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## Afro-Cubans in Ybor City: A Centennial History, 1986

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Afro-Cubans  
in  
Ybor City  
  
*A Centennial History*





## FOREWORD

Ybor City enters its second century under conditions far different from those that marked its beginning. Cigar-making, which once dominated Tampa's whole economy, is now a very minor local industry and is fast becoming a forgotten art. The factories are nearly all empty, or serve other purposes, and Ybor City's landscape is scored with grassy open spaces where houses and businesses used to stand. Despite this transformation, Ybor City has remained an important element within the city of Tampa. Because of its age and distinctive character, it offers an anchoring point in the frenzy of Tampa's recent growth. Planners and developers are attempting to resurrect Ybor City's commercial vitality as an extension of changes underway downtown. Its unique historic atmosphere complements and humanizes the impersonal modernity of glass and steel towers. Ybor City is viewed as a cultural asset – a potentially profitable "Latin Quarter" which, if properly developed, could enhance Tampa's competitive appeal among the growing cities of the sunbelt.

But, Ybor City is also a community where people live, and where a large number of Tampa's citizens have ties and roots. Diverse groups have a stake in the revitalization process and represent longstanding interests that deserve to be protected. Fears have been expressed that outside consultants and commercially oriented developers may misunderstand or misrepresent the history and traditions of the people who built the neighborhood. There is concern that new development may bring further destruction to ethnic businesses and institutions.

If the rebirth of Ybor City is to be based on preserving its cultural heritage, then such destruction should clearly be avoided. The revitalization process should also reflect a complete and accurate understanding of what Ybor City's heritage actually has been. Authenticity is a standard needed to ensure that the cultures of the groups involved will be interpreted in a dignified manner. It is also a sound marketing strategy.

This publication is designed to fill a specific gap in the existing literature on Ybor City's ethnic history, that caused by the general lack of information on Afro-Cubans. They represent a group that has been part of Ybor City since its very beginnings, and this fact deserves recognition. Of added importance, their dual identity as both black and Cuban Americans makes their historical experiences in Tampa a unique lens through which to observe the nature of ethnic and race relations in our city and society.

The information and photographs contained herein are the product of collaborative efforts that began in 1984, when the board of La Unión Martí-Maceo donated their organizational records to the USF Special Collections Department. Since that time I have been researching those records, and I have interviewed many members of the Afro-Cuban community. In particular, I have drawn extensively on the knowledge of Frank Jimenez, whose sharp memories and seasoned insights extend back to the turn of century. Others too numerous to mention also contributed, and much of what is presented here comes from oral history sources. Summarizing and interpreting the experiences and values of a community that is not one's own is a difficult task, fraught with possible error. I would like to apologize for any egregious mistakes I may have made in this process, and to express my appreciation for the openness and generous hospitality of the people who have worked with me on this project. This has been a uniquely satisfying experience, in which I was able to pursue my research interests as an ethnohistorian in collaboration with a community that wanted its story to be told.

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Cover: Juan Monteagudo and unknown friend; Anthony Silva, age 2, 1926; Irene Cortes, 1927; (in auto) Pedro Casellas jr., Luis Casellas, Loretta Casellas, & Pedro Casellas sr.; unknown family group, c. 1900; Diana Blanco, age 3.x



## Afro-Cubans in Ybor City

On April 12, 1886, 50 Cuban cigarworkers in Key West boarded the sidewheeler *Hutchinson* and sailed for Tampa. Sr. Vincente Martinez Ybor and his partners had just concluded arrangements to develop a large cigar manufacturing colony there, and the sojourners were the labor force for the new enterprise. Their importation for this purpose was a simple business calculation. Members of the newly formed Tampa Board of Trade were also mainly concerned with business, and they provided generous inducements to assist in the creation of this new local industry. They welcomed the cigar magnates for the capital they planned to invest in their town, and they also welcomed the cigar-makers for the wages they would spend. Through that spring and summer boatloads of Cubans and Spaniards continued to arrive, by the end of the year totalling over 3000.<sup>1</sup> Their arrival effected sudden changes in the social and cultural character of Tampa. By 1890 immigrants outnumbered the natives,<sup>2</sup> and they brought along cultural values and practices that often conflicted with the established traditions of white southerners. Compared with native Tampans, the immigrants differed in language, religion and appearance -- liabilities in a region not noted for toleration. Of the Cubans, a sizeable minority (about 15%) was black. Within the immigrant community there was wide support for liberal social doctrines, and much disagreement with southern views on labor unions and race relations. As Ybor City grew, there would be numerous clashes between militant cigarworkers and local white "citizens' committees". The deal that had been struck between Ybor and the Tampa Board of Trade was a marriage of convenience, the beginning of a relationship between Latin immigrants and native born Southerners that profited both, but which has not always been congenial. In large degree, the history of Tampa is a product of that relationship -- a study in sharp contrasts between cultures, beliefs, religion and race. Nowhere are these contrasts more clearly drawn than in the unfolding development of Tampa's Afro-Cuban community, the subject of this book.

The Statue of Liberty was delivered during the same year that Ybor City was founded; they are now sharing the same centennial. As part of the statue's celebration, much has been said and written recently concerning the difficulties experienced by immigrants in American cities. The hardships that black people have endured, especially in the South, are equally well known. However, almost nothing is known about the experiences of black immigrants, such as Afro-Cubans, who would seem to have gotten a double serving of challenges from their adopted homeland. As foreigners, they suffered unfamiliarity with the language

been small. In addition, however, black Cubans as a group have been somewhat invisible, neglected by local historians and isolated from the mainstream of the City's political affairs. As Cubans living in Ybor City and West Tampa, they were cut off from black Americans by cultural differences and the lack of common residence or employment. They were also divided from their own ethnic community by laws that prohibited black and white Cubans from attending the same schools or belonging to the same social organizations. The early Afro-Cubans in Tampa withdrew into a community of their own making. Wages earned in the cigar fac-



Close-up view of front wall of *La Unión Martí-Maceo*. The tile work, which depicts the society's two namesakes, was installed in 1985.

and local customs, as well as intolerance from the native-born. As blacks, they faced added obstacles stemming from racial discrimination. Such conditions caused problems but also promoted a strong sense of group identity.

Few people are even aware of the existence of Afro-Cubans in Tampa, partly because their numbers have always

stories were pooled in a mutual aid society, *Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo*, to which most Afro-Cubans belonged. The society occupied a commodious two-story brick building in Ybor City and offered social and economic benefits that were critically important. A great many members devoted considerable effort in order to maintain it, and they managed to keep it in operation through strikes,



layoffs, the depression, and Urban Renewal. To a large extent, the history of the community and the history of this organization are the same, and neither has yet come to an end. Although the original building fell to Urban Renewal in the 1960s, the society still exists. It is now located on 7th Avenue in Ybor City, next to some of the landmarks of its past. The building sits directly across from a small park dedicated to José Martí, one of the society's namesakes. The park occupies the former site of the Pedros House, in which La Unión Martí-Maceo was originally founded. Current members include grandchildren of the founders, and they are hopeful that their own descendants will continue to belong. Towards that end, a major purpose in writing this book is to spotlight the history of this important community institution. It is also intended to establish for Afro-Cubans a much deserved, and long lacking, place in the documented heritage of Ybor City. The dual centennial of the Statue of Liberty and Ybor City seems an especially appropriate time to offer such a revision.

## Afro-cubanidad

"Sin el negro Cuba no sería Cuba."  
Fernando Ortiz, 1947.

African slave labor was the foundation of Cuba's giant sugar industry. At emancipation, which occurred in 1886, the island's population was about one third black. The role of Afro-Cubans in the production of national wealth is a major part of the concept of *afro-cubanidad*.<sup>2</sup> Beyond simple economic contributions, however, black Cubans have had a large influence on the literature, music, religion, and politics of Cuba. Black participation in the wars for Cuban independence gave rise to many heroes whose exploits are celebrated by white and black alike. The nation of Cuba has deep roots in African soil.

Black Cubans and black Americans share the same legacy of slavery, and their ancestors largely originated from the same parts of Africa. Both groups have also experienced a long history of racism and the enduring handicaps of servitude and bondage. In Cuba, as well as in the United States, there were laws restricting the liberties and opportunities of persons of African descent. Doctrines of white

superiority found acceptance in both places. Segregation was not as stringent in Cuba, but it was certainly in effect there. Black Cubans encountered numerous formal and informal limits in employment, political participation, recreation, socializing, and marriage. For Cuban as well as American blacks, the chains of slavery were replaced by the yoke of second-class citizenship. There were, however, important differences in the specific effects of slavery in Cuba compared with the United States. When filtered through the lens of Cuban history and the cultural values of the Spaniards who colonized the island, slavery in Cuba produced a kind of racism that is more polite and subdued, whispered about rather than shouted, but no less malevolent in principle.<sup>4</sup>

The expansion of slavery came later in Cuba, not fully flourishing until the 19th century. Cuban slaves had more recent and continuous contacts with Africa, and Afro-Cuban culture reflects a greater degree of African influence than is found with Afro-Americans. In addition, Spanish colonial authorities allowed Cuban slaves and free persons of color to create formal organizations (called *cabildos*) based on their tribal affiliations. The *cabildos* functioned as mutual aid societies and as effective repositories of African language, lore, and religion.<sup>5</sup> As a result, the music and folklore of Cuba contain many elements that are unmistakably African in origin. Within the Cuban national culture as a whole, this African contribution is freely and positively acknowledged. For the most part, black and white Cubans share the same culture, neither Spanish nor African in its major component, but rather an amalgamation of both.

Some authors have argued that slavery in Cuba was not nearly as harsh as in the United States, that Spanish Catholic planters and administrators were less racist and more humane in their treatment of Africans. Other accounts challenge this perspective, documenting widespread conditions on Cuban sugar plantations that were extremely brutal.<sup>6</sup> Planters were plagued by excessive rates of mortality, suicide, and uprisings among the slaves -- strong evidence of dissatisfaction with the treatment accorded by their owners. However, Cuban laws regarding manumission were more generous than those in the United States, resulting in a relatively larger population of free persons of color. In addition, restrictions against mixed mar-

riages were less effective. Unlike the United States, where one was either black or white, Cuba drew no firm boundary between races. Cuban racial categories reflect a continuum of darkness, including *pardos* who are brown and *morenos* who are black and other labels covering various intermediate possibilities. Many of the free people of color in 19th century Cuba were *mulattos*, who by law and custom had more access to the resources of their white kinfolk than did *mulattos* in the United States.<sup>7</sup> Free Afro-Cubans, especially *mulattos*, were often educated and occasionally succeeded in gaining wealth and fame. Many of the free Afro-Cubans lived in the city of Havana or in other large towns where they worked at various occupations, including cigarmaking. Although barred from entering many of the professions and subject to numerous discriminatory restrictions, Afro-Cubans who were able to win their freedom operated under conditions relatively more benign than those affecting their American counterparts.

Slavery and race relations in 19th century Cuba were essentially contradictory. Plantation slaves who were the majority lived under conditions that were objectively dreadful, worse by most measures than the plantations of the American South. At the same time, particular features of the Spanish administration in Cuba permitted slaves more avenues for obtaining freedom and potentially bettering their individual circumstances. Barriers were not eliminated, however. Nor did the tribulations of the plantation slaves go unnoticed by free town dwelling Afro-Cubans. Slave rebellions during the 1840s resulted in a series of new harsh restrictions on free blacks and *mulattos*, and in 1844, 34 influential Afro-Cubans were executed for allegedly conspiring to foment a slave insurrection.<sup>8</sup> Included were the well known poets Plácido and Juan Francisco Manzano. They and the others were evidently innocent of the charges against them, but the actions taken by the Spanish helped inspire insurrectionist visions in the next generation of Afro-Cubans. Fifty years hence, in Tampa, there would be a revolutionary organization named for the murdered poet Plácido.

The abolition of Cuban slavery and independence from Spain were political agendas much intertwined in the latter half of the 19th century. Initially, the



Cuban Creoles most interested in ousting the Spanish were also heavily invested in the maintenance of slavery. Many were wealthy planters who conspired with Americans to annex Cuba as part of the slaveholding South. The outcome of the Civil War in the United States permanently ended those aspirations. Conditions under Spanish rule continued to deteriorate, however, and so did the political strength of the Spanish empire. In 1868, Cubans dared commence an open rebellion against Spain. The ranks of the revolutionists then included planters of varying degrees of wealth joined with poor whites, free people of color, indentured Asians, and slaves. There was no shortage of grievances against the Spanish. Race and slavery very soon emerged as important issues in the conflict. Cuban forces were greatly augmented when planters, such as the leader Cespedes, freed their slaves to join the rebel army. Afro-Cubans were involved at all levels in the struggle, including such powerful military figures as Antonio Maceo, Flor Crombet, and Quintín Banderas. Despite the contrary interests of wealthy white planters, rebel demands and platforms increasingly emphasized abolition, racial equality, and social justice. On the other side, the Spanish attempted to manipulate the racial issue, promising eventual abolition as a way of recruiting Afro-Cubans into the loyalist forces. The Spanish also spread rumors among the Cubans that General Maceo was plotting a black uprising aimed at driving all whites off the island. The diversity of interests among the rebel forces offered fertile ground in which to sow disunity.<sup>9</sup>

In 1878, ten years after war began, the Creole insurgents surrendered in a field at Zanjón. Divided and exhausted, the rebels accepted a truce. As one of the conditions, slaves who had fought with the liberation army were to be granted immediate freedom. Ironically, most slaves who had remained loyal to the Spanish stayed in bondage. This proved to be a short-lived distinction, however, because the total abolition of slavery in Cuba was by then very near at hand. During the Ten Years War, the Spanish enacted measures designed to gradually emancipate the slaves. Following the Moret Law of 1870, anyone born of slave parents was automatically free, and slaves over the age of 60 were also granted their freedom. By the time emancipation was finally decreed in 1886, most



General Antonio Maceo

Afro-Cubans were no longer slaves. For many who had fought against the Spanish, and also among those who had fought with them, there was a deepening conviction that real freedom would come only when the colonial regime was finally vanquished.<sup>10</sup>



## Cuba Libre

"To all Cubans; whether they come from the continent where the sun scorches the skin, or from countries where the light is gentler, this will be the revolution in which all Cubans, regardless of color, have participated."

José Martí, 1891

"I am bringing you a war of justice and reason; come with me and you will be sons worthy of Cuba."

