An African Tree Produces White Flowers: Black Consciousness in the Afro-Argentine Community during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Erika Denise Edwards
Doctoral Student. Florida International University

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, Afro-Argentines had a high level of black consciousness despite their diminishing numbers. The existence of black consciousness explained how Afro-Argentines consciously fought to maintain levels of agency in a society that pushed to forget them. Yet, as the nineteenth century drew to a close, certain aspects of this black discourse manifested as elitist viewpoints amongst the differences in the black middle class. This negritude, or black pride the black elite espoused, did not serve to bring this black community together, but separated it based upon pre-existing class differences. Further, this separation caused a detrimental wedge within the black community. The discourse perpetuated by the black elite was not intended for their poorer black counterparts. Instead, they used it to legitimize their social standing in Argentine society.

The Roots Have Been Planted: Afro-Argentine History

In 1776, Viceroy Vértiz created the first official census after the establishment of the Vice-Royalty of River Plate. Census infor-

mation compiled between 1778 and 1836 reveals that blacks accounted for a sizable minority of the Buenos Aires population. Of the 24,363 individuals documented by the 1778 census, more than thirty percent, or 7,236, were black (though the city's percentage of blacks fluctuated over time).[1] In contrast, blacks had a larger presence in the interior of Argentina as a result of the internal slave trade. Ten interior cities and the territories surrounding their jurisdiction were home to approximately 60,000 Afro-Argentines in 1777.[2] At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was a sizable slave population that performed diverse tasks. Within the city, slaves often denote the social status of whites, because they were very expensive in colonial Argentina. Blacks worked as domestic servants and as artisans. Female servants labored as wet nurses and black washerwomen. Male slaves labored as the "city's craftsmen." Similar to other slave institutions in the Americas, masters "hired out," or rented, their slaves to others who wanted cheap labor.[3]

In 1813 Argentina enacted the Law of Freedom by the Womb Act, which freed all children of slaves, though certain limitations still applied to them. Known as libertos, the law insisted that these children stay with their mothers until they married or reached twenty years of age. Before obtaining freedom, libertos served as unpaid laborers for their mother's owners until the age of fifteen, after which the children began to earn one peso per month.

Slavery gradually declined in the period between 1810 and 1827. During these years, municipal censuses revealed an improvement in the legal status of Afro-Argentines, for example, in 1810 eighty-three percent of the black population lived under the control of white households. This number decreased to 74% by 1827.[4] Additionally, black families also gained more autonomy. In 1810, sixty-eight percent of black families lived under the control of white households. By 1827, this percentage had decreased to 52%. Nevertheless, it would take till 1853 for Argentina to officially abolish the institution, though Buenos Aires continued to allow slave ownership until 1861.[5]

Unlike the economic autonomy gained by manumission during the first half of the nineteenth century, the latter half of it brought with it a sharp and detrimental decline in the black population. This has been attributed to both political and social transformations. By 1860, the Unitarian party gained control of the country from the Federalists, their political enemies, after fighting them for almost thirty years. Political leaders such as Domingo Faustino Sarmiento wanted to modernize Argentina and looked to the United States, England, and France as models. Their desires coincided with the "Export Boom," a time during

which Europe was experiencing its Second Industrial Revolution and looked to Latin America for raw materials. As Argentina's connections with industrialized countries strengthened, it adopted scientific racism, which stressed that a modernized country could only be a white country.[6]

Surprisingly, perhaps, the black elite also promoted whitening. Elite blacks and mulattoes separated themselves from their poorer working-class counterparts, who still publicly acknowledged their African heritage. Added to these social and political changes, the waning slave trade, decreases in the black male population, low birth rates, and miscegenation contributed to the decline of the black population, so much so that by 1900 many believed that blacks no longer existed in Argentina. This, however, was not true. Via the black press and literature, Afro-Argentines fought against their cultural extinction during the late nineteenth century. Black discourse revealed that there were two options for Afro-Argentines: assimilation or resistance. The majority chose to assimilate into the white society and become both physically lighter in appearance, as black women more notably married white men, and culturally whiter, as many rejected their African roots. The second option was to continue to hold on to African heritage, which was chosen by the minority, who relied upon it as inspiration to survive.

