

The Frozen Image

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The government's Cuban Commission against Racism and Racial Discrimination, which emerged from the Cuban National Union of Writers and Artists (UNEAC), unofficially, but also publicly, announced that a whole, new media project meant to rescue the history and importance of General Antonio Maceo y Grajales—also known as the Bronze Titan—would begin to take shape.

One of Cuban historiography's recent lacunae has been a paucity of diverse projects studying Antonio Maceo's life and thought. As a myth, his has resisted the test of time and generations. Most Cubans still only know of him in his military persona, and the media is one of the entities most responsible for contributing to the promotion of this stereotyped image of him—often even wielding a machete.

This lack of historiographical progress has contributed to freezing the image of certain, relevant historical figures, particularly those of important blacks who have made a huge mark on Cuban history and culture. Maceo is presented like an invincible warrior of limited intelligence, especially when compared to Martí.

Racism and regionalism are both elements that could well keep dividing Cubans. Racism today is illustrative of Cuban society's fractured discourse, emblematic of a hidden rage that defies examination, given the authorities' shortsightedness and lack of political will.

Any official promotion of Maceo's life and thought today is nothing like it was dur-

ing the republican period. Back then—every December 7th—politicians, historians, writers, painters, and intellectuals contributed to the construction of this warrior myth. It was a day of national mourning for all those who fell in our independence struggles. These personalities gave eloquent speeches and published detailed articles in the press. Town halls all over Cuba organized events at which locally or nationally prestigious politicians and historians participated. The House of Representatives gathered at a solemn session to hear speeches by famous political and cultural figures. These celebrations were bonafide events, and the place to find the most brilliant oratory about Antonio Maceo. Between 1908 and 1959, the House of Representatives was visited by prestigious speakers who spoke on varied subjects including ideology, morality, and ethics. José Manuel Cortina, Orestes Ferrara, Juan Gualberto Gómez, José Antonio Fernández de Castro, Ramón Zaydín, Miguel Coyula, and Salvador García Agüero are just a few of them. García Agüero, himself, was responsible for one of the most polemical and contradicted speeches of all time, showing that Maceo was the “purest, strongest, a completest manifestation of the Cuban Revolution's greatest impact.”

December 7th was a much-anticipated date, just like January 28th, Martí's birthdate. Many events, dinners, and parades were organized; books were published and republished in preparation for that date. Historiography after 1959 has been quite inferior and even



Antonio Maceo

poor; few book projects or other publications have been developed about Maceo's life and thought since then.

There were Maceo societies all over Cuba before, which were enclaves of true, ethical citizenship—but they were dismantled. A great number of black and mulatto groups identified themselves as *Sociedad Hijos de Maceo* [Sons of Maceo Society], *Sociedad Maceo Sport Club* [Maceo Society Sports Club], *Sociedad Gloria a Maceo* [Glory to Maceo Society], *Sociedad Gran Maceo* [the Grand Maceo Society], *Sociedad Unión Maceo* [Maceo Union Society], *Sociedad Nueva Estrella Maceo* [Maceo New Star Society], etc. They were veritable bastions against racism, prejudices, and discrimination, and played a decisive role in the education and empowerment of black citizens, and in building up the self-esteem of Cuban blacks—which today is incredibly fragile.

The promotion of Maceo's thinking is different in Cuba today. When seen in the context of his personality, little is known about the literary value of his work, particularly those texts he wrote during the Republic of Letters. Important titles he penned have never again seen the light of day. Civilian and citizen Maceo is just ignored. The very same censors that today distort historiographic production from the Republican period opportunistically try to use his thinking. Dulce María Loynaz, daughter of General Enrique Loynaz del Castillo, wrote in her memoir *Fe de vida* about how it pained her to realize that Cuban society had lost sight of the life and thought of heroes like Maceo. She was always proud of being a follower of Martí and Maceo. This is one of the ethical values that contemporary Cuban society must recover, so it can battle its demons, and create scenarios in which autonomy and diversity will be key factors.