Antonio Maceo, 1886

Several of the rebel leaders, including Antonio Maceo, initially refused to surrender at Zanjón, vainly extending the struggle for a few more months and finally retreating into exile. Following the Ten Years War, Cuban revolutionaries began the slow process of rebuilding for an eventual return to the island. During the early years Key West, Florida supplied a major base of support for the exile organization. Later, this responsibility was also shouldered by Cubans living in Ybor City and West Tampa. Exiled Cuban cigarworkers became one of the principal mainstays of Cuban resistance and eventual independence. Black Cuban cigarworkers were prominently involved.<sup>11</sup>

A sizeable colony of Cubans had been established on Key West in 1869, a direct result of the Ten Years War. Political unrest in Cuba led cigar manufacturers to find a safer haven in which to operate. Underlying the move, however, were also burdensome tariffs and restrictions the Spanish had imposed on the Cuban tobacco industry. Although many of the cigar manufacturers were themselves Spaniards, their economic problems engendered sympathy for the separatist aims of the Creoles.<sup>12</sup> Most of the workers in their factories were also ardent supporters of Cuban independence.

The craft of cigarmaking in Cuba included several features that tended to promote political awareness and a rebellious tradition. Cigarmakers were skilled independent workers who attached a high value to their labor. Havana cigarworkers were in the forefront of union organizing and heavily involved in the politics of the nation. In addition the

*lectores*, who read to the workers while they rolled cigars, offered a constant flow of information and ideas which helped inspire sentiments in favor of independence.<sup>13</sup> Cigarworkers were among the early casualties in the first uprising against Spain. In 1869, two cigarmakers were hanged in the plaza at La Punta for having spoken in support of Cuban liberation.<sup>14</sup> To their names would be added a growing list of martyrs who died for the cause, but the most important contributions of cigarworkers in the independence movement were financial and organizational.

Wages earned by exiled cigarmakers were funnelled into a series of revolutionary clubs and converted into arms and supplies for the liberation army. Organizers of the clubs also assisted in generating propaganda and strategy for the revolution. These clubs were initially established in Key West during the Ten Years War. In preparation for the next armed uprising, they proliferated in Key West and Tampa.<sup>15</sup> Cigar manufacturers supported this activity and permitted leaders of the revolutionary party to enter the factories in order to exhort the workers and solicit donations.

Patriotic solidarity between factory owners and workers was difficult to maintain because their working relationship made them adversaries. Cigarmakers were as militant in their support of trade unionism as they were of independence. During the 1880s there were numerous strikes in the Key West factories. Labor unrest was a major factor prompting Ybor and other manufacturers to move to Tampa. The leadership among the workers eventually agreed to suspend labor agitation for the sake of unity, but the conflicts were not eliminated, and they strained the effectiveness of the revolutionary organization.<sup>16</sup>

Race was another source of division. Several of the most capable military figures were black or mulatto. Within the ranks of the revolutionary leadership, especially among those who were wealthy and white, fears were expressed that these men posed a potential danger should they become too powerful. Others voiced concern over how well black officers could command the support of white troops. These attitudes hindered the military effectiveness of the officers in question and diminished overall strategic capacities of the revolutionary forces.<sup>17</sup> The exiled cigarworkers, upon



José Martí

whom the military depended so heavily, were also subject to racial divisiveness. In both Key West and Tampa, significant numbers of cigarworkers were black. There was little overt discrimination in the cigar industry, and blacks participated heavily in both union and nationalist activities. However, Cuban racial attitudes and etiquette influenced tendencies to segregate and snub black Cubans.<sup>18</sup> Dissensions over real and imagined racial slights posed an ongoing threat to worker unity.

Lack of unity was one of the principal failings in the Ten Years War and was a problem that lingered in exile. Workers were wary about what their capitalist allies were planning for post-independence Cuba, and vice versa. Black revolutionists questioned whether the sacrifices they were making would in fact earn them social justice. All agreed only on the need to expell the Spanish. José Martí stepped into this breach, forging a broad humanitarian rhetoric capable of appealing to all factions and interests.<sup>19</sup> He spoke persuasively about the need to resolve just grievances of workers and to build an independent Cuba where no one would suffer exploitation. On the question of racism, he was forthright and unequivocal: "for me the one who promotes hatred in Cuba or who tries to take advantage of that which exists is a criminal, and he who tries to





José Martí and a group of supporters assemble on the steps of Ybor's factory following a speech, in 1892. Courtesy *Tampa Bay History*.

suffocate the legitimate aspirations of a good and prudent race is also a criminal."<sup>20</sup>

Martí first visited Tampa in 1891. Little known before his arrival, he immediately became a hero to the cigarworkers of the city. In his first speech he strongly emphasized the need for racial unity and the moral as well as political importance of doing away with racism.<sup>21</sup> Tampa's revolutionary leadership included a number of Afro-Cubans. Martí especially cultivated their support and friendship, partly to serve as an example to the white Cubans. Martí's best known association was with Ruperto and Paulina Pedrosos. Others included Cornelio Brito, Bruno Roig, and Joachin and Manuel Granados. Martí's agenda during his first visit included the formation of *La Liga de Instrucción de Tampa*.<sup>22</sup> This was an educational organization similar to one in New York, *La Liga*, which was begun by Rafael Serra, a well known Afro-Cuban and close friend of Martí. The Tampa club was organized at a meeting in the home of Cornelio Brito. There were 30 in attendance, including those listed above and, according to oral history, Alejandro Acosta, Nicasio and Cecilio Navarro, Teodoro Miro, Hilario Mendez, Antonio Sastre, Teófilo Domínguez, and Florencio Troncoso.<sup>23</sup> Only a few of the names have been preserved, and the activities of Tampa's black Cubans during independence survive only in the barest details.

Ruperto and Paulina Pedroso originated in Pinar del Río, Cuba, but they moved to Havana during the Ten Years War and then to Key West. They came to Tampa sometime in the late 80s.<sup>24</sup> Ruperto was a cigarmaker, but he and Paulina also had a boarding house at 12th St. and 8th Ave. Ruperto had several brothers and sisters who had come with him to Tampa. His sister Ignacia and brother José operated a boarding house and restaurant in the next block. A number of the relatives lived in these two boarding houses, forming a large extended family.<sup>25</sup> Martí had great affection for both Paulina and Ruperto and usually stayed with them during his visits to Tampa. On these occasions, the Pedrosos flew the Cuban flag from the gable of their house and crowds would gather in street outside, hoping to catch a glimpse of "El Maestro". To protect against assassination, Ruperto slept in the hall with his body positioned in front of Martí's bedroom door. Martí strolled arm in arm with Paulina on the sidewalks of Ybor City, demonstrating at once his regard for her and his contempt for racist injunctions against this kind of physical contact.<sup>26</sup> Ruperto and Paulina remained in Tampa after the end of the war, but returned to Cuba in 1910, following a bitter strike in the cigar factories. In recognition of their service to the republic, the Cuban government gave them a house to live in rent free and Ruperto received

a job as doorman in a police station in Havana. Paulina, who was then going blind, was awarded a small pension.<sup>27</sup>

Cornelio Brito, whose name is frequently mentioned in documents and in whose home *La Liga* was formed, remains largely a mystery. Although described by one author as wealthy and educated,<sup>28</sup> his occupation and place of residence are unknown. He never appeared in city directories or census listings although he reportedly lived the remainder of his life in Tampa, part of the time in the house formerly occupied by the Pedrosos.<sup>29</sup>

More is known about Bruno Roig, another of the founders of *La Liga*. He first came to Tampa in 1887, at the age of 32, and established a grocery store on the corner of 11th St. and 7th Avenue.<sup>30</sup> Both prosperous and respected, he was prominent among the leadership of Tampa's Afro-Cuban community both during and after the war for independence. At the close of the war in 1898, he brought his wife Henrietta from Cuba. She was much younger than her husband (22 compared to his age of 43). Several years later they had a son, Felipe.<sup>31</sup> The Roigs initially remained in Tampa, but they too returned to Cuba, in 1913, as the result of financial problems that caused him to lose everything he had acquired in Florida.<sup>32</sup>



Paulina Pedroso. Courtesy of Anthony P. Pizzo.





Plaque in Martí Park, 8th Avenue & 13th St., commemorating Paulina and Ruperto Pedroso's contributions to Cuban independence.

Although most were cigarmakers, several other Afro-Cuban independence supporters operated businesses. Teodoro Miro had a warehouse in Ybor City, and Cecilio Navarro had a grocery store, which he left in 1897 to fight in Cuba. Juan Jimenez, Navarro's brother-in-law, operated a boarding house, bar, and restaurant in Port Tampa.<sup>33</sup> Manuel Granados' barber shop on 7th Avenue served as a gathering place for both black and white revolutionaries. His brother Joachin, a cigarmaker, served for a time as secretary of the Tampa delegation to the PRC (Cuban Revolutionary Party).<sup>34</sup>

During the independence period, several very well known Afro-Cubans were living in Tampa. Francisco Segura, a labor activist and writer, assisted Ramón Rivero in publishing *La Revista de Florida*, the highly regarded revolutionary newsweekly. (Rivero, who was white, was lector in Ybor's factory and a central figure among the exile leadership).<sup>35</sup> Another Afro-Cuban, Guillermo Sorondo, led the governing body of the PRC in Port Tampa. He was an anarchist of some renown and an associate of Carlos Baliño, leader of the anarchist

wing of the independence forces. In the 1870s, Sorondo founded the *Colegio Unification*, the first Afro-Cuban organization in Key West. He was expelled from Key West following the general strike of 1889; from there he went to Ocala, serving as the head of the PRC governing council in that city in 1893.<sup>36</sup> (Joaquin Granados also lived for a time in Ocala, and was secretary of the Fermin Salvochea club, of which Baliño was president).<sup>37</sup> In 1897, both Sorondo and Baliño left Ocala and came to Port Tampa. Another of their associates, José Morales, helped Juan Jimenez establish his business there. Juan Jimenez was responsible for collecting dues and donations from the workers in that area. Living next door to the Jimenez establishment was the well known Afro-Cuban labor organizer and journalist, Martín Morúa Delgado,<sup>38</sup> who 15 years later would become a member of the Cuban Senate and the nation's first black cabinet member. Ironically, Morúa Delgado was the author of a 1910 law repressing black political parties, a measure partly responsible for an uprising in which upwards of 3000 black Cubans were slaughtered.<sup>40</sup>



Bruno Roig, 1904. Courtesy of Sotero Gonzalez.



## Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo

In 1898, Cuba was freed from Spanish control. Neither Martí nor Maceo lived to see this happen, and many who did survive the struggle were disillusioned with the outcome. The war for Cuban independence had been converted into the Spanish-American war, and Martí's vision of equality was swept away in the transition. A large number of Tampa's Afro-Cubans returned home to share in the victory, but were instead treated to the lingering racism of Cuban society and the new belligerent racism of American troops and administrators. In addition, the Cuban economy had been devastated by the war. Returning emigrés of all colors confronted a scarcity of employment.<sup>41</sup> Back in Tampa there were jobs, and in Ybor City there was a community still committed to the goals and principles of José Martí. Or, so it must have seemed.

A great many Afro-Cubans returned again to Florida and began to build a more permanent community in exile.<sup>42</sup> By the turn of the century, Ybor City hosted a large immigrant population of three national identities – Cuban, Spanish, and Italian. Within each of these groups, mutual aid societies were formed to provide medical care and sick benefits. The societies also sponsored most social and cultural activities, emerging as the principal institutions of the Latin community. Altogether there were five ethnic societies, begun within the same short period (1891-1902) and organized along lines that were extremely similar.<sup>43</sup> Members paid small weekly dues in exchange for sick and death benefits, complete medical care, and access to social functions.

The Cubans didn't establish a mutual aid society until after Independence, although there had been no prior shortage of Cuban organizations. There had been more than 40 revolutionary clubs in Tampa, and the *Liceo Cubano* provided a forum for the whole Cuban community.<sup>44</sup> The *Club Nacional Cubano*, forerunner of *Circulo Cubano*, was founded



Teofilo Dominguez, and his daughter, Rose, c. 1900. Courtesy of Fredesbinda Millet.



Maria de Jesus Vierna, c. 1895. The wife of Teofilo Dominguez, she was also active in aiding Cuban independence. Courtesy of Fredesbinda Millet.

in 1899. Originally called the "October 10 Club", both black and white Cubans were members. A dispute soon arose, the details of which were not recorded.<sup>45</sup> The issues, however, clearly had to do with race. Black members were either ejected, or they withdrew, and within the next year founded their own organization, *Los Libres Pensadores de Martí y Maceo* (Freethinkers of Martí and Maceo).

Most chroniclers of this split have suggested that Florida's segregation laws were the sole cause, and that former comrades in the independence struggle were forcibly separated in their post-war organizations.<sup>46</sup> This interpretation is oversimplified, however. It ignores longstanding racial divisions in Cuban society and obscures the real significance of what occurred in Tampa. Cuban social organizations were racially segregated long before the advent of Jim Crow in the United States. Martí's concern with racism was grounded in reality, and many of his efforts, in Tampa especially, were aimed at overcoming this problem. The precarious unity he had achieved there fell away with discouraging ease. There is no evidence whatever that white Cubans attempted to resist the imposition of Jim Crow restrictions on the new organization, and Cubans in Tampa were well known for resisting conditions that displeased them. In naming their organization, the Afro-Cubans honored both Martí and Maceo, white and black heroes who had also been the leading proponents of racial solidarity. Although there is no recorded verification, it seems likely that this name was chosen partly as a reminder to the white Cubans that they were violating basic principles of the revolution. The minutes from the early years of the Martí-Maceo society contain numerous references to the strained relationship between Tampa's black and white Cubans.<sup>47</sup> The relationship continued, but it was no longer solidary, and the Afro-Cubans in Ybor City and West Tampa found themselves increasingly on their own.