The Tree Grows Tall and Strong: Evidence of Black Agency and Discourse in Buenos Aires

Afro-Argentines maintained their African heritage in the areas of dance, music, art, and religion. From the seventeenth to well into the twentieth century communal organizations such as cofradías, nations (cabildos), and mutual aid societies, shaped and promoted black discourse. Afro-Argentines first organized cofradías, or religious brotherhoods, as a means to maintain their African heritage. The first cofradía in the city of Buenos Aires appeared in 1772, after the Archbishop of Buenos Aires authorized its establishment in the Church of La Piedad. Both free blacks and slaves were eligible for membership in cofradías. In addition, both men and women were allowed to join, although female officers were not permitted to hold positions at the same level as their male counterparts. In order to maintain membership, members had to pay dues, participate, and live a Christian lifestyle. Joining a cofradía guaranteed a funeral, with a set number of masses said in honor of the deceased member. Moreover, in the late nineteenth century, cofradías served as a support group, to "stimulate the spirit... among the unfortunate blacks." Black autonomy within cofradías was limited, though; a local priest or chaplain always retained absolute control of the brotherhood. For example, members were not permitted to speak without permission and officers could not spend money without the priest's approval. Additionally, the officer in charge of the money had to be an outside member, white, and appointed by the priest (all other officers were elected). As a result of the priests' control over cofradías, black discourse did not flourish well within these organizations and blacks searched for other alternatives.

African 'nations' (cabildos) became the next area in which black discourse developed. Divided loosely by their ethnic ori-

gins, in the 1820s nations such as the Cambundá, Benguela, Lubolo, Angola, and Congo were officially acknowledged by the government. Unlike cofradías, nations had greater autonomy. After obtaining police permission, they could spend their money as they saw fit, which often went to various ventures that helped black members purchase their freedom and that established schools for their children. Nations also aided their members when they became unemployed or when they needed financial assistance for their farms or businesses. Consequently, African societies sometimes divided the black community. For example, if a dispute erupted within an African nation, members quit it and formed other nations. Thus a spider web of societies formed, which limited the opportunities for the creation of a true collective black discourse. The decline of the nations coincided roughly with the fall of Governor Rosas, in the 1850s.

As African nations declined, mutual aid societies emerged. Of the three types of communal organizations, mutual aid societies gave Afro-Argentines the most autonomy. In 1855, the first mutual society, known as the Sociedad de la Unión de Socorros Mutuos, wrote its constitution. Unlike the church-controlled cofradías or the government-controlled nations, mutual aid societies created their own laws and offered many benefits. Members too sick to work received a daily stipend until they could return to their jobs, as well as free medical, too. When a member died, the other members had to attend the funeral as mourners. From the 1860s to the twentieth century, the two most successful mutual aid societies were La Fraternal and La Protectora. The former established a school for black children that functioned for fourteen years. But, by the 1870s, the school and aid society no longer existed. The latter had better luck and lasted well into the twentieth century. For almost sixty years, La Protectora debated the direction of the black community. Besides the typical benefits promised to members, La Protectora established a library and a mausoleum in Recoleta's cemetery that provided free burials for its members. In the midst of declining numbers, La Protectora's strength positively uplifted the black community and held blacks together. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, cofradías, nations, and mutual aid societies allowed blacks to congregate, celebrate, mourn and, most importantly, survive in public spaces.[7]

Black agency also thrived in literature, an area that has received less scholarly attention. In Buenos Aires, black writers and poets discussed problems within the black community. Their writings were especially crucial between 1880 and 1900, as black intellectuals from the elite tried to make sense of their declining numbers. Unfortunately, even though few if any scholars have examined Afro-Argentine literature, a small minority of Afro-Argentine writers emerged during the late nineteenth century. The poets Horacio Mendizábal, Gabino Ezieza, and Casildo G. Thompson are examples of writers who expressed the black pride that thrived during the late nineteenth century.

