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Struggle and Repression: Afro-Cubans After Independence¹

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In 1912, the army, the Rural Guard, and zealous white volunteers massacred approximately three thousand blacks and mulattoes, mostly in Cuba's eastern province of Oriente. Among the victims were hundreds of members of the Partido Independiente de Color (Independent Party of Color), a political movement founded in 1908 by a mulatto veteran of the 1895-1898 independence war, Evaristo Estenoz, to struggle against racism and for better participation of Afro-Cubans in the new republic. At the suggestion of mulatto senator Martín Morúa Delgado, a close supporter of Liberal president José Miguel Gómez, Estenoz' party had been banned by the congress in 1910, on the grounds that, by representing the interests of only "one race," it violated the equality guaranteed by the constitution.² In May 1912, under the leadership of Estenoz and Pedro Ivonet, another mulatto veteran, the Partido Independiente de Color planned a last-ditch attempt to regain legality: a nationwide armed protest to be held on the 20th of May, the anniversary of the republic. The slogan of the *independientes*' protest was to be: "Down with Morúa's law, long live Gómez!" This was a way of forcing the president to pressure the congress to relegalize the party. Some sources even indicate that a secret agreement existed between Gómez and Estenoz: Gómez would pressure the congress, and in return the Partido Independiente de Color would support Gómez' reelection in November 1912.³

One day before the armed protest, however, a policeman of the province of Santa Clara accused the party of preparing a black revolution. The alarm reached the other provinces and massive arrests of suspects immediately followed. As a consequence, no protest occurred in most provinces. Only in Santa Clara did a few *independientes* escape, going underground. But in Oriente, where Estenoz and other leaders were campaigning, Afro-Cubans were in the majority and the color line was less important. For a few days, the provincial authorities did not take action. Hundreds of *independientes* rallied at a coffee plantation belonging to one of their members near La Maya where they launched their slogan, without shots or violence. But by May 21 fear was spreading in the rest of the island, mostly through the press, which announced "the racist war of Estenoz" and circulated false rumors of violence against whites. Throughout the island, whites immediately organized in armed

self-defense squads. Afro-Cuban congressman Generoso Campos Marquetti attempted to bring things back to reality and asked the government to negotiate with the *independientes*. Neither the Conservatives nor the Liberals backed him: all called for cross-party unity against Estenoz' racist threat. Within a few days, the government sent thousands of troops and volunteers to Oriente and distributed seventeen thousand arms to white citizens in the provinces. The U.S. government sent marines to protect American properties.⁴ Throughout the island, to be black or mulatto meant to be a suspect and a possible target. During the months of June and July, whites gave free rein to violence.

The worst atrocities occurred in Oriente. The constitutional guarantees were suspended and martial law prevailed in the areas under military control. The population of entire villages was displaced in order to cut the supply to the *independientes*. Hothead troops and volunteers indiscriminately killed Afro-Cubans, rebel or loyal. Prisoners were summarily executed, their ears sometimes cut off and brought back to Santiago de Cuba. The lives of peaceful *oriental* Afro-Cubans were put at such risk that many fled to join the *independientes*. Hidden in a hilly area that they knew better than the military, between seven hundred and two thousand rebels avoided contact with the army for as long as possible, limiting their action to some looting and destruction. But irrevocably the noose was tightening and the massacre progressing. On June 27, Estenoz was killed at point-blank range, together with fifty men. The government exposed his body, covered with flies, in Santiago, and most newspapers displayed the photograph on the front page with exultant headlines. In mid-July Ivonet was taken prisoner and killed when he allegedly tried to escape; his body was brought to Santiago, flung across a horse, and paraded through the streets. The army needed another two weeks to trace and overcome the last *independientes*. Meanwhile two thousand had been arrested in Oriente and awaited trial.⁵

Although armed protest had taken place only in Oriente, the repression was nationwide and directed not only against *independientes* or those assumed to be, but at virtually any Afro-Cuban. In Santa Clara, where the presence of a few underground *independientes* produced terrifying rumors, violence against blacks and mulattoes was particularly bloody. But even Havana, where no protest took place, saw an unprecedented spiral of racism. White armed squads organized and hunted Afro-Cuban suspects. Bands of Creole⁸ students armed with clubs raided the streets of central Havana, forcing blacks to step off the sidewalks, pulling off their hats, and beating them up. The tiny minority of Afro-Cubans of the nearby town of Regla, after two nights of violence, had to abandon their homes in search of refuge. Everywhere, the prisons filled up with hundreds of black and mulatto suspects, and Afro-Cubans lost the few public jobs they had. Newspapers daily reported from all provinces the deaths of Afro-Cubans who had been shot, hanged, stabbed, or beheaded.⁷

The massacre of thousands of blacks and mulattoes in Cuba in 1912 is extraordinary on several accounts. With the exception of the expeditions against unconquered Indians, the use by a white governing elite of such brutal and massive violence against an ethnic minority as a means of securing its dominance over society was uncommon in early-twentieth-century Spanish-speaking America. Similarly, the successful organization by men of African descent of a political party transcending the social

differences between blacks and mulattoes is without parallel in Hispanic America. Why, then, did racial tensions in Cuba rise to such a degree that some blacks and mulattoes felt it necessary to form their own party? Why did the Creole elite of Cuba perceive Afro-Cubans' organization to be so threatening that it resorted to massive slaughter?⁸ I propose here, first, to examine the racial structure of Cuba's society and employment as well as the change taking place in the Afro-Cuban community in the early 1900s. Second, I will focus on Creole denial of Afro-Cuban change and refer back to the independence struggle as a possible catalyst of Creole and Afro-Cuban attitudes. Third, the policies of the first U.S. military occupation and of Cuba's first independent government will be analyzed, as a means of showing growing racial tensions. A fourth part will be dedicated to the beginning of Afro-Cuban protest. Fifth, I will analyze the Partido Independiente de Color's ideology and membership, with the aim of demonstrating its potential strength. Finally, I will review the history of Creole repression and provide possible explanations for the massacre of 1912.

At the beginning of this century whites were the majority in Cuba, making up almost 70 percent of the total population of 2,048,980 reported in the U.S.-sponsored census of 1907. The proportion of Afro-Cubans had declined since the mid-nineteenth century to reach 30 percent by 1907 (274,272 blacks and 334,695 mulattoes).⁹ Moreover, Cuban society was deeply divided along racial and social lines, with whites occupying in all sectors better positions than blacks and mulattoes. As in colonial times, whites kept Afro-Cubans at a distance. Intermarriage between mulatto or black women and white men was not uncommon in the popular class, but at the same time the engagement of a black man and a white woman was seen as outrageous by Creole society. Public education was integrated, but private schools generally did not accept dark-skinned students, thus further preventing their access to the university. Entertainment was segregated, some restaurants would not serve Afro-Cuban customers, and many organizations were for whites only. Ballrooms and public baths were often divided into two sectors by a rope. Clubs would further divide Creoles, Asturians, Canarians, and Galicians on the one hand, blacks and mulattoes on the other hand.¹⁰

Race was also a determining factor in employment, with some occupations overwhelmingly for whites and others for blacks or mulattoes. Although among whites as well as Afro-Cubans one man out of two was employed in agriculture, the latter were more likely than whites to be agricultural workers and tenants than farm owners. Black and mulatto men were overrepresented in other, subordinate occupations, such as day laborer and servant. They made up about half of the workers employed in construction (carpenters and masons) and in the manual skills of tailor, shoemaker, blacksmith, baker, barber, and hairdresser. In many industries, such as the cigar factories, they were mostly restricted to the less exclusive trades and the lower skill levels.

