

# 1

## "PATRIA Y LIBERTAD" *Schomburg and Puerto Rico*

The works of José Julián Acosta and Salvador Brau have been my first inspiration to a further and intense study of the Negro in America.

—ARTURO SCHOMBURG, letter to Richard Pattee, dated February 3, 1937

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IN A LETTER WRITTEN IN 1937 to Richard Pattee, professor of Latin American history at the University of Puerto Rico, Schomburg identifies his intellectual forefathers in the study of peoples of African descent as white Puerto Rican abolitionist, politician, historian, and a former teacher of his, José Julián Acosta, and white Puerto Rican journalist, poet, and historian Salvador Brau. Each man played a vibrant role in Puerto Rico's political sphere at the end of the nineteenth and first decades of the twentieth century. This chapter explores Arturo Schomburg's intellectual genealogy; it looks at the men who influenced his development as a thinker, writer, historian, and archivist. Contrary to charges that he abandoned the group to which he was born, made by members of the Puerto Rican community and scholars of that history, an examination of Schomburg's life's work reveals an active interaction with his intellectual Puerto Rican and Cuban forefathers throughout his life. For many of them, the liberation of enslaved men and women of African descent was central to their aspirations of creating independent nations.

A consideration of these figures is imperative to understanding the complex man that Schomburg came to be; indeed, a standard feature of biographical sketches of influential men and women is a recreation of their own inspirations. Schomburg's early years have been chiefly characterized by what remains unknown to this date, and the revolutionary period of his life has received scant critical attention from scholars either in Puerto Rico or on the mainland United States.<sup>1</sup>

Identifying Schomburg within a strictly Anglophone tradition, and treating his parentage and upbringing as negligible, ignores his *raison d'être*, namely, broadening and complicating contemporary notions of blackness so as to better learn and appreciate all that peoples of African descent have accomplished since the beginning of recorded history. Understanding the late-nineteenth-century Hispanic Caribbean in the aftermath of the Haitian Revolution and the islands' struggles for freedom, both in terms of ending slavery as well as in terms of the establishment of independent nations, provides a deeper comprehension of this man of African descent. Indeed, for this Afro-Latino, whose own passion for the recovery and assemblage of documents attesting to black excellence necessarily included works from the Spanish-speaking world, from the Iberian Peninsula to its former colonies in the Americas, this period is fertile ground for comprehending the breadth and scope of his later activities.

## PORTRAITS OF A REVOLUTION

The last decades of the nineteenth century were a time of upheaval for the two remaining Spanish colonies in the Caribbean, as creole elites created divergent visions for the futures of Puerto Rico and Cuba.<sup>2</sup> Eighteen sixty-eight saw simultaneous uprisings, the *Grito de Lares* in Puerto Rico and the *Grito de Yara* in Cuba; while the former was suppressed within days, the latter sparked the Ten Years' War, a conflict that ended in a stalemate, with Cuba still a colony and slavery remaining the social, political, and economic foundation of that society. Whereas the majority of Cuban revolutionaries both on the island and in exile labored for complete independence by the last decades of the nineteenth century, Puerto Rico's political scene was more complicated, with divisions present both within the leadership on the island itself as well as in the New York exile community.<sup>3</sup>

The question of the independence of Puerto Rico in the nineteenth century cannot be discussed without an understanding about the abolition of slavery on the island. Latin American historiography has, to a great extent, pushed to the margins of their inquiries the presence of African peoples and their descendants. In light of the Haitian Revolution, fear of similar occurrences dominated the hemisphere, leading to widespread terrorizing of peoples of African descent, enslaved and free. This was particularly striking in the Hispanic Caribbean, to which land-owners, free blacks, and enslaved men and women had fled during the uprising in Saint Domingue.<sup>4</sup> In its aftermath, the sugar industry in Cuba expanded

exponentially, as the island became the primary producer of sugar in the hemisphere; Puerto Rico, which had previously been an island mainly used for defense of the region during the eighteenth century, also saw considerable expansion in its sugar industry and consequently in the population of enslaved African laborers during the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup>

The reality of slavery was also central to Puerto Rican independence efforts; there were rebellions and uprisings throughout the island, as the enslaved fought for their own freedom.<sup>6</sup> Eighteen forty-eight saw the abolition of slavery in the French Caribbean colonies of Guadeloupe and Martinique and a slave rebellion in nearby St. Croix, leading to the passage of the *Bando contra la raza africana* in Puerto Rico. This decree made no distinction in color (mulatto or black) or legal status (slave or free); anyone who harmed a white person, or who even made a threat against one, was subject to imprisonment, if not mutilation or death.<sup>7</sup> While this decree was revoked within months, its passage speaks to the widespread repression of individual liberties on the island.<sup>8</sup>

Revolutionary fervor therefore marked the decade of the 1860s in the Hispanic Caribbean and its exile communities in the United States. Eighteen sixty-eight saw the Liberal Revolution whereby Queen Isabella II of Spain was deposed on September 17, as well as the uprisings in Puerto Rico, the *Grito de Lares*, which took place on September 23, and in Cuba, the *Grito de Yara*, which began on October 10. While conservative factions existed in Puerto Rico, liberalism would be the prevailing political ideology. Writing about the effect of liberalism on Afro-Latin Americans in the nineteenth century, George Reid Andrews observes: "The explicitly egalitarian rhetoric of liberalism—which invoked the concepts of civic equality, political democracy, and the rights of citizenship—touched a powerful chord with these longtime victims of colonial absolutism and social hierarchy."<sup>9</sup> Liberalism therefore created distinct visions of the future of the nation, which were affected by factors such as race, class, and gender.