In his poems, Mendizábal's nationalistic sentiment noted the plight of blacks.8 His well-known poems, "¡Alerta!" and "In memory of the Battle of Cepeda" acknowledged the Afro-Argentine military hero, Colonel José María Morales. The last line of the former, "Remember the splendid glories/Where my fathers found out how to die," revealed Morales' heroic role and black

heritage.[9] Black soldiers had served in Argentine armies since the country's foundation. Mendizábal wanted to recognize the role of blacks in the army. By 1869, his nationalism waned while his black consciousness grew. He realized nationalism and black pride could not coexist. In his second book, Hours of meditation, a disillusioned Horacio Mendizábal wrote:

"The May Revolution proclaimed the principles of equality, liberty and brotherhood; but these noble principles must be practiced before the law and before society, not offending the man of color, not scorning him, not forgetting him."[10]

In this passage Mendizábal declared he no longer believed that the nationalism born from the independence movement included all Argentine citizens. The freedom obtained through national independence applied only to the Spanish Creoles and excluded Argentines of color. Dissatisfied, he looked to other blacks in the Diaspora for inspiration and uncovered levels of Pan-Africanism, to a certain extent. The poems "Plácido"and"Lincoln"retold the struggles of blacks in Cuba and the United States. Mendizábal dedicated "Plácido" to the Cuban poet Gabriel de la Concepión Valdés (1804-1844), who was executed for his alleged involvement in a conspiracy to free black slaves and gain Cuban independence. In his poem titled "Lincoln," Mendizábal praised Abraham Lincoln for freeing the American slaves.[11] Unfortunately, his disappointment with Argentina's racism and his cries for black uplifting were only realized a few years before his death. Horacio Mendizábal's impact on black discourse in Argentina was brief but powerful. The next writer, Gabino Ezieza, was more successful in addressing the black community's concerns.[12]

During his brief affiliation with La Juventud, Ezieza wrote poems that one could describe as Afrocentric. His poem "I am," written in 1897, gave praise to Falucho, a black soldier who fought in the interior. More importantly, Ezieza pointed to the abuse of the system of military conscription that continuously drafted black men. This occurred more frequently during the wars for independence and territorial expansion. "An Easterner: absent from his country,"also had elements of Afrocentrism. The following strophe summed up his longing for Africa, a place of safe haven and beauty he expressed throughout the poem:

> Far, very far away I find myself
> from that dear homeland
> whose memory my aching heart
> does not forget.
> Over there my eyes are fixed
> my hope is locked up over there
> where I adore the beautiful land
> where my mother was born.[13]

Similar to Horacio Mendizábal's work, Gabino Ezieza's poem disclosed the country's black past. During the 1870s and1880s, Argentina wanted to whiten the country and ignore its black population. In response, Ezieza looked to his African heritage for strength because Argentina eliminated blacks from its "national social equation."[14] This homeland always accepted and welcomed him, so he focused on the land where "[his] mother was born." Ezieza was not figuratively describing his mother's birthplace; he was actually emphasizing a longing to reconnect with his African heritage.

The most complete annunciation of racism in Argentina came, however, from Casildo G. Thompson.[15] His polemical poem

"Song to Africa," published in 1877, openly attacked racism in Argentina:

Do you know the name of
That divine and blessed land
That jewel which God bequeathed
[to the world,
That chaste offended virgin
Of humiliated prominence?
Its name is AFRICA, listen,
[beautiful Africa!
It is the birthplace of the Black: it is the homeland.[16]

Like Ezieza's poem, Thompson's poem characterized Africa as a welcoming and accepting place and further underscored Afro-Argentine alienation in Argentina. Thompson showed that there was no shame in being black. If anything, Thompson believed the shame and disgrace belonged to their white oppressors:

Do you know what happens and why
[sadly
The beautiful African virgin
Takes off her fine clothes
And does not wear the smile of a
[sultan?
Because an hour sounded, a wretched
[hour!...
From the tall peak to the low forest
A lecherous beast
Named the white man
Ripped the breast of virgin Africa
With brutal greediness, bloody fury.[17]

Thompson described the inhumane treatment of blacks in Argentina. The whippings, verbal abuse, and other tortures suffered under the control of whites proved their savagery. Africans conversely represented purity and regalness. Thompson reclaimed the stereotypes that had been given to blacks and transferred these to his oppressors. Surprisingly, the poem's conclusion requested forgiveness –instead of revenge– on the part of the black community.