Commerce and trade were almost closed to Afro-Cubans: hardly any of them were merchants or salesmen. No Afro-Cuban was registered as a banker or a broker. In fact, only as peddlers did Afro-Cubans contribute more than marginally to trading. In the growing, privately owned sector of communication and transportation, blacks and mulattoes had some jobs in the railroads, but almost none in the telegraph and telephone or the tramway companies. Because few of them had been able to attend school

beyond the elementary level, and because their access to the university had been virtually prohibited by racial discrimination, they were excluded from the most prestigious professions: out of 1,240 physicians and surgeons, only 9 were Afro-Cuban, and out of 1,347 lawyers, only 4. But a tiny proportion of blacks and mulattoes were architects and draftsmen, dentists and veterinarians, journalists, printers, lithographers, artists, and photographers; they represented half of Cuba's musicians.

In 1907 central, provincial, and municipal administrations employed only a small proportion of Afro-Cubans. These different levels of government provided minor jobs, such as messenger, porter, and clerical worker, of which Afro-Cubans received about 7 percent, mostly as messengers and office boys. Out of 8,238 policemen and soldiers enlisted, 21 percent were Afro-Cuban, but restricted to the lower ranks. Blacks and mulattoes were better represented among the firemen, making up 42 percent of the 937 registered, and probably among the temporary laborers of the public works programs. In the upper levels of public employment, however, their participation fell again dramatically: there were only 113 Afro-Cubans out of the 2,132 male teachers and 9 Afro-Cubans out of the 205 officials of the government.¹¹

In reality, the position of Afro-Cubans in the labor force had changed little since the end of the last war for independence. Since colonial times, they had been generally confined to certain manual skills, and they were unable to gain access to the expanding sectors of trade, communication, and state employment. In the early 1900s, the economy was still deeply shaken by the war and was subjected to growing U.S. penetration. Unemployment and underemployment were high, especially during the summer months after the completion of the sugar crop harvest. Public jobs quickly became the major source of power and wealth for Cubans, and politics the main access to them. For this very reason white Cubans were not ready to share public office with more than a handful of prominent Afro-Cuban leaders who were capable of draining off thousands of votes if denied the usual patronage. State employment for blacks and mulattoes was thus uncertain and scarce.¹²

Another reason for Afro-Cubans' difficulties was that independence did not produce any massive return of Spaniards to their country of origin. Such a move would have left a void in the labor force, particularly in the administrative, commercial, and other nonmanual sectors, which Afro-Cubans could have helped to fill. The contrary happened. The U.S. military administration of 1898-1902 protected Spanish properties and businesses, and left many Spaniards in public office. The first Cuban government of Tomás Estrada Palma (1902-1906) promoted Spanish immigration, only a few years after independence from Spain. Shortly after the end of the war the flow of Spanish immigrants resumed, bringing more than 70,000 to settle in Cuba between 1902 and 1907.

The number of Spaniards with a gainful occupation increased from 103,912 in 1899 to 146,831 in 1907. Spaniards were dominating all the expanding sectors of labor. With 47,297 of them being merchants and salesmen, they controlled domestic trade. Naval transportation was in their hands, and most of the jobs in the railroads and the tramways were allocated to them. They had the highest positions in the tobacco factories, and they represented 90 percent of the island's miners and quarrymen. They were even displacing Afro-Cuban servants and charcoal

burners. Except as musicians, Spaniards exceeded the number of Afro-Cubans in all professional occupations. Even in the distribution of public jobs they were in a good position compared with blacks and mulattoes: in 1907 there were 20 Spanish government officials (compared with 9 Afro-Cubans) and 377 Spanish male teachers (compared with 113 Afro-Cubans); Spaniards were on a par with Afro-Cubans as firemen, and only as policemen and soldiers were they less numerous than Afro-Cubans (13 percent compared with 21 percent).¹³ In addition, Spanish immigration had a considerable effect on Cuba's incipient labor movement. Some Spaniards came to Cuba with previous experience in worker organization; they founded and led anarchist and socialist unions in most sectors. Themselves often racist, viewing native Cubans more as competitors than companions, they opposed any attempt to protect native workers and to attribute more qualified jobs to Afro-Cubans. As a result, unions seldom accepted white Cubans in their leadership and sometimes excluded Afro-Cubans from membership.¹⁴

From 1899 to 1907, however, the Afro-Cuban community had changed. Its transformation is best seen in the drop of Afro-Cuban women registered in the labor force, from 48,767 in 1899 to 47,722 in 1907, despite their demographic growth of 18 percent. Simultaneously, their proportion among female labor had decreased from 73 percent to 65 percent. No doubt, the much higher proportion of black and mulatto women with a gainful occupation still showed a significant difference between the Afro-Cuban and the white--native and foreign-born--communities. Afro-Cuban women had a long history of working outside their homes, dating back to the time of slavery, while many had supported their family during the wars for independence. They also overwhelmingly outnumbered white women having a gainful occupation because racial difference matched social difference: in many cases Afro-Cuban families could not survive without the work of the women. Women were often heads of households, either as widows, single mothers, or the companions of poor, jobless or absent men. But the fact that fewer women had to work in 1907 meant that on the whole Afro-Cuban men were better employed and often earned enough to provide a living for their families.

In 1907, as in 1899, most Afro-Cuban women worked as laundresses, servants, seamstresses, peasants, and dressmakers. Although not registered in the censuses, Cuba's midwives and healers were often of African descent. Only in a few prestigious occupations, such as nurse, merchant, teacher, and clerical worker, did white female participation exceed that of Afro-Cubans. But again there were signs of change. In 1907 the number of black and mulatto women working in agriculture had dropped. Fewer were in domestic service, in which they were often replaced by Spanish female immigrants. Afro-Cuban working women began to move toward factories and organized labor, as showed by the increase of their participation in the tobacco industry from 21 percent in 1899 to 32 percent in 1907. And, to the great surprise of Cuban contemporary hygienists, who were quick to point out the lasciviousness of women of African descent, the proportion of blacks and mulattoes among female prostitutes did not exceed their proportion in society.¹⁵

Simultaneously, the Afro-Cuban family structure was slowly evolving toward legal marriage as a dominant pattern of union, an evolution that had been temporarily slowed down by the departure of many black and mulatto men to join the struggle for independence. In 1907 as in 1899,

however, 50 percent of Afro-Cuban children under 14 years of age were still illegitimate, compared with only 14 percent of white children in 1907. And in a society that discriminated not only against darker skin, but also against illegitimacy, this condition further handicapped young blacks and mulattoes.¹⁶

