

# The Boundaries and the Bonds of Citizenship: Race, Empire, and Exile in Cuba, 1898-1902

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## Abstract

This article explores the challenges that Cubans exiled abroad and internally exiled Africans in Cuba posed to the entwined processes of US empire- and Cuban nation-state formation at the turn of the twentieth century. While exiled Cubans made demands on state and empire concerning their rights of citizenship *and* inclusion, internally exiled Africans made demands on state and imperial officials concerning their rights to self-determination *and* non-belonging. Both sets of challenges threatened to disrupt the capitalist, white supremacist national/imperial projects of Cuban state- and United States empire-formation. Highlighting these cases while juxtaposing them reveals how exile was used as a preemptive technology of control during empire- and nation-state-building in U.S.-occupied Cuba at the turn of the twentieth century.

**Keywords:** Africans; exile; US imperialism; citizenship; freedom; equality

## Resumen

Este artículo investiga los desafíos que cubanos exiliados y africanos exiliados internamente plantearon a comienzos del siglo XX a la creación del estado cubano y al imperialismo estadounidense. En tanto los cubanos exiliados fuera de Cuba hicieron demandas de ciudadanía e inclusión, los africanos internamente exiliados dentro de Cuba hicieron peticiones en torno a derechos de autodeterminación y autoexclusión. Ambas posiciones amenazaron alterar tanto el proyecto capitalista, supremacista blanco de formación del estado cubano como la formación del imperio estadounidense. Al subrayar y juxtaponer estos casos el artículo demuestra cómo el exilio

funcionó como una tecnología de control en la Cuba ocupada por Estados Unidos a principios del siglo veinte.

**Palabras claves:** africanos; exilio; imperialismo estadounidense; ciudadanía; libertad; igualdad

On August 22, 1901, José González Padilla and Enrique García, the secretary and delegate of the Federación Obrera de Tampa (Workers Federation of Tampa), addressed an urgent letter to the Cuban secretary of state demanding protection of life and property for Cubans in Tampa. Cuban workers, they wrote, were suffering physical abuse and kidnapping at the hands of their employers and white vigilante affiliates.<sup>1</sup> The workers demanded their right to protection as citizens of the fledgling Republic of Cuba, rights which they argued included sponsored repatriation back home. However, Cuba had been occupied by the United States at the conclusion of the War of 1898 and was held as a protectorate between 1898 and 1902. By 1901, a republican constitution had been adopted, but would not become active until May of 1902. In other words, at the time of their plea, José and Enrique were not yet formal citizens of Cuba. Additionally, while the US government appointed a Cuban commissioner in Washington D.C. beginning in 1898, it was unclear to what extent the commissioner was responsible for Cubans in the United States.<sup>2</sup> While the Treaty of Paris, which formally ended the War of 1898, bound the United States to “discharge the obligations that may under international law result from the fact of its occupation, for the protection of life and property” in Cuba, these protections did not extend to Cuban war-time refugees and exiles.<sup>3</sup> The early dissolution in December 1898 of the international organization built and sustained by Cuban exiles called the Cuban Revolutionary Party was an early troubling sign that Cubans abroad would be expected to fend for themselves. In the wake of the Treaty and the disbanding of the Party, tens of thousands of Cubans who had fled Cuba during the lengthy independence wars and relocated across the Americas found themselves in a deeply vulnerable position. The Tampa workers were joined in their pleas by Cubans elsewhere in Florida, as well as in Mexico, Haiti, Venezuela, Colombia, Puerto Rico, and beyond.<sup>4</sup> Together these Cubans addressed demands for protection to their political representatives and to the United States government, demands that went largely unanswered. Hovering in the undefined space between colonial subject and national citizen, Cubans abroad—those who requested repatriation and were refused it, as well as those who requested protection were denied it—became exiles.

In February of 1902, six months after José and Enrique sent their letter, Miguel Betancourt of the Cuban province of Camagüey wrote a letter to the US military governor of Cuba, Leonard Wood, asking that a consul be appointed

to represent the interests of 310 African foreign residents of Cuba, including himself. In reference to Cuban authorities in the province, Betancourt wrote: "they are trying to compel us to become Cuban citizens which ought not to be for we are born in Africa."<sup>5</sup> As stipulated by the accords of the 1898 Treaty of Paris, eligible residents of the island of Cuba had one year to affirm their loyalty to the Spanish crown and, in failing to do so, they *de facto* renounced their allegiance to Spain in favor of an as yet undefined (Cuban) citizenship. The formal affirmation of Spanish allegiance had to be notarized and the Spaniards' name registered with the state, disadvantaging many poor, rural, and remote residents. Indeed, 5 to 10 times as many of the registrants who affirmed their allegiance to Spain in this year were literate, compared to those who were not. A further obstacle for African-born persons residing in Cuba was the fact that the Treaty defined those entitled to Spanish citizenship as individuals born on the peninsula or in Spanish territories, which excluded most formerly enslaved persons born in Africa. If there was no path to Spanish citizenship for the African-born, there was no clear path to Cuban citizenship either. As the 1901 Cuban Constitution stipulated, one had to be born in Cuba, or to Cuban-born parents to be entitled to citizenship. The problem of statelessness for the African-born was quickly resolved with a clause establishing a path to Cuban citizenship through naturalization. However, forcing the African-born to naturalize under a dedicated clause denied them the opportunity to claim citizenship based on military service in the revolutionary army, or by the requirements of residency used to assess the cases of other foreigners. A gesture of inclusion masked a double dispossession, deepening a condition of exile that African-born residents already keenly felt. Miguel Betancourt and the 310 Africans<sup>6</sup> he represented were determined to reject the offer of citizenship.

The connection between Cuban workers abroad and the Africans in Cuba outlined in the two opening paragraphs of this essay is not immediately obvious beyond the fact that they raised their concerns with state officials. In fact, at first glance the cases seem quite opposite. While José and Enrique chose to leave their homes in Cuba for foreign shores, Miguel had been forced to leave his home on the African continent against his will. While José and Enrique demanded citizenship rights that were out of reach, Miguel Betancourt rejected a citizenship that was foisted upon him. These essential and important differences notwithstanding, both cases highlight the ways in which exile (external and internal) was used as a technology of empire and nation-state formation for the United States and Cuba at the turn of the twentieth century.

The historical subjects I study here were exiles, where exile is defined as a mutable condition experienced by those who, as a result of the actions of oppressive states, are permanently alienated from their homes. By mutable

I mean to underscore exile as a condition that can be acquired or lost as the exile's personal and contextual circumstances change.<sup>7</sup> The process of exiling people deemed unfit to belong in the nation during the nineteenth century was more varied than we customarily imagine. While many a nineteenth-century exile was handed the judicial sentence of exile or death, the processes that supported exile in the cases explored in this paper were much less conventional. For most elite nineteenth-century exiles, banishment was a recognized punitive legal action with relatively well-defined repercussions. State authorities in Latin America often exchanged and moved exiles like pawns on a chessboard, using enemy pieces to gain advantages. However, unlike elite exiles, who were seen to confer strategic advantage, the poor, racially mixed and African-born external and internal exiles discussed here were not seen to confer much advantage to any side, and were treated in much more callous ways.

If the definition of exile in this study is stretched, the definition of "home" is likewise expanded. In this essay, "home" refers to more than nation, province, town, or abode. Rather, it is defined as a place or space of belonging where one can live with dignity and safety. Thus, Cubans like José González Padilla and Enrique García who left Cuba voluntarily or involuntarily for reasons (whether political or economic) related to the wars, became exiles once they were unable to return home or secure their own safety in the U.S. as Cuban citizens. Meanwhile, Africans in Cuba who had been originally dispossessed and displaced (from home) through enslavement and who wished *not* to be incorporated into the Cuban republic were made to endure a form of deepened internal exile, when they were forced to accept Cuban citizenship, which extended and intensified their original dispossession and alienation, and thus promoted neither safety nor belonging.