The sun of Redemption: the hour
[sounded
In the quadrant of destiny
Now in the name of love slaves and
[tyrants
Shake hands
Thus Equality of Justice joins
Them in a confused embrace.[18]

Thompson desired unity rather than accusation. He proposed a chance for both races to come together, even while acknowledging the initial awkwardness of such an embrace. However, the first step in the process would be recognition of blacks and their struggles. Then the black community would have to surmise which direction would be best for its declining population. Black newspapers served this purpose by providing a public space for blacks to discuss issues that affected the black community.

La Juventud and La Broma were the most influential newspapers. Within the black community, they debated the important topics of assimilation, unity, and black pride. Both newspapers published many of the poems written by our previously discussed poets. In general, newspapers provided another vehicle for black discourse and did not passively watch public spaces transform as a result of white immigration. Afro-Argentines acknowledged their dwindling numbers and actively discussed potential responses to this in their newspapers.

Articles deliberated possible reactions to unemployment and racial discrimination.

Black discourse existed throughout the nineteenth century. It manifested itself in cofradías, nations, mutual aid societies, and literature. Clearly, Afro-Argentines understood their surroundings and their fate. Yet the movement was not unified but rather disjointed. Racism affected the black community and caused class division. There were those who wanted to publicly express their African heritage but who were largely shunned by the white majority and the black elite. In turn, the elite turned to literature, a more Europeanized outlet through which to express its African pride. It should be noted that the majority of blacks could not read; thus, there was a clearly drawn line separating the black community. As a result, Afro-Argentines could no longer created a unified discourse. Horacio Mendizábal, Gabino Ezieza, and Casildo G. Thompson were all poets and members of the black elite.

The Tree Splits Apart: Class Divisions within the Black Community

During the fight for independence and the national period, political leaders claimed to have rid Latin America of the caste system. Creoles fought for economic freedom from the Peninsulars, or Spanish-born whites. The importance of individual self-value became the rhetoric of the independence movements. Laws began to stress the equality of men. Slavery declined and Indians were recognized as individuals under the law, which allowed people of color throughout the African Diaspora to advance economically.[19] By the 1850s, many South American countries eliminated the

Régimen de castas, or legislation that divided society into a well-defined hierarchy of racial castes.[20]

In his book, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth -Century Cuba*, Alejandro de la Fuente notes this socioeconomic ascension in Cuba. Affluent Afro-Cubans challenged the notion that all blacks were equal or inferior in the eyes of whites. In an effort to separate themselves from the lower class blacks, black intellectuals referred to them in negative terms. For example, Ramón Vasconcelos, a prominent Afro-Cuban intellectual of the twentieth century, called them "la negrada," or "stupid black mass" that had taken only superficial things from progress. Afro-Cubans also discouraged public displays of "blackness." In

Cuba, this meant condemning the religious practices of Santería and comparsas, or processions during carnival. Vasconcelos was referring to the comparsas when he stated: "Go to the wilderness, where you can unleash your rapture and obscenity without offending the sight and refinement of those who want to live in a civilized society, not in an African village…As long as a drum exists, there will be barbarism."[21]

In an effort to embrace traditional "white" values, elite Afro-Cubans stressed the importance of marriage and family. The Cuban black elite was alarmed by the fact that the number of white marriages was double that of black marriages, and that the illegitimacy rate of blacks was triple that of whites.[22] Fearing that these statistics only confirmed white society's stereotypes, black intellectuals promoted the virtues of marriage and family for black women. Females needed to be reformed because, as Ramiro Neyra, an Afro-Cuban intellectual put it, when black women "fell" they "dragged with them the honor of all other women and a good part of the respect that males as men deserved."[23] These comments did not sit well with black women. In response to the sexist undertones of Vasconcelos' rhetoric, who claimed "black women lacked culture and morality," a woman named "Indiana" replied "whereas it was a woman's duty to guide her household, men were supposed to protect and care for their families, not to have mistresses and to abuse their wives."[24] The sanctity of marriage would have to be upheld by both sexes within the middle class. Afro-Cubans adopted elite values in order to be accepted by white elites.