Change was also visible in education. Afro-Cuban men and women were rapidly closing the literacy gap between them and Cuban whites. From 1899 to 1907, the proportion of blacks and mulattoes over 10 years of age who could read and write had increased from 24 to 45 percent, while within the same period of time the literacy rate among white Cubans had risen from 44 percent to only 58 percent. The progress was even more impressive when considering the proportion of literate according to age. In 1907 only 11 percent of Afro-Cubans over 65 years of age could read and write, while 32 percent of white Cubans over 65 were literate. But among young Cubans of 10 to 14 years of age, the gap had disappeared. White, black, and mulatto Cubans were all literate in the proportion of 70 percent. Afro-Cuban children were even attending school slightly more often than whites.¹⁷

Afro-Cuban adults struggled to get education. Young veterans returned to school after the end of the war. Ricardo Batrell, for example, was born in 1880 on a sugar plantation in the province of Matanzas, where he had worked in the fields since he was 8 years old, without ever going to school. In early 1896, at the age of 15 and illiterate, he joined the Liberation Army, because, he said, mulatto leader Juan Gualberto Gómez, "the personification of [his] race," had committed himself to the cause of independence. Batrell climbed the rungs of the military ladder from simple assistant to lieutenant. After the armistice he locked himself up for six months to learn to read and write, and in 1900 he was appointed a policeman in Bolondrón, in his native province, where one of his army superiors had been elected mayor.¹⁸

More exceptional was the case of Juan Tranquilino Latapier. The son of a tailor in Santiago de Cuba, Latapier had his *bachillerato* and was a law student at the University of Havana when he joined the independence movement in 1895. His contribution was short-lived: he carried the message setting the date for the launching of insurrection throughout the island, but he was arrested with Juan Gualberto Gómez immediately after the outbreak on February 24, 1895, and spent the war in exile. Back in Cuba--unlike the veterans--he did not have to readapt to civilian life. Having resumed his studies, in 1902 he became the first Afro-Cuban doctor in civil law and was nominated an official in the Secretary of Justice. Latapier was thus to appear among the 153 Afro-Cubans with an academic or professional title registered in 1907--one of a tiny minority compared with 5,559 white Cubans with a higher education. Latapier's graduation, however, aroused comments in the white Cuban press that indicate, together with the uniqueness of his success, the depth of racial prejudice prevailing in Cuban society. The popular magazine *El Figaro*, for example, felt it necessary to precede its eulogy of Latapier with a long anthropological introduction, in which it stated that skin color had no influence on human intelligence and that, with proper exercise and a stimulating environment, the brains of black people could develop to the size and weight of the brains of whites.¹⁹

The change taking place in the Afro-Cuban community was indeed not easily validated by white Cubans. After all, at the turn of the century, the Creole laboring classes, like Afro-Cubans, were recovering from the damages of war and competing with Spanish immigrants; as for the Creole elite, it was further frustrated by U.S. political supervision and economic penetration from certain levels of power and wealth that it had expected to gain with independence. From the standpoint of white Cubans, to favor blacks' and mulattoes' political and socioeconomic integration would have further limited their own position in society, a step that they did not want to take. Therefore, they did nothing to change the negative image of mulattoes and, above all, of blacks. They continued the Spanish colonial effort to present Afro-Cubans as inferior and savage as a means of justifying their lower position in society. Many white Cuban intellectuals still described them as a servile and prostrated race.²⁰ The press, however, was the most outspoken voice of racial prejudice. Almost all journalists of the daily newspapers were white and wrote as spokesmen of Creole or Spanish interests.²¹ Occasionally a prominent nonwhite leader's open letter or interview would appear in the papers. But in general, Afro-Cuban presence was confined to the small section of *crónica de las sociedades de color* [Chronicle of the societies of color], which reported social activities. Afro-Cubans, however, were more visible in the criminal news, which always mentioned the race if the culprit was *pardo* (mulatto) or *moreno* (black), and often omitted it if he or she was white, thus contributing to an image of people of African descent as predisposed to crime.²²

Brujería was, nevertheless, the sensational issue of the early century. *Brujería* had deep African religious origins and involved the complex practice of supernatural powers, together with the use of plants and animals, as a means of healing, protecting, or harming people. Although women as well as men could be transmitted the secret procedures of *brujería*, men were considered as more powerful, thus more frightening. The campaign against *brujería* had the advantage that race did not need to be mentioned: *brujos* were implicitly black or mulatto. By attacking them, journalists and intellectuals could give free rein to their revulsion for "African savageness," "dirtiness," "superstition," and "lubricity." *Brujería* supposedly represented a threat to Cuban civilization and needed the mobilization of all (Creole) citizens to be eradicated. In more than one case, "rumors" attributed the disappearance of a white child to a black *brujo*, while newspapers would deliberately fan suspicions until some Afro-Cuban suspect would be arrested.²³

Creoles' continuous presentation of Afro-Cubans as servile, criminal, or savage not only served the purpose of justifying their lower position in society and of discrediting their change. It also allowed Creole elite to disregard Afro-Cuban decisive participation in the independence wars by reviving the contemptuous colonial images of people of African descent. By doing so, they denied that, behind an appearance of rigid racial stratification accepted by all, early-twentieth-century Cuban society contained the seeds of profound transformation that had been sown during the struggle for independence.

Cuban wars against Spain were not the communion of blacks, mulattoes, and whites that Creole antiracist leader José Martí envisioned.²⁴ From the launching of the Ten Years' War in 1868, the expectations of Creoles and Afro-Cubans diverged. White Cubans such as Carlos Manuel de Céspedes rose in arms to defend the interests of the

Cuban *hacendados* of the eastern provinces against Spanish domination; for them slavery was an issue that needed to be solved only after independence, and by gradual emancipation and government indemnization of slave owners. As for Afro-Cubans such as the brothers Antonio and José Maceo, Guillermon Moncada, Flor Crombet, and Quintín Banderas, their aim was not only to free Cuba from Spain but also to free immediately blacks and mulattoes from slavery. In the war of 1895-1898, although most Cubans of lower class, regardless of their ethnic background, fought for independence and social change, Afro-Cubans again had expectations of their own. Living in a colony in which slavery had ended only in 1886, and in which racial segregation ruled most aspects of life, they fought for a new society that would acknowledge their racial equality and full citizenship. For them, participating in the war against Spain was a way of proving self-respect, strength, and manhood, all qualities denied to them by slavery and racial discrimination. In their mind there was no plan of returning to Africa: Cuba was their country, the land that they made productive by their labor, and they wanted to be full partners in the new republic.²⁵

This explained why Afro-Cubans were overrepresented in the independence struggle. In the last war of 1895-1898, especially at its beginning, they made up between 50 and 80 percent of the troops, and they represented about 33 percent of the male population.²⁶ They had also died for the cause of freedom in a much higher proportion than white Cubans.²⁷ Some Afro-Cubans, such as Quintín Banderas, a mason born about 1837 in Oriente, left their families at the launching of the movement in 1868 to live a rebel life until the U.S. occupation in 1898. Banderas rose from soldier to lieutenant colonel in the Ten Years' War and to general in command of one thousand infantry soldiers in 1895. A man with little education and a reputation for brutality acquired during his thirty years in the *manigua*, he nevertheless anticipated that independent Cuba would reward him with a high government position for his military achievements. Banderas' rise in the Liberation Army was not unique among Afro-Cubans. Although many famous leaders died in battle, generals Jesús Rabi and Agustín Cebreco, for example, were among Banderas' contemporaries in 1902 to greet the inauguration of the republic, full of hope for their future. Among the younger generation, men such as Ricardo Batrell or the leaders-to-be of the Partido Independiente de Color, Evaristo Estenoz and Pedro Ivonet, were promoted as officers in 1895-1898 and expected to further progress in the republic. The independence wars indeed offered unprecedented opportunities for rapid advancement to Afro-Cubans, on which they built up hopes of social recognition and upward mobility for postindependence times.²⁸