During the next two decades, there developed two strains of liberal thought regarding the future of Puerto Rico: the *Asimilistas* desired that the island be declared a province of Spain, its inhabitants sharing the same rights as their peninsular counterparts along with the establishment of institutions that would recognize the specificities of Puerto Rico, while the *Autonomistas* called for decentralization, with control of the island's economic affairs left in the hands of Puerto Ricans themselves.<sup>10</sup> The latter group would eventually succeed, as the Spanish Crown did grant autonomy to Puerto Rico in 1897; the *Carta Autonómica* was signed November 25, 1897, with the new Puerto Rican government under the Autonomous Charter installed in February 1898. Two weeks into that month,

on February 15, the U.S.S. *Maine* exploded in Havana Harbor, prompting the United States to enter the Cuban insurrection against Spain, which had been ongoing since 1895. It is for this reason that for many Latin Americanists, “Spanish-American War” is a misnomer that erases the fact that it was a war being waged by Cuba for independence; instead, they offer the term “Spanish-Cuban-American War.”<sup>11</sup> By the summer of 1898, both islands, along with the Philippines and Guam, had been ceded to the United States, thereby signaling the end of the Spanish Empire.

It is notable that neither group of Liberal politicians called for the complete independence of Puerto Rico; separatism was a characteristic of the exile communities on the mainland, not on the island itself. As Harold J. Lidin writes, “They were liberals, not radicals, and their victory came after much patient insistence that they were faithful to Spain.”<sup>12</sup> In her study on the regulation of race and sexuality in Puerto Rico in the decades between 1870 and 1920, Eileen J. Suárez Findlay writes how a tactic used by these lawmakers in their negotiations with the Spanish Crown was to highlight their preference for peace, thereby distinguishing themselves from surrounding islands: “Social conflict had always remained at a minimum, particularly when compared with Haiti and its slave-led revolution, or Cuba, where the struggle to end slavery and gain independence from Spain had exploded in a bloody, decade-long war.... Puerto Rico would advance through legislative change, not rebellion, they insisted.”<sup>13</sup> In concordance with this point, Ileana M. Rodríguez-Silva writes: “At a moment in which most imperial politicians equated blackness with instability and destruction, particularly in the Caribbean, Puerto Rican liberals sought to represent themselves and the island population as white and hence harmonious and stable.”<sup>14</sup> Upon the transfer of power from Spain to the United States, these legislators only slightly shifted their message, assuring the new colonizer that they would not seek independence but instead were eager to be a part of the United States.

Key to the assurances offered by the Liberal leadership to U.S. politicians, as they had to their Spanish counterparts, was the manner in which the abolition of slavery had been managed in the 1860s and 1870s. Puerto Rico avoided the bloodshed of Haiti, Cuba, and the United States itself in its quest to end slavery.<sup>15</sup> Instead, two laws were passed regarding this effort: first, the Law of Partial Abolition, the 1870 Moret Law, whereby the state purchased children born between 1868 and 1870 and vowed to compensate their owners. This legislation also emancipated those enslaved men and women who were over the age of sixty.<sup>16</sup> This latter statute of the law was mostly symbolic, as there were very few enslaved human beings who reached this age.<sup>17</sup> Still, approximately ten

thousand persons were freed under the Moret Law; three years later saw the passage of the Abolition Law, which liberated the remaining 31,000 enslaved humans. The state once again vowed payment to the landholders as well as stipulated obligatory labor of three years (*contratación*) for the newly freed, the *libertos*.<sup>18</sup> In this way, insular politicians were able to later claim that they had kept the Puerto Rican family intact.

The metaphor of the great Puerto Rican family (*la gran familia puertorriqueña*) is one whose origins are in this historical moment of the late nineteenth century, when the liberation of the small segment of the population that had been enslaved left lawmakers facing the task of integrating them into society, thereby creating a cohesive nation. As Suárez Findlay writes, "To replace the brutality of slavery and the *libreta* labor regime, they posited a benevolent but hierarchical paternalism as the glue which would hold society together under Liberal leadership and which would effectively mold a pliable workforce."<sup>19</sup> Social harmony was a guarantee, then, provided that everyone knew their place within a highly regimented hierarchy and respected said order. The exile communities in New York and Florida did no such thing, instead seeking to destroy such stratification in order to create a region defined by freedom and equality for all.

### PUERTO RICAN REVOLUTIONARIES: BETANCES, HOSTOS, RODRÍGUEZ DE TIÓ

Dr. Ramón Emeterio Betances, Eugenio María de Hostos, and Lola Rodríguez de Tió lay the spiritual foundation for the Puerto Rican nation and for a broader Caribbean nation, and so are esteemed throughout the region and its diaspora; exiled by Spanish authorities, all were prolific writers who were deeply involved in the fight for the independence of the lands of the Hispanic Caribbean in order to create a coalition of these nations.<sup>20</sup> Cuba being the largest landmass of the Greater Antilles, the establishment of its sovereignty as a liberated nation would serve to secure the Antillean Confederation.<sup>21</sup> Betances and Hostos died shortly after the United States intervention in 1898, and while Betances's remains were repatriated (he had spent a good part of his life in France), Hostos instructed that he wished to be buried on the island only when Puerto Rico was free; he is buried in the Dominican Republic.<sup>22</sup> Rodríguez de Tió lived into the third decade of the twentieth century; having moved to Cuba a year after the conclusion of the war, she lived and died there, and is buried in Colón Cemetery in Havana.

**Dr. Ramón Emeterio Betances**  
**(Cabo Rojo, PR, 1827–Neuilly-sur-Seine, Île-de-France, 1898)**

¡Unámonos! Amémonos! Formemos todos un solo pueblo....Las Antillas para los antillanos.

[Let us unite! Let us love! Together we will form one people....The Antilles for the Antilleans.]

