowed for an expansion of Blackness to one that is more pan-African and that is inclusive of other communities of color. Moreover while this new category includes diverse Black immigrants, is inclusive of other ethnic groups of color who have experienced discrimination or marginalization (Forester 2004:393-394).

Organizational memory, then, forms a part of a cultural repertoire (along with ritual celebrations and formal recruitment practices), which the union leadership uses to communicate its identity. Use of this cultural repertoire (Clemens and Minkoff 2004) promotes inclusiveness and helps to shape the discourse on the organization’s history, mission and its legacy in a consistent manner that most, if not all, of its members can relate to. This process is not without its challenges or conflict as Forester notes in relating her fieldwork experiences; union members from different ethnic groups regularly express
distrust or experience conflict over cultural misunderstandings or negative conceptions about other ethnic groups. However, this particular study shows the powerful use of an accepted shared memory in helping to shape a collective identity that facilitates the work of an organization comprised of diverse members.

Although the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo in its current configuration is vastly different from an established labor union, there are many parallels to be drawn between it and the union examined as part of Forester’s work. In its early days, the Martí-Maceo Society provided a regular and safe meeting space for progressive and radical laborers, many of whom participated in important cigar strikes (Greenbaum 2002). Thus, some of its current and former members can recall family discussion of involvement in industry strife and one could argue that this history constitutes a legacy for the organization. More importantly perhaps, from its inception it acquired a racialized identity as a result of internal divisions within the Cuban population of Ybor City and the racially discriminatory laws of the era. In addition, a number of the elderly members have reported some personal involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, and acknowledge a shared history of collective struggle against marginalization and exclusion within Ybor City, historically, and in the historic district’s contemporary efforts to outline its history. In recent years, the organization has witnessed an increasing diversity among its members which now includes African Americans who attend meetings fairly regularly, as well as Spaniards, Italians, and White Americans. Aside from this change in the membership’s composition, there are competing visions among the members over just what Black Cuban identity means to them personally, and how it should be reflected or projected by the organization as a whole.
As they work to build the Martí-Maceo Society and expand its membership, the leadership might consider examining the ways in which they communicate the organization’s identity and how this defines its rituals, activities and events (See Forester 2004; Taylor and Whittier 1992; Poletta and Jasper 2001). Throughout most of the past decade, it appeared that the organization’s identity was closely tied to efforts aimed at staking a claim within the larger history being written and circulated about the diverse Ybor City ethnic enclave which often ignored the existence and experiences of Black Cubans and segregated mutual aid societies within the community. Over time however, it is not clear that this conceptualization has been consistently communicated to or that it remains acceptable to the general membership. Competing visions as to the identity of the Martí-Maceo Society, some of which were identified in Chapter Six have not been examined or incorporated into a larger, more cohesive notion of collective identity. Some of the members who call for recognition of a Cuban national identity before all others advocate for active support of a very conservative political agenda with a strong anti-Castro and anti-revolutionary sentiment. Others, who propose that the organization adopt an identity that is more “American” in character, focus on either emphasizing the multiple ties to Tampa’s African American community or conversely, to diminish emphasis on race (e.g. Blackness) and to resurrect the organization as a diverse, multi-ethnic, multi-racial organization that seeks to celebrate Black Cuban heritage. But the larger question of what the organization stands for and to what end its members are working remains unclear.