The Martí-Maceo society was begun on October 26, 1900 in the home of Ruperto and Paulina Pedroso. Several of those present at the charter meeting had also been involved in *La Liga*, including Bruno Roig, Alejandro Acosta, and Teofilo Dominguez. There were altogether 23 persons attending the meeting. They decided to base their club on a similar organization in Santa Clara Cuba, of which Bruno Roig was a member.<sup>48</sup> The main purposes at





Part of a photo showing the founders of Martí-Maceo in 1904. Courtesy of Sotero Gonzalez.

the outset were educational and recreational. Dances, picnics and lectures were given, a baseball team was formed (*los Gigantes Cubanos*), and efforts were begun to create a school for members and their children.<sup>49</sup>

Medical and economic benefits were added in 1904, when Martí-Maceo merged with *La Unión*. The latter was an Afro-Cuban organization in West Tampa begun by Juan Franco, a cigarmaker who also belonged to Martí-Maceo.<sup>50</sup> The merger greatly enhanced the size as well as the treasury of the combined organizations. Just prior to the merger, there had been a balance on hand of \$41.24. Within the next year, that amount had jumped to \$1,757.00.<sup>51</sup> Revenues continued to climb with the expansion of the Afro-Cuban population of Tampa (which increased by 80% between 1900 and 1910).<sup>52</sup> In 1908, *La Unión Martí-Maceo* was formally incorporated under Florida law, and in that same year a substantial brick building, costing \$18,000, was begun at 11th Street and 6th Avenue in Ybor City.<sup>53</sup>

The Afro-Cubans shared the same needs and problems as the other immigrants in Ybor City, and their mutual aid society accomplished many of the same purposes as the others. Florida at that time was an inhospitable environment offering almost no publicly supported social or medical services, even

to citizens and certainly not to aliens. In addition, the vast cultural differences between immigrants and natives created tensions and assimilationist pressures that conflicted with national pride. These problems were minimized through deliberate isolation. The economic importance of the cigar industry allowed Ybor City and West Tampa a measure of self-determination, and they became places unto themselves. The ethnic societies were yet another level of isolation, organizations within which each of the groups was able to maintain a distinct cultural identity while providing for the social and medical needs of the members.

For Afro-Cubans an organizational expression of group identity was doubly important, because the post-independence period in Ybor City coincided with the Jim Crow era in Florida. The Supreme Court ruling known as *Plessy vs. Ferguson* was handed down in 1896, giving constitutional authority to the enactment of laws requiring segregation in public services and facilities. Even in Ybor City, all theaters, parks, churches, and schools were racially segregated. The same was true of most bars and restaurants. The streetcar that ran down 7th Avenue

carried whites in front and blacks in the rear. If the white section became too full, blacks were required to give up their seats.<sup>54</sup> Such conditions were degrading as well as disabling, and created a distinct difference in status between black Cubans and the other immigrant groups. The Martí-Maceo society helped counteract some of these problems, and provided Afro-Cubans with an effective means of collectively addressing their individual difficulties. Members of Martí-Maceo had access to the same system of medical benefits offered by the other ethnic societies, providing excellent health care not available to black Americans. Moreover, shared participation in this landmark experiment in socialized medicine, helped integrate both the society and its members into the larger immigrant community. Black Cubans also used the Martí-Maceo society to overcome limits on their social and recreational options. They staged plays, concerts, and lectures, and had frequent dances and picnics. The club served as a daily gathering place offering a cantina, game area, and library. The Afro-Cubans were a small group (fewer than 300 households in 1900), but still large enough to support the many activities sponsored by Martí-Maceo.<sup>55</sup> Their community developed within this context and was unusually cohesive for the fact that black Cubans had many fewer choices in their leisure time pursuits.





Original building of *La Unión Martí-Maceo*, erected 1909. Courtesy of USF Special Collections.



Souvenir from a literary and musical performance held at Martí-Maceo August 29, 1909 celebrating the official opening of the new building. Courtesy Francisco Rodriguez.

## Tampeños

Afro-Cubans had little encouragement, or desire, to assimilate into American society. In the period between the turn of the century and the depression of the 1930s, black Cubans in Tampa maintained a highly distinct community centered in their mutual aid society and held together by shared employment in the cigar factories. As long as the cigar industry remained healthy, they had little incentive to shed their ethnic identity.

In 1900, over 90% of black Cuban men and about 15% of the women worked in the cigar industry. Many households had three or more members working in the factories.<sup>56</sup> Cigarmaking was skilled labor, and cigarmakers earned a good living compared with other workers during the same period. Moreover, Cuban and Spanish cigarmakers took unusual pride in their occupation. They wore starched white shirts to work and boasted to each other about their skills. Workers in each factory hired a *lector* who filled the hours they worked by reading them novels, essays, and a variety of newspapers.<sup>57</sup> Enlightening as well as entertaining, they justifiably considered this practice to be a major intellectual achievement. Afro-Cuban cigarmakers shared in all these traditions. Several of the *lectores* were black, including Facundo Accion who was president of Martí-Maceo in 1912 and 1913.<sup>58</sup> Cigarmakers' wages were based on skill not color, and the workplace was integrated.

There was also a general absence of housing discrimination in Ybor City and West Tampa. Black Cubans lived interspersed with white Cubans, Italians and Spaniards. They worked together in the factories, and their children played together in the yards and streets. Neighbors knew each other and were usually friendly. However warm these relations, lines were still clearly drawn, and most socializing occurred in the clubs which were segregated. Race relations in the Latin community had a distinctively ambiguous quality, often characterized as benign yet hypocritical, and similar to Cuba where racism was usually practiced with an air of polite embarrassment.



Afro-Cuban immigrants maintained a high level of contact with each other and a close association with their homeland. Cigarmaking was a mobile occupation.<sup>59</sup> The skills and small number of tools involved transported easily, and cigarmakers could find work in a number of places including Havana. Besides Tampa, there were large Cuban colonies in Key West and New York City. Cuban cigarmakers, both black and white, moved freely among these places and returned home often. Especially during strikes and layoffs, the ability to find work elsewhere was helpful in avoiding economic hardship. This mobility gave an added dimension to the community life of Afro-Cubans in Tampa. Many assumed they would eventually go back home to stay, and quite a few did. Large numbers of Cubans returned to the island each year around Christmas; some remained for months and others even longer. Afro-Cubans had a relatively low rate of naturalization and a general reluctance to learn English.<sup>60</sup> Classes in Spanish were offered at Martí-Maceo to help ensure that the children born in Tampa would not lose their native language. Frequent contact with black Cubans from other parts of the United States enhanced their sense of Cuban identity and increased awareness of conditions in other cities.



Turn of the century Afro-Cuban family. Seated is Maria de la Cruz Lavin, the mother, daughter Seraphin (standing left), son José Pilar (center), and daughter Caridad (right). Courtesy Francisco Rodriguez.

Within the Latin enclave, Afro-Cubans in Tampa were able to fashion an adjustment to the unique difficulties they faced as black immigrants. The factories gave them a living, and *La Unión Martí-Maceo* supplied many of the rest of their needs. So long as these arrangements could be maintained, life in Jim Crow America was rendered far less disagreeable. There were problems with this from the beginning, however.

Cigarmakers in Tampa engaged in almost continuous battles in defense of their wages and working conditions. Over the course of thirty years they were defeated more times than they won, and their economic status steadily eroded with costly strikes and declining wages. Afro-Cubans had a longstanding involvement in organizing Tampa's cigarmakers. In 1886, black Cubans established a local chapter of the Knights of Labor.<sup>61</sup> Among those taking part in independence activities in Tampa, Guillermo Sorondo, Francisco Segura, and Martín Morúa Delgado were well known for their labor activism. Although none of these men remained in Tampa after the war, many of the Afro-Cubans who did stay had similar views on labor unions. A spontaneous strike in 1899, *la huelga de la pesa*, gave birth to an independent union of immigrant cigarworkers known as *La Resistencia*. Numerous Afro-Cubans joined, including the forementioned Alejandro Acosta, Juan Jimenez, Antonio Sastre, and Ruperto Pedrosó.<sup>62</sup> During the strike, the *Tampa Tribune* stated that white Cuban cigarmakers were attempting to force their black compatriots to leave the city. Oral accounts challenge the accuracy of this report, and it perhaps better serves to illustrate efforts by the white establishment to sow disharmony.<sup>63</sup> One of *La Resistencia's* main grievances against the factory owners was over the hiring of non-union black workers, mainly Americans, in the Jacksonville factories. In labor disputes it was very common to use black strikebreakers. This measure was intentionally designed to fuel the racism of white union members and undermine solidarity between black and white strikers. Many of the American labor organizations at that time, including the Cigarmakers International Union, succumbed to this tactic and were openly segregationist.<sup>64</sup> *La Resistencia* reportedly was not, but it collapsed in 1901. In the years that followed, the CMIU emerged as the only real alternative. Black cigarmakers in Tampa remained active in the

union but were hampered by its racist policies, especially when they sought work in other cities. They were also less able than the other workers to protect their interests on the job.<sup>65</sup>

Although black Cubans earned equal wages as cigarmakers, they were rarely hired for better paying jobs, such as selectors or foremen. Beginning early in the century, a growing number of Italian women learned to make cigars and found work in the factories. They frequently replaced black Cuban men, many let go on the pretext that it would be improper for black men and white women to work near each other.<sup>66</sup> Black Cubans in Tampa had a fragile dependence on the cigar factories. Between 1910 and 1914, Afro-Cuban participation in the cigar industry dropped from 94% to 83%. By 1924, it was down to 73%. Although some of the new occupations reflected upward mobility, more were in lower paying jobs such as laborers, porters, bellboys, and janitors.<sup>67</sup> Even before mechanization and the depression, black Cubans in Tampa had begun to lose ground.

Maintaining the solvency of the mutual aid society was also an ongoing struggle for the Afro-Cubans, because theirs was the smallest ethnic community in Ybor City. Only about 15% of Cubans in Tampa were black. Growth of the black Cuban population during the first decades of the century mirrored that of the white Cubans, expanding rapidly at first and levelling off considerably in the teens and twenties. Membership in Martí-Maceo rose from about 100 in 1908 to a high point of 275 in 1911, then dropped off and stayed at about 150 until the 1930s.<sup>68</sup> The dues collected by Martí-Maceo totalled only a fraction of what the larger societies had, although the benefits were essentially the same. Dues were only 60c a week, but when members got sick they collected \$1.50 a day plus the costs of medical treatment. Without considering the costs of medical care, the financial benefits were more than 17 times greater than the dues. To maintain a balance, there would need to be more than 20 healthy members to support each one who was sick. In such a small organization, a few too many sick members could quickly deplete the treasury.

The leadership of *La Unión Martí-Maceo* faced formidable administrative problems. In addition to the benefits, there was a mortgage to pay and a host of expenditures for supplies, equipment,



utilities, etc. Dues alone could not cover all the costs, and fundraising was a varied and constant endeavor.

Social events were the major source of additional revenue. The club gave frequent dances which usually netted several hundred dollars. They sold tickets at the door, charged extra for tables, and also sold food and drinks. Known as "top and bottom dances," these were very popular affairs attended by most of the members. The name arose from the fact that bands were hired to play on both levels of the two-story building. The Cuban Marine Band played at Martí-Maceo when they came to Tampa, and the club sponsored musical and dramatic performances that regularly featured travelling Cuban musicians and theatrical companies. In addition to the professional performances, there were many given by the members themselves. Plays were staged, directed, acted, and sometimes even written by members who regarded themselves as serious amateurs. Most were full time cigarmakers who rehearsed



Members of Martí-Maceo on a picnic, c. 1900. Courtesy *Sociedad La Unión Martí-Maceo*.



Black and white cigarmakers in a Tampa factory. Courtesy USF Special Collections.





Board of directors of Martí-Maceo, 1917. Seated (left to right): José C. Rivas, Jacinto San Martín, Francisco Flores (president), Julio Pozo, Juan Franco. Standing, first row (left to right): Eladio Valdes, Emilio Carcanal, Alejandro Hernández, Pablo Valdes, Juan Casellas. 2nd row, Rogelio Pérez and Gustavo Linares. Courtesy USF Special Collections.

When the dancehall was not being used by the membership, it was available for rent to other organizations. Such rentals provided added revenue. Martí-Maceo owned three small houses that provided still more rental income. There were also regular donations of goods and services. Some of the tables and chairs "rented" at the dances were brought from home by club members, who then often paid to use their own furniture. The board of directors and the *vocales*, who collected the dues, gave many hours each week to managing the affairs of the club. Donated labor also came from members with needed skills like carpentry or electrical wiring.<sup>69</sup>



A group of young people dressed for a dance at Martí-Maceo in the early 1920s. (left to right): Edvugas Casellas; Rogelio Gonzalez; Petronilla Casellas; Pedro Casellas; Juanita Casellas. Courtesy Catalina Alavarez.

during evenings and on weekends. Martí-Maceo sponsored a youth organization (*Los Jovenes Progresistas*) that staged additional theatrical productions and cultural events. The membership also included several musicians and skilled orators who regularly gave presentations at the club. Martí-Maceo provided its members with a means of expressing their talents, and the performances they created also served as fundraising events.

Additional money came from sales in the cantina. Each day after work, men stopped into the club to spend a few hours. They could play dominoes, chess, cards, or pool, and there was a variety of newspapers and magazines to read. Food and beverages were available, and the club earned a profit from these purchases. As with the social and cultural events, the daily activities at the social hall brought Afro-Cubans together as a community, added to their enjoyment as individuals, and provided an important source of revenue to offset the costs of their medical care.



Black and white cigarworkers in front of the Labor Temple at Nebraska and 11th Avenue, in 1919. The Labor Temple was one of the only places in Tampa at that time where public meetings included blacks and whites in the same audience. Courtesy Tampa Bay History.



The financial problems of the club and the potential loss of its benefits were broadly shared concerns. Solutions to these problems brought the members closer together and heightened their sense of community. However, their small size made them especially vulnerable to fluctuations in membership, such as occurred during strikes and layoffs. During the 1910 strike, which lasted seven months, the roster dropped from 200 in July to 34 by October, and the treasury was cut in half. Because of the extremely high rate of mobility among the cigar-makers, membership in the organization was in a constant state of flux. Between 1902 and 1925, more than 700 different people joined Martí-Maceo even though the membership at any given time never exceeded 275. More than a third belonged for periods of less than six months. Others joined and dropped out several times; almost 20% of the members had left and re-entered the club four or more times.<sup>70</sup> The frequent changes in membership added complexity to the tasks of bookkeeping, but so long as there was a reasonable balance between the numbers who entered and left, the organization remained viable. The margin, however, was always exceedingly thin.