—RAMÓN EMETERIO BETANCES, *Las Antillas para los antillanos*

Known as *El Padre de la Patria* (The Father of the Nation), Dr. Ramón Emeterio Betances is a renowned figure in Puerto Rican history. Born into the middle class in Mayagüez in 1839 to a Dominican father of African descent and a creole mother, he earned his medical degree in Paris.<sup>23</sup> During a cholera outbreak that affected the city of his birth, he served the enslaved and freed population of African descent. Shortly thereafter he co-founded a secret society that was dedicated to the following three goals: the abolition of slavery, the purchase of newborns who were enslaved so as to grant them their freedom, and the independence of the island.<sup>24</sup> His actions were an affront to Spanish colonial authorities and he was soon exiled because of them.<sup>25</sup> Expulsion from the island for Betances meant living in Paris (1858–59); the Dominican Republic (1861–62); New York (1867); St. Thomas (1868–69); New York (1869–70); Haiti (1870); and finally, Paris. Despite his deportation, he remained active in revolutionary causes across the Caribbean region throughout his life, and developed relationships with those who were also committed to liberation for these countries, including General Gregorio Luperón of the Dominican Republic; Hostos; the Afro-Cuban Antonio Maceo (the subject of a biographical chronicle by Schomburg), leader of the revolutionary forces in Cuba; and José Martí.

In November 1867, Betances published “Los Diez Mandamientos del Hombre Libre” (“The Ten Commandments of a Free Man”), which were: (1) abolition of black slavery; (2) right to vote the budget; (3) freedom of religion; (4) freedom of speech; (5) freedom of commerce; (6) freedom of the press; (7) right to bear weapons; (8) freedom of assembly; (9) inviolability of the citizen; (10) right to elect one’s own authorities.<sup>26</sup> While for a U.S. audience, several of these items are resonant of their Constitution, these were considered universal inalienable rights, not reserved for one particular nation. Striking is Betances’s prioritization of the end of slavery; as the first commandment, it made patently clear his dedication to the end of this economic system. At the conclusion of the document, which is set up as a contract between Spain and Puerto Rico (with the ten “commandments”

presented as conditions of the contract), he writes: "Así seremos españoles, Si no, NO. Si no, Puertorriqueños, ¡PACIENCIA! Os juro que seréis libres [That way (if Spain fulfills all of these conditions) we will be Spaniards. If not, NO. If not, Puerto Ricans, Patience! I vow to you that you will be free!]"<sup>27</sup> Extraordinary is the idea that the colony has the right to negotiate with the Mother Country, and that, in this case, Betances communicates how Spain must fulfill these conditions in order for its colony to continue being a part of the empire. While the legal and juridical status of the island revealed it to already be a part of Spain, for all intents and purposes Betances inverts the power dynamic, utilizing a voice that conveys that Spain desires to be a part of Puerto Rico, and not the converse. Additionally, these ten conditions present Puerto Rico as if the entire populace of the island were in agreement, as if they were speaking in one voice. He conveniently ignored the diversity of opinions that have marked the Puerto Rican nation, both then and into the present day.

Betances's commitment to armed insurrection for the liberation of the island of his birth was demonstrated by his leadership of the Grito de Lares; though he was not physically present, he had co-founded the *Comité Revolucionario de Puerto Rico* in the Dominican Republic in January 1868, which served as the planning committee for the uprising. (He circulated his commandments among the revolutionaries.) Though the rebellion was quickly suppressed by Spanish troops, nevertheless it is cited as the first manifestation of Puerto Rican nationalism and to this day is commemorated by those who remain staunch supporters of Puerto Rican independence.<sup>28</sup>

For the remaining thirty years of his life, Betances was intimately involved with insurrection efforts, raising funds, writing essays and articles, giving speeches, all for the goal of a free Antilles. Gordon K. Lewis writes: "He is the declared opponent of reformers and annexationists alike because both of them assume that Puerto Rico can be spiritually free while politically related to an outside society."<sup>29</sup> For Betances, such a compromise would be an abomination unto itself, the equivalent of consenting to lesser forms of freedom. Though there is no evidence of this, Schomburg's biographer Elinor Des Verney Sinnette speculates that Schomburg may have learned of Betances in his youth, when Betances was exiled in St. Thomas and when Schomburg was also supposedly on the island.<sup>30</sup> She writes: "Perhaps Betances' messages so fired his youthful enthusiasm that Arturo never tired of hearing what was happening in the revolutionary movement... [I]t was the Puerto Rican independence struggle that became uppermost among young Schomburg's interests."<sup>31</sup> Sinnette's conjecture is revealing in that it demonstrates a desire to understand how the man who would play a central role in the collection and

preservation of African diasporic history, how this person could also be the dedicated young man who committed so much of his time and energy to a cause that seemingly had little to do with these later ambitions. In addition to his position as a Mason (the significance of which is the subject of the next chapter), Betances, in the words of Jossianna Arroyo, “truly embodies a Circum-Atlantic diasporic identity.”<sup>32</sup> His passion and dedication to the liberation of the Caribbean and the creation of an Antillean Confederation, one that included all of the islands of the Greater Antilles, including Haiti, provided a model of Afro-Latinx subjectivity for Schomburg and other future scholars and students of black history.<sup>33</sup>

**Eugenio María de Hostos**  
(Mayagüez, PR, 1839–Santo Domingo, DR, 1903)

Cuando hablamos de contienda de raza estamos muy distantes de las sombrías privaciones de aquellos que temen la repetición del drama social de Haití; ésa es una repetición imposible. Lo posible es que la ineptitud o las pasiones de la población predominante utilicen como instrumento de reacción o de anarquía el fraccionamiento de la sociedad en dos razas contradictorias, y reproduzcan los hechos de reconstitución que se observan después de la guerra de abolición en los Estados de la Unión Americana que fueron esclavistas.

[When we speak of a race war we are far from the dismal losses of those who fear a repetition of the social drama of Haiti; that is an impossible recurrence. What is possible is that the ineptitude or the passions of the prevailing population use the division of society into two contradictory races as an implement of reaction or of anarchy, and they reproduce the events of reconstruction that we observe after the war of emancipation in the slaveholding States of the American Union.]