Exile is not just the impossibility of return, it is the impossibility of being at home. It is, as Zygmunt Bauman has noted, "a place of compulsory confinement, but also an unreal place, a place that is itself out of place in the order of things."<sup>8</sup> At some level, exile is an impossible condition of permanent unsettling and of non- or incomplete belonging. The Cubans in Tampa who wished to return, as well as those who pled for their safety abroad, and Africans in Cuba who longed for a separate and semi-autonomous existence in/outside of the state all suffered a form of "compulsory confinement" at the hands of the imperial and national authorities that oppressed them.<sup>9</sup>

"Exile" and loss of "home" were, as noted, different experiences for Cuban émigrés and formerly enslaved and *emancipado* Africans<sup>10</sup> inside Cuba. Where Cuban émigrés imagined returning home to the Cuba they had left behind, or, conversely, being able to live as Cubans with rights abroad and in safety, Africans could not avail themselves of a similar opportunity, as their former

homes were lost to them forever. The juxtaposition of these cases is justified, then, not by the circumstances that led to the exile of these historical subjects, but rather by the way in which the Cuban state and the US empire deepened and extended that exile condition intentionally. I argue that US and Cuban state authorities attempted to marginalize and subdue both groups through exile for strategic reasons related to imperial and national interest. These interests were threatened by the kind of challenges posed to nation and empire by the émigrés and the Africans, challenges which necessitated (in view of the state) their marginalization or erasure. Certainly, many Cubans discontented with the new imperial/national regime challenged the state and empire from within. Among these dissenters were independence war veterans, especially veterans of color, but also organized workers and ardent revolutionary nationalists.<sup>11</sup> Challenges by these groups were met with repression (the 1906 US occupation and massacre of 1912 are notable examples).<sup>12</sup> But while internal challenges have been subjected to robust study, “external” challenges like those posed by the exiled workers and internally exiled Africans have not.<sup>13</sup>

This article, then, makes three important contributions. First, it underscores how exile was used as a preemptive technology of empire- and nation-state-building in U.S.-occupied Cuba between 1898 and 1902. Second, it highlights the threatening nature of the challenges posed by Cubans abroad and Africans in Cuba who demanded the rights of citizenship *and* inclusion or, conversely, rights to self-determination *and* non-belonging. These challenges threatened to disrupt the capitalist, white supremacist national/imperial project. And third, the essay argues that the absence of these cases from the scholarly record is not coincidental.<sup>14</sup> I am not suggesting that these cases and others like them have not been identified by scholars in Cuba and the United States.<sup>15</sup> Rather, I am noting the fact that these cases have not been given dedicated attention either on their own or together. This lack of treatment may, in part, be due to the fragmentary nature of the evidence or to the swift official denial of the claims made by the petitioners. But, as I demonstrate in these pages, I believe that working with these cases gives us an opportunity to “restage differently” so-called “failed moments of resistance to imperial power.”<sup>16</sup> Doing so, as Ariella Aïsha Azoulay argues, allows us to “retrieve a world in which this fact [the defeat or erasure of resistance] was not yet already accomplished,” while also “enabling [...] modalities of protest erased by imperial power to emerge again as competing valid options.”<sup>17</sup> The competing visions articulated by workers in Tampa, Cuban émigrés elsewhere, and internally exiled Africans are valid and allow us to appreciate a wider diversity of responses to nation- and empire-building at the turn of the twentieth century.

This essay is my “restaging” of concurrent efforts to resist the twin and entwined forces of imperial and national power by historical subjects who were far apart in their thinking yet joined in their frustration concerning the emergence of the Cuban state. I hold that the juxtaposition of these cases reveals that we stand to learn much about processes of nation-state and empire-formation in Cuba and the United States, as well as resistance to those processes from the people exiled at their margins and at their centers. This article is an invitation to think otherwise about how we define and how we study exile, about the relationship between exile, empire, and nation-formation in the Americas, and about what we define as resistance to imperial/national power.

### **The Externally Interned**

In their plea for protection sent in August of 1901, the Tampa workers, José González Padilla and Enrique García, identified themselves as “Cuban citizens” laying claim to the rights secured to them by the 1901 Cuban Constitution, which was adopted in February of that year but was not enforced until in May of 1902.<sup>18</sup> Although they were fully aware of the continued subordination of the Cuban authorities to the US government, José and Enrique asked the Cuban secretary of state to use his influence with “the government of Washington” to bring an end to the violence and kidnappings they were being subjected to in Florida. Indeed, while the workers saw themselves as rights-bearing citizens, the protection of their rights was not assured by either Cuban or US authorities. Nearly forlorn, the migrants insisted that they should not be treated as “the pariahs of the present age, orphaned of all protection.”<sup>19</sup> José and Enrique’s letter is bundled together with another sent only two days earlier by Gregorio Cruz, a member of another local labor organization in Tampa, La Liga de Trabajadores Cubanos. Gregorio noted that Cubans had sought the protection of local authorities only to find that those authorities were in cahoots with the vigilante groups assaulting them. The main culprit of these attacks was the white vigilante group the Citizens Committee, whose stated mission was to protect the American way of life.<sup>20</sup> Eager to control the tobacco industry and offended that Cubans did not seem keen to assimilate to their “American” way of life, by which they surely meant the norms of racial segregation, white Tampanns depicted multi-racial Cubans and their labor organizations as “antagonistic to our laws, customs and government.”<sup>21</sup> Echoing the desperation of José and Enrique, Gregorio concluded his letter with this demand for accountability:

I ask you, is it possible that you and Mr. Quesada [Cuban commissioner in Washington] do nothing for the Cuban colony of Tampa that did everything possible to give you “patria” [a nation]? Is it possible that you do nothing to ensure that the laws of the United States are enforced in Tampa? Is it possible that you will permit that [...] 5 thousand families be thrown out of their homes...?<sup>22</sup>

Like José and Enrique, Gregorio draws the reader’s attention to the responsibility of Cuban authorities to attend to the needs of Cubans abroad, not only because they were Cuban citizens but also because they were revolutionary patriots who were essential to the island’s anti-colonial movement. His letter furthermore underscores the absurdity of the fact that Cubans in Cuba were more protected by the US government than Cubans in the United States where, apparently, “the laws of the United States” needed to be “enforced.”<sup>23</sup> Cuban Secretary of state and governance, Diego Tamayo, immediately brought this issue to the attention of the US military governor in a letter sent on August 23. In fact, Tamayo and his predecessor, Domingo Méndez Capote, began advocating for Cubans abroad starting in the early months of 1899. They received countless letters from Cubans across the Americas who were struggling to make ends meet and failing, who were being taken advantage of or abused, and who desperately wanted to return to Cuba. In February of 1899, Domingo Méndez-Capote appealed to the US military governor recommending that the US government instruct its consuls to ensure the protection of Cubans abroad.<sup>24</sup> He also asked the military governor to consider facilitating the repatriation of Cubans who wished to return and help rebuild the nation after the war.<sup>25</sup> This had been a promise made by revolutionary leadership to the Cuban exile communities during the anti-colonial war. U.S. government officials responded with a strident rejection that must have surprised the secretary. However, Méndez-Capote was powerless to do more.

On the matter of consular support, the response came directly from the sub-secretary of war John de Rue Meiklejohn: “this government does not extend protections in foreign lands to those who are not U.S. citizens.”<sup>26</sup> Meiklejohn further clarified that individual US consuls would be permitted to assist Cubans on a case-by-case basis at their discretion. This choice, of course, left Cubans abroad subject to the arbitrary will of individual US representatives. On the matter of repatriation, the response came straight from the military governor’s office: “the military governor does not approve of the wishes requested at this time. It is as yet difficult to provide employment for the many idle people in the island.”<sup>27</sup> Both the insistence on only affording protection to U.S. citizens abroad and the characterization of Cubans at home and abroad as “idle” were telling. As we have seen, the Treaty of Paris outlined the United States’ re-



sponsibility to “discharge the obligations that may under international law” arise, while (perhaps strategically) leaving wartime Cuban refugees and exiles stranded.<sup>28</sup> Certainly, all parties involved were aware of the vast Cuban exile migrations. The United States had been harboring Cuban migrants and refugees and benefitting from their labor for nearly half a century.<sup>29</sup> However, Article VI of the Treaty addressed only the matter of political prisoners and arranged for their repatriation, leaving abandoned tens of thousands of Cubans who had fled the wars but did not fit into this narrow category of those who were protected.<sup>30</sup>