The composition of the community reflected its mobility. A large number were young adult males, some with families still in Cuba. Many of them lived in boarding houses, and others in extended households. In 1910, there were extra adult relatives in nearly one quarter of the Afro-Cuban families listed in the census.<sup>71</sup> Such arrangements were well suited for people on the move. There were also many families with children, however, who tended to become more firmly rooted in Tampa. The Martí-Maceo society served the needs of both the mobile and the more permanent segments of the community. It provided an easy point of entry for migrants, as well as a place where families could do things together on a regular basis. Many young people met their future spouses at the club, often converting itinerant single males into stable married residents.

*La Unión Martí-Maceo* was located in Ybor City, where the majority of the Afro-Cubans were living. There was also a substantial group in West Tampa, and the two communities engaged in a friendly rivalry. Those in West Tampa were called "alligators" (*caymanos*), a reference to the fact that children there collected and sold baby alligators for the local tourist



Children's Halloween party, 1920s. Courtesy Manuel Alfonso.



Banquet given in honor of visiting Cuban prize-fighter, Kid Chocolate. c. 1932. Courtesy of Manuel Alfonso.





Rhumba costume dance, c. 1938. Manuel Alfonso and Simensia Menendez. Prizes were given for the best costumes. Courtesy Manuel Alfonso.

trade. In rejoinder, the Ybor City residents were called "crabs" (*cangrejos*), because they netted a lot of crabs. Crabs were plentiful, as were various species of fish, and supplied an important source of food. Many Afro-Cubans became proficient fishermen and netmakers. Ybor City's proximity to the bay made this a highly convenient activity. Compared to Ybor City, West Tampa had fewer boarding houses and relatively more families with children, but lifestyles and occupations were essentially the same. Several blocks in West Tampa were inhabited by people who were nearly all related to each other. The four daughters of Francisco Barrios, who came from Cuba in 1886, married and settled in West Tampa. Their husbands' names were Govantes, Ayala, Yzola, and Gonzalez, and their growing families formed into a kind of local clan. The Alonsos, who lived nearby, also had a very large family.<sup>72</sup> Afro-Cubans in West Tampa formed an especially close-knit group. When dances were held at Marti-Maceo, the West Tampa members reserved a string of trolley cars, arriving en masse in display of their separate identity. The *vocales*, who collected weekly dues, were divided between West Tampa and Ybor City, and they competed with each other to see whose neighborhood could raise the most money. There was also a more formal competition

during the annual queen pageant, known as the *fiesta de bando azul y bando rojas* (blue ribbon/red ribbon). The members of *Los Jovenes Progresistas* selected two young women as queen candidates. The blue queen was from Ybor City and the red queen from West Tampa. The winner was chosen based on the number of votes, which also equalled the number of tickets to the banquet sold on behalf of each candidate. The competition between Ybor City and West Tampa was constructive rather than divisive and was an element that heightened enthusiasm among the members of Marti-Maceo.

Activities for young people at *La Unión Marti-Maceo* were designed to involve them in the cultural traditions of their parents. Such events were also intended to ensure that they socialized mainly with other Cubans, rather than Americans. Ethnic differences are no less real for blacks than for whites, and many factors hindered association between Afro-Cubans and Afro-Americans. They differed in both language and religion -- the Cubans spoke Spanish and nearly all were Catholic. Ways of life were also divergent, including food, customs, and cultural traditions. The distance between black Cubans and black Americans was reinforced by a general absence of contact between the two groups. Relatively few American blacks lived in Ybor City or West Tampa, and only a handful worked in the cigar factories.<sup>73</sup> Although black Cubans were aware that they shared a common plight with black Americans, they were also aware of the relative advantages they enjoyed as part of Tampa's

immigrant community. Assimilation into black America had many obvious drawbacks. In addition, Cubans were not always made to feel welcome by American blacks. For many years the only movie theater black Cubans could attend was located in a black American section known as the "Scrub". Cuban teenagers who ventured into this area risked confrontation with groups of American teenagers who regarded them as alien intruders and called them "black Wops".<sup>74</sup> Similar hostilities were encountered by black Cuban children who attended public schools. Cuban students were sometimes the object of ridicule because of their accents and problems with English, and also because their clothes were slightly different from those worn by Americans. Such overt hostility was rarely expressed among adults, but a general absence of contact and the deliberate reserve of black Cubans decreased the likelihood of communication or mutual understanding.

Joint participation in segregated institutions, especially schools, did result in the formation of some friendships between black Cubans and black Americans. However, most of the Cuban children attended St. Benedict's or St. Peter Claver parochial schools. These schools were also segregated, but the classes contained mostly black Cubans. At the end of elementary school, black Catholics wishing to continue their education had to go to public schools, which brought greater exposure to Americans. In the early years, however, few black Cubans



Joachina Sastre, née Pedroso, (seated center) queen of the 1929 bando azul/bando roja fiesta. Courtesy Manuel Alfonso



This club was organized by Julio Valdes Llerena to provide recreation and instruction to black Cuban children. There was a heavy emphasis on reading and recitation, as well as games and parties. It lasted until the late 30s.



Club Juvenil de West Tampa, 1934-35. (males) Top row, left to right, Tony Ayalla, Frank Govantes, Armin Maldonado, Angelito ?, ??, Yoyo Gonzalez, Alfredo Govantes, Julio O'Farrel, Joachin Maldonado, Victor Ayala, Roy Sastre, Armando Valdes. Second row, left to right, ??, Charlie Vasques, Jerry Govantes, Manuel Ayala, Armando O'Farell, Lasado Jimenez, Feliz Alonso, Reynaldo Arnao, Adolfo Milane, Manuel Alfonso. Third row, left to right, Armando Portundo, ? Arnao, Frank Jimenez jr., Alfredo Hornedo, ??, ??, ??, Elpidio Vergara, ??, Lingo Jimenez, ??, ??, (? = name unknown)



Club Juvenil de West Tampa, 1934-35 (females). Top row, left to right Casimira ?, Ofelia Arenas, Grace Arenas, Ana ?, Luisa ?, Antonia Ayala, Clara Maldonado, Dora Garcia, Caridad Pedroso, Onelia Arnao, Emilia Alonso, Leonora Maldonado, Mamita ?. 2nd Row, left to right ??, Olga Alonso, Caridad Ornedo, Carmen Arnao, Ofelia Ayala, Argelia Jimenez, Simensia Ayala, Cerlia Portal, Aurora Maldonado, Romelia ?, Mercedes Torres. 3rd Row, left to right David ?, ??, ??, ??, Celia Llerena, ??, Rosa Alonso. (? = name unknown)





Class at St. Peter Claver parochial school, c. 1950. Teacher is Sister Felicite. Courtesy Sylvia Griñan.

went beyond elementary school. Their labor was needed to bolster household income.

Black Cuban households frequently contained more than one wage earner, a strategy that greatly improved their economic position. Many women worked as strippers, a job that involved removing the stems from tobacco leaves. Children also helped by stripping tobacco at home, and many became apprentice cigarmakers at an early age. Labor laws required factory workers to be at least 16, but such laws were frequently violated. One woman, who began working at 14, explained that when the inspector came she was hidden under a pile of burlap bags.<sup>75</sup> The craft of cigarmaking was often learned in very small factories known as *chinchales*, which means "bed-bugs". A cigarmaker with a small amount of capital and a few workers could easily become a cigar manufacturer, and there were many of these small enterprises in Ybor City. Profits rested on low overhead, and fees collected from apprentices were a further enhancement. Pedro and Catalino Casellas were black Puerto Ricans who became active members of the black Cuban community. Both brothers operated *chinchales* in Ybor City that also trained people to be cigarmakers. In these shops, or under the tutelage of relatives, younger Afro-Cubans in Tampa learned how to make cigars and prepared themselves to enter the same occupation as their fathers. The apprentices included girls as well as boys,

and black Cuban women were increasingly able to move from the low-paying job of stripper to the relatively better position of cigarmaker. However, a growing number of Italian women also learned cigarmaking in the *chinchales*. The expansion of cigarmaking to include women had the somewhat ironic effect of undermining the general position of black Cubans in the industry.<sup>76</sup>

Black Cuban women could also earn extra family income by following more traditional pursuits. Many worked part-time as dressmakers, or did laundry and cooked meals for the men in the boarding houses. Others worked as domestics, usually in the homes of middle-class Spaniards. An Afro-Cuban woman named Antonica Bonilla operated a school in her home which offered Cuban children supplementary classes taught in Spanish. Her daughter gave classes in needlework. Midwifery was another occupation open to black Cuban women. In the early years, a great many of the children born in Ybor City were delivered by Maria Laou, a stately jet black woman whose African mother had taught her midwifery and many other things. Maria Laou was a much respected figure in the community, who was considered to have gifts of prophecy and divination. People from all of the groups sought her counsel on a variety of subjects.<sup>77</sup>

In addition to cigarmaking, many of the Afro-Cuban men were trained as barbers. Cubans regarded hair-cutting and mustache trimming to be an art, much



Catalino Casellas, c. 1910, originally from Puerto Rico, operated a *chinchal* at 1604 23rd St. in Ybor City. Courtesy Catalina Alvarez.



Pedro Casellas, c. 1920, brother of Catalino, also owner of a *chinchal*. Courtesy Catalina Alvarez.





José Toribio Lara (front left) inside his barber shop at 1704 14th Street, in Ybor City. c. 1925. Courtesy Violet Lara Robinson.

like cigarmaking, and it was a trade that attracted many black apprentices. For most this was not a primary occupation, but was done at home on weekends as a source of added income. There was an Afro-Cuban barbershop on 14th Street in Ybor City. It was operated by José Toribio Lara. He also trained apprentices, and so the numbers of Afro-Cuban barbers continued to grow. Named the "Cuban American Barbershop", it was sometimes referred to as the "consulate", because it became a central gathering point for black Cubans in Ybor City. The shop had five chairs, and there was always a sizeable crowd of men who were getting their hair cut, or waiting, or just chatting with those who were waiting. A cigarmaker's daily itinerary would usually include stops at both the barbershop and Martí-Maceo.<sup>78</sup> In either or both of those places one could learn everything of importance that had happened on that day.

The lives of black Cuban men were filled with camaraderie. On the factory floor, in the club, at Toribio's shop, at union gatherings, there were many opportunities to congregate and enjoy each others' company. Each day after work they met at Martí-Maceo, cigar smoke and conversation filling the air. On weekends, a number of the men played baseball on a team in West Tampa, known as the "Cuban Stars". The lives of black Cuban women were less enjoyable. Traditional Cuban values<sup>79</sup> encouraged male dominance. Wives and

daughters were cloistered and their aspirations suppressed. Women only went to the Martí-Maceo clubhouse with an escort for dances or other formal activities. The assistance of the Ladies Committee was welcome in organizing these events, but the directorate was all male. Women were not accorded full membership in Martí-Maceo, although the wives and children of members were eligible for medical care. Single women were enrolled in the "family section", and their benefits were smaller than those paid to single men. Despite the advantages of the added income, many husbands would not permit their wives to work. Extra wage earners in black Cuban households were frequently older children or other adult relatives, instead of wives whose role was to prepare meals and keep house.<sup>79</sup> Wives who did work could not walk to the factory alone, but were expected to travel in groups to avoid any hint of scandal while they were outside of the house. They were also usually expected to surrender their wages to their husbands at the end of the week. Girls growing up in Cuban families in Tampa often contemplated their mothers' situation with concern over what their own lives might hold.

This conflict was one of several stresses on the bubble that had enclosed the Afro-Cuban community in Tampa. By degrees, it was weakening and threatening to burst. The younger American born generation confronted options in wider world than their parents had known, and sometimes rejected old ways of doing

things. Marriages with Americans occurred despite parental objections, inevitably weakening the hold of traditional Cuban values. Even among those who married other Cubans, beliefs and practices were subject to numerous Americanizing influences. Theirs was the common experience of the children of immigrants. Although there was strong identification with the heritage of Cuba, most considered themselves Americans, not Cubans. In addition, like many others whose parents arrived around the turn of the century, their lives were about to be transformed by drastic changes affecting urban America during the 1920s and 30s.



Young *Tampeñas*. c. 1920. (left to right): Juanita Casellas, Lizzie Casellas, Petronilla Casellas, Maria Casellas. Courtesy Catalina Alvarez.



## Afro-Cuban-Americans

For second generation Afro-Cubans, the prospect of assimilation without integration had to be more squarely confronted. In the 1920s machines were introduced that could make cigars far faster and cheaper than hand rolling. The cigar-makers' much vaunted skills were becoming obsolete. Cigars themselves began to go out of fashion, overtaken by modern preferences for cigarettes. This transformation of the workplace and declining market collided with the depression of the 1930s and effectively ended an era for the cigarmakers. Black Cubans in Tampa were no longer sheltered from employment discrimination. However, the depression and world war that followed stirred new resistance on the part of black Americans. Some Afro-Cubans actively joined in this struggle, and all benefited from the changes it ultimately brought. The barriers separating black Cubans from black Americans began to fall.

The labor climate in the Tampa cigar factories deteriorated rapidly during the 1920s, culminating in a punishing loss by the union in the strike of 1931. Following the collapse of the strike, union leaders were driven out of town, the *lectores* were removed from the factories, and what remained of the workforce increasingly consisted of low paid American workers who operated cigarmaking machines.<sup>80</sup> Within a short period thousands of Cuban, Spanish, and Italian cigarmakers and strippers were thrown out of work, at a time when there were no other jobs to be found. The Latin community plunged into crisis. Without employment, cigarmakers and their families were forced to rely on public assistance. Tampa's emergency federal relief benefits were exceedingly stingy, not enough to survive on and much lower than in other places. Knowledge of these discrepancies spread rapidly through communication with other Cubans in Key West and New York City. Word of better employment opportunities, especially in New York, also travelled quickly, and there began a mass exodus of Cubans from Tampa.<sup>81</sup> Black Cubans

were especially motivated to leave. They faced even slimmer employment prospects in Tampa, and benefits available through public relief were substantially less for black applicants. Between 1930 and 1940, about one quarter of the foreign-born whites left Tampa. More than half of the foreign-born blacks left during the same period.<sup>82</sup> In a series of testimonies collected in 1935, numerous departing Cuban cigarworkers complained that they had suddenly become "superfluous".<sup>83</sup> It was as if the city of Tampa, no longer requiring their labor, was eager to send them away.

