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Overcoming the Other America: José Martí's Immanent Critique of the Unionist Paradigm

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Abstract: This article offers a new interpretation of the Cuban intellectual José Martí's international political thought. It argues that Martí's analysis of early US imperialism and call for Spanish American unity are best understood as an immanent critique of the "unionist paradigm," a tradition of international political thought that originated in the American independence movements. Martí recognized the impediments that racism had placed in the way of both US and Spanish American efforts to stabilize the hemisphere's republics by uniting them under regional institutions. He argued that, in his own time, Anglo-Saxon supremacism had deprived US-led Pan-Americanism of all legitimacy, causing a crisis of international political order in the Americas. In the context of this crisis, he developed a revised, antiracist unionism that, he argued, would free Spanish America's republics from imperial aggression and interstate conflicts, making the region a global model of stable and inclusive self-rule.

José Martí's "A Vindication of Cuba" appeared in the New York *Evening Post* on March 25, 1889, offering a striking new perspective on a question that had long preoccupied both politicians and the public, and had lately been the subject of intense debate: Should the United States add Cuba to the union? Though he was an opponent of annexation, Martí's determination to vindicate Cuba was inspired by the antiannexationist press, which argued that Cubans, both white and black, were racially incapable of performing the duties of US citizens. The *Evening Post* had recently republished an editorial from the

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Philadelphia *Manufacturer*, which suggested that the “only way to raise Cuba to the dignity of a state would be to Americanize it completely, by covering it with people of our own race.”¹ This proposal must have struck a nerve for Martí, who had himself declared in an earlier essay that the Western Hemisphere was “not yet American enough.”² Martí’s “Vindication” challenged annexationists and antiannexationists alike by giving an account—at once familiar and original—of what it would mean for Cuba, the United States, or any other part of the Americas to become more American.

He began by describing how deeply he and his fellow Cuban patriots admired the United States: “We have adopted the heroes of this country as our own heroes,” and “hailed the success of the North American Union as the crowning glory of humanity.” But Martí insisted that “no self-respecting Cuban would like to see his country annexed to a nation where the leaders of opinion share towards him prejudices excusable only to political jingoism.” The problem was less the racially charged commentary on Cuba in prominent US publications itself than what this commentary portended for the future of the North American Union. It revealed that the admirable ideals of US political culture were intermixed with “evil elements that, like worms in its heart, have begun in this mighty republic their work of destruction.” Anglo-Saxon supremacism was steadily undermining the world’s “archetypical nation of liberty,” authorizing domestic inequalities and imperial ambitions that marred the United States’ democracy at home and deformed its conduct abroad. Soon, Martí predicted, racial stratification and aggressive unilateralism would destabilize the country’s political institutions and extinguish the respect it enjoyed among advocates of republican government throughout the Americas, provoking a crisis that would shake the entire hemisphere.³

Still, Martí did not despair. He lauded the Cubans, both black and white, who staffed their island’s profitable sugar industry, crafted fine cigars in enclaves across the Americas, and won renown as “scientists and merchants, engineers, teachers, artists, lawyers, journalists, orators, and poets” around the globe.⁴ He insisted that Cubans’ civic virtues had been amply evidenced during the centuries they “suffered impatiently under tyranny,” and even more emphatically demonstrated in recent decades, as Cubans of all races contested Spain’s claim on their island, fighting for “the same charter of liberties upon which independence was founded” elsewhere in the Americas.⁵ Once liberated from imperial rule, Martí envisioned Cuba uniting with the longer-established mainland Spanish American republics to eradicate racial hierarchies inherited from Europe and overcome the indifference, insults,

¹José Martí, *Obras Completas* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1991), 1:234. Hereafter *JMOC*.

²*JMOC* 6:352.

³*JMOC* 1:237.

⁴*JMOC* 1:239.

⁵*JMOC* 1:237.

and interventions of the United States. By advancing the revolutionary project initiated by the American independence movements, Cubans would Americanize not only themselves, but their entire hemisphere, and perhaps the world.

Martí's "Vindication" offered US readers an outsider's critical perspective in their own language, translating and condensing arguments he had made in Spanish-language publications over two decades of exile. In this article, by situating Martí's writings within a current of international political thought that originated in the British and Spanish American independence movements, I argue that his intervention can best be understood as an immanent critique.⁶ I show that Martí's analysis of early US imperialism and call for Spanish American unity drew upon, revised, and redeployed a framework for thinking about international politics that David Hendrickson has called the "unionist paradigm."⁷ Earlier exponents of this paradigm argued that the frequent conflicts amongst Europe's sovereign states were incompatible with republican self-government. So, after gaining independence, they sought to unite the former colonies of the Americas under federal unions empowered to pacify their interactions. Martí's most important critical insight was to recognize the impediments that racism had introduced into both the United States' and Spanish America's unionist projects since independence. He demonstrated that, in his own time, Anglo-Saxon supremacism was systematically frustrating US-led efforts to forge a hemispheric political order that could sustain republican institutions in the Americas. But rather than abandon the unionist paradigm, Martí developed an alternative, antiracist unionism that, he argued, would free Spanish America's republics from imperial aggression and interstate conflicts, making the region a global model of stable and inclusive self-rule.

I begin by reviewing the literature on Martí's ideas concerning the United States and inter-American relations, and briefly describing the history of the unionist paradigm in the Americas. By uncovering the influence that this paradigm exerted upon Martí and the revised unionism resulting from his immanent critique, we gain new insight into both Martí's political thought and the evolution of the unionist paradigm, the Americas' most

⁶For the historical origins and analytic form of "immanent critique," see Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 19–43; and Rahel Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 177–214. Martí was immersed in German philosophy during his university education in Spain, where Hegel's contemporary Karl Krause was influential. See O. Carlos Stoetzer, *Karl Christian Friedrich Krause and His Influence in the Hispanic World* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1998); and Gerard Aching, "Against 'Library-Shelf Races': José Martí's Critique of Excessive Imitation," in *Geomodernisms: Race, Modernism, Modernity*, ed. Laura Doyle and Laura Winkiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 151–69.

⁷David Hendrickson, *Peace Pact: The Lost World of the American Founding* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 14.

significant contribution to international political theory. Next, I examine Martí's writings on racism, showing how he adapted arguments he originally advanced in the context of the Cuban independence movement to serve as the framework for his critical analysis of the impediments to effective unionism in the Americas. Drawing connections between manifestations of racism in Cuba, in the United States, and in inter-American politics, Martí anticipated arguments developed a generation later by José Vasconcelos, W. E. B. Du Bois, and other critical theorists of race and empire in the Americas.⁸ Next, I describe how Martí's understanding of the role of race in inter-American politics informed his critical journalism on the first Pan-American Congress. In discouraging fellow Spanish Americans from supporting the United States' proposals at the Congress, he criticized a form of unionism made ineffective by imperial ambition and Anglo-Saxon supremacism, anticipating the emergence of a revised unionism in Spanish America. Finally, I offer a new interpretation of Martí's best-known essay, showing that his famous distinction between "Our America" (Spanish America) and "the other America" (the United States) updated the New World/Old World contrast from earlier expositions of the unionist paradigm, positioning Spanish America in the vanguard of global history, poised to overcome the imperial threat posed by the other America, and create a regional union capable of sustaining racially inclusive republican political institutions.