The inattention of the US government to Cubans abroad during the occupation was no accident. Rather, it was reflective of a US white supremacist policy that was central to US expansionism overland and overseas during the early twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> Government documents in the US national archives relating to the Military Government of Cuba are riven with disparaging, deprecating, and downright racist representations of Cubans and of their supposed incapability for self-governance.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the military governor’s dismissive depiction of Cubans at home as “idle,” and his implication that Cubans abroad would exacerbate the problem of idle workers if they returned, is unsurprising. This Malthusian perspective was infused with a racist discourse that framed the problem as not only stemming from the excess of population, but also rooted in the nature and composition of the population. Despite the existence of large numbers of unemployed native Cubans, and even as Cuban workers abroad were refused repatriation, the US government crafted immigration policies that favored white workers, many of them Spanish and Canary Islander. Between 1902 and 1907, 128,000 Spaniards alone migrated to Cuba.<sup>33</sup> One newspaper in Cárdenas insisted that: “The Spaniards will always be the best ally in our efforts to sustain the Cuban personality. Race, language, religion, and customs form very strong bonds.”<sup>34</sup> Jamaican workers and other Antillean laborers, on the other hand, were deemed undesirable and were subject to broad discrimination.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to being racialized, the depiction of poor Cubans as “idle” or lazy furthermore suggested that they bore the responsibility for their own unemployment. The characterization showed a willful disregard for the radical dislocation experienced by Cuba’s rural and urban populations during three decades of grueling war. The wars of independence claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of civilians and displaced many more. Cubans were not “idle”; they were destitute.<sup>36</sup> Even the most decorated Cuban military veterans of African descent could not always find work. The famous general Quintín Banderas had trouble securing a job as a janitor after the war, never mind a government post.<sup>37</sup>

Leaving the lives and livelihoods of Cubans abroad in the hands of individual consuls proved devastating for Cubans who repeatedly failed in appealing to the goodwill of US representatives. In Mexico, Juan Ortega Manzano escaped



the clutches of the *Compañía Colonizadora de la Costa Oriental de Yucatán*, a Spanish company that had lured Cubans to Mexico during the war promising them an escape from depredation and a better future. Yet, upon fleeing, Ortega Manzano found that the US consul at Mérida refused to help him free his ailing wife and six children from the company lands, where they toiled in semi-slavery.<sup>38</sup> In Caracas, Venezuela, Francisco Arredondo y Miranda, a veteran of the first Cuban independence war (1868-1878) and longtime exile in that country informed the Cuban secretary of state that the “natives of Cuba have appealed to the minister of the United States in this capital and to the American consuls residing in the interior of this country and have received from them no protection.”<sup>39</sup> Protection was of the utmost urgency in Venezuela at the time due to the escalating civil war between liberals and conservatives and the dangers of forced conscription.

The statements and (in)actions of US officials with regard to Cubans abroad can only be seen as callous given that Cubans had no other effective representatives to depend on before 1902. However, US officials were not the only ones to blame, especially after 1902. Despite their early efforts to convince US authorities to attend to vulnerable Cubans abroad, Cuban political elites, especially those hand-selected by US officials, shared a similar vision of what kind of nation Cuba should strive to become, and this vision—that of a modernized and orderly Cuba friendly to US business—was not one that would be enhanced by the participation of mixed race and radicalized workers with a broad inter- and transnational perspective born of decades of revolutionary participation.<sup>40</sup> Although they chafed under the military regime and many were offended by the degree of control the U.S. exercised in Cuba, Cuban national elites embraced Americanization and welcomed US business and US tutelage as necessary for Cuba’s advancement.

The disparaging label “idle” applied to the émigrés also obscured the revolutionary activism and sacrifices that Cubans abroad had made for nearly three decades. While elite men like the long-time exile and first President of Cuba, Tomás Estrada Palma, were celebrated as revolutionary patriots, their working-class counterparts who toiled tirelessly for the revolution were more often marginalized. Cubans carrying the banner of revolution had circulated across the Gulf World and Greater Caribbean as migrants, exiles, and refugees since the 1820s. Small handfuls in the early nineteenth century became tens of thousands by the end of the 1800s.<sup>41</sup> Cubans lucky enough to flee the particularly devastating war of 1895 which culminated in what we often call the Spanish American War may have saved their own lives, but flight rarely led to a better existence. Judging from the abject poverty recorded in the letters collected in the Cuban Revolutionary Party archive addressing the conditions of migrants and refugees

throughout the Americas during the war years and after, poverty, if not outright destitution, was the norm. Juan Ortega Manzano and the plantation laborers in Yucatán stand out for the devastation and the unfreedom they suffered, but migrants throughout the Caribbean suffered greatly overall. Making a desperate case for repatriation from Puerto Rico, Dr. Arrastia observed that Cubans there were so poor that the majority had lost everything “even their clothing.”<sup>42</sup> Similarly, on May 23, 1899, two members of a prominent Veracruz Cuban Club appealed on behalf of over 1,000 families who were suffering crushing poverty and wished to return to Cuba.<sup>43</sup> Gabriel López García may have been among them. López García fought in the wars and fled to exile towards the end of the conflict. The conclusion of the war found him in the port of Veracruz, far from the family he had left in Florida where he had been first stationed as an insurgent soldier. Desperate to reunite with his family, he wrote to the Cuban authorities multiple times begging for enough money to pay a boat fare. His letters went unanswered. Ultimately this weary soldier paid his way to Tampa by working as a crewmember on a US ship. He walked from Tampa to the town where he had left his family sleeping on the road as he went. When his family last saw him, he had been departing Florida a proud insurgent and he returned to them a destitute and broken man.<sup>44</sup>

The rejection of the Cuban leadership must have wounded López García deeply, given his sacrifices for the revolutionary cause. It also must have been unexpected, given the history of the Revolutionary Party which had recruited him into the ranks of the insurgency. Organizing the vast Cuban exile migrations became a central strategy of the revolution in the early 1890s. The famous Cuban Revolutionary leader, José Martí, recognized the power of harnessing the strength of Cubans abroad in service of the revolution. He also knew that to appeal to the large numbers of working-class, non-white Cuban migrants and exiles, he would have to echo the inclusive nationalism they espoused.<sup>45</sup> Under the auspices of the Cuban Revolutionary Party, Cubans abroad became networked into an impressive hemisphere-wide international revolutionary organization with units in Europe as well. Between 1892 and 1898, the Party was a critical engine of the war, providing arms, munitions, supplies, and soldiers to the war effort, while fomenting international solidarity and building diplomatic goodwill across the continent. For Cubans abroad, participation in the party inspired nothing short of a fundamental reimagining of self.<sup>46</sup> Migrants came to see themselves as citizens of a nation in the making and they were encouraged to expect that Cuba would become, as Martí had promised, a democratic nation made “with all and for the good of all” that would protect the rights and ensure the equality of all citizens.<sup>47</sup> These words and this broken promise surely reverberated in the mind of Gabriel López García as well as in

the minds of the members of the Federación Obrera de Tampa when they wrote their angry letter to the secretary of state demanding their rights in 1901. Even before the establishment of the Cuban Constitution of 1901 and, with it, formal Cuban citizenship, this multi-racial community of impoverished working-class émigrés saw themselves as citizens with rights and responsibilities. They had extensive nation-building experience abroad and a deep expectation that José Martí's promises would be fulfilled. These were far from the "idle" people the military governor imagined them to be, but they were the kinds of people who would carry with them a memory of a promise that national and imperial elites never intended to fulfill. According to Cuban revolutionary elites, the exiled workers had served their purpose during the revolution (raising money, gathering arms and munitions, housing soldiers, creating national revolutionary cultures and traditions, building democracy from the ground up) and were no longer needed. In fact, they were a possible liability given their self-entitlement and activist experience. For US imperial authorities, Cubans abroad were potentially troublesome elements that could destabilize the new republic.

As for the Cubans residing in Florida who intended to stay, their plight saw no improvement in and after 1902. One year after José, Enrique, and Gregorio sent their letters, the Cuban mayor of Tampa was assaulted. Four years after that, the Cuban minister in the U.S. brought the issue of the continued abuse of Cuban workers in Florida to the attention of the US Secretary of state Elihu Root.<sup>48</sup> It is clear from the archival record that this issue remained unresolved for many years despite repeated complaints by Cuban officials both before and after the US occupation of Cuba. This was a precursor of the racist and anti-immigrant violence that Cubans and other Latinx migrants would be subjected to in the Southeastern United States during the course of the twentieth century.