For a time, the crisis spawned a new type of commercial enterprise in Ybor City. Owners of large automobiles and trucks did a thriving business by transporting families and their belongings to new destinations. Throughout the early 30s several such conveyances left town each week, jammed with passengers and usually headed for New York City. These departures registered profound effects on the life of the community. Families separated, friends were lost, businesses failed, and the mutual aid societies were threatened by declining membership rosters. In October of 1930, *La Unión Martí-Maceo* was already down to 107 members, by October of the following year they slid to 47. The treasury suffered growing deficits at a time when chronic

illnesses of older members placed mounting demands on the benefit system.<sup>84</sup> The capacity to sponsor social activities, both for enjoyment and as a source of revenue, was greatly curtailed. For those black Cubans who decided to stay in Tampa, this was a time for retrenchment. For those who left, it was the beginning of a new life.

The Afro-Cuban community was fragmented, but not really scattered. A large contingent moved to New York City, where they lived in several different neighborhoods but managed to maintain contact with each other fairly well. Both black and white Cubans tended to cluster in a section of Manhattan between Lennox and Lexington Avenues from 110th to 115th Street. White Cubans began a social club, known as "Club Tampa". The black Cubans in the neighborhood also established a social club in the 1930s, the "Julio Antonio Mella Club," named after a Cuban patriot.<sup>85</sup> Pedro Millet's barbershop, located on 116th St., was like Toribio's back in Tampa, a central meeting place for black Cubans in New York. It too was referred to as the "consulate". As new people arrived from Tampa, word spread from the barbershop throughout the various apartment buildings where Tampeños were living. Newcomers got assistance



The Maldonado family posed for this picture in 1937, just before leaving Tampa for New York City. This was the last time they were all together. One brother (Joaquin) had already left. (rear left to right): Armin, Dora, Leonora, Felipe, Aurora, Mercedes, Anibal; (front left to right) Evelio, Fredesbinda, Virginia (mother), Evelia, Francisco (father), Francisca, Raphael. Courtesy of Mercedes Torres.



from those who were already settled and knowledgeable about the city. There was a sizeable group of black Cubans living in New York when the depression arrived. Many had spent varying amounts of time in Tampa and were already acquainted with the families arriving from that city. For example, Sr. Millet, proprietor of the barbershop, had been a cigarmaker in Tampa in 1922, his first time away from Cuba. He stayed for only a few months, however, moving on to Jacksonville, Philadelphia, and finally New York. His wife Fredesbinda, whom he met and married in Philadelphia, was born in Tampa, but her family had left in the early 20s. Her mother, who was also living near them in New York, had been involved in Cuban independence activities in Tampa. Her first husband, Teofilo Dominguez, was one of the original founders of Marti-Maceo, and Manuel Dien, whom she married after the death of Teofilo, was also among the founders of the club.<sup>85</sup> There were other families with similar experiences. The longstanding mobility of the Afro-Cuban community in Tampa had preadapted the depression era migrants with an existing network of helpful acquaintances. An organization called the "Workers' Alliance", was a particularly valuable source of aid. Located on 3rd Avenue near 103rd Street, it had been established some time earlier by a coalition of Cubans and Puerto Ricans. Its



Erundina and Ysabel Cabrera, former Tampeños, in New York City in a park on Nicolas Avenue, c. 1935. Courtesy Mike Blanco.

office provided newcomers with information on jobs, apartments, and public assistance.<sup>87</sup>

Expectations about job opportunities had perhaps been exaggerated, but most of the migrants were able to find employment. Even with the depression, the very size of New York's labor market offered expanded possibilities. Many found work as cigarmakers in *chinchales*, which had been established in the back rooms of neighborhood candy stores. Others found jobs in the garment district, or in restaurants and hotels. Although these were largely unskilled and low paid positions, many of the migrants were able to retrain themselves and educate their children. Educational opportunities and apprentice programs were better in New York than Florida. There was less discrimination, and the unions were stronger. Adding to the lure, was the excitement that New York City held as one of the largest metropolises in the world. These advantages made it easier to withstand the unfamiliar bone-chilling cold of winter and loss of the comfortable personalized community life they had known in Tampa. Most of the former Tampeños adjusted to New York City with relative ease, and until quite recently, very few returned.

World War II brought an end to the depression, and the end of the war brought a return of prosperity. A new generation of Afro-Cubans, many of them veterans, was reaching adulthood in both New York and Tampa. Several marriages took place between black Cubans who had left Tampa as children and grown up in New York. In 1945 black Cubans in New York organized a fundraising campaign to celebrate the centennial of Antonio Maceo. The money was used to hire a hall and give a banquet. A member of the Cuban Senate travelled to New York to address the gathering. Their efforts yielded enough money for the banquet with several hundred dollars left over. The success of this event led to the formation a new social club. The Mella Club had languished in the late 30s. Its replacement, the *Club Cubano Interamericano* was founded in September 1945. The membership included a large number of former Tampeños. *Interamericano* was added to the name because not all the members were Cuban; many were Puerto Rican.<sup>88</sup> There was a natural affinity between black Cubans and black Puerto Ricans.



Juan and Evelia Mallea shortly after their marriage in 1942. Juan Mallea is currently president of Marti-Maceo, an office he has held since 1981.



Elpidio Vergara, who moved from Tampa to New York during the 1930s, shown here after service in World War II. Courtesy Sylvia Griñan.





*Club Interamericano Cubano. Courtesy Fredesbinda Millet.*

They shared the same language and cultural background and many of the same experiences as black members of predominantly white minority groups. Black Puerto Ricans were also part of the the Afro-Cuban community in Tampa, although their numbers were much smaller. During that same period, the president of *La Unión Martí-Maceo* was Juan Casellas, a Puerto Rican whose uncles were the proprietors of the *chinchales* in Ybor City. The building housing *Club Interamericano Cubano* was located on Prospect Avenue in the Bronx, near where many of the Afro-Cubans were then living. The new club was similar to Martí-Maceo, except without medical benefits. There were parties, concerts, lectures and a youth club that sponsored plays and dances. By 1947 there were 100 members. In that year, each of the members donated \$5.00 to a special fund that was sent back to Tampa to help *La Unión Martí-Maceo*.

The officers of Martí-Maceo struggled to keep it going during the 1930s and, through various means, were able to succeed. Although the membership was considerably reduced, expenses had also dropped. The mortgage had been paid off, eliminating that cost. Benefit payments were adjusted and apportioned, and several members declined to accept benefits in order to help the club and others who were more in need. Aid also came from other parts of the com-

munity. The Franco Pharmacy, verging on bankruptcy, cancelled a \$300 debt owed by Martí-Maceo. Dr. Aurelio Gonzalez, owner of Gonzalez Clinic, reduced the fee he charged members of *La Unión Martí-Maceo* and extended them unlimited credit.<sup>89</sup> Dr. Gonzalez was a much revered benefactor whose portrait still hangs in the office of *La Unión Martí-Maceo*. With all of these measures, Martí-Maceo avoided closing, but its functions and atmosphere were much transformed.

There were no longer enough members to support regular social activities, and Afro-Cubans in Tampa had many fewer opportunities to see each other as a group. Families and friends still visited, but it was mainly weddings and funerals that brought large numbers together. Another event that maintained a sense of community was the annual *noche buena* celebration, which occurred on Christmas eve. It was customary to butcher and roast a pig. The meat was served with rice, black beans, and yucca. Dinner usually followed midnight mass, and dancing lasted well into the morning. Many families had their own celebrations, but there was always an extremely large gathering at the home of Dominga Solar Roque. Over the years, her *noche buena* dinner developed into a community tradition, which her daughters Mimira and Dulce Maria continued after her death in 1936.<sup>90</sup> These festivities came only once



Juan Casellas, shown here around the time he first became president of Martí-Maceo in 1917. Courtesy Catalina Alvarez.

a year, however, compared with the almost weekly activities that had previously gone on at Martí-Maceo.

This gap tended to promote more associations with black Americans, and Martí-Maceo increasingly became a center for activities that were not strictly Cuban. During the New Deal Martí-Maceo was used as the site for a federally sponsored music academy and playground for black youth of the city. In addition, a very significant source of revenue came from renting the facility to black American groups. The Martí-Maceo dancehall was the best one available to blacks in Tampa and was much in demand. Such well known black entertainers as Chic Webb, Fats Domino, B.B. King, and Cab Calloway performed there when they came to Tampa. Many of the younger black Cubans attended these performances with a growing appreciation for the music and culture of Afro-Americans.

In an effort to capitalize on the demand for the hall, the board of Martí-Maceo decided to risk expansion and build an outdoor patio. A fundraising drive was begun in 1941. The president at that time was Frank Jimenez, a second-generation Tampeño who had many acquaintances throughout the larger community. The



other officers, which included Rogelio Alfonso, Oscar Antorcha, Juan Casellas, Eugenio Felipe, and Juan Garcia, were also long-term members of both the club and the community. Together they were able to mobilize an impressive array of resources, and their efforts brought an outpouring of assistance from all parts of the Ybor City community. Members of the *Circulo Cubano*, who had built a patio of their own, were particularly supportive. They loaned money, helped negotiate the purchase of the land, and located building materials that could be obtained at cost. *Circulo Cubano* also gave them 100 tables with chairs. The other ethnic societies and many local businesses made donations. A white Cuban did all the plumbing at a much reduced rate, and a black American bricklayer provided his services at a very low cost. Al Lopez, the baseball player, loaned them \$2000, and the Ybor City Chamber of Commerce donated the dance floor. Paint was provided by the Coca Cola Company, along with many cases of Coke. An Italian beverage distributor donated beer. The grand opening was held on April 6, 1942 with a dance featuring three different bands -- two American and one Cuban.<sup>91</sup> The patio was a huge success. Its completion buoyed the confidence of the members and helped ensure the continued survival of *La Unión Martí-Maceo*.



Frank Jimenez, 93 years old, was president of Martí-Maceo in 1941 when the patio was built. Born in Tampa, his father was among the original members and both father and son served as officers many times.



Teenagers dancing in the Martí-Maceo patio, 1950s. (left to right): Sylvester Williams, Rose Lara, Ernest Livingston, Rose Casellas, Martin Lara, others unknown. Courtesy Sylvia Griñan.

Ybor City was holding on, but the cigar factories remained idle. Like the rest of the immigrants, Afro-Cubans sought other kinds of occupations. Rogelio Alvarez was a cigarmaker who had come to Tampa in the 1920s. Increasingly pessimistic about his future in the cigar industry, he began a part time cleaning business on 7th Avenue in Ybor City. He gave only passing attention to the development of this enterprise until the early 30s, when the layoffs began at the same time he decided to get married. Refocusing his efforts, he created a very successful establishment which is still in existence and operated by his nephew, John Casellas.<sup>92</sup> Another depression inspired business was begun Ramón Padron, a cigarmaker and part-time musician with the *Floridano Sexteto*. Lack of work for cigarmakers increased the importance of his music and brought him growing contacts with black American entertainers. He and his wife, Julia, established a small hotel in Ybor City, partly designed to accommodate visiting black entertainers who were unable to register in the white-only hotels of the city.<sup>93</sup> Baseball had been a favorite pastime for many Afro-Cuban men and boys, and for Hipolito Arenas it offered a new career. While playing for a local team, Arenas attracted the interest of a



Hipolito Arenas, 1927.





Alvarez Cleaners, 931 7th Avenue, before demolition by Urban Renewal. Courtesy Catalina Alvarez.

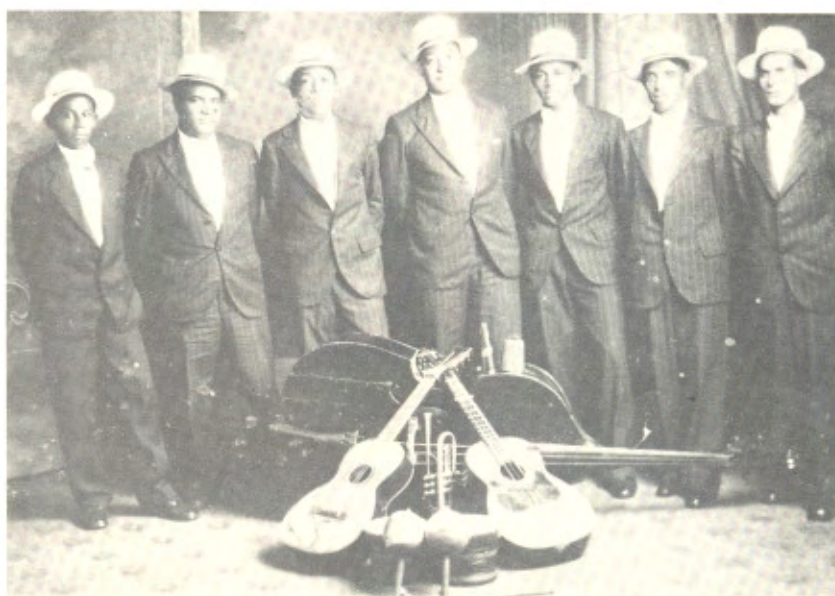
scout for the "Atlanta Black Crackers", a professional team affiliated with the Negro Leagues. Throughout the 1930s, he travelled to all parts of the United States and made the acquaintance of legendary ballplayers like Josh Gibson and Satchell Paige. With a growing family back in Tampa, he ended his professional career in 1939, and became the first black foreman at the Tampa Gas Co. He remained actively involved with baseball and still works with local youth leagues.<sup>94</sup> The Arenas Field on Spruce Street in West Tampa is named for him.

Not all of those who stayed had such alternative possibilities. Some were reluctantly forced to accept work unloading banana boats for eight cents an hour. Language problems confined many to unskilled jobs in stores, restaurants, or warehouses in Ybor City and West Tampa. Although there is no way to measure it, the average real earnings of black Cubans in Tampa had undoubtedly declined by a considerable amount. However, there were offsetting factors. Those who remained in Tampa tended to be older people, already close to retirement, or people whose individual circumstances had been slightly better to begin with. The most skilled of the cigarmakers were still able to find work, and those who had managed to acquire other skills, like teaching or bookkeeping, were also able to continue working.