I conclude by describing how Martí's immanent critique of the unionist paradigm foreshadowed efforts by anticolonial intellectuals around the globe to build regional federations that could support new democracies, diminish disparities of wealth, and constrain imperial power.⁹ These twentieth-century federative projects demonstrate the unionist paradigm's enduring value as a framework for thinking critically about international politics. They also illustrate how immanent critique can help address one of the most pressing problems in contemporary politics and political theory, helping us to find, in the present crisis of legitimacy surrounding racist and imperialist ideas and institutions from the past, a vision of and a path toward a more just and peaceful future.

⁸Diego von Vacano, *The Color of Citizenship: Race, Modernity, and Latin American / Hispanic Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Juliet Hooker, *Theorizing Race in the Americas: Douglass, Sarmiento, Du Bois, and Vasconcelos* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Inés Valdez, *Transnational Cosmopolitanism: Kant, Du Bois, and Justice as a Political Craft* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

⁹Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World-Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015); Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

Martí, the United States, and the Unionist Paradigm

The nature of Martí's views on the United States and inter-American politics has been the subject of scholarly controversy, much of it colored by politics that postdate Martí's own career. In 1953, while on trial for his role in an unsuccessful coup, Fidel Castro declared that "the intellectual author" of his actions was "José Martí, the Apostle of our independence."¹⁰ This attribution inspired an immense literature, which casts Martí as the egalitarian progenitor of the Cuban Revolution's social reforms and a prescient analyst of the United States' imperial proclivities.¹¹ But the Cuban Revolution's opponents—many of whom, like Martí himself, live and work in US exile—have not been content to cede the apostle's imprimatur. Rather, they have corrected their adversaries' "falsified" account of Martí, depicting him not only as an intellectual enemy of Marxism-Leninism, but as a lifelong admirer of the political thought, institutions, and culture of the United States¹²

Though both camps capture important aspects of Martí's thought and summon ample evidence to support their interpretations, each offers a partial account, tailored to the ideological divisions of the Cold War. Studies that avoid retrospective reading by reconstructing the intellectual currents and historical contexts that shaped Martí's thinking and writing offer fuller depictions and more compelling explanations of his ideas, but most of this research has focused on Martí's innovative poetry, prose literature, and literary criticism.¹³ I argue that Martí's international political thought is

¹⁰Fidel Castro, *José Martí: El Autor Intelectual* (Havana: Editora Política, 1983), 164.

¹¹Roberto Fernández Retamar, *Ensayo de Otro Mundo* (Santiago: Editorial Universitaria, 1969); Ela López Ugarte, ed., *Siete enfoques Marxistas sobre José Martí* (Havana: Editora Política, 1978); Graciella Chailloux Laffita, *Estrategia y Pensamiento Económico de José Martí Frente al Imperialismo Norteamericano* (Havana: Universidad de la Habana, 1989); and Pedro Pablo Rodríguez, *De las Dos Américas: Aproximaciones al Pensamiento Martiano* (Havana: Centro de Estudios Martianos, 2002). For Martí's role in contemporary Cuban political culture, see Katherine A. Gordy, *Living Ideology in Cuba: Socialism in Principle and Practice* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 43–60.

¹²Carlos Ripoll, "The Falsification of José Martí in Cuba," *Cuban Studies*, no. 24 (1994): 3–38; Ripoll, *José Martí, the United States, and the Marxist Interpretation of Cuban History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1984); Enrico Mario Santi, *Pensar a José Martí: Notas para un Centenario* (Boulder, CO: Society of Spanish and Spanish American Studies, 1996); Roberto González Echevarría, "José Martí: An Introduction," in *José Martí: Selected Writings*, trans. Esther Allen (Penguin Books, 2002), ix–xxvi.

¹³Julio Ramos, *Divergent Modernities: Culture and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Latin America*, trans. John D. Blanco (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Laura Lomas, *Translating Empire: José Martí, Migrant Latino Subjects, and American Modernities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008). Exceptions include Rafael Rojas, *José Martí: La Invención de Cuba* (Madrid: Editorial Colibrí, 2000); and Anne

best understood as an effort to address a crisis of hemispheric order caused by the rising influence of Anglo-Saxon supremacism on US foreign policy through an immanent critique of the unionist paradigm.

The unionist paradigm is a tradition of international political thought developed in the Americas in the period of the independence movements.¹⁴ Its distinguishing feature is an account of the corrosive effects on republican political institutions caused by the conflictual interactions of sovereign states located in close proximity to one another. Early expositors, such as Alexander Hamilton, illustrated this threat by reference to European history, which furnished numerous examples of republics that fell victim to a vicious cycle. Even when formally at peace, Hamilton observed, European states faced a constant threat of invasion from their neighbors. To guard against this threat, they raised large standing armies and built ample military fortifications. To fund these expenditures, they imposed heavy taxes on their populations, creating extensive bureaucracies and police forces to enforce these extractions. Then, well armed, well organized, and in constant need of funds, European states attacked their neighbors and repressed their own subjects, making stable self-rule impossible.¹⁵

Though trans-Atlantic isolation afforded some temporary respite, if the republics established after independence in the Americas were going to endure, they would have to escape the vicious cycle of conflict and oppression that doomed their European predecessors. Thus, Hamilton and other unionist political thinkers, including Mariano Moreno in the Río de la Plata, José Cecilio del Valle in Central America, and Simón Bolívar in Andean South America, proposed to unite the New World's former colonies under expansive federal unions. They argued that unions would not only insulate the Americas against entanglement in European conflicts, but also prevent a reprisal of European history on American soil. Transferring some prerogatives of sovereignty from constituent republics to an overarching federal

Fountain, *José Martí, the United States, and Race* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014).

¹⁴The term "unionist paradigm" is from Hendrickson, *Peace Pact*. Daniel Deudney uses the term "republican security theory" to describe the same intellectual tradition in *Bounding Power: Republican Security Theory from the Polis to the Global Village* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). See also Peter Onuf and Nicholas Onuf, *Federal Union, Modern World: The Law of Nations in an Age of Revolutions, 1776–1814* (Madison, WI: Madison House, 1993); Germán A. de la Reza, *La invención de la paz: De la República Cristiana del Duque de Sully a la Sociedad de Naciones de Simón Bolívar* (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 2009); and Tom Long and Carsten-Andreas Schulz, "Republican Internationalism: The Nineteenth Century Roots of Latin American Contributions to International Order," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, doi:10.1080/09557571.2021.1944983.

¹⁵Terence Ball, ed., *The Federalist with Letters of "Brutus"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 19–35.

authority would discourage American states from resorting to arms or to foreign alliances in their disputes with other American states, stabilizing the republican political institutions within each by diminishing the imperative to prepare for war with its neighbors.¹⁶

Contrasting the Old and the New Worlds played a dual role in these early articulations of the unionist paradigm. Europe's imperial powers presented the most significant external threat to independence in the Americas, and mitigating this through improved diplomatic and military coordination was a primary impetus for unity. At the same time, Europe's history of failed republics offered an effective foil for unionism, illustrating the impossibility of sustaining republican political institutions within an unregulated system of sovereign states. Federal unions would allow the New World to escape the clutches of the Old and then to surpass it, making political freedoms unattainable within conflict-prone Europe possible in the Americas. The Old World / New World contrast in early unionist political thought underpinned a progressive historical narrative that inverted then-dominant climatic theories of American degeneracy, placing the Americas in the vanguard of global history.¹⁷ Martí's immanent critique of the unionist paradigm rested on a modified hemispheric contrast, which inverted later, Anglo-Saxon supremacist theories of Spanish American backwardness, underpinning a new progressive historical narrative that placed Spanish America in the vanguard of global history.