### **The Internally Exiled**

While the thousands of Cubans who were unable to return to Cuba, and the many more who were left without citizenship protection abroad longed for inclusion within the Cuban nation, certain African-born people within Cuba struggled with the opposite. Africans like Miguel Betancourt felt trapped within the emergent nation. They imagined a future in which Cuba might become a home in which African people identified as such could live while not being part of the state.<sup>49</sup> This vision stood in stark contrast to the options commonly understood to be available to formerly enslaved or indentured African-descendants in Cuba and across the post-emancipation Americas: assimilation or repatriation.<sup>50</sup> In Cuba, Spanish authorities offered sponsored repatriation to Africans

immediately after emancipation in the 1880s, hoping to encourage free Blacks to leave Cuba in an effort to whiten the population.<sup>51</sup> In the United States, the repatriation of Afro-descendants was the project of the American Colonization Society whose work in this area extended throughout the nineteenth century. Perhaps aware of both Spanish and US histories of state-supported and state-sanctioned repatriation, some Africans in Cuba appealed to the US government to fund their return after the War of 1898. However, unlike the Spanish before them, the US government refused these requests for funding.<sup>52</sup> After all, within the US context, repatriation and its expenses had been the responsibility of the Colonization Society.

Although never large in number, some formerly enslaved or indentured people did leave Cuba for Africa during the nineteenth century, either with the involvement of Spanish authorities, or more often through the combined efforts of philanthropic organizations and the multinational mixed commission court in Havana set up to manage liberated Africans.<sup>53</sup> Just as returning to Africa (re-emplacement) was no easy matter, neither was staying in Cuba. Those who stayed did not necessarily embrace assimilation into emergent Cuban national culture as it was developing during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Rather, many Africans maintained old and developed new hybrid “Africanist practices” which challenged the supposed contradiction between Cubanness and Africanness so fundamental to dominant views of Cuba’s modernity.<sup>54</sup> Within these “Africanist practices” we find the founding of new African ethnic societies well into the twentieth century, calls and projects for repatriation to Africa, an insistence on publicly identifying as African and continuing to maintain cultural traditions legally proscribed or disparaged by dominant society. Undoubtedly drawing on these traditions and displaying deep political creativity and savvy, men like Miguel Betancourt paved a third way of thinking about Africans’ political possibilities, one that disrupted the binary between repatriation and assimilation. Calling for “a consul of our nation,” Betancourt sought legal representation on behalf of the Africans he represented based on an affirmation of their recognized foreign legal status.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, both the US census and the 1901 Cuban Constitution affirmed the foreign identity of African-born residents of Cuba. I suggest that Betancourt rejected Cuban citizenship because he recognized that this form of political inclusion was also a form of political erasure. Implicit in Betancourt’s rejection of citizenship is the recognition that acceptance of the same would entail a loss of some kind. Betancourt not only refused to accept that loss, he insisted on a gain as well, one that he saw as owed to him and his compatriots for their suffering.

When Miguel Betancourt asked the US military governor Leonard Wood for a consul in 1902, his letter was forwarded to the Cuban secretary of state

who responded: “We cannot recognize any person as a representative of the Africans who reside in Cuba because those natives of Africa, as a result of the causes that motivated their immigration, must be considered Cubans and, as such, must submit to the laws and authorities of the country.”<sup>56</sup> Not only was Betancourt’s request refused, but the secretary of state deemed it necessary to explain to Betancourt why persons like him who were victims of the slave trade could not belong to a nation capable of appointing a consul. This was unnecessary as Betancourt’s own letter anchored his request for a consul in the history of forced displacement he and fellow Africans endured. In advance of asking for consular representation, he asked his interlocutor to take, “into consideration that we were brought here by the Spanish government.”<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, in his letter the secretary of state described Africans’ inclusion in the Cuban state as an act of forced submission—an insensitive and likely intentional choice of words. But perhaps the most egregious offense on the part of the secretary was referring to the slave trade as “the circumstances that motivated their immigration.”<sup>58</sup> It is hard to miss the significance of this choice of phrasing, as it bluntly misrepresented slavery. In so doing, the secretary attempts to undercut the foundation of Betancourt’s claim for autonomy, which was rooted in the crime of forced dispossession and the barbaric commodification of human life.

In exploring Betancourt’s range of motivations for rejecting citizenship and for seeking protection, we can find clues in this letter. These clues set in context help us appreciate Betancourt’s thinking and his strategy. First, let’s consider the style of Betancourt’s petition. It is noteworthy that Betancourt signed this letter in his own hand, given the low literacy rates in early twentieth-century Cuba, especially among people of color. While we do not know what Betancourt read, we do know that he was able to read and, thus, might presume that he read local and national newspapers and had first-hand knowledge of events, debates, and opinions concerning numerous political issues during the tumultuous years before the island’s formal independence. Cuban politics was a continuously evolving situation between 1898 and 1902. Awareness of a possible political opening or opportunity for Africans to determine their place in society may have inspired Betancourt to make the request in the first place. The purpose of the letter (the request for a consul) and the framing of the request (respectful but not sycophantic) demonstrate the confidence Betancourt had in himself, in the legitimacy of his petition and in his right to elevate that petition to the highest authority in the land. The fact that Betancourt referred to the military governor as “vuesencia” or “your excellency” and that he referred to his request as a “gracia” or special dispensation granted by the Spanish monarch to his or her subjects during colonial times may be important: “esperamos de vuesencia el que nos conteste esta estancia, gracia que no dudamos alcanzar de su dignísimo corazón.”<sup>59</sup>

Substituting the military governor for the king, and making a formal appeal for special consideration while also invoking the language of citizenship elsewhere in the letter, Betancourt blended monarchical and republican traditions in an attempt to advocate for his community. Both traditions had circulated in Latin America for a century and informed Back politics from the Age of Revolutions forward.<sup>60</sup> How enslaved Africans appealed to the King, especially in order to gain leverage over colonial elites, is well documented. As Bianca Premo has argued, “enslaved people of African descent were [...] the progenitors of the enlightenment” due to the ways they invented themselves in civil courts beyond the binary of slavery and freedom and beyond their masters’ will, as individuals always in the process of becoming free.<sup>61</sup> Enslaved people across the Americas continuously strove for freedom using every tactic available and created our modern notions of freedom as they went along. After emancipation, people of African descent in Cuba continued to imagine and reach for freedom, some by seeking inclusion and equality, and others by endeavoring to form their own societies and polities.<sup>62</sup>

This brings us to the novelty of Betancourt’s argument, our second point. Grounding his claim to foreign status historically, Betancourt stated that it was the Spanish who brought Africans to Cuba against their will: “fuimos traídos a esta isla por el gobierno español.”<sup>63</sup> By announcing the responsibility of the former colonial power for his condition of dispossession, Betancourt deftly implied that it was the responsibility of the new “liberating” authority to right the wrongs committed under the former administration: reparations in the form of “a consul of our nation.”<sup>64</sup> After establishing a historical basis for his request, Betancourt framed his right to reject citizenship based on birthplace (“somos nacidos en África”).<sup>65</sup> His allusion to the importance of birth place and his strategic use of birth place as a way to evade Cuban citizenship reveals his awareness that Cuban citizenship as constituted in the 1901 Cuban Constitution was birthright citizenship. Anyone born on Cuban soil, or to Cuban-born parents could automatically be Cuban. All others aspiring to Cuban citizenship had to gain it through naturalization. As mentioned, the 1901 Cuban constitutional committee recognized the problem presented by African-born foreigners, who would be made stateless by a constitution based on birthright, and included a special clause in the constitution guaranteeing Africans’ citizenship through naturalization. But that citizenship came at the price of true belonging, dignity, and recognition. Africans were unable to appeal to their military service or term of residency in order to claim their right to Cuban citizenship. The clause that afforded them a place in the nation simultaneously robbed them of the possibility of true and full inclusion. So, Betancourt, and those he represented, inverted the logic of birthright to establish the claim for the right to remain foreigners in