These high expectations made it all the more necessary for the Creole elite to leave Afro-Cuban war participation in the dark. In reality, the strong presence of Afro-Cubans in the independence movement had raised concern among white Cubans since the time of the Ten Years' War. It exacerbated the fear of a black uprising against the whites that had prevailed among Spaniards and Creoles since the victory of the Haitian revolution in 1804. More than once, mulatto general Antonio Maceo had been accused by some of his white companions of preparing the ground for a black republic. Fear of an Afro-Cuban takeover of the rebel movement was the major reason for the signature of the Pact of Zanjón by Creole insurgent officers and the Spanish government in 1878, which

Maceo and other Afro-Cubans opposed in the Guerra Chiquita (Little War) of Oriente. Racial prejudice still pervaded the last independence war. As early as 1897, the entirely white independent provisional government had begun to replace Afro-Cuban military commanders with whites. As Ricardo Batrell bitterly observed, Afro-Cubans were encouraged to fight and die for a free Cuba, but as soon as victory came into sight, they were pushed aside, excluded from power in peacetime.²⁹ The Creole elite's expectation was indeed to keep its domination unchallenged after independence.

Differing expectations also led to divergent interpretations of the struggle for independence. For Afro-Cubans, it was a redeeming cycle in which they had been the leading liberators from Spain and the most committed founders of the Cuban nation. For white Cubans, the Ten Years' War had absolved them of the sin of slavery, because Céspedes and his companions eventually decreed the abolition of slavery; and the merging of black, mulatto, and white soldiers in the ranks of the Liberation Army of 1895 had further cleared Creoles of the accusation of racism. Similarly, for blacks and mulattoes, Antonio Maceo--the Bronze Titan, as he was called, who died in battle on December 7, 1896--was the symbol of the Afro-Cuban capacity to command and rule, while for white Cubans Maceo's high position in the army was another proof of their own lack of racism.³⁰

It was with these divergences in mind that white, black, and mulatto Cubans met the U.S. intervention in the war in 1898 and U.S. subsequent military occupation. Again, Cuban reception was mixed. Most of the Liberation Army, and especially Afro-Cubans, resented the American intervention, because it blocked them from achieving a victory over Spain. But many Creoles, Autonomists³¹ as well as Separatists, who feared black and mulatto political participation greeted the American arrival with relief.

The U.S. occupation further exacerbated the racial tensions existing in Cuban society. American officials felt contempt for Cubans in general, and more particularly for Afro-Cubans. Their policy prevented black and mulatto access to influential positions. For example, the U.S. military government dismembered the Liberation Army and discriminated against blacks and mulattoes when appointing officers for the newly created Rural Guard and Artillery Corps. It protected Spanish interests and set up the legislative framework for selective immigration of Europeans. However, it also reformed public education in a fully integrated system that irritated some Creole families reluctant to see their children sitting next to black children. In sum, however, although these policies were imposed on Cubans by the United States, they could only be discriminatory because they drew on deeply rooted patterns of racial differentiation and on overall Creole endorsement.³²

After the inauguration of the republic in 1902, the Creole elite showed no interest in addressing the issue of race. Moreover, silence was supposed by many leading Cubans to be the best answer to the "black problem." The first independent government of Tomás Estrada Palma, composed mostly of Creoles returned from exile, decided that no specific antidiscriminatory policy was necessary. It was assumed that the new constitution, which vaguely stipulated "All Cubans will be equal in the eyes of the law" and granted Cuban citizenship to African-born, would satisfy everyone. Universal male suffrage was accepted with some

reluctance, but never openly because some Creole politicians questioned nonwhite enfranchisement.³³ With suffrage Afro-Cubans became an essential factor in the elections, but at the same time they could not be left to decide their own vote. Both Liberal and Moderate political programs ignored the issue of race and worked to attract black and mulatto voters through the clientele of such Afro-Cuban leaders as the Liberals Juan Gualberto Gómez, Generoso Campos Marquetti, and Martín Morúa Delgado, or the Moderates Lino D'Ou and Rafael Serra. In 1904, out of sixty-three congressmen, four were nonwhite, and out of twelve senators, only Morúa was nonwhite.³⁴ Few among so many, obedient to party discipline, and serving their own interests as well, Afro-Cuban congressmen did not tackle the problem of racial integration.

Going beyond the policies initiated by Americans, the Creole government aimed directly at reducing the proportion of Afro-Cubans in Cuba's population. It strengthened, for example, the immigration law imposed on Cuba by the United States in 1902, which prohibited Chinese immigration and restricted that of nonwhites. New legislation prohibited the influx of "races of color," but promoted Spanish immigration. The racial discrimination initiated by the Americans in the army, the Rural Guard, and the police was continued. Afro-Cuban access and promotion to higher ranks in the Rural Guard were further limited. From November 1902, educational qualifications and political recommendation would be taken into account, and only in the case of equal qualifications would a veteran outmatch an exile, a Unionist or an Autonomist; officers had to take an examination and to provide their own horses, uniforms, and equipment.³⁵ This was a severe blow for blacks and mulattoes, who had been overrepresented in the Revolutionary Army, but had less education and wealth, and lacked extended political patronage. Afro-Cubans were completely excluded from the diplomatic staff. The government publicly offended the Afro-Cuban senator and congressmen by not inviting their dark-skinned wives to presidential receptions.³⁶

As early as in 1902, Afro-Cubans began to question the attitude of the republic as an institution toward their people. To their mind, massive participation in the independence struggle had proven blacks' and mulattoes' commitment to the republic, which, in return, owed them a "rightful share" in public jobs.³⁷ After the first U.S. military administration, which left them out, they were no longer willing to hold back their claim in the name of Cuban unity. As Ricardo Batrell and another Afro-Cuban veteran, Alejandro Neninger, explained: ". . . after the independence war, our white brothers told us that they were not giving us our rightful participation in the country's jobs, because the Americans were imposing themselves, and that we needed to wait until the latter had left." So, as proof of "patriotism," they waited. At the independence in May 1902, Afro-Cubans waited another "six months, in order to see if it was true that those responsible for not fulfilling justice toward the colored were the Americans or the Cubans. And they became convinced that those responsible for the discrimination against the colored element were the Cubans, not the Americans, because the latter had left and the Cubans were doing nothing to change the situation of the colored element in the nation . . ."³⁸