The transition away from cigarmaking and the diminished size of the community had several direct implications for young Afro-Cubans. Education assumed

greater importance, and more continued on in school beyond the 8th grade. Public school brought increased contact with Americans at a time when the numbers of Afro-Cuban youth in Tampa had dropped sharply. These conditions made it very difficult for parents to enforce injunctions against associating with Americans. However, most remained unwilling to permit their children, especially girls, to attend social activities anywhere but Martí-Maceo. The club no longer had enough members to sustain such events, and the City was expanding

its recreation programs. Conflicts arose between children who wanted to participate in the City programs and parents who would not let them. A remedy for this problem was found by creating a youth organization within Martí-Maceo composed of both Cubans and Americans. This resolved the numerical deficiency, while permitting parents to keep their youngsters within the reach of watchful eyes. Named the "Pan American Club", it was started in 1950 by José and Sylvia Griñan. The Griñans were members of Martí-Maceo who had four young children of their own. Mr. Griñan had a tailor shop on 7th Avenue and had been an instructor in the WPA vocational classes. At that time his wife worked as a school secretary, and both took a special interest in youth problems. As the adult sponsors, they raised funds, organized the membership, and helped develop activities. Donations of money and materials were secured from a number of Ybor City businesses. The first president was Ernest Livingston, an American, and the membership was fairly evenly representative of both groups. The Pan American Club sponsored plays, dances, and musical performances reminiscent of those previously held by Martí-Maceo, but with more of an American accent. Many lasting friendships were formed in this context, and obstacles to intermarriage began to dissolve.<sup>95</sup>



Sexteto Floridano, c. 1940. (left to right): Bilingue Garcia (bongos), El Cojo (guitar), Nilo Oxamendi (bass violin), Ramon Padron (tres guitar/bandleader), Chichito Garcia (maracas), Gerardo Beriel (guitar), "Currito" (trumpet).





Pan American Club performance. (left to right): Martin Lara, Rose Casellas, Gloria Lara, Sylvester Williams. Courtesy Sylvia Griñan.

The older generation also began to have more active associations with Americans. An organization known as "The Frogs" was begun by black Americans in the late 40s, when black people were once again able to vote in Tampa. This was mainly a social club, but the members were also interested in finding ways to change the oppressive racial climate. Vincente Valdes, who was on the board of Martí-Maceo, became a member and encouraged other black Cubans to join. The Frogs rented Martí-Maceo for meetings, and it became a club within a club. They organized social activities and held forums to which political candidates were invited.<sup>96</sup> Although the original club went out of existence, there is still an Afro-Cuban organization in Tampa that bears its name. This one is called *Los Sapos*, which is the Spanish word for frogs, and includes many of the current members of *La Unión Martí-Maceo*.

The Civil Rights struggle began gaining momentum in the 1950s, and many of the younger Afro-Cubans became involved. Two major figures were Francisco Rodriguez jr., a lawyer, and Aurelio Fernandez, a teacher. Both were native born Tampeños whose parents had been active members of *La Unión Martí-Maceo*. Aurelio Fernandez' mother, Conchita Mendez, was a talented actress and musician, and one of the principal organizers of the club's cultural activities during the 1920s. Francisco Rodriguez sr., who came from Cuba in the 1890s,

was well known throughout Ybor City as an eloquent orator and outspoken social critic. He had been a supporter of Cuban independence and a member of *La Resistencia*. A speech he gave during the 1931 strike was sufficiently stirring that it caused the Citizens Committee to single him out as a troublemaker. His son, who became a lawyer for the NAACP, earned similar distinctions.

Francisco Rodriguez jr. initially wanted to become a teacher. He graduated from Florida A & M in 1939 and accepted a position in Ft. Pierce. There, even more than in Tampa, the disparities in treatment accorded blacks and whites were difficult to ignore. His salary was far lower than those of white teachers, facilities and materials were clearly inferior, and it was disagreeable to comply with the comportment expected of a black man in a small southern town. He later transferred to Tampa, where conditions were little better. World War II interrupted his career, but as a returning Marine veteran he discovered that nothing had really changed. Segregation persisted in a climate of intermittent racial violence. Influenced by the activism of his father, he left to study law at Howard University in Washington, D.C., graduating in 1950. Howard's law school was a major center of activity for the NAACP, and there he became involved with the legal strategies of the national black leadership. In 1952 he was appointed by the NAACP as special counsel for the southeast region and returned to Tampa. In the wake of the

1954 Supreme Court ruling that overturned Plessy vs. Ferguson, he filed a series of legal actions to desegregate recreational facilities and schools in a number of Florida counties, including Hillsborough. He also led the way in efforts to desegregate public transportation and to equalize the pay of black nurses. He made two unsuccessful efforts to win election to public office, running for Judge of the Juvenile Court and for the City Council. Although he ran last among the candidates in the latter election, he polled an unexpected 5000 votes.<sup>97</sup>

Aurelio Fernandez was one of his principal campaign organizers. Also a veteran of World War II, Aurelio Fernandez became a teacher and later a principal in the Hillsborough County school system. He held both an MA and PhD from the University of Michigan and was one of the leading black educators in Tampa. His interests extended into many areas of civic life, including service on the board of directors of the Clara Frye Hospital, leadership in fundraising for the United Negro College Fund, and an active involvement in local politics. Like Francisco Rodriguez, he helped bridge the gap between black Cubans and black



Luis Gonzalez sings at Pan American benefit performance. Courtesy Sylvia Griñan.





Francisco Rodriguez Sr. delivering an oration at Martí-Maceo. Courtesy Francisco Rodriguez.



The Griñan family, c. 1945. (left to right): José, Carmen, Yolanda, Dolores, Sylvia. Courtesy Catalina Álvarez.

Americans. At countless public meetings he spoke with fearless eloquence against segregation in schools, playgrounds, and housing, and he backed up his rhetoric with action. In the late 1950s, he helped initiate the construction of new homes for black families in the suburban development known as Progress Village. The first of these houses were completed in the summer of 1959, but he never witnessed the fruition of his most ambitious civic project. While returning from summer coursework at the University of Michigan, he was killed in an automobile accident. He was only 36 years old, and his untimely loss was mourned throughout the black community of Tampa.<sup>98</sup>

The 50s turned into the 60s, and dramatic changes began to occur. In 1960, the Youth Council of the NAACP initiated a series of sit-ins at downtown lunch counters. These actions brought negotiations with political and business leaders that ended segregation in most public accommodations. By the time the 1964 Civil Rights Act became law, the most obvious trappings of Jim Crow had virtually disappeared from Tampa. Not yet affected, however, were the important issues of housing and schools. Although the local white leadership had moved relatively quickly to desegregate lunch counters and public beaches, they proved less willing to act in school desegregation. In 1960, county school superintendant J. Crockett Farnell publicly espoused a gradual policy of "token integration", and it was several years before even small steps were taken. Under court order in 1962 they began assigning the younger black children to white schools, but only within their own neighborhoods. It was not until 1964 that black teachers were assigned to white schools.<sup>99</sup>

The Ybor City School was chosen as the site for the first such assignment, and Sylvia Griñan, an Afro-Cuban teacher, was given the dubious privilege of serving as pioneer. Although no reasons were given for why she was chosen, it seems likely that her dual identity as both black and Cuban was perceived as a way to ease the process of investing a black teacher with authority over white pupils. At the first faculty meeting, the principal pointedly introduced her as a "Cuban and a Spanish-speaker". Notwithstanding this introduction, most of the other teachers treated her with the customary reserve that was accorded blacks by whites



**ELECT**  
**FRANCISCO A.**  
**RODRIGUEZ**  
**YOUR..**  
**City Representative**  
**DISTRICT 2**

Lawyer - Marine Veteran  
 Former Teacher



during that time. Empty chairs surrounded her at meetings. She ate her lunches alone and found herself systematically excluded from the casual socializing that went on among the faculty. Mrs. Griñan's response to her experiences in this setting included a new sense of political activism, and she scored additional "firsts" by becoming the first black member of the League of Women Voters and the first black woman to seek election to the school board.<sup>100</sup>

Other changes occurring in the 1960s nearly destroyed *La Unión Martí-Maceo*. The organization had withered in size, and its members were steadily aging. The building and the neighborhood that surrounded it were also growing decrepit. Maintaining the physical structure had become an uphill struggle. In 1948, Laureano Diaz, who was then president of Martí-Maceo, had travelled to Cuba with a direct appeal for funds to President Grau San Martín. He succeeded in obtaining \$5000 to be used for building repairs. In 1956, President Batista gave them an additional \$10,000.<sup>101</sup> The Cuban revolution in 1959 drastically altered relations between Tampa and Havana. This change had many ramifications for the club and its members, one of which was to end further hope of aid from Cuba.<sup>102</sup> In 1964, a City building inspector visited Martí-Maceo and filed a report citing several costly code violations. The treasury was too low to afford

the repairs, and there was growing uncertainty about the implications of the Urban Renewal program targeted for Ybor City. They waited. Within a year, the officers of Martí-Maceo received a letter from the Urban Renewal agency informing them that their clubhouse and the houses they owned were all slated for demolition.

They were clearly made to understand that efforts at resistance were useless. Even if legal actions to spare the building could have succeeded, the costs of bringing it up to minimum code were well beyond their financial capacities.<sup>103</sup>

Following receipt of the letter, the members of Martí-Maceo debated the future of their organization. They had been awarded \$45,000 in compensation. Some favored a drastic contraction, using the funds to maintain a single office where meetings could be held and the records housed. This option was offered as a realistic assessment that they would never again be able to support social activities. Others were more optimistic and favored buying a new building large enough to serve as a multi-purpose clubhouse, like the one they were losing. The optimists prevailed, and a committee composed of Ernesto Martinez, Rogelio Alfonso, and Manuel Alfonso began searching for a new site. The building they found was far less grand, but still located within Ybor City, on 7th Avenue at 14th Street. It had originally been a warehouse owned by a dry goods merchant named Pérez. For a time it served as a storefront church and then as a union hall. Much work was required to convert it into a social hall. One of the



Aurelio Fernandez with his mother, Conchita Mendez. Courtesy Mike Blanco.





Laureano Diaz, 1940. At that time he was secretary of Martí-Maceo. He was serving as president in 1948 when he travelled to Cuba and secured a donation from the government.

members, Genaro Casamayor, was a carpenter who labored many weekends at adapting the interior. The committee also purchased three other houses in Ybor City to replace the rental income from the ones they were losing.

Arrangements were concluded and they removed the contents of their former building. The wreckers came on a summer morning in 1965. A small group of members gathered to watch as they destroyed the product of nearly sixty years of labor and concern. Those who had worked so hard to build the patio painfully witnessed it crumble. Included in the group was the ailing Alejandro Acosta, one of the original founders of Martí-Maceo. He had also been among those present when José Martí formed *La Liga de Instrucción de Tampa*. As he watched the building being torn down, his thoughts surely traveled back over the changes that he and Ybor City had been through since Martí's time. Another older member, Luis Oxamendi, knelt on the sidewalk and crossed himself. It was a difficult occasion, eased only by the fact that the society itself was going to continue.<sup>104</sup>

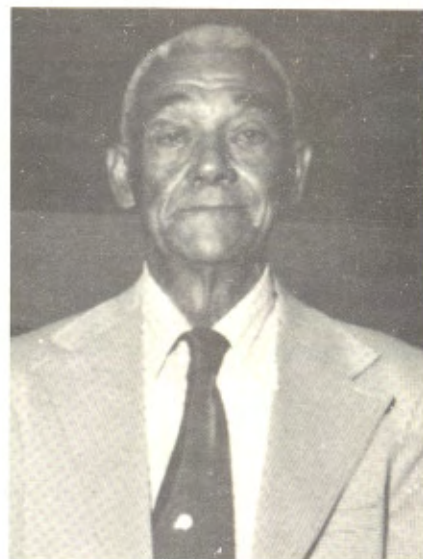
Urban Renewal devastated Ybor City and brought a great deal of hardship to the Afro-Cuban community. In addition to the clubhouse, they demolished the building occupied by Alvarez Cleaners. José Griñan's tailor shop, the Padróns'

hotel, and many people's homes were also lost. Neighbors were scattered, and the fading commercial vigor of Ybor City was all but extinguished.

It was not at all clear that the optimists had been correct in their predictions that *La Unión Martí-Maceo* could survive. Financially, they were still solvent. Income earned by the three houses and periodic rental of the hall was sufficient to meet expenses. Martí-Maceo sponsored no activities of its own, although a small group of men still met there each day to play dominoes. The core of the leadership during the late 60s was comprised of Rogelio Alfonso, Juan Casellas, Laureano Diaz, and Juan Garcia. All four had served almost continuously as officers in the club since the late 1920s and had been especially active during the crisis period of the depression.<sup>105</sup> They stalwartly attempted to keep it going, but within a few years the domino players had dwindled to a handful. Finally the games ceased and the club no longer stayed open during the daytime. Meetings became far less frequent and finally stopped altogether. The younger Afro-Cubans in Tampa, who might have taken the empty places at the domino tables, were not as committed to Martí-Maceo as their parents and grandparents had been. They had less need of it. One of the ironies of desegregation was that it removed Martí-Maceo's functions as an escape from Jim Crow. Black Cubans in the 1960s had far more choices in their social and recreational activities than the earlier generations. Their neighbors, co-workers, friends, and in-laws had come to be predominantly Americans, a fact that further reduced interest in social activities at Martí-Maceo. All of the ethnic societies in Ybor City confronted this problem, and nostalgia alone was not enough to sustain them. In the case of Martí-Maceo, however, a fortunate demographic development came to the rescue.



Rogelio Alfonso, 1960s. Courtesy Manuel Alfonso.



Juan Casellas, 1970s. Courtesy Francisco Rodriguez.





All that remains of the original building is this brick that was salvaged by Manuel Alfonso (left). Center is Laureano Diaz and (right) John Casellas, son of Juan Casellas.