—HOSTOS, “El problema de Cuba” (“The Problem of Cuba”)

In the year of Arturo Schomburg’s birth, 1874, Eugenio María de Hostos wrote an article that directly confronted the fears that many held regarding revolution in the Antillean nations. “The Problem of Cuba” was published in *El Mundo Nuevo / América Ilustrada*, a biweekly publication published in New York between 1871 and 1875 that was one of the major periodicals written in Spanish.<sup>34</sup> As Kirsten Silva Gruesz writes: “*El Mundo Nuevo* encouraged its readers to align themselves along multiple lines of affiliation: as residents or citizens of the United States who took pride in their cultural Hispanism, or as members of a far-flung transnational community of progressive, elite Spanish Americans—with the political valence of that term left deliberately vague.”<sup>35</sup> Notably, the newspaper was founded by



Ernest Piñeyro, who was active in the efforts to end Spanish colonialism and who left Cuba at the beginning of the Ten Years War.<sup>36</sup> Hostos directed his comments, therefore, not only to a Spanish-language audience but, more importantly, to one that included members of the white Cuban upper class, such as Piñeyro himself, who feared the increased participation of Afro-Cubans in the war as soldiers as much as, or perhaps more than, they did their Spanish colonizers. Indeed, the Spanish would conjure the violence of the Haitian Revolution as a means by which to terrorize their colonies, much as did all of the slaveholding societies in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>37</sup> The Spanish utilized this apprehension as a strategy to disarm, literally and figuratively, insurgent troops.<sup>38</sup>

In the midst of his article about Cuba, then, Hostos attempts to reassure his audience by unequivocally stating that no such occurrence could happen in Puerto Rico. Instead, he cites the ongoing Reconstruction project in the United States, whereby there were efforts to legislate equality for all in the eyes of the law, as the humanity of the newly emancipated was recognized in order to integrate this population into the Union. Hostos's allusion to the United States was notable because the United States, like Cuba, had a sizeable population of peoples of African descent; Hostos makes clear that it is possible to successfully bring these populaces together under the guise of a nation.

Indeed, from his perspective, the inhabitants of the remaining Spanish colonies shared one defining characteristic as subjects of the Mother Country; later in the article, he writes: "Nacemos muertos....Esclavos blancos que sabían explotar o cantar su esclavitud; esclavos negros que la sufrían y la lloraban; dominadores hambrientos que necesitaban de ella para retirarse ahítos; ésa es la sociedad de Puerto Rico y Cuba [We are born dead....White slaves who knew how to exploit or sing about their slavery; black slaves who suffered slavery and cried; starving oppressors who needed slavery in order to retire, full; that is the society of Puerto Rico and Cuba]."<sup>39</sup> For Hostos, who employs slavery as a metaphor for political oppression, there is no difference between those of African or European descent on these islands, as they are all subject to the whims of an insatiably corrupt system that benefits no one other than the Spanish Empire itself.

In the nineteenth century, the name Eugenio María de Hostos was known throughout the Spanish-speaking world. One of the first sociologists in the region, he traveled extensively: in Spain for his studies as a young man, then later to New York, where he joined the fight for Antillean independence. Like Betances, Hostos sought the creation of an Antillean Confederation that would unite the Spanish-speaking islands of the Greater Antilles as a political unit. In order to raise awareness and find possible alliances to support the call for revolution,

Hostos traveled for four years, from 1870 to 1874, to a number of South American countries, including Colombia, Peru, Chile, Argentina, and Brazil. In addition to his passion for Puerto Rico and Cuba, Hostos devoted himself to the Dominican Republic; he established a close friendship with General Gregorio Luperón, who led the Dominican insurgency against the Spanish in the 1860s and who would go on to serve as vice president and later president of the country.<sup>40</sup>

Hostos previewed his efforts to unify the nations of the Hispanic Caribbean in his novel *La peregrinación de Bayoán* (1863), where, in a coda, he tells his audience that his protagonist, Bayoán, represents Puerto Rico; Marién, his love interest, represents Cuba; and Guarionex, Marién's father, represents the Dominican Republic. Schomburg would later use "Guarionex" as his pen name in both his concise contributions to Martí's newspaper *Patria* and in his Masonic writings, which is a focus of the third chapter in this study.<sup>41</sup> At Luperón's invitation, Hostos reformed the educational system of the Dominican Republic, establishing schools and advocating for the education of both boys and girls. As Angel Villarini Jusino and Carlos Antonio Torre emphasize, for Hostos, "[d]omination, more than anything, is oppression of the human mind. An oppressed individual's existence resides in underdeveloped thinking. Neocolonial education becomes an instrument of domination in the measure in which it produces a sick mind devoid of conscience, truth, freedom, or justice."<sup>42</sup> Hostos's recognition of the role of the educational system in the perpetuation of ideological discourse is a principle that will echo in one of Schomburg's most famous pieces, his 1913 speech to the Teachers' Summer Class at the Cheyney Institute in Pennsylvania, titled "Racial Integrity: A Plea for the Establishment of a Chair of Negro History in Our Schools and Colleges."

**Lola Rodríguez de Tió**  
(San Germán, PR, 1843–Havana, Cuba, 1924)

Cuba y Puerto Rico son / de un pájaro las dos alas, / reciben flores o balas /  
sobre el mismo corazón... Cuba and Puerto Rico are / two wings of one bird. /  
They receive blows or bullets / in the same heart...