The prospect of overcoming the Old World inspired politicians and political thinkers to apply the unionist paradigm to interstate relations not only within, but also between the former British and Spanish American empires.¹⁸ In his famous 1823 Address to Congress, President James Monroe responded forcefully to rumors that the monarchies of France, Russia, Prussia, and Austria, having just suppressed a constitutionalist rebellion in Spain, were contemplating a joint effort to reconquer Spanish America.

¹⁶See Mariano Moreno, "Plan de Operaciones," in *Plan de Operaciones y Otros Escritos*, ed. Gustavo Varela (La Plata: Terramar, 2007); José Cecilio del Valle, "Manifiesto del Gobierno Supremo de los Estados del Centro de América," in *Obras de José Cecilio del Valle*, ed. José del Valle and Jorge del Valle Matheu (Antigua: Sanchez & De Guise, 1929), 1:40–44; Simón Bolívar, "Discurso de Angostura," in *Doctrina del Libertador*, ed. Manuel Pérez Vila (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 2009), 120–47.

¹⁷Antonello Gerbi, *The Dispute of the New World: The History of a Polemic, 1750–1900*, trans. Jeremy Moyle (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973); Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *How to Write the History of the New World: Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001).

¹⁸Arthur P. Whitaker, *The Western Hemisphere Idea: Its Rise and Decline* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1954); James E. Lewis Jr., *The American Union and the Problem of Neighborhood: The United States and the Collapse of the Spanish Empire* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

This first articulation of what would later become known as the “Monroe Doctrine” followed the pattern set by earlier unionist thinkers, dividing the world longitudinally into rival “systems”: Old and New, monarchical and republican. Monroe noted the many advantages that the United States derived from its union, and emphasized that “by enlarging the basis of our system and increasing the number of States, the system itself has been greatly strengthened.” He did not suggest that the United States should expand to encompass the hemisphere, but he insisted that the exclusion of European intervention should be a foundational principle of international politics throughout the Americas, arguing that within an “American System” that limited foreign interference and interstate conflict, Spanish Americans would adopt and maintain republican constitutions, aligning themselves with the New World against the Old.¹⁹

A more ambitious unionist project was unfolding at the same time on the other side of the hemisphere. Under President Simón Bolívar, Colombia concluded bilateral “Treaties of Union, League, and Perpetual Confederation” with each of the other Spanish American republics, providing for the free movement of citizens across national borders, eliminating duties on trade, establishing procedures for the mediation of disputes, and pledging mutual military support in the case of external invasion or internal disturbances. In 1824, Bolívar issued invitations to an “Amphictyonic” Congress of the American republics, to be held in Panama. In the invitations, he expressed his hope that the Panama Congress might become the central organ of a permanent political union, developing a code of public law to govern all of Spanish America’s sovereign states in their interactions with one another, and thus providing a “foundation for the eternal duration of our governments.”²⁰ Both the Monroe Doctrine and the Panama Congress would serve as crucial precedents for Martí’s revised unionism, testing the range over which the paradigm could be applied and uncovering impediments to its implementation.

The primary impediment on which Martí would focus his critical analysis of early unionism was racism and specifically Anglo-Saxon supremacism, and this emerged clearly in the US response to the Panama Congress. Though Bolívar did not initially include the United States in his plans, his vice president, left in charge while Bolívar led a military campaign against Spanish strongholds in Peru, sent an invitation to the administration of President John Quincy Adams. Adams accepted, nominated delegates, and

¹⁹James Monroe, “Seventh Annual Message to Congress,” Dec. 2, 1823. See also Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011), 42–62.

²⁰Germán A. de la Reza, ed., *Documentos Sobre el Congreso Anfictiónico de Panamá* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 2010), 40. See also de la Reza, “The Formative Platform of the Congress of Panama (1810–1826): The Pan-American Conjecture Revisited,” *Revista Brasileira de Política Internacional* 56, no. 1 (2013): 5–21.

asked Congress to appropriate funds for their trip. But his request met staunch resistance from slave-state legislators, who thought closer relations with Spanish America might imperil slavery in the United States, and who ridiculed the prospect of US delegates even sitting down to discuss international politics with the “native Africans, their American descendants, the mixed breeds, the Indians, and the . . . Creole Spaniards,” who would be assembled in Panama, let alone agreeing to be bound by such a “motley” assembly’s decisions.²¹

Of course, racial prejudice and the fear of upsetting racial hierarchies were regular features of political discourse throughout the Americas well before the independence movements, and both shaped early expositions of the unionist paradigm. Some prominent unionist thinkers suggested that shared European languages, legal systems, and culture were essential for organized international politics, implicitly disqualifying the Americas’ non-European populations, while others argued that federal unions would facilitate cooperation in the suppression of slave rebellions and the expropriation of indigenous lands.²² But the opposition within the United States to the Panama Congress marked a shift, reflecting the rising influence of a novel conceptualization of race itself. So-called “scientific” racism became dominant in Europe and the Americas during the nineteenth century, replacing the Enlightenment’s understanding of racial difference as a fungible effect of climate with a biological account, which described race as a heritable trait that endowed persons of different races with disparate aptitudes and races themselves with distinct destinies.²³

Scientific racism fatally undermined inter-American solidarity, carving a latitudinal color-line across the New World. Once “sister republics,” the Spanish American states became fit targets for conquest, filibusterism, and unilateral intervention. Their “Latin” and “mongrel” citizens were deemed incapable of governing themselves or participating faithfully in international politics.²⁴ While military actions in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean won the United States new territories and expanded influence,

²¹Speech of John Randolph in the US Senate, March 1, 1826, in *Gales and Seaton’s Register of Debates*, 19th Congress, 1st Session, 112.

²²John Jay, *Federalist* No. 2, in Ball, *Federalist Papers*, 6; Andrés Bello, “Congreso Americano,” in *Las Obras Completas de Andrés Bello*, ed. Rafael Caldera, vol. 10 (Caracas: Fundación La Casa de Bello, 1981), 642; James Madison, “Vices of the Political System of the United States,” in *The Papers of James Madison*, ed. William T. Hutchinson, vol. 9 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 350–51; Simón Bolívar, “Un Pensamiento Sobre el Congreso de Panamá” in de la Reza, *Documentos Sobre el Congreso de Panama*, 51–52.

²³George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 51–95.

²⁴Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 208–48; Michel Gobat, *Confronting the American Dream: Nicaragua under U.S. Imperial Rule* (Durham, NC:

they eroded the legitimacy it once enjoyed as an exemplar and patron of republican government in the Americas, spurring resentment and resistance in Spanish America.²⁵ As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the American System envisioned by the early expositors of the unionist paradigm was in crisis.