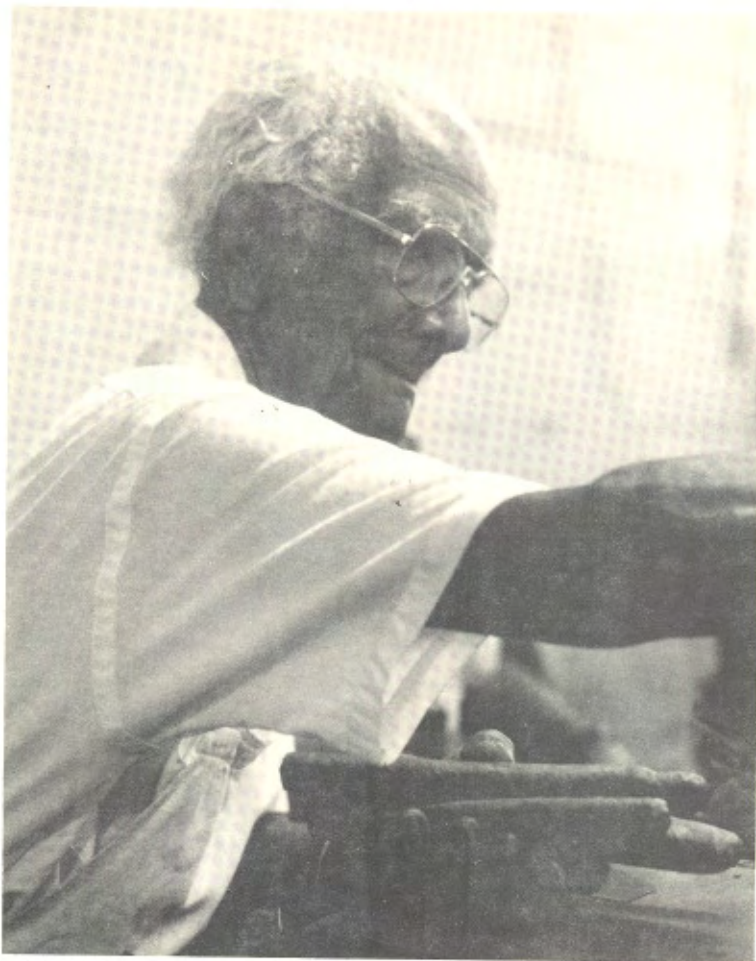
Present building of La Unión Martí-Maceo, 1226 7th Avenue.

## Revival

The exodus of Afro-Cubans from Tampa during the 1930s mainly consisted of younger people -- an "age cohort" who left together and whose destinations were for the most part the same. By 1970 the New York Tampeños had begun to reach retirement together. Florida has long been the favored retirement spot for New Yorkers. During the 1970s, which saw the birth of the Sunbelt phenomenon, this trend intensified. In recent years, a growing number of Afro-Cubans who were born in Tampa, but spent most of their lives in New York, have come back to retire. Their return has greatly fortified *La Unión Martí-Maceo*, which has grown from a low point of 34 members in the late 60s to a current level over 100. The increase achieves a critical mass, enough members to support social activities. Dances and banquets are given every few months. Monthly membership meetings draw sufficient numbers to ensure that issues will be hotly debated. The resumption of activities has done much to revitalize the Afro-Cuban community in Tampa. To date about 30 families have moved back from New York, and they are still coming. Renewed immigrations from Cuba have also added several members. *La Unión Martí-Maceo* is strong financially, and the board has recently made substantial investments in improvements to the building. Although many of the new members are past retirement age, some of their younger relatives have also been choosing Tampa as a place to settle. It is not inconceivable that Martí-Maceo might still be around when Ybor City celebrates its next centennial.

It is important to emphasize that its survival to this point is due to much more than the passive effects of fortunate demographic circumstances. It also stems from the efforts of a number of people who refused to let the organization die, and who actively promoted the return migration as a means of keeping it alive. Rogelio Alfonso, Juan Casellas, Laureano Diaz, and Juan Garcia con-





*Laureano Diaz, 1986, still making cigars at the Maniscalco cigar factory in Ybor City.*

moved there during the 1930s. He also paid a visit to Juan Mallea, an old friend from Tampa whom he had not seen since 1937. Juan had married Evelia Cortes, who was also a former Tampeña. Their children were grown and he was near retirement from his job as a motorman for the New York City subway system. The Malleas were brought up to date on what had happened to Martí-Maceo and Ybor City, and on the changes that had taken place since the sit-ins of the 60s. Mr. Mallea's last experience before leaving Tampa had been an unpleasant confrontation with a white policeman, whose menacing rudeness left a strong impression. He departed with the conviction that he would never again live in the South. Many of the black Cubans who moved to New York shared similar memories of Tampa and, like Mr. Mallea, had not thought of it as a particularly attractive place to retire. The visitor from Tampa urged him to reconsider.



*Juan Garcia, who was treasurer of Martí-Maceo from the mid 1930s to the early 1970s, also still makes cigars at the Maniscalco cigar factory.*

tinued to serve as officers even though there were scarcely any members. Juan Garcia, the treasurer, labored to keep their finances in order, and they all dealt with the difficult tasks of managing the rental property and maintaining the clubhouse so that it too could be rented. More the guardians of a monument than the stewards of a living organization, they approached their responsibilities very seriously. It is because of their efforts that *La Unión Martí-Maceo* was able to remain in existence. Rogelio Alfonso's son, Manuel, who had been involved in the club all his life, went a step further. He began a recruitment effort aimed at resurrecting Martí-Maceo as an active social organization and restoring it as the center of Afro-Cuban community life in Tampa.

In 1970, Manuel Alfonso traveled to New York City to visit relatives who had



During the following summer, the Mallea's reciprocated Manuel Alfonso's visit along with Juan's cousin, Cira and her husband, Delio Alfonso. They reacquainted themselves with Tampa and travelled down to Key West. Before the visit was over, they had all decided to move back. Pedro Millet and his wife Fredesbinda had also independently rediscovered Tampa on a vacation a few years earlier, and they too decided to return permanently.<sup>106</sup>

Others followed their example, and within a few years more than a dozen Afro-Cuban families had moved from New York back to Tampa. It was like a reverse replay of the exodus during the depression. Networks of support and information were quickly reestablished between Tampa and New York. Those living in Tampa provided various types of assistance, such as help finding housing, arrangements with contractors, and information on schools, jobs, services, etc. The resettlement process followed a familiar pattern.

As for the Afro-Cuban migrants in previous generations, *La Unión Martí-Maceo* provided a welcome center of activity. The organization needed new members, and the returnees had need of Martí-Maceo. This mutuality served as a catalyst. It ignited an enthusiasm that affected the Afro-Cubans who had stayed in Tampa as well as those who had recently returned. Working together, they planned a dance. Funds were raised, and invitations were delivered door to door. The event was an unqualified success, netting over \$100 which was immediately applied to organizing the next one.<sup>107</sup>

For the first time in many decades, Afro-Cubans packed the hall of *La Unión Martí-Maceo*. The reunion also included a considerable number of Puerto Ricans. Some, like the Casellas family, were from Tampa, but most were the spouses of returning New Yorkers. And, there were American spouses as well. The newly reconstituted Afro-Cuban community of Tampa was more cosmopolitan than before -- a blend of north and south, old and new.

Although this diversity has occasioned small frictions, it has been a creative mixture that brings the experience of New Yorkers who were active in *Club Interamericano Cubano* together with the accumulated wisdom of those Tampa members who were the mainstay of *La Unión Martí-Maceo*. Women have much

more influence over decision-making than formerly. A near majority of the present board of directors are women, and the Ladies Committee, chaired by Clara Maldonado, organizes all the social and cultural activities. Despite the changes, Martí-Maceo has not lost its Cuban identity. Meetings are conducted in Spanish, and most of the music played at dances is Cuban. Celebrations are sometimes given on national days of Cuba, such as the birthday of Antonio Maceo, and the club participates in national festivities organized by other Cuban groups in Tampa. Most members share a strong nostalgia for the Cuban community of their childhood and for the nearly forgotten way of life they once knew in Ybor City. Pride in the accomplishments of their parents and grandparents, who laid the foundation for *La Unión Martí-Maceo*, motivates their desire to see the organization continue. It is more than a social club that serves their collective convenience, but rather stands as a tribute to early efforts by the people they loved to overcome hardship and discrimination.

The changes in Ybor City, especially the effects of Urban Renewal, were shocking to those who had not been back since the 1930s. Plans unveiled a few years ago for the revitalization of Ybor City caused both optimism and concern. This time the planners pledged to preserve the historical character of Ybor City's Latin community, a sensitivity not reflected in the Urban Renewal process. However, Martí-Maceo's present building lacks the historical and architectural significance that the old one had and is not protected by historic preservation guidelines. Anger over the loss of the original building had not faded, and there were worries that a new round of redevelopment could bring similar consequences. Ironically, Tampa's rediscovery of Ybor City's valuable ethnic heritage, a trend that paralleled their own ethnic revitalization, seemingly threatened the renewed efforts by Afro-Cubans to preserve *La Unión Martí-Maceo*.

Throughout the many decades of its existence, the Afro-Cuban community in Tampa has had a low visibility in the local



Members of the present board of directors of Martí-Maceo. (left to right): Juan Mallea (president), Laureano Diaz, Manuel Alfonso, Dora Garcia, Evelia Mallea, Graciela Vergara, Ida Menendez, John Casellas, Guillermo Valdes, Joachin Maldonado.



media. Histories of the city and the Latin community rarely include more than a passing mention of black Cubans, and newspaper articles about Ybor City's immigrant mutual aid societies have typically omitted Martí-Maceo. Public perceptions of Ybor City's heritage have been largely shaped by these documents. The absence of Afro-Cubans from this record would seem to deny that they were part of this heritage. Several members of Martí-Maceo became concerned that they would not be included in the planning process and would be left with little support if their building was once again threatened. Ricardo Menendez, whose

long involvement with the New York maritime union brought a good understanding of politics, spoke forcibly about the need to alter this situation. He was joined in this effort by Juan Mallea, who had become president of Martí-Maceo, and whose energetic leadership had been an important factor in the recent growth of the organization. Also included in this group were Manuel Alfonso and Sylvia Griñan, both of whom had always lived in Tampa and were familiar with the local political environment. They began identifying the different agencies and advisory boards involved in Ybor City planning, requesting to be included in their

deliberations and insisting that Martí-Maceo be recognized as an historic institution. They also came to see me in my office at the University of South Florida to ask if I would research the history of the Afro-Cuban community and then write about what I had learned. In that way, it was suggested, officials and the general public could be made aware of the role played by Afro-Cubans in the development of Ybor City -- could be made to see the importance of preserving *La Unión Martí-Maceo* as a unique aspect of Tampa's ethnic heritage. The foregoing represents my effort to carry out their request.





## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Joan Marie Steffy, "The Cuban Immigration to Tampa, Florida, 1886-1898," (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of South Florida, 1975), p. 8.
- <sup>2</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890*:
- <sup>3</sup> See Fernando Ortiz, "La Cubanidad y los Negros," *Estudios Afrocubanos*, 3 (1-4): 3-14, 1959. Rosa Valdes-Cruz, "The Black Man's Contribution to Cuban Culture," *The Americas* 34(2): 244-251, 1977. Roger Bastide, *African Civilizations in the New World*: London, C. Hurst & Co., 1967.
- <sup>4</sup> Rafael L. Lopez Valdes, "Discrimination in Cuba," *Cuba Resource Center Newsletter*, 2: 6-14, 1973. Lourdes Casals, "Memories of a Black Cuban Childhood," *Nuestro*, April: 61-62, 1978. Lourdes Casals, "Race Relations in Contemporary Cuba," *Minority Rights Group*, Report #7, 11-27, 1979.
- <sup>5</sup> Fernando Ortiz, "Los Cabildos Afro-Cubanos," *Revista Bimestre Cubana*, 16(1): 5-39, 1921.
- <sup>6</sup> For the former view, see Herbert S. Klein, *Slavery in the Americas: A Comparative Study of Virginia and Cuba*. University of Chicago Press, 1967. For the latter, see Franklin W. Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba during the Nineteenth Century*, Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970. Gwendolyn M. Hall, *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies: A Comparison of St. Domingue and Cuba*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971.
- <sup>7</sup> Klein, 260-261. Franklin Knight, "Cuba," in *Neither Slave nor Free*, D.W. Cohen & J.P. Greene, eds, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, p. 282-285.
- <sup>8</sup> Knight, "Cuba," p. 303.
- <sup>9</sup> Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba*, pp. 154-178.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup> Gerald Poyo, "The Cuban Emigré Communities in the United States and the Independence of their Homeland, 1852-1895," doctoral dissertation, U. of Florida, 1983; "Tampa Cigarworkers and the Struggle for Cuban Independence," *Tampa Bay History*, 7(2): 94-105, 1985. L. Glenn Westfall, *Key West: Cigar City USA*, Key West: Historic Key West Preservation Board, 1984. Orlando Castaneda, "Martí, los Tabaqueros y la Revolucion de 1895," Havana: Ministerio de Agricultura, 1946.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>14</sup> Castaneda, p. 18.
- <sup>15</sup> Poyo, "Cuban Emigré Communities," "Tampa Cigarworkers." Steffy, "Cuban Immigration to Tampa."
- <sup>16</sup> Gerald Poyo, "José Martí, Architect of Social Unity: Class Tensions in the Cuban Emigré Communities of the United States, 1887-1895," Center for Latin American Studies, Paper #5, Gainesville, Florida: 1984. Poyo, "Cuban Emigré Communities." Castaneda, "Martí y los Tabaqueros."
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid. See also Louis A. Pérez, jr., *Cuba between Empires: 1878 - 1902*. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983.
- <sup>18</sup> Poyo, "Cuban Emigré Communities," p. 227. Steffy, "Cuban Immigration to Tampa," p. 47-49.
- <sup>19</sup> Poyo, "José Martí, Architect of Social Unity." Steffy, "Cuban Immigration to Tampa," p. 37-43. Jorge Manach, *Martí: Apostle of Freedom*, translated by Coley Taylor, New York: Devin-Adair Co., 1950.
- <sup>20</sup> Quoted in Philip S. Foner, *Antonio Maceo: The "Bronze Titan" of Cuba's Struggle for Independence*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977, p. 114.
- <sup>21</sup> Steffy, "Cuban Immigration to Tampa," p. 48.
- <sup>22</sup> Poyo, "Tampa Cigarworkers," p. 101.