—RODRÍGUEZ DE TIÓ, "A Cuba"; translation in Acosta-Belén (2005)

Schomburg historiography, which for this writer includes Schomburg's own publications, is decidedly male-centered (that is, there is a notable absence of women, seemingly in his professional life and work), and so while there is discussion of Betances and Hostos in the same breath as Schomburg, there is little mention of Lola Rodríguez de Tió outside of *independentista* circles and the work of

contemporary Puerto Rican feminist scholars such as Virginia Sánchez Korrol and Edna Acosta-Belén. While her name may be little known, Rodríguez de Tió's writings, particularly her poetry, were vital to the Antillean liberation struggle. In 1868, inspired by *El Grito de Lares*, she wrote the verses of "La Borinqueña," where she urges her compatriots to awaken from their slumber, as the moment for the fight has arrived; the poem was soon put to music and continues to be sung. Rodríguez de Tió's "La Borinqueña" is the anthem of the Puerto Rican independence movement. It is not, however, the national anthem of the island: those lyrics were composed by Manuel Fernández Juncos thirty-five years later. Her poem "A Cuba" provides one of the most widely-known images of the relationship between Puerto Rico and Cuba that survives to this day. Rodríguez de Tió and her husband were exiled from the island from 1877–80 (when they lived in Venezuela); 1889–95 (when they lived in Havana); and 1895–99 (when they lived in New York City). Like Schomburg, Rodríguez de Tió joined the revolutionary activities in New York; she served as an officer in the Club Hermanas de Rius Rivera, the women's club of the Puerto Rican Section of the Cuban Revolutionary Party, for example.<sup>43</sup> This club, like the others, was charged primarily with fundraising for the war effort in Cuba. Following the conclusion of the 1898 War, Rodríguez de Tió lived the rest of her life in Cuba, working for the Ministry of Education, until her death in 1924; though she visited Puerto Rico only sporadically, she remained committed to its independence.<sup>44</sup>

Historian Félix Ojeda Reyes honors these men and woman as "peregrinos de la libertad," "pilgrims of freedom" in his book of the same name.<sup>45</sup> Each of them fought not only for the independence of their home country, but also for the independence of both Cuba and Puerto Rico. All of them favored the creation of an Antillean Confederation that would include all of the islands of the Greater Antilles—Cuba, Hispaniola, and Puerto Rico. Jossianna Arroyo demonstrates how in Betances's configuration, Haiti played a key role in this union, whereas Hostos thought this nation, while it had an acknowledged legacy of successful revolution, should have no part in the political configuration of the confederation, bowing to the antiblack sentiment that has steered the hemispheric approach to Haiti.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, in Betances, Hostos, and Rodríguez de Tió, Schomburg had models of exiles whose writings revealed a deep passion for the independence of the Hispanic Caribbean islands as well as offered a vision of a more holistic Caribbean; with Betances in particular, an Afro-Latino who was deeply invested in the liberation and union of black peoples throughout the Caribbean, Schomburg found an exemplar of African diasporic thought.

## CUBAN COMPATRIOTS: SERRA AND MARTÍ

The revolutionary activities in New York toward the end of the nineteenth century brought together exiles from both of the remaining colonies of the Spanish empire; Cuban and Puerto Rican men and women shared the passionate belief that Spain's expulsion from the Caribbean was necessary for the progress of their island nations, and this would only be accomplished through armed insurrection. Thus, they collaborated in all things: fundraising for weapons and supplies, planning, writing newspaper articles, preparing pamphlets, educating one another, all with the single goal of a free Caribbean, where they would enjoy the same rights as all liberal and democratic nations. Schomburg was in the midst of these efforts in New York; he met and worked members of the Cuban community, two of whom were to figure prominently in their countries: Rafael Serra and José Martí. While Serra is the lesser known of the two, he played a critical role, co-founding several revolutionary clubs as well as the Partido Revolucionario Cubano, alongside Martí. He also established a school that provided free classes to members of these communities, many of whom were working-class and of African descent. A depiction of the Antillean revolutionary movement of the late nineteenth century would be incomplete without reference to José Martí, who was its acknowledged core. In his relationship with Afro-Cubans in general and with Serra in particular, as well as in his writings on race, Martí demonstrated his commitment to a free Cuba that was inclusive of all of its inhabitants.

**Rafael Serra y Montalvo**

**(Havana, Cuba, 1858–Havana, Cuba, 1909)**

Revolucionar es remover, destruir y cambiar de una vez un sistema por otro que en nada se parezca al sistema caído. Cuando á un sistema solo se le quita ó añade, quedando siempre su base original, entonces no se evoluciona: y los cubanos, como principio de salvación y de progreso, tenemos que revolucionar.

[To revolutionize is to remove, destroy, and change once and for all one system for another that does not resemble in any way the fallen one. When one only removes or adds to a system, leaving its original base intact, it doesn't evolve: and the Cuban people, in the name of salvation and of progress, we need to revolutionize. ]

—RAFAEL SERRA, "Hay que pensar" ("One Has to Think")

Published first in his newspaper *La Doctrina de Martí* and later in his collection *Ensayos políticos* (1899), Rafael Serra here makes clear the necessity for the complete destruction and the construction of new social structures through revolution; reminiscent of Audre Lorde's admonition that the "master's tools will never dismantle the master's house,"<sup>47</sup> Serra underscores that the amendment of existing structures will inevitably lead to the replication of those structures, irrespective of intent to the contrary. After the 1898 war and the establishment of the Cuban Republic in 1902, Serra witnessed the infiltration of white supremacist thought in the creation of a new Cuba that systematically excluded Afro-Cuban civic participation; in his writings, which included articles and essays, in the newspapers he created, and in the schools he founded, Serra personally took on the task of creating a more educated populace of African descent who would be able to contribute to their nation in new ways, ones that would allow for both its progress and its salvation.