In discussions during general membership meetings within the past year, there has been growing contention over how much emphasis should be given to Black or Afro-
Cuban identity when describing the organization to the public at large or through media outlets and in flyers when advertising events. During such discussions, Richard, the current president, has continuously asserted that the membership’s shared history of collective struggle against discrimination and exclusion is precisely related to the fact that the organization and its members were identified throughout their history as Black, and that this identification is precisely what makes the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo unique within the Ybor City historic district. While some members agree wholeheartedly with this position, those that disagree stress the importance of building new relationships with other communities, particularly those represented by the other mutual aid societies still in existence: (White) Cubans, Italians, and Spaniards. They further argue that too much of an emphasis on race and what might be perceived (by other stakeholders) as resentment over the treatment that Black Cubans received in the past could reduce opportunities for dialogue and even, diminish their chances to increase organization’s visibility in the community. More importantly, these members argue that a continued emphasis on Blackness might diminish support for any future bids to secure national historic landmark status. Interestingly, the members who most often make this argument are younger (in their late 40s through mid-50s), have at least one African American parent, and either are or have been married to an African American. Coming from this small faction, it’s difficult to argue that their motivation is simply about denigrating Black identity at an individual level. Rather, they say, it is important to be strategic in negotiating relationships with a long history of contention and mistrust and that are only recently being established.
These contemporary discussions have not yielded consensus related to the collective identity of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo and its membership or the way in which the organization is promoted within the community. Information about the organization that is distributed to the public through a variety of means may differ depending on who is called upon to disseminate the information.\footnote{The majority of such materials are printed flyers because the organization did not have its own website until 2008.} For instance, discrepancies in the founding date of the organization were circulated in a variety of documents, including letterhead and newsletters (which proclaim the organization “An Ybor City institution since 1900”) and other documents, such as the mission statement, that establish the founding date of the sociedad as 1904.\footnote{This discrepancy arises from recognition of different dates that may be equally valid related to the founding of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo. A Black Cuban mutual aid society formed by members ejected from the original Club Nacional Cubano was founded in 1900 under a different name. These individuals later merged with a smaller Black Cuban organization in 1904 to officially form the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo. Organization founders and current members ancestors’ would have been represented by members of both of these early Black Cuban organizations.} More recently, flyers that advertise Happy Hour at the “Martí-Maceo Afro-Cuban club” have been circulated, as have others that identify the organization as “the Cuban Club Patio,” the colloquial term by which African Americans and English-speaking Black Cubans referred to the organization in the past (ca. late-1940s to the early 1960s). Discussion at a general membership meeting within the past six months resulted in a call to cease referring to the organization as an “Afro-Cuban” one and for continued use of the term, “Cuban Club Patio.” The rationale given was that while “Afro-Cuban” had never been used to describe the Martí-Maceo Society previously, the second term was one that had actually been used in advertisements circulated in past years and used widely enough that Tampa’s established Black community would be familiar with it. However, reinforcing use of the
second term also removed any overt association with an African-derived identifier for the organization and its activities.

Ultimately, such discussions and the decisions that emerge from them with regard to organizational practice will have to focus on consistency of message rather than perceived accuracy to a given version of Black Cuban history or legacy. As Blight (2001) notes, nostalgia and memory are constructed and reconstructed as a way of reinterpreting the past in order to make sense of current-day circumstances. Alonso (1994:389) further posits that

nationalist re-presentations of the past, produced by those in the control of the state system, appropriate and transform local and regional histories and the memories of subordinated groups through the strategies of naturalization, idealization, and de-particularization. Pasts that cannot be incorporated are privatized and particularized, consigned to the margins of the national and denied a fully public voice.

The construction and (reconstruction) of memory is most often conducted as part of a nationalist process which seeks to marginalize the history of subordinated groups through evocations of nostalgia for a past that excludes these groups. Alonso’s characterization of how the state manipulates memory and nostalgia to its own ends provides an apt description of the conditions in which the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo finds itself within the political landscape of Ybor City heritage preservation. The nostalgic version of history created by historic preservation elites is one that characterized the Ybor City
immigrant enclave as an ideal community in which industrious workers overcame ethnic divisions and propelled Tampa to greatness. This version of Ybor City history, which has been widely circulated neglects or minimizes the presence of Black Cubans, African Americans, and cigar workers with radical leanings. However, as Williams (1991:31) notes, when the nation-state appropriates the cultural products and practices of subordinate groups, it allows for the discursive spaces through which subordinate groups may challenge their positionality.