In Argentina, as in Cuba, better socioeconomic conditions allowed the emergence of a black elite during the 1820s. Several middle-class Afro-Argentines held professional positions as military officers, pharmacists, or schoolteachers, while others owned small businesses.[25] Blue-collar workers who invested in Buenos Aires' growing economy further expanded the group. Eugenio Sar, for example, was a sailor and stevedore who invested in real estate and became a prominent member of the black community. Another example was a black musician and coachmaker in the 1830s who amassed enough wealth to negotiate the purchase of a title of Spanish nobility.[26] Even though some blacks experienced upward mobility, the majority of blacks in Argentina "failed to breach the barriers" that continued to keep the black community in the lowest levels of social and vocational positions.[27] Nevertheless, the black elite continued to grow. By the second half of the nineteenth century, a socio-economic distinction that separated the black community into two classes developed within the Afro-Argentine community in Buenos Aires.

Similar to the blacks in Cuba, Afro-Argentines adhered to specific values in order to become accepted by the white elite, further disrupting black unity. The economic security achieved by the prosperous blacks created an educated class and brought about two important changes. First, the black elite financially supported the rest of the black community. For example, Juan Pablo Balparda's cigarette factory and dance halls regularly supported black newspapers by supplying advertisements of their businesses in order to reach the black community.28 Eugenio Sar appears as a donor on subscription lists that supported black newspapers.[29] Second, the black elite's adoption of white elite values –honor, virtue, and privacy– caused the black elite to express its black pride differently. It chose to express their

black consciousness in a more "European" style, through literature. Horacio Mendizábal, Gabino Ezieza, and Casildo G. Thompson, the three previously discussed black elite poets, incorporated African discourse into a European style of literature. As a result, when the black intellectuals looked upon the more public displays of the carnival, African nations, cofradías, and the candombe African dance, they did so with displeasure and quiet disdain.

In Argentina, class conflict played out in newspapers, too. The black newspapers worked to unite the community but also disseminated two distinct opinions. *La Juventud* wrote for working-class blacks from 1876-1883, even though the majority of the black population was illiterate. It addressed issues such as racial discrimination and unemployment that affected the black middle class to a lesser extent. European immigration displaced working-class blacks such as street vendors and laundry washers in various areas. *La Juventud* frankly dismissed the treatment of workers on various occasions and drew attention to the city's unemployment situation. For example, one of its articles stated: "discontent is widespread, and he who has work today cannot depend on having it tomorrow."[30] The writers of *La Juventud* argued it was no longer acceptable to discard employees. A change had to occur, but it would not come from the government.

In contrast, instead of focusing on unemployment that affected poor blacks, the black elite chose to write about social clubs, get-togethers, and dances. Like Afro-Cubans, they wanted to distance themselves from the black working class. In 1876, the newspaper *La Broma* was created to offer this sort of writer a forum. It lasted well into the 1880s, making it the longest running black newspaper in Argentina. *La Broma* promoted the need for reform within the black community. It (as well as other newspapers) urged working-class blacks to leave domestic service positions because of their resemblance to the slave regime, and instead strive to become skilled laborers. In 1878, a guest editor proclaimed: "Come on, to the workshops, our sons, to the workshops, our successors!"[31] This advice, however, did not consider the rise of unemployment among the black poor, which forced many of them to remain in subservient jobs. Instead, the advice hoped poor blacks would become assimilated into the black middle class and end racial stereotypes.

La Juventud attacked *La Broma's* class views, thus reflecting the black community's class division. The latter rarely responded to the attacks, even though on one occasion it denied its class views and argued: "the colored society is united, it thinks as a single man, it longs for the realization of its hopes according to a single prediction, and it is animated with vitality like a heart that beats to a single rhythm."[32] In response, *La Juventud* felt rejected and overwhelmed. It would be responsible for relaying the community's problems of racism and unemployment and the black community would remain divided. Prominent Afro-Argentine families further intensified class division with the creation of the social club "The Argentine Hope," whose fees were too expensive for the average black worker. The cries of *La Juventud* begged: "let the divisions that exist among us be ended," but the club did not lower its entrance fee.[33] In response *La Juventud* announced the formation of "The Sons of Order," a club "composed of humble workers, in which exist union, progress, and friendship."