Serra was one of the two men to whom Schomburg presented himself upon his arrival in New York, the other being Flor Baerga.<sup>48</sup> An Afro-Cuban and an autodidact, Serra was a *tabaquero* and activist whose dedication to the independence of both islands was notable, as was his commitment to the education of men and women of African descent. Born free in Havana, Serra founded a free school, *Armonía*, and a newspaper of the same name in 1879 while living in Matanzas, at the age of twenty-one; his goal for this mutual aid society was the "modeling of citizen consciousness."<sup>49</sup> Within a year, he was exiled to New York, where he lived until the turn of the century. There he co-founded a number of organizations that supported the Antillean insurgency, including Los Independientes (a revolutionary club), the Partido Revolucionario Cubano (Martí's political party) and Las Dos Antillas; Schomburg was a member of the latter two and, and in the case of Las Dos Antillas, served as secretary.<sup>50</sup> In 1890, Serra founded La Liga, which was modeled after the Directorio Central de las Sociedades de la Raza de Color, an Afro-Cuban association founded three years earlier in Cuba with the explicit goal of establishing the "moral and material well-being of the raza de color through the promotion of formal education and 'better habits.'"<sup>51</sup>

Writing about Serra's organization, Aline Helg observes, "The society of La Liga brought together working-class Cubans and Puerto Ricans of African descent living in New York and provided them with general education, a propaganda against Spanish colonialism, and family entertainment."<sup>52</sup> Despite challenges, including the racism of white Cuban exiles, with Martí's support Serra was able to open a similar organization in Tampa for Afro-Cubans there in 1892.<sup>53</sup> Martí

himself taught at La Liga, and was named head supervisor and honorary president; it was at this time that his nickname of “Maestro” began to circulate.<sup>54</sup> Serra’s passion for the education of peoples of African descent was connected to his ideas of the responsibilities of citizens; Alejandra Bronfman observes, “His was a liberal notion of citizenship, premised on equality but also on a sense that citizens had obligations that could be met only if they began their civic lives with adequate education and preparation.”<sup>55</sup> A lingering legacy of racism and enslavement had been the woeful state of educational systems for peoples of African descent on the island, free or enslaved. Serra’s schools and newspapers therefore provided an alternative to racist declarations that peoples of African descent could not reach the intellectual capacity of those of European descent. Again, we see an emphasis on education as fundamental for the decolonization of the mind, a theme Schomburg would take up in his own work.

After Martí’s death, Serra founded the newspaper *La Doctrina de Martí*, which stood as an important and necessary corrective to those who had willfully misinterpreted Martí’s efforts to create a Cuban nation that was inclusive of everyone. Naming Serra’s paper as “the most influential of the numerous newspapers that advanced Martí’s thought,” Gerald E. Poyo writes: “During its existence *La Doctrina* reminded Cubans of Martí’s broader nationalist ideals that included creating a republic based on social justice, mutual respect among the social classes, and racial harmony.”<sup>56</sup> Serra launched this newspaper in New York in 1896, where it was published with regularity until 1898; this was only one of the several periodicals of which he was in charge.<sup>57</sup> He then published *La Doctrina* in Cuba, to which he returned after the conclusion of the war. In the first decade of the twentieth century, he was elected to the legislative body twice, in 1904 and 1909; in 1907, he published a collection of essays, *Para blancos y negros. Ensayos políticos, sociales y económicos*. The title of the compendium is an indication of the stratification of Cuban society in the first decades of the twentieth century, when Cuban nationalist rhetoric had encouraged racial fraternity by attempting to silence and marginalize the population of African descent. Until his death in 1909, Serra continued to write explicitly about civil rights and social justice issues in language that reflected his liberal beliefs: as Bronfman writes, “his model for equal citizenship was based...on the reality of a conscience that was moral, virtuous, and educated.”<sup>58</sup> Citizenship, then had nothing to do with race but instead with the inherent equality of one’s soul.<sup>59</sup>

**José Martí**  
**(Havana, Cuba, 1853–Dos Ríos, Cuba, 1895)**

No hay odio de razas, porque no hay razas...El alma emana, igual y eterna, de los cuerpos diversos en forma y en color. Peca contra la Humanidad el que fomenta y propague la oposición y el odio de las razas.

[There is no racial hatred because there is no such thing as race...The soul, equal and eternal, emanates from bodies diverse in form and color. He who foments and spreads opposition and hatred of the races sins against Humanity.]

—JOSÉ MARTÍ, "Nuestra America" ("Our America")

José Martí always stated that the republic would have been impossible without the brawn and muscle of all races.

—ARTHUR SCHOMBURG, "General Antonio Maceo"

In his portrait of the Afro-Cuban general Antonio Maceo,<sup>60</sup> Schomburg references José Martí in four instances, each of which honors the man known as "El Apóstol de la Revolución," (the Apostle of the Revolution) for his dedication to his beloved homeland. Father of the Cuban nation, Martí's renown is such that he is claimed by all sides of the political spectrum within a Cuban context, from Fidel Castro himself to Castro's most virulent critics. Martí is the sole figure that unites his *patria*, both on the island and in its diaspora. For the greater American audience, English-, Spanish-, Portuguese-, French-, and Dutch-speaking, Martí is held in great esteem for his utopian visions for the island of his birth and his foresight regarding U.S. imperial ambitions throughout the hemisphere. Finally, his essays, articles, and chronicles (*crónicas*) are matched by his creative output, his poems and novels, as Martí is also known as one of the fathers of Latin American Modernismo, a literary movement that heralded the development of a distinctly Latin American literature, as opposed to one that had been considered derivative of European models on the world stage. For all of these reasons, Martí has garnered an expansive amount of scholarly attention since his death in battle in 1895.