- <sup>23</sup> Interview with Frank Jimenez, Jan. 24, 1985, Tampa, Florida.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid. *Twelfth United States Census: 1900, Microfilm Records of Manuscript Census Schedules for Hillsborough County*, University of South Florida Library.
- <sup>26</sup> Manach, *Martí: Apostle of Freedom*, p. 318.
- <sup>27</sup> Interview with Frank Jimenez, Jan. 24, 1985.
- <sup>28</sup> Jorge Manach, *Martí: Apostle of Freedom*, p. 276.
- <sup>29</sup> Interview with Frank Jimenez, July 23, 1986, Tampa, Florida.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> *Thirteenth United States Census: 1910, Microfilm Records of Manuscript Census Schedules for Hillsborough County*, University of South Florida Library.
- <sup>32</sup> Interview with Frank Jimenez, Jan. 24, 1985.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup> José Rivero Muñiz, *Los Cubanos en Tampa*, serialized in *La Gaceta*, Viernes, 24 de Agosto de 1973. In Special Collections, University of South Florida Library. Joaquin Granados was secretary of the PRG between July and October, 1892.
- <sup>35</sup> Poyo, "Tampa Cigarworkers," p. 96.
- <sup>36</sup> Gerald E. Poyo, "The Anarchist Challenge to the Cuban Independence Movement," *Cuban Studies/Estudios Cubanos*, 15(1): p. 38, 1985. Muñiz, *Los Cubanos en Tampa*, in *La Gaceta*.
- <sup>37</sup> Muñiz, *ibid.*
- <sup>39</sup> Interview with Frank Jimenez, July 23, 1986, Tampa, Florida.
- <sup>40</sup> In the early years of the Cuban republic, mounting discontent by black veterans led to the establishment of a black political party. Morúa Delgado, who was elected to the senate in 1910, was allied with the party then in power and a close associate of President Gomez. His legislation, known as the Morúa Law, prohibited racially exclusive political parties. Thwarted, the veterans eventually took up arms (in 1912). The Gomez government responded with massive violence and the massacre of thousands of innocent civilians. Morúa Delgado did not live to see this outcome; he died two months after the passage of the law. Thomas T. Orum, "The Politics of Color: The Racial Dimension of Cuban Politics During the Early Republican Years," unpublished PhD dissertation, (New York University, 1975).
- <sup>41</sup> Louis A. Pérez, Jr., "Cubans in Tampa: From Exiles to Immigrants," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 576 (October 1978): 129-140.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup> Durwood Long, "An Immigrant Cooperative Medicine Program in the South, 1887-1963," *The Journal of Southern History*, 31 (November 1965): 417-434. Gary R. Mormino & George E. Pozetta, "The Cradle of Mutual Aid: Immigrant Cooperative Societies in Ybor City," *Tampa Bay History*, 7 (Fall/Winter 1985): 36-58.
- <sup>44</sup> Steffy, "Cuban Immigration to Tampa." Muñiz, *Los Cubanos en Tampa* in *La Gaceta*.
- <sup>45</sup> *El Circulo Cubano y La Unión Martí-Maceo*, Album-Exposicion. al Gobierno y Pueblo de Cuba. Tampa, Florida, 1917, p. 14. In Special Collections, University of South Florida Library. Muñiz, *The Ybor City Story (Los Cubanos en Tampa)*, translated by Eustatsio Fernandez & Henry Beltran, (Tampa, S.N. 1976), p. 130. Works Progress Administration, Federal Writers Project, "Life History with Jose Ramon Sanfeliz," In Special Collections, University of South Florida Library. Sylvia Griñan, "The Cuban Negro in Tampa, Florida," (1950) p. 28. Unpublished mss in Special Collections, University of South Florida Library.
- <sup>46</sup> See especially Muñiz, *ibid.*, and Mormino & Pozetta, "Cradle of Mutual Aid," p. 46.



- <sup>47</sup> *La Unión Martí-Maceo Records*, minutes of meetings: 5/18/02; 8/22/06; 8/26/06; 3/24/09; 4/22/08; 5/29/09; 6/09/09; 10/05/09; 1/12/10. In Special Collections, University of South Florida Library.
- <sup>48</sup> *La Unión Martí-Maceo Records*, minutes of meeting on October 26, 1900.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, July 8, 1902.
- <sup>50</sup> WPA, "Study of *La Unión Martí-Maceo* Cuban Club for the Colored Race." Special Collections, University of South Florida Library.
- <sup>51</sup> *La Unión Martí-Maceo Records*, treasury entries Dec., 1904 and Dec. 1905.
- <sup>52</sup> Between 1900 and 1910, the black Cuban population of Tampa changed from 791 to 1472, based on a comparison using the microfilm schedules of the Twelfth and Thirteenth U.S. Censuses.
- <sup>53</sup> WPA, "Study of *La Unión Martí-Maceo*." *Tampa Daily Times*, August 1 - 22, 1908, official notices.
- <sup>54</sup> Jesse J. Jackson, "The Negro and the Law in Florida, 1821-1921: Legal Patterns of Segregation and Control," unpublished MA thesis, Florida State University, August 1960. Thelma Bates, "The Legal Status of the Negro in Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 6(1928): 159-181.
- <sup>55</sup> Twelfth US Census: 1900, Microfilm records of manuscript census.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid*. Of 284 adult Afro-Cuban males who listed occupations, 254 were cigarmakers. Of 138 adult women, 27 were strippers or cigarmakers.
- <sup>57</sup> See Louis A. Pérez, Jr., "Reminiscences of a Lector: Cuban Cigar Workers in Tampa," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 53 (April 1975): 443-449. Interview with Frank Jimenez, July 23, 1985.
- <sup>58</sup> Interview with Sylvia Griñan, Aug. 3, 1986. Facundo Accion was Mrs. Griñan's uncle.
- <sup>59</sup> Patricia Cooper, "From Handcraft to Mass Production: Men, Women, and Work Culture in American Cigar Factories," unpublished PhD dissertation (1981), University of Maryland: 12. United States Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries: Cigar and Tobacco Manufacturing*, Part 14 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1911): p. 250, reports that 49.7% of the Cubans had returned home at least once since first immigration.
- <sup>60</sup> In 1930, the naturalization rate for black Cubans in Florida was 13.6% for males and 12.9% for females. Ira D. Reid, *The Negro Immigrant* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939): 249.
- <sup>61</sup> Durwood Long, "La Resistencia: Tampa's Immigrant Labor Union," *Labor History*, 6(Fall 1965): 195.
- <sup>62</sup> Interview with Frank Jimenez and Manuel Alfonso, Nov. 15, 1985, Tampa, Florida.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid*. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, July 28, 1899.
- <sup>64</sup> Long, "La Resistencia," p. 205. George E. Pozzetta, "Alerta Tabaqueros!: Tampa's Striking Cigar Workers," *Tampa Bay History*, 3(1981): 25.
- <sup>65</sup> Interview with Frank Jimenez and Manuel Alfonso, Nov. 15, 1985.
- <sup>66</sup> *Ibid*. *Immigrants in Industries*, p. 192.
- <sup>67</sup> These figures derive from microfilm records of the Thirteenth U.S. Census: 1910, and City Directories for Tampa from 1914 and 1924, Special Collections Dept, Univ. of South Florida Library. In 1910, 504 of 536 black Cuban males listed cigarmaking as their occupations. In the 1914 directory, 210 out of 255 black Cuban males were cigarmakers. In 1924, 178 out of 245 black Cuban males were cigarmakers.
- <sup>68</sup> *La Unión Martí-Maceo* records, membership rosters.
- <sup>69</sup> Interview with Juan Garcia, July 5, 1984; interview with Laureano Diaz, June 21, 1985; interview with Frank Jimenez, October 14, 1985. All done in Tampa, Florida.



- <sup>70</sup> *La Unión Martí-Maceo* records, analysis of membership rosters between 1902 and 1925. During this time period, the club maintained a permanent expanding list of all persons who joined. Dates of entry and exit were noted for each.
- <sup>71</sup> Thirteenth U.S. Census: 1910, microfilm records. There were 61 black Cuban households containing non-nuclear family members compared with 203 nuclear families. There were 219 single adult males listed separately, most apparently living in boarding houses.
- <sup>72</sup> Interview with Frank Govantes, June 8, 1985; interview with Frank Jimenez, May 23, 1986; interview with Hipolito Arenas, June 3, 1986. All done in Tampa, Florida. Twelfth U.S. Census microfilm records lists Francisco Barrios and family living in West Tampa.
- <sup>73</sup> *Immigrants in Industries*, p. 192.
- <sup>74</sup> Interview with Juan Mallea, May 17, 1984; interview with Manuel Alfonso, June 4, 1984, Tampa, Florida.
- <sup>75</sup> Interview with Erundina Dominguez, June 4, 1986, Tampa, Florida.
- <sup>76</sup> Interview with Catalina Alvarez, October 16, 1985. *Immigrants in Industries*, p. 192. Nancy Hewitt, "Women in Ybor City: An Interview with a Woman Cigarmaker," *Tampa Bay History*, (Fall/Winter 1985): 161-165.
- <sup>77</sup> Interview with Manuel Alfonso, June 4, 1984; interview with Grace Casamayor, March 12, 1985; interview with Erundina Dominguez, June 4, 1986.
- <sup>78</sup> Interview with Violet Lara Robinson, February 7, 1986, Tampa, Florida.
- <sup>79</sup> Twelfth U.S. Census: 1900, microfilm records. Of 156 black Cuban households containing husbands and wives, 56 had two or more adults who listed occupations. In 25 of these 56 households the wife of the family listed none. See also, Hewitt, "Women in Ybor City," p.161.
- <sup>80</sup> Robert P. Ingalls, "Strikes and Vigilante Violence in Tampa's Cigar Industry," *Tampa Bay History*, 7(Fall/Winter 1985): 117-134. Interview with Manuel Alfonso and Frank Jimenez, November 15, 1985.
- <sup>81</sup> WPA, "Personal Observations of Emigration of Workers." Special Collections, University of South Florida Library.
- <sup>82</sup> Sixteenth U.S. Census: 1940, "Report by Nativity and Sex for the City of Tampa, 1930 and 1940", Table C-36, p. 151. In 1930 there were 631 foreign-born blacks in Tampa and 14,521 foreign-born whites. For 1940, those same figures were 311 and 11,082, respectively.
- <sup>83</sup> WPA, "Personal Observations."
- <sup>84</sup> *La Unión Martí-Maceo* records, membership rosters for October 1930 and October 1931.
- <sup>85</sup> WPA, "Personal Observations." Interview with Esperanza Valdes, March 12, 1985, Tampa, Florida.
- <sup>86</sup> Interview with Pedro and Fredesbinda Millet, May 9, 1985, Tampa, Florida.
- <sup>87</sup> Interview with Juan and Evelia Mallea, May 17, 1984, Tampa, Florida.
- <sup>88</sup> Interview with Pedro and Fredesbinda Millet. Interview with Joaquin and Clara Maldonado, July 5, 1984, Tampa, Florida. *Club Interamericano Cubano*, reglamentos, New York, NY, in possession of author.
- <sup>89</sup> Interview with Frank Jimenez, January 24, 1985.
- <sup>90</sup> Interview with Grace Casamayor, August 30, 1986, Tampa, Florida.
- <sup>91</sup> Interview with Frank Jimenez, January 24, 1985. *La Unión Martí-Maceo*, Souvenir program from the opening of the Patio, April 5, 1942, Special Collections, University of South Florida Library.
- <sup>92</sup> Interview with Catalina Alvarez.
- <sup>93</sup> Interview with Julia Padron, January 24, 1985, Tampa, Florida.
- <sup>94</sup> Interview with Hipolito Arenas.



- <sup>95</sup> Interview with Sylvia Griñan, February 3, 1985. Sylvia Griñan, "The Cuban Negro in Tampa," pp. 30-32.
- <sup>96</sup> Interview with Frank Jimenez and Manuel Alfonso, April 10, 1986. Interview with Julia Padron.
- <sup>97</sup> Interview with Francisco Rodriguez, August 20, 1986, Tampa, Florida.
- <sup>98</sup> Interview with Ruth Fernandez, August 22, 1986. Obituary in *Florida Sentinel Bulletin*, Tampa, Florida, August 1959.
- <sup>99</sup> Steven F. Lawson, "From Sit-In to Race Riot: Businessmen, Blacks, and the Pursuit of Moderation in Tampa, 1960-1967," In Elizabeth Jacoway & David Colburn, eds, *Southern Businessmen and Desegregation* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press), pp. 257-281. Interview with Francisco Rodriguez.
- <sup>100</sup> Interview with Sylvia Griñan.
- <sup>101</sup> Interview with Laureano Diaz; interview with Juan Garcia.
- <sup>102</sup> Recent political changes in Cuba have greatly reduced, although not eliminated, contacts between Cuban-Americans in Tampa and their friends and relatives still living on the island. There were relatively few black Cubans who left Cuba after 1959, although there are a few recent immigrants among the current members of Marti-Maceo. In the period just prior to Batista's ouster, loyalties of the members were divided, but conflicts were averted through a formal agreement not to discuss politics at the club.
- <sup>103</sup> Interview with Manuel Alfonso, June 4, 1984.
- <sup>104</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>105</sup> Ibid. 106. Ibid. Interview with Juan and Evelia Mallea; interview with Pedro and Fredesbinda Millet.
- <sup>107</sup> Interview with Pedro and Fredesbinda Millet.



¿Por que existirá tanto atropello  
tanta tiranía entre unos y otros?  
cuando lo existente es la hechura  
de la naturaleza bien hechura.

Es muy concebible que pasara  
al comienzo; en tiempos primitivos  
y que así vivieran los primogenitores  
debido a su ignorancia mucha.

Esas distinciones tan extricas  
son propias de los tiempos medioevales  
cuando prevalecía solo y reinaba  
la voluntad absoluta del magnate.

Y por una leve friolera  
cualquiera infeliz iba al cadalso  
y hasta un inocente en plena plaza pública  
como a un criminal se alcabuceaba.

Pero que hoy en el siglo de las luces  
cuando existen tantos adelantos  
hagan divisiones en el cementerio  
se cree solo por que existen.

Que uno se crea mejor que el otro  
y que existan tantas divisiones  
redunda solo en detrimento  
de todos los que viven en el orbe.

Se destruyen mutuamente sin razón  
se odian solamente por prejuicio  
sin comprender que todo lo que existe  
es obra y hechura del mismo constructor.

Que toditos tienen derecho a disfrutar  
de igual modo de todo lo creado  
y que ante esa ley no existen distinciones  
y que todos tienen un dercho igual.

Que aberración que en plen Siglo XX  
se maltrate sin ningún derecho  
en plena época que existe el aeroplano  
y progresa dodo de común acuerdo.

Se terminarán esas distinciones  
cuando los humanos se den cuenta  
y desaparezcan el sistema  
unica medida salvadora.

Mientras tanto seguimos soportando  
la irregularidad del vil sistema  
que se sigan uno y otro odiando  
con mengua de todo el conviviente.