The fantasy world of *La Broma's* audience would not last long. It appeared as though elite blacks could achieve equal social standing amongst themselves, but society at large still did not acknowledge the differences between blacks. To the white majority, all blacks were equally inferior. The only way to become acceptable was to lighten, to whiten their skin. The black elite would have a rude awakening. Segregation remained a constant problem for Afro-Argentines. Whites barred blacks from social clubs, dance halls, and theaters. During the summer of 1879, a campaign encouraged segregation in places of entertainment. Outraged, the black press, alongside some white newspapers, vehemently protested. Due to the white support, the mayor had to address the problem and the chief of police later announced that he would not enforce the segregationist practices of dance hall owners, but he did not mention he would assist blacks in any efforts to defy these rules. Despite a positive outcome in the summer of 1879, the black elite remained discouraged. From that moment on, *La Broma's* rhetoric changed.[34]

La Broma began to print articles that focused upon political and racial issues, similar to those in *La Juventud*. Froilán Bello, a writer for *La Broma* frankly denounced the treatment of blacks, and wrote: "today it is the theater that is closed to us…and the day after that it will be the church, where we all have the right to go to worship God, who is the kind father of all human beings, regardless of race or color."[35] In 1880, after the collapse of *La Juventud*, *La Broma* borrowed its motto, "Organ of the Working class," as part of its masthead. It also acknowledged both the black soldiers who fought in the wars of independence and the black washerwomen, who were the mothers of the community.[36] Apparently, the black elite had finally realized the importance of unity. However, this realization did not seem to have had any effect. The views promoted by the black elite continued to hinder the community well into the twentieth century. Black consciousness was evident within the black middle class, but it was strictly exclusive.

In 1905, Juan José Soiza Reilly, an Afro-Argentine member of the elite, wrote an article in the popular journal *Caras y Caretas*, a magazine with a large white readership. Eustaquio Peciller founded the magazine in 1898, which lasted until 1939, covering all important aspects of Argentine life, including politics and European immigration, border issues with Chile and, surprisingly, the decline in the black population.[37] In an article titled "People of Color," Reilly wrote about the issues facing the diminishing Afro-Argentine community. The first lines address the black population: "Little by little, this race is becoming extinct. With slow, strong destruction, the black sons of the race of the sun walk toward death. It is sad. It is pitiful…It pitiful and sad to contemplate the darkness of this wounded race's stoicism…."[38]

Soiza Reilly feared that the black population would become extinct. In 1905, his article called for awareness as well as attention. Additionally, his article disproved the notion that the black population had disappeared. In fact, it touched upon one of the main reasons why the black population was disappearing –blacks were becoming lighter: "Meanwhile, the race is losing its primitive color in the mixture. It is becoming gray. It is dissolving. It is lightening. The African tree is producing white Caucasian flowers."[39]

Soiza Reilly recognized the black community's current dilemmas. Its numbers had decreased to the point of extinction and the mixing of black women and white men had also lightened the black community. An imbalance in the gender ratio among the black population forced black females who wished to marry to seek husbands among white male immigrants. In turn, white male immigrants chose black females because of a shortage of female immigrants. Notwithstanding, Soiza Reilly argued that the small community had to remain united. *La Ortiga*, a newspaper directed by an Afro-Argentine, was distributed widely in the "homes of the Ethiopian race." Soiza Reilly also noted the existence and importance of La Protectora, the mutual aid society founded by the working class in the 1880s, which provided various economic advantages as well as social support to its members.[40]

As with other writers of black discourse, Soiza Reilly nostalgically remembered his African roots. For the majority of the article, Soiza Reilly described his black ancestors in a European fashion. His ancestors descended from kings and queens of Africa, such as Ramses III of Egypt, who mastered the art of suicide, and Ranavalo of Madagascar, a queen without a crown, scepter, or homeland who transformed into a Parisian lady: "Today she covers her blackness with Parisian elegances…She knows French. She uses a hat, puffed socks, and black boots."[41] Her transition reflected the desires of all among the black middle class who sought to become Europeanized. Additionally, these lines revealed the potential for blacks to become acculturated and trained in the ways of Europeans. He traced his lineage to powerful African people to legitimize his genealogy for *Caras y Caretas's* white audience. Afro-Argentines could justify their social status because of their rich legacy. Blacks in the Americas came from a powerful line of influential, strong, and beautiful people. Soiza Reilly also compared other Diasporic blacks to those in Buenos Aires:

"Brazil, that still feels the weight of its manumitted slavery, it still has some black villages. North America more. Roosevelt helps them. He protects them. He has invited to his table 'coloured gentlemen' and he embraces them. 'They are men like me,' he says. He is right. Relatively, there are very few in Buenos Aires, but enough to divide into categories. Plebeians and aristocrats."[42]

Soiza had a sense of connection with other blacks in the African Diaspora. Brazil had recently emancipated its slaves in 1889 and some of its black population continued to be concentrated in villages of their own. In the United States, Juan José Soiza Reilly imagined a country free of racial prejudice. Black U. S. citizens, according to him, were equal in the eyes of President Roosevelt. His perception of the United States as a place of cultural progress, however, impaired his recognition of Jim Crow laws. Soiza Reilly recognized the small number of blacks in Buenos Aires, in contrast to the larger black populations of Brazil and the United States. Yet, he cleverly disclosed his class views. Although the black population in Buenos Aires remained small, it still had "plebeians and aristocrats," the two social classes that had emerged in the nineteenth century, and continued to persist in the twentieth century. Soiza Reilly subtly posited that his black discourse was exclusively for the black elite:

"[The] people of color in Buenos Aires have literary newspapers, beneficent societies and aristocratic salons, where instead

of the grotesque candombe or zemba –lewd like a monkey's grimace– they dance in modern suits in the manner of Louis XV…. Now those numerous corrals where the people of color lived thrown together in a depressing promiscuity have faded into oblivion. Now, there are black families that ride in livery coaches and wear fabulous jewels."[43]

Soiza Reilly distinguished himself from the blacks who continued to practice candombe. He belonged to the aristocratic class that danced in the manner of Louis XV. Black elites successfully Europeanized its discourse. Soiza Reilly's nostalgically traced heritage included famous Africans and illustrated his Afro-centric writing style. Nevertheless, Soiza Reilly only traced his heritage to African royalty to legitimize his race in the eyes of his white audience. In contrast, he criticized blacks who practiced the candombe, true testaments of African heritage. Elite black discourse, which included Soiza Reilly's article "Gente de color," excluded the black working poor. The "status" of the black elite afforded them the limited privileges of socio-economic advancement, even during the twentieth century. The black community did not unify. Instead their class differences continued to split Afro-Argentine discourse.

The Creation of White Flowers: Black Discourse Transformed

Black consciousness existed in Argentina. From their initial arrival and throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Afro-Argentines celebrated their African heritage and maintained limited autonomy through cofradías, African nations, and mutual aid societies. They also addressed serious issues including declining numbers, racism, and unemployment. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, a small but prominent black elite, consisting of retired military officers, writers, musicians, and prominent investors, emerged. Their socio-economic status put them into contact with the white elite, a class they desperately tried to join. Strongly believing in the idea of the equality of man, which had been introduced during the fight for independence, Afro-Argentine intellectuals adhered to white elite virtues—honor, privacy, and virtue. They gave up public displays of blackness such as African nations, cofradías, and carnival, opting for more "formal" and "civilized" ways through literature and the newspapers. This form of expression limited their negritude to literate (mainly intellectual) blacks, and separated them from the rest of the black community simply because the majority of Afro-Argentines could not read. The black elite strongly criticized and ostracized the blacks who continued to showcase their African heritage in the public sphere. They did so because the black elite realized it would never achieve full inclusion into white society as long as its poorer counterparts perpetuated racial stereotypes. Thus, in a blinded effort to achieve social recognition and equality, the black elite chose to forgo expressing its African roots to unite and uplift its community, choosing instead to transform its black consciousness into a "white" one, both culturally and materially.