Protest came first from the veterans, who created their own Asociación de Veteranos de Color (Association of Veterans of Color) within the national veteran organization. They began, in 1902, by

campaigning against the exclusion of Afro-Cubans from the Havana police and they sent a delegation to meet with the capital's mayor. They received the support of the Afro-Cuban congressmen, who held a special meeting with President Estrada Palma, and the support of the *sociedades de color* under the leadership of Juan Gualberto Gómez. A few symbolic appointments followed, but no real change took place.³⁹ Black and mulatto veterans then backed the general strike of November 1902, provoked in part by racial discrimination. Pushed aside by Spanish immigrants in the more qualified jobs of master cigar maker and sorter in the foreign-owned tobacco factories, Cuban workers went on strike to demand priority for Cubans, regardless of race, over foreigners, especially as young apprentices. In the final agreement between tobacco workers and managers, however, the mention of race vanished.⁴⁰ The next struggle in which Afro-Cuban veterans actively participated was the national campaign to get the government's promised indemnity for their enrollment in the Liberation Army. Because Estrada Palma feared that the approximately 30,000 veterans would resort to violence, Afro-Cubans were more successful in getting their claims paid and sometimes overpaid. But the pay came too late for many who, meanwhile, had contracted heavy debts. And they still received no jobs.⁴¹

Discontent among Afro-Cubans rose. Even Moderate Rafael Serra, the black companion of Martí in New York exile, demanded in his newspaper, *El Nuevo Criollo*, more jobs for Afro-Cubans in the security forces, public education, the post office, and customs, all offices in which they were largely underrepresented. Serra also began to campaign against immigration. He maintained that the Spanish newcomers, by accepting low-paying jobs, were taking employment away from Afro-Cubans; the government, he added, should instead pass legislation to protect labor.⁴²

When the Moderates began to prepare Estrada Palma's reelection through political purge, fraud, and violence, the frustration felt by Afro-Cuban veterans reached a climax, as they were the first to lose the few jobs they had. No one illustrated better their destiny than black general Quintín Banderas. After the end of the war, having no land to go back to in his native Oriente, no wealth, and no education, Banderas turned to politics. He moved to Havana and supported the Liberals, but failed to be a candidate in any election. After the Moderates' victory in 1902, Banderas vigorously stood with the veterans' association with the hope of securing public office and payment for his thirty years in the independence struggle. During the first general strike of 1902, he publicly attacked Estrada Palma's government and was a member of the veterans' commission set up to arbitrate the conflict between the tobacco workers and the cigar factories. Shortly afterward he was refused a position of porter by the government, a denial that deeply humiliated him. After the Cuban Congress passed a bill paying U.S. \$1.00 per day of service in the Liberation Army to men and almost \$4.00 to generals, Banderas was among the outspoken organizers of a meeting in Havana in May 1903, to protest the delay in the payment of the claims. A few months later he returned to Oriente, declaring to the press that he was giving up politics and his opposition to the government. Jobless, he was apparently in such poverty that he could not wait for the veterans' payment and sold his claim in advance to speculators in order to start a new life in his province. One year later, however, mismanagement and heavy debts returned him to poverty--and to Havana and politics. He

tried every door. In January 1905, for example, some of his supporters organized a special evening for his benefit in the popular Payret Theater of the capital, but they failed to rally many people, and thus to raise funds. In August a desperate Banderas asked President Estrada Palma for a monthly pension of \$150.00, but he was denied even an audience. He bitterly accused the government of ingratitude and racism. This new setback, however, did not prevent him from publishing advertisements in some newspapers in which he offered his expert services for dealing with all matters related to the payment of the Liberation Army claims.⁴³

In August 1906 Afro-Cubans massively joined the Liberals led by José Miguel Gómez, who took their arms to overthrow the Moderates. Once again, blacks and mulattoes were overrepresented in the insurgent army. Among them were Liberal veterans, such as Banderas, Batrell, and Evaristo Estenoz, as well as younger Afro-Cubans who had not fought for independence. The Revolution of August was to be the last return to insurgent life of Banderas, now seventy years old. During the night of August 23, the Rural Guard in the service of Estrada Palma murdered Banderas in his sleep and mutilated his body. In his pockets were found two pesetas and three centavos, and a letter demanding a hundred-peso loan from a *hacendado* for his family. Beyond Banderas' tragic death, the Revolution of August also meant the end of the veterans of his generation's struggle. But for younger veterans and for Afro-Cubans for whom this was the first armed rebellion, it revived the hope of a "rightful share" in Cuba's government. The rebellion prompted the second U.S. military intervention. The Liberals of José Miguel Gómez, however, had won. Gómez promised to favor Afro-Cubans if he became president. During the U.S. occupation of 1906-1908, Liberals secured Gómez' future election and their seizure of the state.⁴⁴

Afro-Cubans knew, however, that in order to have their "rightful share" in the next Cuban government, they needed this time to lobby actively during the U.S. administration. In Camagüey, Lajas, Santa Clara, and San Juan y Martínez (province of Pinar del Río), veterans issued manifestos calling Afro-Cubans to unite in their struggle for social recognition and to "find [their own] solutions to [their] problems, without the old tutelages."⁴⁵ In September 1907, about two hundred gathered in Havana to discuss the necessity of bringing back to life the late-nineteenth-century Directorio de la Raza de Color (Directory of the Race of Color) as coordinator of all Afro-Cuban organizations. This mobilization was clearly grass-roots and produced by the new hopes built up during the Revolution of August. Therefore it alarmed white Cubans, who feared again that the heavy participation of Afro-Cubans in the Liberal rebellion would lead to a revolution along Haitian lines. Besides, such leaders as Juan Gualberto Gómez, Rafael Serra, Martín Morúa Delgado, Lino D'Ou, and Generoso Campos Marquetti were reluctant to back the popular discontent. After all, they had been elected as congressmen or senators and they did not want to risk the relative respect that they enjoyed among the Creole elite.⁴⁶

One man, Evaristo Estenoz, decided to take advantage of the Afro-Cuban leadership's unresponsiveness and of the new Liberal division between *zayistas* (supporters of Alfredo Zayas) and *miguelistas* (supporters of José Miguel Gómez). Estenoz, a mulatto from Oriente, was thirty-five years old and lived in Havana. He was a private contractor

and ran a French boutique with his wife. He had been in Europe and, in 1905, he traveled with Rafael Serra to the United States to visit with black organizations. Estenoz, however, was not only the symbol of "colored" success through "education and money" that *El Nuevo Criollo* portrayed.⁴⁷ A man with pride and ambition, he had taken part in most revolutions and protests. He had been a major in the Liberation Army, a leader in a construction workers' strike in 1899,⁴⁸ and an outspoken member of the executive committee of the veterans of color. In September 1905, he refused an electoral position with the Liberals in Havana, "because if they give us [the Afro-Cubans] a broom or a messenger plate, they demand that we have the knowledge of señores [Juan Gualberto] Gómez or Morúa, or the heroism of the great Maceo."⁴⁹ Shortly afterward, he was arrested, together with other Liberals, for conspiracy against the government and sentenced to long-term imprisonment, but was granted amnesty in May 1906.⁵⁰ In the summer of 1906, he joined the Liberal revolution in Havana and Matanzas, where he was promoted to general.

During the first months of the second U.S. occupation, Estenoz began to stand out by eagerly campaigning for the "rightful share" for Afro-Cuban veterans in the job distribution.⁵¹ He met the U.S.-appointed governor of occupation, Charles E. Magoon, to whom he presented a project of agricultural colonization for veterans unqualified for public office. In the summer of 1907, he traveled throughout the island and met with those calling for black unity. By then, he was convinced that the only way Afro-Cubans could get their share was by organizing their own party, independent from the Liberals and the Conservatives (ex-Moderates). Estenoz tried to rally outstanding Afro-Cuban veterans, such as generals Jesús Rabí, Silverio Sánchez Figueras, and Ricardo Batrell.