If this dissertation has made a contribution in this area of inquiry, it has been to outline the degree to which Black Cubans in Tampa —throughout their immigrant trajectory— have been active agents in challenging the structural conditions they have confronted over time. More importantly, these efforts have not been limited to the development of a thriving organization in the face of exclusion and mistreatment in a distant past. Black Cubans in Tampa have consistently challenged dominant ideologies used to define what constitutes a Cuban, a Black person, and perhaps more importantly, membership within particular communities, understood as changing over time. They have done so using evolving strategies that can often be found within the dominant discourses on race, ethnicity, and the stratification of society (or rather, societies) that dictate hierarchies based on identity at various historical moments. As Williams notes (1991:29), “hegemonic ideas about belonging and not belonging in racial and cultural terms often converge in state and nonstate institutional practices through which subjects are shaped in ways that are at once specific and diffused.” The recent history of the Martí-Maceo Society and its members suggests that such struggles continue despite ongoing challenges to continued existence of the organization.
While competing visions of Black Cuban identity articulated by Martí-Maceo members have validity and are based on the subjective experiences of key factions within the organization, it will be up to the society’s current leaders to decide upon which narrative frame to build an organizational identity and mission that will allow the organization to grow and eventually, prosper within the historic district as a recognized stakeholder. To date, this has not occurred.

Conclusions

In research conducted with Black Cuban members of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo, I chose to examine how notions of individual and collective identity inform efforts to reestablish the organization into a viable community organization in the Ybor City historic district. As highlighted in various portions of this dissertation, members’ notions of ethnic and racial identity emerge consistently in discussions that center on the future of the Martí-Maceo Society. While these discussions very often reflect perceptions related to individual understandings of ethnic or racial identity (such as Milagros’ contention that she is “Cuban first, whether White or Black), they can be more accurately understood as providing a framework upon which competing notions of Black Cuban collective identity is built.

One of the main research questions posed at the outset of this research study had to do with understanding how the examination of the Black Cuban identity in Tampa can inform us related to theories on immigrant adaptation and racial identity formation. Researchers like Rodríguez (2000) and Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) contend that the increasing presence of Latin American and Caribbean immigrants challenges the biracial
system of identification that characterizes this country, due in part to different
conceptions of race among these immigrants, who tend to recognize a wider range of
racial categories and the potential for mobility between these. However, this may not
necessarily be the case for Black Hispanics given the persistence of race as a means for
stratifying populations in this country (Benson 2006; Harrison 1995; Waters 1999;

It also doesn’t appear to have been the case for the Black Cuban community in
Tampa. While maintaining certain ethnic practices allowed them to enjoy freedom of
movement and association with non-Blacks within the Ybor City enclave, such privileges
were not afforded them in wider Tampa social circles and did not come without
difficulties and discrimination within the enclave. As much as segregation and
discriminatory laws may have played a role in the need for establishing a separate Black
Cuban organization, discrimination by White Cubans and other White immigrants who
sought to differentiate themselves from Blacks in the eyes of the larger power structure
appears to have played an equally important role. As a result, this population experienced
segregation and social exclusion within Ybor City despite their ethnic difference from
African Americans.

This research therefore can be more accurately construed as contributing to
literature that focuses increased attention on the growing diversity of Black populations
in this country. Most recently, this research has focused on increases in immigration from
sub-Saharan Africa and the Latin America/the Caribbean with large Black populations
(Insert citations). My research with the members of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo
suggests persistence in acknowledging a Cuban ethnicity well into the fourth generation
within this population, although this may only be the case with those individuals who continue to associate themselves with this Cuban heritage organization. More research is needed with a representative sample of individuals who identify as being Black and of Cuban descent, many of whom are no longer affiliated with this ethnic society, to learn whether variables such as socioeconomic status and parents’ countries of origin/stated identity play a role in such preferences (See Waters 1999). Moreover, although current members may have expressed less willingness to support a racialized collective identity for the organization as a whole, they were more likely to use a racialized Cuban identity when identifying themselves as individuals. This differs from the way in which members 20 years ago most often chose to identify themselves when responding to the same item: as Cuban or Cuban-American. Although these surveys were conducted with small convenience samples that prohibit generalization to the wider Black Cuban population, these findings do suggest that among members there has been a growing acceptance of Black identity at the individual level, coupled with a continued desire to identify as Cuban, as well. These findings contrast with research conducted with other Black immigrant populations (See Benson 2006; Waters 1999).