Cuba. If Cuban citizenship was a birthright, then Africans could use the lack of Cuban birth as a means of rejecting citizenship.<sup>66</sup> By this logic, they could also refuse naturalization. The fact that Africans had been recognized as not naturally belonging either to Spain nor to Cuba must have emboldened them, strengthening their resolve to articulate a new political identity and their attempts to formalize it. Indeed, Betancourt must have known of the foreign classification of Africans in the 1899 US census of Cuba because a debate about this had circulated in an island-wide newspaper, the *Diario de la Marina*, in 1900.<sup>67</sup> Interacting with a census taker, if he did, would have given Betancourt an opportunity to list himself as African-born, publicly affirming his identity as a foreigner. In fact, nearly 13,000 native Africans were identified in the 1899 US census of Cuba, and Betancourt may have been among them.<sup>68</sup> In 1899, African natives were the third largest community of foreigners on the island behind the Spanish and the Chinese.<sup>69</sup> However, by 1901, Africans' foreign status was taken from them as they were re-signified as impossible subjects with nowhere to belong other than to the Cuban nation. Betancourt likely knew that in rejecting naturalization, he was creating an impossible situation for Cuban state authorities. Having a community of unaffiliated yet organized Africans in Cuban territory would be unacceptable and, therefore, unthinkable.<sup>70</sup>

The fact that Betancourt asked specifically for a consul of "our nation" should not surprise us if we take into consideration both the longer historical context of African ethnic organizations and the more immediate historical context of the dislocation created by the transition of power in Cuba between Spain and the United States. During the Spanish colonial period, Africans were permitted to gather by nations in semi-autonomous Afro-ethnic associations. Matt Childs has likened these organizations to "African consulates" since they appeared to be representatives of foreign "nations" before the Spanish colonial state.<sup>71</sup> In the immediate post-emancipation period, as colonial officials determined to crack down on the *cabildos*, some fearfully described the constitutions of these associations as akin to those of states.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, between 1898 and 1902, consuls and consular agents were proposed, approved, and denied daily by the intervening US government as foreign communities sought sure footing in a shifting political landscape. Surely the semi-autonomy of the organizations, the historical valence of "consul" within African communities and the transitional political context of the occupation period could have encouraged Betancourt to imagine what was already entirely thinkable: that Africans might be able to be represented by a consul of their own and carve out an existence somewhere on a continuum between returning to Africa and becoming fully Cuban. Could Betancourt have also been aware of efforts by British West Indian William George Emanuel, resident of Havana, to actively petition the US military governor to



recognize him as consul of the Africans in Cuba?<sup>73</sup> As early as 1899, Emanuel had published opinion pieces in the widely circulating newspaper *Diario de la Marina* concerning Africans' right to maintain their foreign status. Emanuel, himself, had been recognized as the representative of Cuba's Africans by a consortium of African ethnic organizations in the early 1890s, which means that by 1902 he had been advocating for the rights and interests of Africans in Cuba for a decade.<sup>74</sup> During the time of Betancourt's petition, Emanuel had been at least partly responsible for the creation of an organization called the African Colony of Cuba (Colonia Africana de Cuba) which appointed its own consular agents and aspired to island-wide representation. La Colonia Africana, which extended into Santa Clara province, may have been present in Camagüey as well.

We have explored the style and structure of Betancourt's petition, but what future exactly did he imagine? This is a tricky question. Taking stock of the format of Betancourt's letter to the U.S. military governor, we might see his request as motivated mostly by the fear of losing a degree of freedom or a space of autonomy enjoyed by associated Africans during the colonial period, a freedom that might be lost in some measure due to full incorporation. However, the space of freedom for associated Africans had already begun to shrink after emancipation. Indeed, the cabildos were seen as an anachronism incompatible with the image of modern Spain during the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>75</sup> As we have seen, Betancourt drew on colonial knowledge and technologies, while also employing the language of republican citizenship and statehood.<sup>76</sup> It is at the intersection of colonial and republican forms of political belonging that Betancourt articulated something specific to the condition of his community—a future political existence for displaced Africans (imagined as existing in Cuban territory but outside of the Cuban state) that challenged the limits of the possible within the emerging modern global international order.<sup>77</sup> This existence might preserve some of the privileges granted to the cabildos by the colonial state pre-emancipation, privileges that Africans had come to see as "rights."<sup>78</sup> But, it also engaged notions of modern citizenship and its relation to territorial boundaries. By making claims to belonging and non-belonging based on place of birth while seeking representation by a consul, Africans adapted their older colonial assertions of cabildo-based autonomy to a more modern imperial and republican national context, all while taking advantage of a time of messy political transition.

What was it about Cuba at the turn of the twentieth century that both inspired and permitted the development of such a radical perspective? In examining the context of Betancourt's request, it is important to consider not just the historical existence of African ethnic societies, but also their repression, especially during and after the 1880s. This will help us understand just how threatening Betancourt's position was in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century to

both white and assimilationist Black elites.<sup>79</sup> The African and African-identified Cubans' refusal to abandon African cultural practices was an affront to the respectability politics embraced by upwardly mobile Black Cubans who understood that to advance politically and socially in Cuba they had to place as much distance as possible between themselves and Africa. According to Melina Pappademos, during the transition from colony to nation, those in Cuba who were African-identified "set about formulating a new relationship to state and society, one that contended with the evolution of white supremacy in Cuban nationalism and the neocolonial presence of the United States in Cuban affairs, and one that acknowledged African ethnics' loyalties to multiple patrimonies."<sup>80</sup> However, while not insignificant, African-identified persons in Cuba willing to articulate a more expansive political vision in response to this dilemma remained a minority. Although African ethnic societies existed well into the 1930s, the forces that marginalized Africa in the construction of the Cuban nation, only to reclaim African culture in a cannibalistic fashion in and after the 1930s, would win the day.

In this context, Miguel Betancourt, who elaborated his perspective in 1902, was right to be skeptical that citizenship in Cuba would confer equal rights to all citizens regardless of race and ethnicity. Indeed, African-born and African-identified individuals in turn-of-the-century Cuba did not have much reason to be hopeful about their future on the island given the assault on African cultures and life ways since emancipation in the mid 1880s. Incorporation into a Cuban nation governed by a myth of racial unity that saw African barbarism as a fundamental threat to Cuban modernity, and its erasure as fundamental to the formation of a modern Cuban national body, could only lead to continued dispossession for Africans. If those in power had their way, the new republic would be one in which Africans had no place. In his book, *Almost Citizens*, Sam Erman notes that in the case of American Indians' radical dispossession, which included attempted cultural destruction and forced naturalization in the United States during the 1880s, citizenship "envisioned as a shield for individuals against federal overreach" became "the government's sword."<sup>81</sup> While in the case of American Indians' dispossession, the shield was unmasked as a sword, in Cuba the sword was double-edged. On one hand, citizenship constituted a meaningful act of rights-giving and, on the other, it was also a thinly veiled gesture of continued subjugation and erasure. That subjugation and erasure in Cuba took the form of Anti-African legislation that led to the criminalization of African religious practices, the persecution of Africans as *brujos* (witches), bans on public manifestations of African culture, restrictions placed on African ethnic associations, among other forms of repression.<sup>82</sup> Restrictions placed on African associations begin in the 1880s and included bans on the accumulation

and preservation of wealth (when associations were dissolved all assets passed to the church to which the organization was affiliated). In fact, William George Emanuel, the self-proclaimed representative of the Africans in Cuba, fielded many complaints from Africans about the ways in which they were swindled out of their property or coerced to sell. The protection of Africans' properties was a central concern of Emanuel's and appeared in his letters to the U.S. military governor between 1899 and 1901.