His proposal, however, raised many questions in Afro-Cuban leaders' minds. First, there was concern about the reaction of the U.S. rulers. As one veteran put it, "to make collective appearances as a race" when Cuba was under the military occupation of a nation in which "our race . . . is subject of the most irritating despotism" could threaten the future of Cuban independence.⁵² Second, the idea of a separate political party based on racial lines seemed to many too risky. By doing so, would not blacks and mulattoes lose the few representatives and thus the few public jobs they had? That was the fear of Batrell, who ended up using the threat represented by Estenoz for his own advancement in the *zayista* movement under the patronage of Juan Gualberto Gómez.⁵³ Emilio Céspedes and others from Camagüey maintained that Afro-Cubans should work instead within the existing parties toward a more proportional representation of their race in public jobs. Afro-Cuban united action, they added, should focus on moral and economic progress, such as the organization of schools, funds for professional training, saving banks, and cooperatives.⁵⁴ Last but not least, many worried that the existence of a black and mulatto party would only intensify racism.

Estenoz, nevertheless, gained the support of less prominent veterans. At the end of August 1908, with the few he had successfully rallied, he founded the Partido Independiente de Color, which was recognized as a political party by the U.S. administration. Estenoz also began to publish *Previsión*, the party's organ. His short-term goal was the congressional elections of November 1908, to which the Partido Independiente de Color managed to present candidates only for the provinces of Havana and Santa Clara. Predictably enough, with only a few weeks of life, the party's attempt ended in total failure. It was,

however, immediately perceived by the Liberals as a threat to their reserve of Afro-Cuban votes. On September 20, for example, *miguelistas* and *sayistas* sent two hundred supporters to disrupt the first meeting held by the *independientes* in a public park of Havana and precipitated the police intervention.⁵⁵ As had already happened with every attempt of Afro-Cuban political organization, the *independientes* were accused of racism, on the grounds that they were threatening Cuban unity by mobilizing the blacks against the whites.⁵⁶

In reality, however, the Partido Independiente de Color wanted the integration of Afro-Cubans in society and their participation in government "in order to be well governed." Its political program addressed only a few issues directly related to race: it demanded an end to racial discrimination, Afro-Cuban access to higher positions in public service and the diplomatic corps, and an end to the ban on nonwhite immigration. Most of the other demands--such as compulsory free education from eight to fourteen years, free technical, secondary, and university education, state control of private schools, abolition of the death penalty, reform of the judicial and penitentiary systems, the eight-hour work day, priority for Cubans in employment, and the distribution of national lands to Cubans--would have benefited Afro-Cubans as well as popular-class Creoles.⁵⁷ As *Previsión* summarized, "our motto for the time being is 'Cuba for the Cubans,' our profession of faith, state liberalism."⁵⁸

Most *independiente* demands were shared, in fact, with other political parties. Only the lifting of the ban on nonwhite immigration was exclusive to the Partido Independiente de Color. All other parties, including the Partido Obrero Socialista (Workers' Socialist Party), supported European immigration by family.⁵⁹ As for *Previsión*, it denounced that the government's goal behind the often-subsidized European immigration was "to whiten the horizons" and "to destroy [the Afro-Cubans], even though in the slow way" of demography. It requested true democracy in immigration policy, "except for those [immigrants] who would be inadmissible because of their considerable lack of education." It ironically asked: "If black Americans were coming to Cuba, would the government refuse them entrance?"⁶⁰ Such a proposition was not without problems, because nonwhite immigrants, as was to happen later with Jamaicans and Haitians, would have competed with Afro-Cubans for lower jobs. It is more likely that *Previsión's* goal was to reinforce at all costs the proportion of the *raza de color* in Cuban society.

Nevertheless, the *independientes* did not advocate a different Afro-Cuban or African culture. On the contrary, as Estenoz told the U.S. Special Representative Enoch H. Crowder when asking for the recognition of its party, they wanted "to prove to the world the culture and civility of the Cuban race of color." And in the early 1900s, civility meant European values and culture. *Previsión* strongly stigmatized African dance and drumming as "barbarisms of bygone days" and manifestations of "African atavism." *Brujería* and traditional healing had also to be eradicated as reminders of a servile past. But the newspaper denounced the hunt of *brujos* launched by the Creole press as a subtle way to portray blacks as uncivilized and to question their enfranchisement. Similarly *Previsión* qualified the marches to the beat of African drums organized by the Liberal and Conservative parties in election time as "a crusade for the discredit of the black masses."⁶¹ Many articles in *Previsión* urged blacks and mulattoes to study and work

hard. The newspaper also campaigned for the legal marriage of Afro-Cuban couples. It wanted a new legislation on illegitimacy and the immediate, free-of-charge, legal recognition of children when mutual-consent couples got married. It also challenged the Catholic church to promote religious marriage among blacks through the ordination of Afro-Cuban priests.⁸² Women, however, were not conceded new rights by the *independientes'* civility campaign. They reasserted that the right place for a woman was at home serving her husband and raising her children. A series of articles headed "El trato social" (social behavior) recommended, for example, that women should always side with their husbands, so that "male pride would not be hurt."⁸³

Although the *independiente* vision of culture was broadly conventional, the party did make an original contribution to the Cuban debate on race. As *Previsión* stated, all human races belonged to a single species. Human unity was "the theological truth, the scientific truth." If skin varied in color, its composition was similar in all races. As well, human-skull shape did not prove racial inequality, as one could find brachicephalic, dolicocephalic, and mesocephalic persons in every race.⁸⁴ As a consequence, if all races were equal, an article said, "we do not long for black supremacy over whites; but neither do we accept, and never will, white supremacy over blacks." Racial equality also meant that intermarriage between Afro-Cuban men and white women should be considered as natural as intermarriage between white men and black or mulatto women.⁸⁵ Simultaneously, *Previsión* refused to make any distinction within the race of color and to value mulattoes more than blacks: all belonged to the "Afro-Cuban family."⁸⁶

Black and Cuban was nevertheless the main racial message of the *independientes*. Cuba was to be "for whites and for blacks," as Martí had written, and the *independientes* wanted Afro-Cubans to be recognized as a full element of Cuban nationality. Their demand for jobs in the diplomatic corps, "so that the republic would be represented as it is," was a symbol of the visibility and representativeness they hoped to acquire. But for this very reason, it produced uneasiness among the ruling class. In January 1910, Estenoz visited veteran Manuel Sanguily, the new secretary of state of Gómez, to ask him to nominate blacks in the foreign service. According to *Previsión*, Sanguily agreed that a man such as Juan Gualberto Gómez fulfilled the requirements for being a consul--a statement that infuriated the newspaper, because it meant that Afro-Cubans still needed extraordinary stature to be appointed to public office, when many whites in service were incompetent. To those who questioned the intellectual capacity of *independientes*, should they win in the elections, to intervene in all state organisms, Estenoz gave a similar answer. He pointed out nine incumbent white mayors who were illiterate and he stressed that Afro-Cubans' level of education was progressing faster than whites'. "Supposing that our electoral strength would be so big that we would not have enough capable and prepared men for all public offices," he added, "why would it not be allowed to blacks, in order to make up the number, to bring a few complete nonentities identical to those who are now in very good supply in all spheres of government and in all branches of power?"⁸⁷ As for minor public jobs, the *independientes* demanded that Afro-Cubans get them in numbers corresponding to their proportion in society. Again and again, *Previsión* reported that blacks and mulattoes had made up more than 80 percent of the Liberation Army, but had been deprived of the fruits of

victory. Afro-Cuban commitment to independence demanded that they pursue, in Martí's words, "the revolution until the disappearance of the smallest injustice."⁶⁸