Another key research question guided this study had to do with the continued existence of a Black Cuban community in Tampa. Because this research did not incorporate a representative sample of Black Cubans in Tampa, it offers no definitive response as to whether a Black Cuban community continues to exist in Tampa outside of the members of the Martí-Maceo Society. During his tenure as directiva president, Richard has often noted that when he goes to funerals he sees former members and their extended families gathered suggesting that the descendants of this community continue to
live in Tampa and socialize with each other (at least during key life events), but they choose not affiliate with the organization. Despite repeated invitations on the part of members who encounter these individuals at family functions and other gatherings, the organization has not been successful in attracting them. As a result, the Martí-Maceo Society appears to represent an important historical institution for a community that is largely absent from its day-to-day affairs.

It is likely that the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo serves as a key source of community for its small roster of members. Most of the remaining Black Cuban members of the sociedad share multiple kinship ties that have persisted in some cases for more than a generation. As a mutual aid society, the organization afforded Tampa’s Black Cubans access to economic resources and cultural capital or knowledge and values that are developed distinctly within particular classes or social groups (See Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). It also allowed for the transmission of this cultural knowledge to subsequent generations, thereby culturally and socially reproducing the Black Cuban community, as characterized by Bourdieu’s (1990[1980]) concept of habitus. Although the contemporary membership has dwindled to very low numbers and despite the contention among current members regarding the organization’s collective identity and mission, this process of social reproduction may account for the persistence of a Cuban identity among present-day members.

The preceding discussion on the degree to which a Black Cuban community exists within Tampa begs the following question: What purpose does the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo serve? Judging from members’ responses at various junctures during the past decade, the main purpose is to prevent the organization from closing in honor of the
work and struggle their ancestors encountered in the hostile Jim Crow environment of the Deep South. My informants clearly feel that if the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo closes its doors, knowledge of the contributions and the history of the Black Cuban community will disappear. A number of activities to date including, the work of Greenbaum in documenting and publishing the organization’s history, the acquisition of a historic marker in front of the current social hall, and the designation of the property as a local landmark can be seen as concrete steps taken that will continue to honor the community and organization’s historical legacy. For instance, researchers are currently able to access a number of organizational records, archives, and photos through the University of South Florida special collections archives to learn more about the Martí-Maceo Society.

Although each of the of Ybor City’s historic mutual aid societies have been in decline for decades, only the Martí-Maceo Society was displaced and as a result, no longer has equal access to resources available to the other ethnic societies in the district. This outcome is more than simply happenstance, and for present-day members, the loss of their organization and their property would mean that the forces that sought to erase them and their contributions to the development of the district will have won.

However, although the organization has taken steps to formalize, it has largely failed to build upon such efforts to increase its membership and to reach out to their extended family members and friends who may share a distant familial tie to the Martí-Maceo Society. One of the biggest challenges noted when observing efforts to strengthen the organization is that the leadership has yet to articulate a collective identity that resonates with the existing membership and that can be used to mobilize efforts to attract
new members. This effort will more than likely prove to challenge existing resources of the directiva or governing board and may require them to seek technical assistance to solidify the jobs and duties of the governing officers, as well as to develop strategies for operationalizing the formal mechanisms which may already be in place (i.e. mission/vision statements, articulation of goals, etc.) and to communicate these effectively to the membership and eventually, to the public.

While the original mutual aid society established by Black Cuban cigarworkers served as an adaptive mechanism for a segregated population of immigrants (See Woodard, 1987; Sassen-Koob, 1979; Kerri 1976), the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo, as it now stands, doesn’t appear to. But then again, this is probably true for all of the historic ethnic societies in Ybor City. None of them work with new immigrants to help them adjust to this city and country. For Spanish and Italian members of these existing societies, the present-day conditions and immigrant flows are radically different from the ones that brought their grandparents. With regard to Cubans, more recent arrivals are not settling in Ybor City and have found other Hispanic neighborhoods in which to settle. All of the former mutual aid societies now serve to celebrate the previous generations from which they are descended.

As noted, earlier, however, the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo has provided Black Cubans with a physical space which sits on property that is held in collective ownership by the members themselves. Within this space, members have continued to socialize with each other, extended family members, friends, and at times, community members invited to a particular event. More importantly, this space has allowed Martí-Maceo members to work together and share resources in the face of adversity. Despite
differences between members concerning the organization’s identity and its future
direction, the members of the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo have been successful in
working together to construct alternate discourses that challenge their sub-altern position
within Ybor City. However, in the end, this may not be enough.