I use the term “crisis” here in the sense defined by Jürgen Habermas. Anglo-Saxon supremacism-inspired US unilateralism eroded what Habermas calls the “consensual foundations” of the American System, leaving it “anomic,” lawless, without rules or norms to govern the interactions of its constituent states except *raison d'état*.²⁶ Martí's immanent critique took this crisis as its point of departure, analyzing its causes in order to determine not how the norms constitutive of the unionist paradigm in its early expositions could be restored, but rather how they could be transformed, yielding a unionism that would not be susceptible to the same crisis-tendency.²⁷ Existing scholarship on international political thought in late nineteenth-century Spanish America has not recognized the influence of the unionist paradigm in the region, and existing scholarship on the unionist paradigm has not acknowledged that late nineteenth-century Spanish America was a site of innovative unionist thought. These gaps limit not only our historical understanding of the unionist paradigm, but also our ability to evaluate its deficits and attractions as a framework for theorizing international politics. Martí's immanent critique demonstrates both how racism rendered early expositions of the unionist paradigm incapable of breaking the vicious cycle of intervention, conflict, and oppression, and how the paradigm could be modified to more effectively support stable self-rule throughout the hemisphere.

Martí on Race, from Cuban Independence to Inter-American Relations

Throughout the nineteenth century, Cuba was dominated, in more than one sense, by the institution of slavery. After the Haitian Revolution, Cuba became the world's largest exporter of sugar, and plantations proliferated across the island until enslaved persons made up over a third of the

Duke University Press, 2005); Caitlyn Fitz, *Our Sister Republics: The United States in an Age of American Revolutions* (New York: Norton, 2016).

²⁵Greg Grandin, “Your Americanism and Mine: Americanism and Anti-Americanism in the Americas,” *American Historical Review* 111, no. 4 (Oct. 2006): 1042–66; Michel Gobat, “The Invention of Latin America: A Transnational History of Anti-Imperialism, Democracy, and Race,” *American Historical Review* 118, no. 5 (2013): 1345–75.

²⁶Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1975), 3.

²⁷Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 203.

population, with new conscripts arriving regularly until 1867.²⁸ Slavery also contributed to the exceptional longevity of Cuba's submission to imperial rule. Fearful that conflict might spark a slave rebellion, its Creole planters remained loyal to Spain while their mainland counterparts fought for independence. Spain exploited these fears throughout the nineteenth century, using racial divisions to suppress a series of insurgencies that began in 1868 and extended until 1880.²⁹

Martí made his most important contributions to the cause of Cuban independence as a spokesman and organizer within the large and racially-diverse community of Cuban political exiles and migrant workers in New York City.³⁰ His success rested on bridging the racial divides that had undermined earlier struggles. He accomplished this with a two-pronged strategy. First, in the era of scientific racism's ascendancy, he insisted that "there are no races," denying the reality of race itself as a biological category. The "mixed-up and warmed-over theories" that comprised scientific racism were the work of "feeble-minded thinkers, who study under lamp-light," measuring skulls and conducting arcane experiments. The flaws in their findings were clear when examined "under the bright, natural light of the sun." In the real world, the "universal equality of man shines brightly."³¹ It followed that "a man does not have rights because he belongs to one race or another. Simply by being a man, he is entitled to all the rights of man."³² The efforts to categorize humans by race that dominated nineteenth-century social science and the racial hierarchies that dominated nineteenth-century social life were both "sins against humanity," based on deep scientific and moral errors.³³

Second, Martí rhetorically stretched syllables, sentences, and facts to characterize both slavery and racism as European barbarities perpetuated on the Americas against the will of Americans themselves. He presented the Cuban independence movement as an effort not just to cut ties with Spain, but also to abolish these legacies of Spanish rule.³⁴ Martí denounced both white Cubans who shrank from the struggle because they feared it would lead to a race war and black Cubans who, in his evaluation, gave white Cubans grounds for their fears by suggesting that independence might not be identical with racial justice. Both were falling prey to a "Spanish ruse" that divided the

²⁸Rebecca J. Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1862–1899* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 6–28.

²⁹Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868–1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 1–89.

³⁰Gerald E. Poyo, *"With All, and for the Good of All": The Emergence of Popular Nationalism in the Cuban Communities of the United States, 1848–1898* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989).

³¹JMOC 6:22.

³²JMOC 2:298.

³³JMOC 6:22.

³⁴JMOC 3:26–30.

island and delayed independence.³⁵ Fighting against Spanish rule, Cubans would forge a unified national identity, transcending the racial divisions imposed upon them and achieving universal rights that directly implied the more particular aspirations of black Cubans.

As Lillian Guerra notes, Martí's "raceless nationalism" helped unite fractious communities of exiles and islanders, but it also "allowed white revolutionaries to insist that the transcendence of race had already occurred even as black revolutionaries insisted that the contrary was still true."³⁶ Consequently, Martí's antiracism had mixed effects in Cuba. While the struggle for independence advanced racial equality in some key domains, black Cubans' efforts to secure civil rights and fight segregation were sidelined or suppressed when they threatened the patriotic coalition's tenuous unity. After independence, it became commonplace for white Cubans to dismiss black Cubans' complaints about inequality and discrimination by invoking Martí's image and writings, claiming that racial equality had already been achieved on the island.³⁷

To fully evaluate Martí's thoughts on race, we must consider how he applied the ideas he developed in relation to Cuba to other contexts. While the strategic demands of the struggle for independence were the original inspiration for his antiracism, living in exile in New York and writing for newspapers that reached readers across Spanish America led him to extend these arguments to US domestic politics and inter-American affairs. If Martí's raceless nationalism had limitations as a philosophy of black liberation within Cuba, especially when compared with the ideas of his black contemporaries, his antiracist internationalism offers clear attractions, particularly when compared to the forthrightly racist "anti-imperialism" of his contemporaries in the United States.³⁸

Martí's writings on race in the United States often adopted an immanent mode of argument, juxtaposing descriptions of events that illustrated why the country's praiseworthy political ideals would be impossible to achieve so long as its political institutions were undermined by racism. Martí recounted a joyous commemoration of the Emancipation Proclamation in New York before describing the terror inspired by a wave of lynchings in the South.³⁹ Reporting from Philadelphia on the centenary celebrations of

³⁵JMOC 2:423.

³⁶Guerra, *The Myth of José Martí*, 26–27.

³⁷See also Ada Ferrer, "The Silence of Patriots: Race and Nationalism in Martí's Cuba," in José Martí's "Our America": *From National to Hemispheric Cultural Studies*, ed. Jeffrey Belnap and Raúl Fernández (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 244; and Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886–1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 24–54.

³⁸See Eric T. L. Love, *Race over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

³⁹JMOC 12:335.

the US Constitutional Convention he recounted how, in country's early years of independence, the weakness of federal authority under the Articles of Confederation had given rise to "a rabid fight by every state against the others to secure their peculiar interests," imperiling the accomplishments of the Revolution.⁴⁰ He praised the advocates of the proposed Constitution, demonstrating extensive familiarity with the writings of James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and other early expositors of the unionist paradigm. He also described the Convention debates, emphasizing one particular cause of disagreement: "the refusal of each state to . . . submit its institutions, especially the inhumane institution of slavery, to the general agreements of the union."⁴¹ Martí acknowledged that the Constitution was signed and the union secured only because its advocates agreed to defer disagreements concerning slavery and the slave trade, but noted that "to postpone is not to resolve. Allowing an evil to persist only exacerbates its ill effects. Looking the other way while a crime is committed will always lead to bloodshed."⁴² The persistence of slavery after independence in the United States not only caused the bloodshed of the Civil War, but also established racial and regional divisions that, decades later, still generated tensions that threatened to topple the Union.