By October 1909, the tone of the *Independiente* organ turned virulent, as it appeared obvious that the presidency of José Miguel Gómez would not bring fundamental change, but would build up its antiracist image around the appointment of Morúa as president of the senate. The major target of *Previsión* became racial discrimination. Many articles reported cases of Afro-Cubans' being turned down for jobs, denied service in restaurants and barbershops, and unfairly arrested or sentenced.⁶⁹ *Previsión* qualified these incidents as "moral lynchings" and placed them in the long list of crimes against free blacks that started in 1844 with the Conspiracy of the Ladder.⁷⁰ According to the organ, Cuban racism was founded on the fear of blacks and, thus, hidden. It implied white permanent control of blacks so that they would not be able to think and act on their own. At any sign of Afro-Cuban independent initiative, terrorized whites and servile blacks would immediately shout, "Racism, don't divide the races!"⁷¹ Now the time had come to react. Afro-Cubans were summoned, in the name of those fallen in the war for a free Cuba, to face up to any racist harassment--even, if necessary, through the use of violence. Neither the fear of shedding blood, nor that of provoking a third U.S. intervention or U.S. annexation should stop them. They were even ready to abandon Cuba to save their honor.⁷²

Simultaneously, Afro-Cuban affiliation to the Partido Independiente de Color was growing at a steady rate. What the Creole press saw in 1908 as an insignificant group of frustrated blacks who could be treated with mockery⁷³ had become in early 1910 a sizable party with active adherents in most provinces and a national network of municipal committees. *Previsión* then claimed 60,000 members, among them 15,000 veterans, 12 generals, and 30 colonels. These figures would have meant 44 percent of Afro-Cuban electors or 14 percent of all male citizens over 21 years of age, and therefore would seem largely overestimated.⁷⁴ A more realistic estimate could be based on the fact that in late 1909, *Previsión* declared a circulation of 9,000 and, in early 1910, issued 15,000 shares in an effort to solve financial problems. In February 1910 the party counted 146 registered municipal committees, mostly in the provinces of Santa Clara, Oriente, and Havana. It had been unable to get a foothold in Camagüey, where blacks and mulattoes represented only 18 percent of the population.⁷⁵ The limited establishment of the party as well as its own reports of meetings made it more likely that it counted between 10,000 and 20,000 potential supporters.⁷⁶ These are nevertheless impressive figures for a grass-roots organization one-and-a-half years in existence.

As blacks and mulattoes increasingly became disenchanted as a result of socioeconomic marginalization and lack of political opportunities, they were attracted by the *independiente* campaign against racial discrimination. Rather than the party's political program or civility campaign, the struggle against discrimination was easy to identify with. Most Afro-Cubans had experienced such humiliations as being refused a haircut by a white barber, denied a job, or suspected just because of the color of their skin. The presentation of the campaign as a continuation of the independence wars reminded them of times of hope, heroism, and companionship, and diminished their sense of resignation.

The Partido Independiente de Color was indeed of popular origin. It lacked the backing of any outstanding national leader able to provide patronage, except Lino D'Ou, a Conservative veteran, congressman from Oriente, who never joined the party, but irregularly contributed to *Previsión*. The *independiente* leaders were indeed of little renown, and only Estenoz occasionally made the front page of the newspapers. They belonged to the middle class: Estenoz was a small entrepreneur; Gregorio Surín, a journalist; and Pedro Ivonet, a veterinarian and a Conservative who joined the party in early 1910 to become the second in command. All three were veterans from Oriente.

As for the members and sympathizers, the files of the proceedings against the party in April and May 1910 (see below) give valuable information on their social origins. Of the 170 men from all over the island arrested and recorded in Havana as suspects of being *independiente*, 85 percent belonged to the laboring classes. Most of them were, in decreasing numbers, tobacco workers, peasants, minor employees, unqualified workers, tailors, day laborers, bricklayers, and carpenters. Besides the already mentioned leaders, only seven shopkeepers, four owners, three journalists, two musicians, one public prosecutor, one industrial, one customs inspector, one municipal accountant, one police officer, and one *hacendado* detached themselves from the laboring classes. With the exception of the journalists, the party counted no intellectual--no lawyer, doctor, teacher, or student--and it counted no one of higher income. The age of the 170 suspects was balanced between those in their late thirties or forties, who had often fought in the Liberation Army, and those in their twenties and early thirties, who belonged to the postslavery and postindependence generation.⁷⁷ Forty-five percent described themselves as black, 52 percent mulatto, and 3 percent white. With the exception of the five white supporters, the figures of blacks and mulattoes, corresponding to their overall proportion within the Afro-Cuban population, showed that the Partido Independiente de Color represented blacks as well as mulattoes. Similarly, although the *independiente* suspects differentiated between *pardo* or *moreno* when giving their race, their affiliation showed that they all identified themselves with the concept of a *raza de color* beyond the differences between black and mulatto. This identification is particularly interesting because blacks and mulattoes had generally separate social clubs, a custom that the Partido Independiente de Color opposed.⁷⁸ It indicates an ethnopolitical consciousness transcending social practices, probably forged in the independence wars and in the common experience of white racism.

The expansion of the Partido Independiente de Color into a party of several thousand members, the growing Afro-Cuban racial consciousness, and the new aggressivity of *Previsión* point to an escalation of the *independientes'* struggle. Their resorting to violence became a possibility. Moreover, the movement was now a serious threat to the traditional parties, especially the *miguelistas*, in the coming elections of 1910. For the Creole elite, the Partido Independiente de Color could no longer be dealt with through mockery alone. It needed quick action.

On the 30th of January 1910, *Previsión* provided the government with an opportunity for intervening. Pointing out the American owners of a Havana hotel that refused to serve blacks, a framed appeal in bold print called:

To the Government and the Blacks of Cuba

Any man of color who does not kill instantly the cowardly aggressor who persecutes him in a public place is a wretch, unworthy of being a man, a dishonor to his homeland and his race.

The Partido Independiente de Color will only cease to exist when a black will severely punish, killing like a dog one of those who come to Cuba to humiliate Maceo's brothers, with the government encouraging and protecting them.