While Martí is almost universally revered (as one critic calls him, the "towering figure of Cuban history"),<sup>61</sup> for Schomburg, Martí is a man he knew personally, as he himself writes in an article that appeared in the NAACP's *The Crisis*.<sup>62</sup> Twenty-one years his senior, Martí, who had arrived in New York in 1880, served as a mentor to the young migrant, as he was to many in the exile communities, Puerto Rican and Cuban alike. As Bernardo Vega notes in his memoirs, for members of the working classes (mostly artisans and tobacco workers), Martí

harkened back to the era of Hostos himself, as both were intellectuals who called for armed conflict in order to establish sovereignty for these islands.<sup>63</sup>

By the time of his arrival in the United States, Martí had already worked as a journalist; he continued producing articles and essays that appeared in newspapers throughout the Americas, writing in both English and Spanish.<sup>64</sup> Though he traveled incessantly—he was also a highly acclaimed orator, and so gave speeches during fundraisers in support for the revolutionary movement—Martí lived in New York for fifteen years, until his return to Cuba in 1895. In his study introducing Martí, Oscar Montero writes: “While living in the United States, Martí witnessed the progressive unraveling of the promise of emancipation for all.”<sup>65</sup> His vision of a new Cuban republic was one that would be inclusive of all of its inhabitants, rather than one that sanctioned and enforced the marginalization of any segment of the population, particularly those of African descent.<sup>66</sup>

Founder of the Partido Revolucionario Cubano (Cuban Revolutionary Party) in 1892 and of the party’s newspaper *Patria*, Martí wrote in the first issue of the newspaper that the party’s main goal was “winning the independence of Cuba and lending direct support to the struggle to free Puerto Rico.”<sup>67</sup> In an editorial accompanying the publication of the party platform, he writes: “The birth of this newspaper rests on the determination and resources of independent Cubans and Puerto Ricans in New York who are committed to contribute, unflinching and tirelessly, to the organization of the free men of Cuba and Puerto Rico as is made necessary by the conditions prevailing on the Islands and their future constitution as republics.”<sup>68</sup> Martí’s inclusion of Puerto Rico in the fight for freedom was one that both drew from the activist work of Betances and Hostos and was also a pragmatic decision: given Puerto Rico’s geographic proximity to Cuba, Puerto Rico was the site where Spanish troops were stationed before fighting the insurgencies. Appealing to an emerging Puerto Rican nationalism had the potential of disrupting military operations before they commenced.

Martí’s vision of a free Caribbean was one that depended on equality for all, irrespective of difference. “Nuestra America” (“Our America”) is perhaps his most widely reproduced essay; published originally in January 1891 in both New York and Mexico City, Martí warns his audience about the expansionist ambitions of the United States in the rest of the Americas. It is in the last paragraph that this, one of his most famous statements, appears. His dismissal of the construct of race in favor of an assessment of human beings that centers on the fundamental equality of the soul is one that has been interpreted to mean that Martí advocated a nationalism that ignored racial difference, which is far from true. Instead, Martí believed in freedom for all men and women, black and white; Montero observes:



"True freedom is inseparable from respect for all of those bodies, not just some of them, and only those nations that could transform this simple fact into a guiding vision would survive and prosper."<sup>69</sup>

In an essay published in a collection focused on "Nuestra America," Ada Ferrer provides the historical context of Martí's article; she makes the point that by the 1890s Spanish authorities and creole elites "had long linked the preservation of social order in Cuba with the maintenance of colonial rule. Pointing to the numerical predominance of the nonwhite population and the economic significance of slavery, they argued for the necessity of maintaining a colonial bond with Spain. To challenge that bond, they said, was to imperil life and property."<sup>70</sup> While both Puerto Rico and Cuba were under Spanish dominion, Cuba had a much more significant population of Africans and their descendants, and, as Ferrer reveals, "colonial discourse had constructed [the categories of race and nation] as irreconcilable for almost a century."<sup>71</sup> During the Ten Years War, the revolutionary troops included large numbers of enslaved and freed men of African descent; this was the period in which terms such as "black Cuban" and "citizens of color" entered the lexicon, as revolutionaries made a discursive intervention by uniting race and national identity.<sup>72</sup> Employing the fear tactic that blacks would be taking over the country should the revolutionaries win, the Spanish managed to sow discord within the ranks of the rebels by speaking explicitly about race. Ferrer records: "In the region of Camagüey, for example, approximately 95 percent of the original insurgent forces had surrendered by the third year of the rebellion," many admitting to the fear of conquest by blacks.<sup>73</sup>

This apprehension was one that Spain successfully employed for the subsequent two decades, through the Ten Years War (1868–1878) as well as the Guerra Chiquita of 1879–80, where Spanish troops successfully defeated the insurgency. By the 1890s, some in the revolutionary leadership had developed a new tactic: "If opponents of independence spoke of race—of racial slavery, of the island's racial composition, and of race war—then to defeat those opponents, independence activists would have to strip race of its ideological hold. They would have to silence the issue of race."<sup>74</sup> Martí's emphasis on an all-encompassing nationalism has been appropriated by various constituencies, some of whom have used his vision to justify policies that marginalized those who clamored for true equality before the law.<sup>75</sup> Rafael Serra was only one critic and politician who continued to call attention to the structural inequalities within the nation itself.

Two years after the publication of "Nuestra America," there appeared his most famous essay on race itself, simply titled "Mi raza." In a frequently cited passage, he writes: "Cubano es más que blanco, más que mulato, más que negro. En los

campos de batalla, muriendo por Cuba, han subido juntas por los aires las almas de los blancos y de los negros [Cuban is more than white, more than *mulato*, more than black. On the battlefields, the souls of both whites and blacks have both risen, dying for Cuba together].<sup>76</sup> Once again returning to the theme of souls, Martí focuses on those who died together during previous insurgency efforts: the revolutionary armies during the Ten Years War as well as the Guerra Chiquita were composed of men of both European and African descent, united in a common vision. For Martí, a compartmentalization of a nation by race means division, and as Oscar Montero observes, “To insist on differences between people in order to separate them is to violate the republic, to do violence to the public trust. Martí believed that to violate the rights of one individual was to violate the rights of all. In brief, that was his definition of freedom. Freedom for one person at the expense of another was no freedom at all.”<sup>77</sup> It was toward this dream of a unified and integrated nation to which Martí appealed in his writings and speeches.<sup>78</sup>

Martí’s death in 1895 had a devastating impact in the exile communities; Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof highlights how, in the only instance in which he makes an appearance in the minutes he recorded as secretary at an October 1895 revolutionary gathering in New York, Schomburg called for a moment of recognition for their fallen leader. Hoffnung-Garskof observes: “Perhaps it was an innocent salute to a nationalist hero. But in the context of the divided Partido Cubano Revolucionario, it was likely an attempt to link the symbol of the fallen martyr to the radical politics of class and race that so permeated the oratory of the evening.”<sup>79</sup> Martí had successfully created alliances across gender, race, and class; the fragility of his organization became apparent as struggles for power came to pass almost immediately after his death.