Martí's greatest concern, however, was the effect of racism on US foreign policy in Spanish America. He filled his columns with translated passages on hemispheric affairs from prominent US publications, offering readers a menacing portrait of the rising colossus in their neighborhood. "They believe in the incontestable superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race over the Latin, they believe in the inferiority of the Negro race. . . and of the Indian. . . They believe that the peoples of Spanish America are comprised, principally, of Indians and Negros."⁴³ Indeed, Martí reported that the racist beliefs that justified the "extermination of the native race, the enslavement of the negro race, and the conquest and robbery of neighboring countries" during the first half of the nineteenth century "have intensified, rather than diminished, with the continuous arrival of European masses" since the Civil War.⁴⁴ That Martí attributes the aggravation of racist sentiment in the United States to mass European immigration is notable. It connects the different dimensions of his thought on race, echoing his efforts to associate slavery and racism in Cuba with Spain, and anticipating his account of US imperialism as the Europeanization of inter-American politics.

Martí argued that the US population's increasing commitment to Anglo-Saxon supremacism was visible not only in the dramatic wars of conquest and unilateral interventions that had cast the American System into crisis,

⁴⁰JMOC 13:320.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²JMOC 13:324.

⁴³JMOC 6:160.

⁴⁴JMOC 6:159–60.

but also, more subtly, in the United States' diplomatic outreach to the hemisphere. Noting in an 1889 article that delegates from the Spanish American republics were gathering in Washington DC for what US newspapers were calling a "Pan-American Congress," he implored his readers to consider whether, "as long as the United States knows so little about Spanish America, and has so little respect for Spanish America . . . is it possible that the United States could invite Spanish America to form a sincere and mutually beneficial union? Is it possible that such a union could be advantageous to Spanish America?"⁴⁵ As the Congress met, Martí would press the same questions, describing how racism had hollowed out the unionist paradigm and warning his readers of the perils of Pan-Americanism.

The Unionist Paradigm at the Pan-American Congress

In the preface to his 1891 volume *Versos Sencillos*, Martí recalls that the poems collected therein were composed during the "anguished winter" of 1889–90, when "the Spanish American peoples met in Washington, beneath the terrifying eagle. Who could forget that shield, the shield bearing the eagle of Monterrey and of Chapultepec, the eagle of López and Walker, grasping in its talons all the flags of America?"⁴⁶ He referred to the familiar bald eagle from the US coat of arms, which was carried by the US Army during the conquest of Mexico in 1848, and by the infamous filibusters Narciso López and William Walker, during their assaults on Cuba and Nicaragua in 1851 and 1855, respectively. In 1889, the US coat of arms was modified to serve as an emblem for the First International Conference of the American States, popularly known as the "Pan-American Congress." For the occasion, the thirteen arrows customarily clutched in the eagle's left talons were replaced by the flags of the seventeen nations in attendance.

This substitution was perhaps meant to suggest the continuity of the unionist project that had once joined thirteen former British colonies and now, just over a century later, contemplated a hemispheric alliance, but Martí read darker intentions into the graphic design. In twelve long articles for an Argentinian newspaper, he argued that the unionist language and symbols attendant on the Congress obscured the real intentions of its instigators. The United States had invited the Spanish American republics to Washington not to advance their prosperity and assure their independence, but to "obligate them to buy what it cannot sell," and to "confederate in their own domination."⁴⁷ Pan-Americanism embodied all the deficits that had caused the crisis of the American System, but to Martí, the Pan-American Congress also offered Spanish Americans an opportunity to

⁴⁵JMOC 6:160.

⁴⁶JMOC 16:61.

⁴⁷JMOC 6:47

“declare a second independence,” and build a more functional unionist politics of their own.⁴⁸

The Pan-American Congress was the initiative of Secretary of State James G. Blaine, whose approach to inter-American relations reflected the transformed geopolitical position the United States had come to occupy by the end of the nineteenth century. Improved military capacities and territorial expansion had blunted the threat of external invasion, and the United States had joined the ranks of the world’s industrial powers, making the country less dependent on European manufactured goods. But steady economic growth after the Civil War gave way, in the 1870s and 1880s, to recurrent recessions and militant labor activism. Blaine believed that insurgent workers posed real dangers to the country’s democratic institutions, and argued that to address this, the United States must ensure growth and prosperity by supplanting Britain as the leading exporter of manufactured goods within the Western Hemisphere.⁴⁹ Blaine gave the unionist paradigm a new economic dimension, suggesting that the stability of republican political institutions in the United States depended on the country dominating trade throughout the Americas. The Pan-American Congress was an effort to achieve this dominance.

At the same time, though he exceeded many of his colleagues in his commitment to racial equality within the United States, Blaine’s thinking on inter-American relations was informed by Anglo-Saxon supremacism. When Chile went to war with Peru and Bolivia in 1879, he argued that the United States should intervene to stop the conflict. “We cannot take the ground that we will not offer friendly intervention to settle troubles between American countries, unless, at the same time, we freely concede to European governments the right of such intervention,” he wrote, articulating the more aggressive Monroe Doctrine that US politicians espoused by his time.⁵⁰ But Blaine continued, deploying the stereotypes that scientific racism associated with the Latin race, buttressing his case for intervention by noting that Spanish Americans were in “special need” of external oversight, being “descended of men that have always been proud, . . . of hot temper, quick to take affront, [and] ready to avenge a wrong whether real or fancied.”⁵¹ After the proposed intervention, more regular US tutelage would “raise the standard of their civilization,” while also allowing the United States to take “the commercial empire, that legitimately belongs to us.”⁵² While the early expositors of the unionist paradigm argued that any

⁴⁸JMOC 6:46.

⁴⁹Edward P. Crapol, *America for Americans: Economic Nationalism and Anglophobia in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1973), 67–90, 166–90.

⁵⁰James G. Blaine, “The South American Policy of the Garfield Administration,” *Chicago Weekly Magazine*, Sept. 16, 1882, 4.

⁵¹Ibid., 3–4.

⁵²Ibid., 8.

sovereign states in close proximity would experience the deleterious effects of potential conflict unless they conceded some powers to an overarching authority, Blaine ascribes Spanish America's woes to the racial character of its inhabitants. From this distinctive diagnosis, he drew a distinctive prescription: rather than building an American System that imposed equal limits upon the sovereign authority of its member states, Blaine's Pan-Americanism would place Spanish America under US supervision, while also capturing its growing markets for US manufacturers.

Despite his suspicions of Blaine's intentions, Martí acknowledged the attractions that closer commercial and political relations between the Americas held for his fellow Spanish Americans. Considered on their own terms, many of the proposals the delegates were slated to discuss would have served "the common good of the peoples of America."⁵³ Reduced tariff rates, a common system of weights and measures, and other policies intended to reduce barriers to trade were all "conducive to peace," each constituting "one less reason for jealousy and resentment" among the nations of the hemisphere.⁵⁴ Nor did he object to cooperation between the Americas on transnational transportation and communications infrastructure. "One should desire, foment, and support the realization of any measure that brings men closer together and makes life more moral and tolerable. Any measure that will bring nations closer together should be realized."⁵⁵ As to Blaine's pet proposal, an inter-American court of arbitration, he allowed that "arbitration would be an excellent thing if it could be hoped that, in the plenitude of its power this still adolescent republic would yield its own appetites to arbitration."⁵⁶ If Martí had reservations about the unionist project contemplated at the Pan-American Congress, then, he did not question the logic of the unionist paradigm. Rather, he maintained that neighboring republics bound by common laws and institutions could enjoy peace, freedom, and prosperity unavailable within a competitive system of sovereign states.