Anti-Africanist assault notwithstanding, the Africans of Puerto Príncipe, Camagüey, and several other provinces attempted to take the political opening created by the messy transfers of power that marked Cuba in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to shore up claims to rights while simultaneously envisioning and articulating new modes of belonging to/with state/nation/empire. Neither Cuban authorities who flatly rejected their petitions, nor the US authorities who dismissed them could integrate the alternative visions articulated by Miguel Betancourt. Thinking beyond the choice to be in or outside of the nation, Betancourt's letters reveal the ability to reimagine Africans' political possibilities as unconstrained by the binary of assimilation and repatriation. This ability emanated from the uneasy inside/outside existence that people of African descent had always occupied in Cuba before and after emancipation, but it also represented a keen awareness of the overt and subtle shifts in Cuba during a dislocating time of political transition.<sup>83</sup> Given the ways Cuba had long been networked into a large Caribbean and Gulf World, we can suspect that developments far beyond Cuba within broader Black Atlantic and Caribbean also shaped Betancourt's thinking and that of Africans in Cuba more generally.<sup>84</sup>

One reading of the radical possibility of Betancourt's "rival geography" would be envisioning a transition from the state of perpetual exile suffered by enslaved Africans to something akin to a twentieth-century maroon existence imagined as a way of being within and also apart from the state, a member of a de-territorialized African polity and a citizen of no nation.<sup>85</sup> This reading is inspired by Johnhenry Gonzalez's concept of "Maroon Nation" for Haiti. Gonzalez argues that Haitian non-elites brought the maroon nation into being after the Haitian Revolution as they conceptualized and acted upon the idea of freedom not as anti-colonial liberation but as the ability to build lives of subsistence outside of the plantation economy.<sup>86</sup> Making a similar argument in a distant place and time, Yarimar Bonilla urges us to think critically about the "emancipatory" potential of the modernist project of political sovereignty. Writing about Guadeloupe in the twentieth century with Puerto Rico and other non-sovereign nations on her mind, Bonilla urges us to take seriously the challenge inherent in the seemingly contradictory call for national sovereignty under a colonial flag. The reader will indulge a wild speculation. Had Miguel Betancourt

been successful in convincing the US government to grant Africans a consul of their own nation, the resulting political reality that he and other Africans in Cuba might have expected could have been something like a semi-autonomous, yet non-sovereign existence within the nested spheres of nation and empire. Bonilla insists that we take seriously non-sovereign politics for these politics “operate as forms of immanent critique: they are attempts to break free from the epistemic constraints of Western modernity.”<sup>87</sup> Indeed, what Betancourt seems to be reaching for is a right to define freedom, dignity, and safety in ways not already determined and constrained by the logics of Western modernity embodied by the Cuban state and US empire and their entwined economic and civilizational projects. In the early twenty-first century in the United States, theorist Christina Sharpe articulated how Black people today living in the aftermath of slavery are positioned as “no-citizen,” as people with “no state or nation to protect [them]” and “no citizenship bound to be respected.”<sup>88</sup> Miguel Betancourt understood this in 1902 and he dreamed a solution to this state of non-belonging, one predicated on the demand to be recognized as a member of different polity altogether, something he called “our own nation.”

Governor Leonard Wood’s dismissal of Betancourt’s letter may have reflected the limits of the Governor’s imagination. Given the context of race relations in the United States in the first decade of the twentieth century, a formerly enslaved man asking for reparations in the form of independence from the nation would have pushed the boundaries of what was thinkable. Miguel Betancourt’s choice to write directly to the US general rather than the Cuban secretary of state was strategic as he hoped to bypass Cuban state officials knowing that they would be unsympathetic to his cause.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, they represented the forces he claimed were making him accept Cuban citizenship. The military governor’s decision to leave this request in the hands of the Cuban secretary is evidence of the deep alignment between the imperial and national authorities. The governor could be sure that the Cuban secretary would make this issue disappear. Adding insult to injury, the letter to Betancourt rests in the archive with these words scrawled across the bottom: “This communication was never sent.”<sup>90</sup> Had he received a response to his petition, Miguel would have been disappointed to learn that his petition had made it into the hands of the very authorities he hoped to circumvent.

The ability to think beyond the logic of Western modernity in order to take seriously Betancourt’s request was something the state and imperial authorities simply did not possess, given their material and political interests, as well as their deeply held belief that Africans were barbaric.<sup>91</sup> The US military governor’s lack of response to Betancourt’s letter can be read as evidence that he either could not be bothered or simply could not integrate the request. Many other letters sent to the governor bearing requests were extensively commented on, making

the clear white paper that enveloped Betancourt's all the more striking. Indeed, Betancourt displayed what the governor and Cuban state authorities would have deemed "an unthinkable sense of entitlement."<sup>92</sup> Forwarding Betancourt's message to trusted Cuban authorities, the governor was confident that the matter would be handled in the only way that it could be. As we have seen, if Cuban elites after occupation shared one thing with their Spanish predecessors and their US overlords, it was a deeply held belief that Cuba's de-Africanization was required for its modernization. The spectacular and gruesome state massacre of Black Cubans in response to the protests of Cuba's Independent Party of Color in 1912 is perhaps the best example of how deeply held the fears of Black power and equality were well into the twentieth century.<sup>93</sup> When the threat of Cuba's Africanization had been contained, the rediscovery of Cuba's African roots became permissible and emerged as the movement known to us as *afrocubanismo*.<sup>94</sup> But this future, one in which Cuba honored the cultural contributions made to the nation by Afro-descendants while ensuring their continued subjugation, was not the kind of future that Africans like Betancourt imagined as radical. Rather, this was the kind of recognition that served to further obscure the political and intellectual contributions made by African-identified people in Cuba, contributions like those that Miguel Betancourt and others like him offered through their anticipation of the failure of the democratic and liberal nation-state to repair the inter-generational damage done by slavery, perpetual forced exile, and dispossession.

## Conclusion

This essay began with two seemingly dissimilar cases of dispossession and alienation, which were drawn together to demonstrate how both the emergent Cuban nation and US empire at the turn of the twentieth century relied on exile as an essential technology for nation- and empire- formation in Cuba. First, I have shown how exile as a political tool was as generative and creative as it was reactive. We often think about the exiling of political dissidents as an act taken by a regime wishing to secure and stabilize its power by expelling a force deemed disruptive. But, in the cases presented here, exile was used as a preemptive and creative strategy to anticipate disruptive forces and neutralize them. The potentially disruptive or troublesome force in this history is represented by poor Black and Brown people both outside and inside Cuba, who forged alternative visions of nation, autonomy, and belonging.

Second, I have shown how and why the challenges posed to state and empire by the exiled Cubans abroad and the internally exiled Africans in Cuba were

threatening. Both groups articulated visions of a future Cuba that could potentially challenge the imperial/national project. The Cuban exile workers abroad in Tampa and Key West as well as many strewn across the Americas, had defined themselves as citizens of Cuba well before the nation was established. Their Cuba was not a nation that would be defined by elite and imperial economic interests at the expense of those of workers. For some, especially Black and Brown exiles, the Cuba they imagined was a place of racial equality and worker empowerment. Cubans who had participated in the Cuban Revolutionary Party had engaged in democratic practices as self-assigned citizens for years before Cuba came into being. The African residents of Cuba who are studied here were also empowered in a way that was, ultimately, unacceptable to state and imperial authorities. The claims, petitions, and complaints they raised to those authorities tell the story of creative and future-thinking people who, seizing the opportunity opened by political disruption, dared to articulate alternative political possibilities for Afro-descendants in post emancipation societies that were unimaginable by others. These alternatives, however, also had a history of their own rooted in generations of freedom-seeking and freedom-making practices among Afro-descendants in Cuba.

While the Cuban workers in Tampa (and elsewhere) and Africans in Cuba were not alone in challenging the new regime/s, they were among the regime/s' first casualties. The Cuban Revolutionary Party, the organization that had sustained the Cuban exiles abroad, was dissolved without a plan or any consideration for the exiles as early as December of 1898, just before the end of the war was formalized with the signing of the Treaty of Paris. The dissolution of the Party, a full two years before the inauguration of the Republic, left the exiles bereft of the representation and structure they had counted on for support. Meanwhile, within Cuba as early as 1899, and certainly by 1901, Africans were informed that they would become citizens of the new nation without consideration as to whether they embraced that status or not. The fact that these cases represent some of the earliest instances of the crushing of resistance is important because here we can glimpse the beginning of a process that extended well into the twentieth century.