Nevertheless, the revolutionary activity in support of Antillean independence of exiled men and women of African descent at the end of the nineteenth century reveals the extent to which they were invested in the creation of their nations. The United States intervention in what had been a Cuban war for independence, the third in three decades, conclusively changed the political status of the islands. Whereas Puerto Rico would go on to become a U.S. colony, the Cuban Republic was declared in 1902; and while Puerto Rico saw the election of one man of African descent to office, Dr. José Celso Barbosa, Cuba saw more representatives, including Martín Morúa Delgado and Rafael Serra himself.<sup>80</sup> As he did not turn his back on the island of his youth later in life, neither did Schomburg forget the legacy of his Cuban comrades, as they would feature prominently in his writings in African American publications (a subject explored at length in the third chapter of the present study).

## SCHOMBURG'S SCHOLARLY INFLUENCES

While the above-mentioned men and woman undoubtedly shaped Schomburg's life and pursuits, he names two men as having sparked his interest in black history: José Julián Acosta and Salvador Brau. Both men were historians: as a young man studying on scholarship in Spain, Acosta had edited an edition of Fray Iñigo Abbad y Lasierra's history of Puerto Rico.<sup>81</sup> This text, originally published in 1788, remains cited as a foundational text in the historiography of the island. For his part, Brau would be named the official historian of Puerto Rico, writing texts that are also considered critical in the discipline. These were two men who demonstrated the significant importance of the construction of narrative in the establishment of a nation.

### **José Julián Acosta** **(San Juan, PR, 1825–San Juan, PR, 1891)**

Con la abolición inmediata puede haber, sin duda alguna, inconvenientes y quebrantos, pero son siempre pequeños, y, por su naturaleza, esencialmente pasajeros.

[With immediate abolition there may be, without a doubt, objections and losses, but these are always, by their nature, small and essentially fleeting.]

—SEGUNDO RUIZ BELVIS, JOSÉ JULIÁN ACOSTA, FRANCISCO MARIANO QUIÑONES,  
*Proyecto para la abolición de la esclavitud en Puerto Rico (Project for the  
Abolition of Slavery in Puerto Rico)*

The Junta Informativa de Ultramar was a committee of delegates from Puerto Rico and Cuba who met in Madrid with the Ministerio de Ultramar (Overseas Ministry) during the final months of 1866 and into 1867 to discuss possible reforms with Spanish officials. From Puerto Rico, the delegates were conservative Manuel Zeno Correa and liberals Segundo Ruiz Belvis, Francisco Mariano Quiñones, and José Julián Acosta. While their conservative counterpart called for a gradual abolition with compensation for landowners, Ruiz Belvis, Quiñones, and Acosta presented a plan for immediate abolition of slavery on the island, with or without compensation. Though the plan was defeated by the junta, nevertheless it established the idea that the question of slavery and its termination could be treated separately in Puerto Rico than it was in Cuba, given the latter's greater dependence on enslaved labor.<sup>82</sup> Representative of liberal politicians, these men were intent on distinguishing themselves from Cuba, thereby making a way for the

restructuring of the political relationship of the island with the Mother Country using the argument of racial harmony.<sup>83</sup>

Acosta was born to Spanish parents on the island in 1825; as a young man, he had studied in Spain, alongside Ruiz Belvis and Betances.<sup>84</sup> Piñeiro de Rivera (1989) notes that in 1851, while there, he co-founded the Sociedad recolectora de documentos históricos, a group whose goal was the gathering of Puerto Rican historical documents.<sup>85</sup> This speaks to what Lisa Sánchez González has named as “paperlessness,” a condition that, in her estimation, defines Puerto Rican subjectivity. She writes:

*Paperlessness* is a serious metaphor, it is a metaphor that frowns, yet it is *the* Boricua dilemma implicitly broached in our authors’ early twentieth-century narratives. Paperlessness denotes a chronically alienated subjectivity, a hermeneutical crisis based in an endless cycle of deferral in U.S. national imaginaries, a cycle that perpetuates Boricua alterity despite documents that should guarantee a legitimate referent (citizenship) and an enunciative center (literature).<sup>86</sup>

While she refers to the period following the granting of United States citizenship on the island in 1917, after it had been annexed by the United States in 1898, the existence of the Sociedad recolectora de documentos históricos reveals that this sensibility of being without papers, being invalid as it were, had existed for Puerto Rican creoles in the mid-nineteenth century. Utilizing Sánchez González’s metaphor suggests that one aspect of a particularly Puerto Rican subjectivity is alienation from the metropole, irrespective of whether the colonial seat of power is Madrid or Washington, D.C. Having papers, having documentation, grants legitimacy to one’s existence; in a culture that values the written word over oral tradition, papers, documents, archives serve as testimony to one’s history. Thus, we witness the pursuit of pamphlets, letters, books, treatises, anything that speaks to the existence of a people. While Schomburg’s lifelong passion has traditionally been contextualized within an African American setting where he was one of a number of black collectors and bibliophiles who held the same goal of combating white supremacy by creating alternate archives, here we see an additional inspiration for this impulse in an educator with whom he had contact as a child in Puerto Rico.

In the aftermath of the failure to secure immediate abolition in Puerto Rico, Acosta returned to the island and the following year was arrested and jailed on suspicion of being a part of the insurrection known as El Grito de Lares. After