But Martí argued that only the most credulous observer could believe that the United States intended to submit to any restraint upon its trade or foreign policy. To properly understand Pan-Americanism, one must "examine" the United States "at its roots . . . so as not to be deceived . . . by the cohabitation of lofty virtues with rapacious desires" that characterized its foreign policy.⁵⁷ The mutual exposure to external threats and shared commitment to political ideals that inspired inter-American solidarity in the period of the independence movements had vanished, leaving the case for Pan-Americanism to rest upon a barren "geographic morality." Spanish Americans were under

⁵³JMOC 6:54.

⁵⁴JMOC 6:55.

⁵⁵JMOC 6:161.

⁵⁶JMOC 6:55–6.

⁵⁷JMOC 6:47–48.

no obligation to help the United States clear its crowded warehouses “simply because they happened to be on the same continent.”⁵⁸ Nor was there any reason Spanish Americans should “march as allies in the battle that the United States is preparing to fight against the rest of the world.”⁵⁹ Proximity offered no grounds upon which to prefer one would-be imperial power to its rivals. Given the disparities that divided the Western Hemisphere, Martí argued, hemispheric integration could not be expected to consolidate Spanish America’s political independence or hasten its economic development, but rather to assure its permanent subordination and poverty. Reviewing decades of conquests and opportunistic interventions, and noting the equally opportunistic indifference shown by the United States at points when Spanish Americans stood in real need of support, he concluded that “they have betrayed their own freedom, and put our freedom at risk. . . . It is incumbent upon us now to place as many restraints upon them as we can forge.”⁶⁰

The Congress’s proceedings confirmed Martí’s skepticism. During debate on an arbitration agreement, the Argentinian delegation proposed an amendment that would have formally proscribed wars of conquest from “American public law,” invalidating any future territorial cessions made “under the threat of war or the pressure of an armed force,” and giving states that made such cessions in the past a permanent and inalienable right to arbitration.⁶¹ The amendment placed Blaine in an exquisite bind. On the one hand, it would have given legal standing to the principles of international politics that defined the unionist paradigm, and greatly increased the legitimacy of his arbitration proposal. Moreover, the amendment was tailor-made to reverse the recent territorial cessions made by Peru and Bolivia to Chile, which both Argentina and the United States had opposed, and which had aroused Blaine’s original interest in arbitration.

On the other hand, the amendment would apply with equal force to the cessions extracted from Mexico by the United States in 1848, and would impose the most important constraints upon the hemisphere’s largest military power in the future. For Martí, the Congress’s vote on the amendment perfectly illustrated how Anglo-Saxon supremacism and imperial ambition had emptied the unionist paradigm of any meaning in the United States:

The voting begins. What American nation will decline to declare that the occupation of a brother nation is a crime, that it would, in full view of its fellows, reserve to itself the right to snatch away by force the rightful claims of a member of its own family? Chile perhaps? No: Chile does not vote against the conquest amendment; but being what it is, it abstains from voting, it does not vote in favor. Mexico maybe? No: Mexico is the

⁵⁸JMOC 6:56.

⁵⁹JMOC 6:57.

⁶⁰JMOC 6:48.

⁶¹JMOC 6:88.

land of Juárez, not of Taylor. One after another the peoples of America vote in favor of the amendment against conquest. "Yes" says every one, and every one louder than the one before. Only one "no" resounds: the "no" of the United States. Blaine, with his head hanging, leaves the room alone. The ten delegates from the north follow.⁶²

After a few digressive passages, Martí returns to the scene of the conference to pose the striking question: "Why was this one nation of our America, of our family, the only one that left the conference with its head hanging?"⁶³ He emphasizes the gravity of the US delegates' divergence from generations of international political thought in the Americas by referring to all of the hemisphere's republics—including the United States—as "our America" and "our family." Martí's rhetorical question summarizes the deconstructive phase of his immanent critique, dramatizing the impediments that Anglo-Saxon supremacism and imperial ambition placed in the way of effective implementation of the unionist paradigm and the crisis of legitimacy spawned by the US delegation's refusal to renounce its right to unilaterally seize territory.

The passage also foreshadows the reconstructive phase of Martí's immanent critique. Ultimately, the Pan-American Congress closed without accomplishing much more than an agreement to hold more meetings, but Martí described this null outcome as the "prelude to a great concord," a demonstration of the potential that lay in the concerted resistance of the Spanish American republics to the "frightening and indifferent power" of the United States. In the crisis of the American System and the collapse of Pan-Americanism, he saw a new unionist project rising in "Our America," uniting Spanish America not only against the United States but in pursuit of a regional political order compatible with racially inclusive republican institutions.

Unionism from the New World to *Nuestra América*

Martí addressed the Spanish American delegates to the Pan-American Congress in person on December 19, 1889, at a special gathering of the Sociedad Literaria Hispanoamericana. Though he had followed the policy debates underway in the Congress closely, he made no mention of them. He did not even convey his concerns about the imperial menace lurking behind the facade of Pan-American unity. Instead, he delivered a personal speech on the internal conflicts of a patriot and scholar in exile. He explained why, though he had found safety, relative comfort, and freedom to pursue his political and intellectual projects in the United States, his hopes for the

⁶²JMOC 6:104. In the sentence concerning Mexico, Martí refers to Benito Juárez, the hero of Mexico's resistance against French occupation, and Zachary Taylor, the hero of the US conquest of Mexico.

⁶³JMOC 6:106.

realization of his philosophical ideals still rested in Spanish America. “No matter how great this land is, no matter how divine, for free men, is the America of Lincoln, for us, . . . the America of Juárez is greater, because it is ours and because it has been unhappier.”⁶⁴

Martí’s use of the possessive pronoun “ours” to distinguish Spanish America from the United States at the Sociedad Literaria foreshadows his use of the term in the 1891 essay “Our America,” his best-known writing.⁶⁵ Both texts contain passages in which Martí suggests that Spanish Americans should take pride in their culture simply “because it is ours.” Notoriously, Martí recommended plantain wine, “even though it is sour,” because “it is our wine!”⁶⁶ Charles Hatfield reads these passages as exemplary of Martí’s “anti-universalism”: the view that “what is good or true depends on who we are.”⁶⁷ Hatfield argues that the central argument of “Our America” is that ideas, institutions, and works of art can be regarded as better than others only to the extent that they more authentically embody the cultural essence of the place in which they operate.⁶⁸ If this interpretation were correct, it would be difficult to argue that Martí’s objections to US imperialism should be understood as an immanent critique. It would suggest that Martí rejected Pan-Americanism and the Anglo-Saxon supremacism-inflected unionist paradigm as merely wrong or disadvantageous for Spanish America, rather than systematically incapable of solving the problems in international politics they were intended to solve. And it would suggest that Martí’s call for Spanish American unity in “Our America” was an ad hoc effort to address the region’s peculiar challenges, rather than the exposition of a revised unionism intended to remedy the deficits that fatally impaired its predecessor.