In order for the organization to reach the goal of stabilization and expansion, the
organization has its work cut out for it. Throughout the past decade the Martí-Maceo
Society’s leadership has taken steps to formalize the organization, including nonprofit
incorporation, developing a calendar of regular activities, and attempting to reach out to
wider contacts within the community. Yet despite these efforts, they have not given as
much thought to the work that goes into maintaining the organizational infrastructure that
has been established, nor the human capital to ensure that established processes are
followed and/or modified when needed. Without addressing these issues, the organization
will not be able to grow much more beyond its current scope— an outcome that runs
counter to the expressed wishes of the majority of members who would like to see the
organization thrive once more.

The Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo may be able to keep its doors open for
another decade by relying on the incorporation of younger Black Cuban members, like
Jessica. However, the organization will have to make a concerted effort to attract large
numbers of younger members given that the majority of members today are in their late
70s and early 80s. Moreover, new generations will bring a different perspective on the
organization’s identity and how it represents their community. They may also develop
new ways to counter the marginalized position that the Martí-Maceo Society occupies
within the Ybor City historic district. However, the impetus for facilitating the emergence
of this or other scenarios requires a great amount of work on the part of the current membership. It remains to be seen whether they can overcome internal conflicts and work in a concerted fashion to address the organizational issues hampering their growth and continue to stake a claim within local heritage preservation efforts.

This research contributes to a wider body of literature focused on identity formation within immigrant populations with long-term settlement in this country. In particular, it demonstrates how understandings of racial and ethnic identity are contingent upon larger market forces that change over time and place. Research with the Black Cuban community in Tampa challenges findings which suggest that Black immigrants uniformly experience a racialization process that leads to a shared group identity with African Americans and minimizes ethnic differences by the second and third generation of settlement in this country (See Benson 2006; Waters 1999). As my work suggests, affiliation to the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo appears to provide a relatively insular social space where descendents of Black Cuban immigrants have been able to share cultural knowledge that most likely has resulted in continued affirmation of Cuban identity into the fourth generation of settlement.

This research also highlights the degree to which racism functions as part of a hegemonic process practiced within nation-states by groups that control the means of production and which seek to homogenize heterogeneous groups and delegitimizes cultural forms that fall outside the proscribed mainstream (Williams 1991). The insular nature of the sociedad was shaped by state-sanctioned racism in the post-colonial South, as well as discrimination within Ybor City practiced by White Cubans (and other immigrants) with a more recent experience of slavery and the subordination of recently
imported Africans. Research with Black Cuban members of the Martí-Maceo Society illustrates numerous instances over their history where they have seized the opportunity to use the rhetoric and discourse employed by elite classes to contest their marginality, as they did when they sought to challenge contemporary versions of Ybor City history by placing themselves squarely within narratives that sought to exclude them. However while prevailing ideologies related to identity may allow for subaltern groups to contest their marginalization, these efforts are largely “limited by hegemonic processes of inscription and by the relations of the forces in society” (Alonso 1994: 392).

Examination of micro-level processes within the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo illustrates the organizational challenges faced by a shrinking membership of mostly elderly members. The organization could benefit from formalization of operational processes upon which members could further build and expand the sociedad. Although new members have joined from time to time, factions have emerged that hamper such efforts. Divisions among members center on contested notions of collective identity rooted in individual understandings of Black Cuban identity. The ongoing friction over these divisions has constrained opportunities for building upon incremental gains made by the organization as a whole (e.g. incorporation and increased revenues from rentals, etc.), and has made it vulnerable to individuals who have taken advantage of lax procedures for their own gain. Although previous experiences with theft have not heretofore resulted in serious ramifications for the organization, the current environment is ripe for individuals to take advantage of administrative disarray and deal a serious blow to the Martí-Maceo treasury. Such a blow would be nearly impossible for a small and struggling membership to overcome and could result in dissolution of an organization.
that has weathered numerous challenges in the past century. For now, the Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo remains a singular example of collective ownership and mobilization of shared resources in Ybor City that once served an adaptive function among a marginalized Black immigrant population. Given current realities, it is not clear whether this unique organization will continue to operate into the next decade.
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