The fact that neither of the cases studied here appears to fit evenly within our existing definitions of exile, that documents are scarce or dispersed, and that the cases fit only uneasily into the narratives we have developed around Cuban Independence and US empire likely explains why these cases have not been richly considered to date. Far from silenced, however, the alternative possibilities represented in these histories have been re-invoked, remembered, and called forth over many decades to invigorate many struggles against injustice in Cuba. We historians have only to recognize the connections. Writing this

history of imperial neglect and national violence is especially significant in today's America and today's world. Thus, third, I hope I have convinced the reader that perhaps equally as important as laying bare the histories of persistent, resilient, and resurgent technologies of white supremacist imperialism is recognizing both the wide array of resistance practices, and of alternative visions articulated by the many valiant individuals in and outside of Cuba who dared to think at the limits of the possible in order to imagine better tomorrows. We need these "Freedom Dreams" to conjure a new and more radically egalitarian future.<sup>95</sup> "[R]estaging differently" myriad buried moments of resistance to imperial power and to national power is, as I argue in these pages, essential to opening and sustaining the path toward that future.<sup>96</sup>

## Notes

1. Archivo Nacional de Cuba (ANC), Fondo Secretaría y Gobernación (Secretaría) 1:11:1
2. Gonzalo de Quesada y Aróstegui was appointed special commissioner for Cuba in the U.S. in 1899, and was sent to represent Cuba at the 1900 World's Fair in Paris. After that, Quesada served as a member of the Cuban constitutional convention in 1901 and was appointed as Cuban minister in the United States in 1902.
3. Article I of the Treaty of Paris (1898) makes no mention of the refugees of the war, contemplating only its political prisoners. The United States had been happy to provide refuge to Cubans fleeing Cuba during the war, but after the war, these Cubans became poor immigrants subjected to the stereotyping of Latin Americans as inferior and lazy. Caroline Shaw notes, in the case of Great Britain during the mid-nineteenth century that despite an established tradition of supporting refugees in that empire, refugee support was a victim of "sensationalism." Few relief societies were prepared to support refugees for the long haul and often turned against them when the newcomers were seen as threatening to take their jobs or when they looked "more like paupers than independent freedom fighters." Caroline Shaw, *Britannia's Embrace: Modern Humanitarianism and the Imperial Origins of Refugee Relief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 99.
4. Displaced Cubans could be found in Europe and Spanish North Africa as well.
5. ANC, Secretaría, 299:1:397. All translations my own unless otherwise indicated.
6. "African" or "africano" is the term that Betancourt uses to describe those he represents who were African-born. However, in other correspondence, "africano" is used to refer to the African-born and African-identified. In all the cases I am working with, "africano" is invoked as a political as well as cultural identity. Thus, I will use African to refer to both the African-born and African-identified, only specifying a distinction concerning birth where necessary.
7. Luis Roniger, James N. Green, and Pablo Yankelevich, *Exile and the Politics of Exclusion in the Americas* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2014).
8. Zygmunt Bauman, "Assimilation into Exile: The Jew as a Polish Writer," in Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Exile and Creativity: Signposts, Travelers, Outsiders, Backward Glances* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 321.



9. Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Exile and Creativity: Signposts, Travelers, Outsiders, Backward Glances* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 1–2.
10. Starting in and after 1820 and due to the anti-slave trade treaty signed by Britain and Spain in 1817, hundreds of African men, women, and children illegally transported on slave-trading vessels were settled in Cuba as liberated Africans or “emancipados”. Inés Roldán de Montaud, “En los borrosos confines de la libertad: El caso de los negros emancipados en Cuba, 1817–1870,” *Revista de Indias*, LXXI: 251 (2011), pp. 160–161.
11. See Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: the Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality: Black Resistance in the Early Republic, 1886–1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995) and Kirwin Shaffer, *Anarchist Cuba: Countercultural Politics in the Early Twentieth Century* (Oakland: PM Press, 2019) for discussion of working-class radicalism in the same period.
12. See Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, for robust treatment of the 1912 massacre.
13. I see internally exiled Africans discussed in the case foregrounded in this paper as presenting an external rather than an internal challenge because they fundamentally saw themselves as foreigners residing in Cuba. Both the externally located Cuban exiles and internally located exiled Africans issued a challenge from an outernational perspective, outside looking in. These differed from challenges emerging within the nation seeking to carve out space within the state.
14. I draw on Michel-Rolph Trouillot here, especially his insistence that histories which issue an onto-epistemological challenge to those in power are more likely to be silenced, in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015).
15. For references see David Sartorius, *Ever Faithful: Race, Loyalty and the Ends of Empire in Spanish Cuba* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); Jorge Luis Giovannetti, *Black British Migrants in Cuba: Race, Labor and Empire in the Twentieth-Century Caribbean, 1898–1948* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Lillian Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Melina Pappademos, *Black Political Activism and the Cuban Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Philip A. Howard, *Changing History: Afro-Cuban Cabildos and Societies of Color in the Nineteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998).
16. Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019), p. 44.
17. Ibid.
18. “Ciudadanos Cubanos,” ANC, Secretaría 1:11:3.
19. ANC, Secretaría 1:11:3.
20. Nancy Raquel Mirabal, “De aquí, de allá: Race, Empire and Nation in the Making of Cuban Migrant Communities in New York and Tampa, 1823–1924,” PhD dissertation University of Michigan, 2001, p. 197.
21. Mirabal, “De aquí, de allá,” pp. 194–196. For more on race and working-class Cuban migrants in the United States see work by Gerald E. Poyo, *With All, and for the Good of All: The Emergence of Popular Nationalism in the Cuban Communities of the United States 1848–1898* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989); Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, *Racial Migrations: New York City and the Revolutionary Politics of the Spanish Caribbean, 1850–1902* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019); Susan D. Greenbaum, *More Than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002); and Andrew Gómez, “Cubans and the Caribbean South: Race, Labor and Cuban

- Identity in Southern Florida," PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2015.
22. ANC, Secretaría 1:11:3.
  23. Ibid.
  24. ANC, Secretaría, 1:1.
  25. Gerald E. Poyo, *With All and For the Good of All: The Emergence of Popular Nationalism in the Cuban Communities in the United States, 1848-1898* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989).
  26. ANC, Secretaría, 1:2.
  27. ANC, Secretaría, 1:23:4.
  28. Treaty of Paris, Article I.
  29. See Jesse Hoffnig-Garskof's work on nineteenth-century Cuban migrants in New York City: *Racial Migrations: New York City and the Revolutionary Politics of the Spanish Caribbean* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).
  30. Some Cubans were repatriated from Florida in the years after the war, and attempts were made to aid the return of some Cubans from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. However, these gestures were more symbolic than anything else. The many petitions existing in the US and Cuban national archives asking for repatriation from across the Americas were regularly denied. US authorities cited limited shipping or lack of funds as the reason. Repatriation of stranded Cubans was not a priority.
  31. Sam Erman makes this point in an excellent study of the U.S. in relation to Puerto Rico during 1898-1917. Sam Erman, *Almost Citizens: Puerto Rico, the U.S. Constitution and Empire* (Cambridge UK, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 7.
  32. Louis A. Pérez Jr., *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).
  33. Aline Helg, "Afro-Cuban Protest: the Partido Independiente de Color, 1908-1912," *Cuban Studies*, 21 (1991), p. 105.
  34. Quoted by Alejandro de la Fuente in, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2001), 46. De la Fuente goes on to note that the first immigration schemes presented to Governor Wood by the Cuban Planters Association insisted that whites were the only workers that should be imported.
  35. As Jorge Giovannetti notes, this exclusion changes starting in 1905. Jorge Giovannetti, *Black British Migrants in Cuba*, pp. 47-48; de la Fuente, *A Nation for All*, pp. 45-47.
  36. John Lawrence Tone, *War and Genocide in Cuba, 1895-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).
  37. Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, p. 120.
  38. ANC, Secretaría, 2:1.
  39. ANC, Secretaría, 1:4.
  40. Kirwin Shaffer, *Anarchist Cuba: Countercultural Politics in the Early Twentieth Century* (Oakland: PM Press, 2019); Joan Casanovas, *Bread Or Bullets. Urban Labor and Spanish Colonialism in Cuba, 1850-1898* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998); Gerald E. Poyo, *With All*; Evan Matthew Daniel, "Cuban Cigar Makers in Havana, Key West, and Ybor city, 1850s-1890s: A Single Universe?" in Geoffroy de Lafourcade and Kirwin Shaffer, *In Defiance of Boundaries: Anarchism in Latin American History* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2018); Susan D. Greenbaum. *More than Black* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002).