But both close reading and contextualization demonstrate the inadequacy of Hatfield’s interpretation. In the passage above, Martí offers another reason for his faith in Spanish America: “because it has been unhappier.” He devoted the majority of his speech at the Sociedad Literaria to explaining the relative unhappiness of Spanish America, offering an extended comparison of British and Spanish American colonial rule that emphasized the extraordinary violence of the Spanish conquest, the stupefying terror of the Catholic Inquisition, and the relatively prolonged and destructive Spanish American wars of independence. British America’s experience of imperial rule was less brutal, and its path to postcolonial stability shorter and

⁶⁴JMOC 6:134.

⁶⁵For the history of the phrase prior to Martí, see Sara Almarza, “La Frase Nuestra América: Historia y Significado,” *Cahiers du Monde Hispanique et Luso-Brésilien*, no. 43 (1984): 5–22.

⁶⁶JMOC 6:20.

⁶⁷Charles Hatfield, *The Limits of Identity: Politics and Poetics in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 3.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, 18–29.

smoother, but “the freedom that triumphed” in the United States was “manorial and sectarian,” a “selfish and unjust freedom, wobbling on the shoulders of an enslaved race.” The absence of obstacles to peace and prosperity had limited critical reflection on inherited European ideas and institutions in the United States, resulting in a limited and partial form of liberty, one more relevant to “a locality, than to humanity.”⁶⁹

By contrast, precisely because of the disadvantages they faced, the former colonies of Spanish America were poised to overcome the limits reached by their counterparts in the north. “We have transformed all this venom into sap! . . . From opposition and misfortune, the most precocious, the most generous, the most persevering people has been born. We were a cesspool, but we are becoming a crucible.”⁷⁰ Continuous conflicts among Spanish America’s heterogeneous communities, the “friction and daily stimulation of our struggles,” had “sifted and purified” the forms of freedom Spanish Americans learned from Europe and the United States, opening the way to the realization in Spanish America of a “humanitarian and expansive liberty, neither local, nor racial, nor sectarian.”⁷¹ Martí inverts the narrative, common in both the United States and in Spanish America, which cast the experience of Spanish imperial rule and the trials of the postindependence period as insuperable obstacles to stable and inclusive self-government in Spanish America. He writes in a determinedly universalist register, staking a clear claim for the relevance of Spanish American political thought beyond the region. Spanish Americans could improve upon the ideas and institutions inherited from their forebears, adopting forms of government and forging a regional order that would allow them not only to resist the United States, but also to fulfill their region’s world-historic role.

“Our America” returns once again to the Spanish American independence movements, reprising arguments from Martí’s writings on race and pursuing the inter-American comparisons that he conducted at the *Sociedad Literaria*. The intensity of Spanish America’s struggles for independence and the thrill of victory sustained the new republics’ internal unity for a time, but tensions soon emerged. “The hierarchical constitution of the colonies resisted the democratic organization of the Republic.”⁷² Established elites suppressed insurgent challenges to their corporate and racial privileges. Rather than “forming common cause with the oppressed,” they attempted to rule with “imported ideas and institutions” that kept peasants and laborers, as well as Afro-descendent and Indigenous peoples, from the halls of power.⁷³

This unstable arrangement exploded in successive civil wars, leading many Spanish Americans to despair of the region’s prospects. Martí denounced

⁶⁹JMOC 6:135.

⁷⁰JMOC 6:138

⁷¹JMOC 6:139.

⁷²JMOC 6:19.

⁷³JMOC 6:18.

these unfaithful compatriots in terms that echoed the Old World / New World contrast from early expositions of the unionist paradigm. He referred to the doubters as “seven-month men,” born prematurely, with “puny arms, . . . arms from Madrid or Paris. . . . If they want to be Parisiens or Madrileños, let them go to the Prado, under lamplight, or to the Café Tortoni, for a sorbet.” His America had no room for sons “who are ashamed of their mothers, because she wears an Indian apron.”⁷⁴ Spanish Americans often criticized their own societies for deviating from a European developmental trajectory, but Martí insisted that the real problem was the critics’ uncritical acceptance of European norms. As Americans, they should not aspire to merely reproduce Europe’s accomplishments; they should surpass them, identifying the tensions immanent in their Old World intellectual inheritances and pursuing the opportunities for progress available in the New World. Thus, he recommended a program of remedial education: “The European university must give way to the American university. The history of America, from the Incas to the present, must be taught in detail, even if this means neglecting the archons of Greece. Our Greece is preferable to the Greece that is not ours.”⁷⁵

Again, Martí’s possessive pronouns should not be read as advancing the relativist claim that institutions grounded in Spanish American realities would be better for Spanish America, but not necessarily for Europe. Rather, Spanish Americans’ attempts to imitate European models had demonstrated the inadequacy of the models themselves. “Absolute ideas must always take relative forms” to be put into action. The translation of theory into practice reveals “errors of form”: contradictions, oversights, and problems present in theories but not apparent until they are applied.⁷⁶ Particular features of the contexts within which theories are applied make them apt to reveal different errors of form. Spanish America’s early, imitative experiments in racially exclusive republican government had revealed that “liberty, to be viable, must be sincere and plenary; if the republic does not open its arms to all and move forward with all, it will die.”⁷⁷ Though based on a particular historical experience, this is a universally relevant insight. That conflicts borne of racial exclusion destabilize republican institutions is, for Martí, as true in Europe as in Spanish America, even if it was not as apparently true in the former as it was in the latter. Precisely because Spanish Americans had learned that they could not build racially exclusive republics without experiencing destabilizing conflict, they were positioned to recognize the flaws in European theories of freedom and to teach the world new truths about politics.⁷⁸

⁷⁴JMOC 6:16.

⁷⁵JMOC 6:18.

⁷⁶JMOC 6:20.

⁷⁷JMOC 6:20–21.

⁷⁸While Martí advanced what were in his time progressive views on racial bars to political participation, his views on women and women’s political rights were

Martí was optimistic about Spanish America's future because the historical and demographic features distinguishing it from Europe made imitating European models impossible. Unfortunately, the same could not be said of the United States. "Our America will be saved by its Indians, and is improving," while "North America, which has drowned its Indians in blood, is getting worse."⁷⁹ As we have seen, Martí believed that mass European migration was intensifying Anglo-Saxon supremacism in the United States at the end of the nineteenth century. The United States was becoming more European, not just demographically, but philosophically and politically, with deepening racial exclusions at home and increasingly imperial ambitions abroad. "Our America" draws upon Spanish America's experiences to develop an immanent critique of the Anglo-Saxon supremacism-inflected unionist paradigm that justified US imperialism.

Martí's famous phrase, "nuestra América," or "our America," revises the contrast between between the Old and the New Worlds in early expositions of the unionist paradigm. In a shift from his reporting on the Pan-American Congress, Martí now distinguishes "Our America" from "el otro América," the "other America," the United States, and assigns features to each similar to those that prior unionist thinkers had associated with the Old and New Worlds. The United States serves as the foil that Europe once provided: a racially hierarchical society, beset by unresolved and suppressed domestic conflicts; and a would-be empire, pursuing an outdated and unstable mode of organizing international politics. Meanwhile, Our America assumes the vanguard once occupied by the New World. Having been forced to confront the racial legacies of Spanish imperial rule, Spanish America was poised to become the "crucible" within which a less racist and thus more effective unionist international politics could emerge.