Bibliography

1- Andrews, George Reid. (1980): *The Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires, 1800-1900*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press: 66.
2- Chace, Russell Edward. (1971): *The African Impact on Colonial Argentina*. Santa Barbara, University of Santa Barbara: 101.
3- Andrews, George R. Op.cit: 32–33.
4- Andrews, George R. Op.cit: 52–53.
5- Andrews, George R. Op.cit: 57.
6- Andrews, George R. Op.cit: 102-5.
7- Andrews, George R. Op.cit : 138-54.
8- de Estrada, Marcos. (1979): *Argentinos de origen africano.* Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires: 167–69; Lewis, Marvin. (1996): *Afro-Argentine Discourse: Another Dimension of the Black Diaspora*. Colombia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press: 35–36.
9- Lewis, Marvin: Op.cit: 38; Mendizábal. (1865): Horacio. *Primeros versos.* Buenos Aires: Buenos Aires: 33.
10- Lewis, Marvin: Op. cit: 43; Mendizábal, Horacio. (1869): *Horas de meditación*. Buenos Aires: Imprenta de Buenos Aires: 32.
11- Lewis, Marvin. Op.cit: 43–44; Mendizábal, Horacio. (1869): Op.cit: 75, 369.
12- de Estrada, Marcos: Op.cit: 172.
13- Lewis, Marvin: Op.cit: 123; Ezeiza, Gabino. (1897): *Nuevas canciones inéditas del payador argentino Gabino Ezeiza*. Buenos Aires: Biblioteca Gauchesca, pp. 22-24.
14- Lewis, Marvin: Op. cit: 125.
15- Andrews, George R. (1980): Op.cit: 169; de Estrada, Marcos: Op.cit: 135.
16- de Estrada, Marcos: Op.cit: 136; Lewis, Marvin: Op.cit: 55–56.
17- de Estrada, Marcos: Op.cit: 136-37; Lewis, Marvin: Op.cit: 57-58;
18- de Estrada, Marcos: Op.cit: 140; Lewis, Marvin: Op.cit: 64-65.
19- Mirow, M. C. (2004); *Latin American Law*. University of Texas Press, Austin: 146.
20- Andrews, George Reid. (1979): "Race Versus Class Association: the Afro-Argentines of Buenos Aires 1850-1900," *Journal of Latin American Studies*. 11. 1: 19.
21. de la Fuente, Alejandro. (2000): *Una nación para todos: Raza, desigualdad y política en Cuba, 1900–2000*. Madrid: Editorial Colibrí: 222.
22- de la Fuente, Alejandro. (2001): *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press: 154–55.
23- Soler Cañas, Luís. (1963): "Pardos y morenos en el año 80." *Revista del Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas Juan Manuel Rosas* 23 : 154–56; "Actualidad." *La Broma* 1:5 (22 August 1878).
24- de la Fuente, Alejandro.(2001): Op. Cit:156.
25- Andrews, George R. (1979): Op. Cit: 23.
26- Lanuza, José Luis. (1967): *Morenada*. Buenos Aires: 100–101; Andrews, George. (1979): Op. Cit: 23.
27- Martín, Alicia. "El carnaval y la cuestión inter-étnica en el Buenos Aires de fin de siglo XIX." In Beatriz Santos *La herencia cultural africana en las Américas* (Montevideo: Ediciones Populares para América Latina, 1998): 40.
28- Andrews, George. (1980): Op.cit: 191.
29- Ford, Jorge Miguel. (1899): *Beneméritos de mi estirpe*. La Plata: 73–74; Andrews, George. (1979): Op. cit.: 24.
30- Andrews, George: (1979): Op.cit: 27; "Consejos Sociales" *La Juventud* 1:4 (23 January 1876): 1.
31- Andrews, George. (1980): Op.cit: 190; "Preparando el Provenir." *La Broma* (26 September 1878): 1.
32- Andrews, George. (1979): Op. Cit.: 30, "Actualidad," 2.
33- "Nuestro triunfo." *La Juventud* (23 January 1876): 1.
34- Andrews, George. (1980): Op.cit: 193–97.
35- Andrews. George. (1979): Op. Cit.: 34; Soler Cañas. Op. Cit.: 274–81.
36- Andrews, George. (1980): Op.cit: 198; "La ley del embudo." *La Broma* (19 August 1881): 1; "La lavandera." *La Broma* (27 October 1881): 2.
37- (Argentina, 2005), 3 May. www.mediosindependientes.com/Disenio.htm.
38- Soiza Reilly, Juan José. "Gente de color." *Caras y caretas* (25 November 1905): n.p.
39- Soiza Reilly: Op.cit: n.p
40- Soiza Reilly: Op.cit: n.p
41- Soiza Reilly: Op.cit: n.p
42- Soiza Reilly: Op.cit: n.p
43- Soiza Reilly: Op.cit: n.p