41. Poyo, *With All*; Lisandro Pérez, *Sugar, Cigars and Revolution: The Making of Cuban New York* (New York: New York University Press, 2018); Hoffnung-Garskof, *Racial Migrations*.
42. ANC, Secretaría, 1:29:3.
43. ANC, Secretaría, 1:23:1
44. ANC, Partido Revolucionario Cubano (PRC), Correspondencia Diplomática de la Delegación de Nueva York) (CD)12:1915-1920.
45. See Poyo, *With All*.
46. Dalia A. Muller. *Cuban Émigrés and Independence in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017).
47. See Poyo, *With All*.
48. Mirabal, “De aquí, de allá,” p. 197.
49. There is a long tradition within the African diaspora of breaking away or carving out spaces of autonomy in the centers and peripheries of empire. The most obvious examples within the diaspora are maroon societies, but in the twentieth century, various projects of settlement like Little Liberia in Mexico and national separatist projects like the RNA in the United States can be seen in this tradition as well.
50. Solimar Otero, *Afro-Cuban Diasporas in the Atlantic World* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2010).
51. Melina Pappademos, *Black Political Activism and the Cuban Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), p. 92.
52. See work on repatriation by Otero, *Afro-Cuban Diasporas* and Pappademos, *Black Political Activism*.
53. Otero, *Afro-Cuban Diasporas*, p. 23-50.
54. Pappademos, *Black Political Activism*, p. 110.
55. “un consul de nuestra nación,” ANC, Secretaría, 299:1:397.
56. ANC, Secretaría, 299:146:3; Pappademos, *Black Political Activism*.
57. “tomando en consideración de que fuimos traídos a esta isla por el gobierno español,” ANC, Secretaría, 299:1:397.
58. “las causas que motivaron su inmigración,” ANC, Secretaría, 299:1:397.
59. “we hope that you will answer this letter and grant our request, which we have no doubt your generous heart will lead you to do.” ANC, Secretaría, 299:1:397. Although the writer uses the word “estancia” in the original Spanish, it is likely that he intended to write “instancia.” An “estancia” refers to a stay or a ranch, whereas “instancia” refers to an instance, but also a request.
60. Jane Landers centers the adaptability and mutability of the Age of Revolutions’ Atlantic Creoles who had to invent and reinvent themselves anew while engaging in tenuous alliances with various European powers to advance their causes for liberty in her *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 13. Other works that engage this theme for Cuba include: David Brown, *Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Matthew D. Childs, *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle against Atlantic Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Philip A. Howard, *Afro-Cuban Cabildos and Societies of Color in the Nineteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998); Ada Ferrer, *Freedom’s Mirror* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
61. Bianca Premo, *The Enlightenment on Trial: Ordinary Litigants and Colonialism in the Spanish Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). Also see, Ann Twinam, *Pur-*

- chasing Whiteness: Pardos, Mulattos, and the Quest for Social Mobility in the Spanish Indies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015); Federica Morelli, "Race, Wars, and Citizenship: Free People of Color in the Spanish American Independence," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 79:1 (2018), p. 146.
62. Enslaved Africans had been crafting their own societies (beyond and within empires) since the beginning of slavery in the Americas, as many robustly studied instances of maroon community formation across the Americas demonstrate. The dichotomy between assimilation and separation as strategies of resistance, however, is overemphasized (and oversimplified), as Betancourt's efforts to craft a means of existence beyond this binary suggests.
  63. "we were brought to this island by the Spanish government," ANC, Secretaría, 299:1:397
  64. "un consul de nuestra nación," ANC, Secretaría, 299:1:397.
  65. "we are born in Africa," ANC, Secretaría, 299:1:397.
  66. African Americans fought for birthright citizenship in part because it served as a critical defense against the threat of forced deportation back to Africa. African Americans had reason to fear removal given the robust emigration schemes carried out by the American Colonization Society. See: Martha S. Jones, *Birthright Citizens: A History of Race and Rights in Antebellum America* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018). Africans in Cuba faced the opposite challenge, as shown in this paper. Their inclusion in the nation as citizens was all but mandated.
  67. *Diario de la Marina*, 26 January 1901. "A los Señores Dignísimos é Ilustradísimos de la Convencion Cubana."
  68. The 1899 US census noted the presence of Africans in Cuba but did not record their provenance or ethnic identification. The explicit perspective of the authors of the census was that African-born persons in Cuba were the remnants of the late slave trade who were advanced in age and likely to disappear from Cuba in the near future. This perspective certainly guided the way in which Africans were depicted in the census without any greater specificity. However, the Chinese and other West Indian migrants were also subsumed into the category "colored," erasing distinctions between them as well. This is a reflection of dominant US perspectives on race.
  69. U.S. War Department. Report of the Census of Cuba, 1899 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1900), p. 99.
  70. See Trouillot's argument about how Black revolution and self-determination are "un-thinkable" to white people, in *Silencing the Past*.
  71. Matt D. Childs, "Re-creating African Ethnic Identities in Cuba," in Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, Matt D. Childs, and James Sidbury (eds.), *The Black Urban Atlantic in the Age of the Slave Trade* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 100.
  72. Rebecca Scott offers an example from Cienfuegos in *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: the Transition to Free Labor, 1860-1899* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000), p. 266.
  73. See: William George Emanuel to John R. Brooke, NARA II, RG 140, Box 1, 117 and Hermenegildo Alvear to John R. Brooke, 17 February 1900, ANC, SEG, 299:398. Philip Janzen has written the first robust treatment of William George Emanuel. See: Philip Janzen, "'Looking forward Always to Africa': William George Emanuel and the Politics of Repatriation in Cuba, 1894-1906," *The Americas*, 78:1 (2021), pp. 37-59.
  74. Fernando Ortiz, *Los cabildos y la fiesta afrocubana del Día de Reyes* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1992), p. 16.
  75. Scott, *Slave Emancipation*, p. 266.

76. Hilda Sabato, "On Political Citizenship in Nineteenth-Century Latin America," *The American Historical Review*, 106:4 (2001), p. 1290-1315.
77. Barry Bunzán and George Lawson, *The Global Transformation: History, Modernity and the Making of Modern International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Michael Hanchard, "Afro-Modernity: Temporality, Politics, and the African Diaspora," *Public Culture*, 1:1 (January 1999).
78. Scott, *Slave Emancipation*, pp. 267-268.
79. Helg, "Afro-Cuban Protest: the Partido Independiente de Color, 1908-1912," pp. 109-111.
80. Pappademos, *Black Political Activism*, p. 95.
81. Sam Erman, *Almost Citizens*, p. 15.
82. There is much wonderful work dedicated to the resistance practices of Afro-diasporans in Cuba and the repression they faced across the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries. See work by Stephan Palmié, Matt Childs, Alejandra Bronfman, Melia Pappademos, Philip A. Howard, Henry B. Lovejoy, Aline Helg, Fannie Theresa Rushing, Alejandro de la Fuente, Kristina Wirtz. In Cuba, texts abound, see works by Maria del Carmen Barcia.
83. See Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).
84. On broader connections at the turn of the century, especially between Afro-Cubans and African Americas see: Frank Guridy, *Forging Diaspora: Afro-Cubans and African-Americans in an Age of Empire and Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: UNC press, 2010).
85. Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1995). Most recently, Yuko Miki cites Said's concept of "rival geographies" in her exploration of the way enslaved Afro-descendants in Brazil fled "into slavery" establishing a maroon existence in the heart of towns in Northeastern Brazil. She sees this kind of flight as a political practice through which the enslaved boldly reimagined their lives as free people at the center rather than at the margins of colonial power. Yuko Miki, *Frontiers of Citizenship: A Black and Indigenous History of Postcolonial Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 174.
86. Johnhenry Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation: A History of Revolutionary Haiti* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).
87. Yarimar Bonilla, *Non-Sovereign Futures: French Caribbean Politics in the Wake of Disenchantment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), xiv.
88. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 22.
89. Lillian Guerra observes a similar phenomenon among Cuban workers who appeal to the US intervention government for protections, attempting to bypass Cuban authorities. In *The Myth of José Martí: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).
90. ANC, Secretaria, 299:146:4.
91. See Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*.
92. Pappademos, *Black Political Activism*, p. 98.
93. See Helg, *Our Rightful Share*.
94. Robin D. Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: Afro-Cubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997).
95. Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003).
96. Azoulay, *Potential History*, p. 44.