The United States also takes Europe's role as the major exterior threat to Spanish American independence, providing an impetus for unification. Even as Spanish America was gradually overcoming its internal sources of discord, "another danger" was intensifying. "The time is coming in which an enterprising and forceful people, which does not know us and disdains us, will draw near and demand a close relationship."⁸⁰ He implored Spanish Americans not to respond to this threat like "conceited villagers," retreating into local squabbles and petty corruption, or like "jealous brothers," seeking separate accommodation within a hemisphere structured by US hegemony. "We can no longer be a people of leaves, living in the air, . . . humming at the whim of the sun's caress, or buffeted and tossed

conventional and his rhetoric—as seen here and in the preceding paragraph—was often uncritically masculinist. See Jacqueline Cruz, "'Esclava Vencedora: La Mujer en la Obra Literaria de José Martí,'" *Hispania*, no. 75 (1992): 29–37.

⁷⁹JMOC 6:16.

⁸⁰JMOC 6:21.

about by storms. The trees must form ranks to keep the giant with seven-league boots from passing."⁸¹ To resist the rising US empire and sustain their independence, the Spanish American states would have to cooperate.

To facilitate their cooperation, Martí recommended an institution with deep roots in American political thought: "immediate union in the continental spirit."⁸² Martí's call for regional cooperation incorporated his account of racism's debilitating effects on earlier efforts to implement the unionist paradigm. His imagined union of the Spanish American republics would not only force the United States to "remove its hands out of respect," and not only provide a framework for peaceful relations between the Spanish American states, but facilitate their progress toward more inclusive republican institutions, abolishing the racial hierarchies the region inherited from European imperial rule. "The pressing need of Our America is to show itself as it is, one in spirit and intent, the swift conqueror of a suffocating past."⁸³ Martí's immanent critique was grounded in the past, then, drawing on an inherited framework for thinking about international politics and correcting the flaws that experience had revealed, but it focused resolutely on the future, seeking progress in the crisis that those very flaws had caused. "The present generation is travelling the road mapped out by their sublime fathers," he wrote, "planting the seeds of a new America, from the Rio Grande to the Straits of Magellan, in the romantic nations of the continent and the sorrowful islands of the sea."⁸⁴

Conclusion

In 1895, Martí returned to Cuba to join the independence movement that he had helped organize from New York. Though he was not a soldier, and had no expertise in military strategy, Martí wanted to be on the island to continue coordinating the movement's sometimes-discordant factions and to counter any military leader who might emerge from the struggle with designs on dictatorial powers. After just a month in the backcountry, moving with insurgent forces, Martí defied admonitions to remain behind the front lines during a skirmish with Spanish troops, and a bullet cut his career tragically short.

Consequently, we do not have a Martían constitution for Cuba, let alone detailed plans for a *nuestra*-American union. Nonetheless, Martí has exerted a lasting influence on Latin American intellectual life, including its political thought.⁸⁵ Following, and frequently citing, Martí, generations of Latin

⁸¹JMOC 6:15.

⁸²JMOC 6:23.

⁸³JMOC 6:22.

⁸⁴JMOC 6:23.

⁸⁵For a broader consideration of Martí's influence, see Ottmar Ette, *José Martí, Apóstol, Poeta, Revolucionario: Una Historia de su Recepción*, trans. Luis Carlos Henao de Brigard (Mexico: UNAM, 1995).

American intellectuals have argued that unilateral US interventions almost always subvert their stated purposes, making the hemisphere more unstable and its nations less democratic.⁸⁶ Martí is also an icon of Latin American unity, whose writings continue to inspire efforts to gain global standing, pacify inter-American politics, and spread prosperity through regional integration.⁸⁷ Understanding Martí's arguments—both condemnatory and constructive—as an immanent critique of the unionist paradigm casts new light on his influence, exposing unexpected continuities between contemporary campaigns to limit US interference in Latin America and a long-standing tradition of international political thought developed in part by politicians and political thinkers in the United States.

Considered against an even broader background, Martí can be seen to have made an early and distinctively American contribution to the efforts of political thinkers in imperial peripheries around the world to critically adapt imperial ideologies and creatively reorganize imperial institutions to serve as tools in a global struggle against imperialism.⁸⁸ Like Martí, these insurgent intellectuals refused to limit the import of their ideas to their own societies, insisting, rather, that the experience of living under and fighting against empire had inspired universal insights, giving rise to “new humanisms” that offered fuller accounts of equality, democracy, and freedom than the old humanisms they revised.⁸⁹ Like Martí, the twentieth-century leaders of decolonization in Africa, Asia, and the Americas thought that, in the short term, regional federations would foment economic development and stabilize democratic institutions in their former colonies, while over a longer period, unity across widely dispersed movements could reform the norms and institutions of international politics, building a more peaceful and egalitarian world order.⁹⁰ These efforts, running parallel to and extending Martí's, suggest that the immanent criticism of the unionist paradigm is a living

⁸⁶Greg Grandin, “The Liberal Traditions in the Americas: Rights, Sovereignty, and the Origins of Liberal Multilateralism,” *American Historical Review* 117, no. 1 (Feb. 2012): 68–91.

⁸⁷Daniel F. Wajner and Luis Roniger, “Transnational Identity Politics in the Americas: Reshaping ‘Nuestramérica’ as Chavismo’s Regional Legitimation Strategy,” *Latin American Research Review* 54, no. 2 (2019): 458–75.

⁸⁸Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Jennifer Pitts, “Liberalism and Empire in a Nineteenth Century Algerian Mirror,” *Modern Intellectual History* 6, no. 2 (2009): 287–313.

⁸⁹Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto, 1986), 9. See also Jane Anna Gordon, *Creolizing Political Theory: Reading Rousseau through Fanon* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 129–61.

⁹⁰Aydin, *Anti-Westernism in Asia*; Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation*; Wilder, *Freedom Time*; Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*; Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2007).

project, and one that remains a fruitful source of critical reflection on international politics.

Much debate in contemporary politics and political theory concerns what we should do when we learn—or finally acknowledge—that ideas, norms, institutions, and practices we have inherited from previous generations have abetted and continue to abet white supremacy, or have justified and continue to justify imperial conquests. Opposing white supremacy and empire might reasonably be thought to entail disavowing ideas and intellectual traditions with histories of racist or imperialist entanglement. But consistent application of this principle would leave us few concepts and approaches with which to conduct our own critical thinking, and deprive us of the shared languages and assumptions we require to convince others of our conclusions. Martí's engagement with the unionist paradigm demonstrates that the causes that ideas and institutions can serve are not determined by their origins or exhausted by their histories. When encountered by a motivated and aptly situated mind, a racist ideology of empire can serve as the starting point and framework for antiracist internationalism. We do not need to insist that Martí's revised unionism was free from errors and entanglements of its own in order to recognize it as an instance of moral learning, an improvement upon the paradigm it revised. Immanent critique will never produce final, universally valid accounts of our political ideals. Nonetheless, by identifying the flaws in our inherited modes of thinking that impede the successful implementation of our projects, we too can learn and improve, finding within the crises of our time a glimpse of the better worlds that concerted action could create.