On that day the Partido Independiente will have accomplished its evolutionary mission.⁷⁹

The government's reaction quickly followed. *Previsión* was seized, Estenoz arrested and sentenced by a criminal court to six months' imprisonment (but pardoned within a month). Simultaneously, Senator Morúa proposed an amendment to the electoral law that would ban the Partido Independiente de Color, on the ground that, by representing only the interests of one race (the Afro-Cubans), it discriminated against the other (the whites), and thus was against the equality guaranteed by the constitution.⁸⁰

In late April 1910, several newspapers launched warnings against a supposed mobilization of Estenoz' blacks against the whites. On that ground, the government of Gómez carried out massive arrests of *independientes* throughout the island, under the criminal charge of conspiracy to stir up a revolution. Hundreds of them were brought to Havana for trial. The margin of social action allowed to Afro-Cubans was then so narrow that to organize a fund raising dance, to read *Previsión*, or to speak badly of white women served as evidence to be charged with conspiracy and threat against the "white" race. Many blacks and mulattoes, *independiente* or not, lost their jobs, especially in the police and the Rural Guard where they began to be perceived as dangerous. Simultaneously, in May, the proposal of Morúa (who died in late April that year) to ban the Partido Independiente de Color became law. However, not all politicians approved of the government's actions against the *independientes*, and some denounced them as ploys to prevent them from running in the elections. The Conservatives seized the opportunity to alienate Afro-Cuban voters from the Liberals. Although they had done nothing in favor of racial equality when in power, in 1910 they paid the bails for the release of the *independientes'* leaders. Moreover, one of their best lawyers acted as the defender of the party in its trial in December and won a verdict of not guilty.⁸¹

The massive imprisonment of 1910 nevertheless proved successful to the government. Although the *independientes* were acquitted, they were seriously weakened by the fact that hundreds of them had spent months in custody. They had lost their jobs, and their families had to borrow money to survive. Moreover, their movement was disorganized. The local committees had often been disbanded, and many supporters were now too frightened to continue as militants. And above all, the party remained banned. During 1911, the *independientes* struggled to reorganize and lobbied to obtain the repeal of Morúa's law. But all their efforts failed.⁸²

It was at that very moment that the *independientes* decided to organize the armed protest of 20 May 1912 that led to the massacre of thousands of Afro-Cubans. Armed protest was not unusual in postindependence Cuba. It had often been a way of gaining concessions from the government. In the major case of the Revolution of August 1906, it provoked U.S. intervention and allowed the Liberals to win power. But armed protest had never served to defend only the Afro-Cubans' cause.⁸³ In 1912, whites' fears mounted, especially after the *independiente* armed protest was launched in Oriente. Oriente was the "black" province of Cuba as well as the origin of all independence wars. It was also the province closest to Haiti, the black republic that obsessed both Spaniards and Creoles. If Afro-Cubans were ever to rebel, Creoles thought, they would start in Oriente.

Was, however, the *independiente* armed protest of 1912 the real source of Creole fear? After all, with the exception of some looting and burning, within a few days it became evident that the *independiente* rebellion was mostly peaceful. By early June 1912, before the massacre began, comments and cartoons in the contemporary Creole press showed that Estenoz' "racial war" was not taken seriously. On the contrary, *independientes'* pacifism was used by Creole commentators as a means of proving that Afro-Cubans were unfit for military fighting and that their role in the independence wars had been in fact marginal.⁸⁴ The massacre of 1912 was indeed not a Creole response to any attack by Afro-Cubans against whites. It was a white war against blacks and mulattoes.

The Creole elite resorted to racial violence for complex reasons. The evolution of Afro-Cuban frustration from protest within the national veterans' association to the organization of an Afro-Cuban autonomous party did represent a real challenge to Cuba's society and political system. In the short term, the threat was only political and limited to the Liberals of President José Miguel Gómez. The *miguelistas* could have lost part of their reserve of Afro-Cuban votes to the *independientes*, and thus have to give precedence to the Liberals of Alfredo Zayas or to the Conservatives. But the Cuban nascent two-party political system would have withstood. It would have taken years of mobilization before the *independientes* could break through and have enough elected representatives to influence local or national policies. In addition, their ideology was not "revolutionary"--in the sense that it did not stand for a complete reversal in the structure of society and power, and even less for a black or a socialist revolution.

Nevertheless, in the long term, the Partido Independiente de Color could have become a weighty third party and diverted important sectors of Conservative and Liberal Afro-Cuban voters, creating a new network of patronage for public jobs. Besides, the Creole elite correctly understood that an *independiente* reformist program would have challenged the very bases of Cuban society. The "rightful share" that the party demanded could have led eventually to changes in the class structure and in the patterns of power, wealth, and income distribution by allowing upward mobility to the Afro-Cuban minority. The positive image of blacks and mulattoes promoted by the party sharply opposed contemporary dominant racist theories, and thus threatened fundamental assumptions of Creole society. Moreover, the virulent *independiente* campaign against racial discrimination revealed that Afro-Cubans' expectations dating back to independence wars had not been silenced by the vague equality

guaranteed by the constitution. Many did not accept the proviso to stay "in their place" and were ready to resume the struggle for their "rightful share."

The perspective of a strong Afro-Cuban opposition also alarmed Creoles in their fragile domination of society. Out of the fear of the blacks' rise after the armistice, many Creole leaders had welcomed U.S. intervention and encouraged Spanish immigration. But as a result independence had given them a limited and insecure political and economic power. During the twelve years that followed 1898, Cubans had been subjected to almost six years of U.S. military rule. American economic penetration was visible in all sectors. Many Spaniards had remained in the high positions they held in colonial times, and new Spanish businessmen, entrepreneurs, and merchants had arrived. Creoles ended up being trapped between American imperialists and Spanish immigrants from above, and restless Afro-Cubans from below. This situation created an unbearable insecurity for the white elite, which chose to direct its resentment against the population's ethnic minority (instead of the real oppressors), as a means of recovering self-confidence in its own superiority.

For all these reasons, the Creole elite concluded that the Partido Independiente de Color should cease to exist and that Afro-Cubans should be taught an exemplary lesson so that they would know "their place" in the future. This was one of the reasons behind the massacre of thousands of blacks and mulattoes in 1912. Some white intellectuals even justified it as an episode of a world racial struggle in which the destiny of blacks was to give way to whites.⁸⁵ Although the slaughter had little demographic consequence, it so profoundly shocked the Afro-Cuban community, inside and outside of Oriente, that no one would again risk organizing a black and mulatto party in Cuba.

Finally, with the tragedy of 1912, the Cuban white elite manifested a fundamental and long-lasting contradiction in its relationship with Afro-Cubans. While intellectuals and politicians lamented over the supposed servility and lack of modern culture of people of African descent, they refused to acknowledge the full meaning of Afro-Cuban large participation in the independence wars and to see the change taking place within the Afro-Cuban community. When Estenoz decided to channel Afro-Cuban discontent, he was blamed for being a pretentious and ambitious mulatto, instead of being perceived as a politician akin to many Cubans of his time. When he and other Afro-Cubans chose the most democratic way to act as full citizens and to become an integrated sector of Cuban society--a political party to represent their interests in the elections--the Creole elite accused them of racism and conspiracy to establish a black republic. Afro-Cubans were compelled to exercise their rights within the established parties and under the control of the white elite. In sum, they were denied to be anything but servile.

NOTES

Unfortunately, the editing of the footnotes could not be completed in time. Participants interested in having a copy of the footnotes can contact the author at the congress or write to Aline Helg, Department of History, Garrison Hall, University of Texas, Austin, TX 78712-1163.