

Two Men and One History

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Two men with one same history, two men who deserve all our respect and admiration, Salvador García Agüero and Ramón Vasconcelos Maragliano not only left to future generations the treasure of their writings and works, but also taught us about their ideas as incorruptible champions of social improvement and the construction of a new Cuba.

Those who had the privilege of knowing them, who have been able to read their literary and political texts, and review their biographies, would be able to assess that these black Cubans have come to represent human beings who have been discriminated, economically and socially undervalued due to their skin color, exploited by class difference, citizens with extremely limited rights in a country with a glorious history of struggle, anthem and flag, but that also suffers from ills that plague many. García Agüero and Vasconcelos Maragliano were able to lift themselves and overcome all the obstacles, to make their mark.

Vasconcelos Maragliano was a journalist and war correspondent, educator, diplomat, essayist and political leader. He was born in Alacranes, Matanzas, on February 8, 1890.

By 1908, he acquired a different sort of job, one as a teacher at the José de la Luz y Caballero School. In his professional career, he dealt with history, politics, the fine arts, and education.

In 1910, he traveled to Mexico and later continued his education in France, Italy and Spain. Vasconcelos Maragliano did not go to university, but his application to the *Colegio Nacional de Periodistas* [National Journalism College] stated that he had taken: “Free courses at different national and foreign academies.” He wrote for multiple publications and founded the *El Liberal*, *El Cuarto Poder* and *El Universal* newspapers, and also directed *La Opinión* and *Rebeldía*. Vasconcelos Maragliano labored assiduously either under contract or as merely a contributor for the *Heraldo de Cuba*, *La Prensa*, *Carteles*, *Bohemia*, *El Mundo*, *Revista de Avance*, *La Semana*, *Información*, *Prensa Libre*, *Diario de la Marina*, *El País* (in his daily column, “Al margen de los días”), *Hatuey* and the *Boletín del Archivo Nacional*. In 1920, he journeyed to Morocco, and later to Madrid, as a war correspondent for the *El Mundo* newspaper.

Vasconcelos Maragliano was Historian of the City of Havana from 1920-1924, and

was opposed to Gerardo Machado's government. Yet, in 1927, he published an article in favor of the extension of powers in *El País*, and on July 15 of the same year, he was named a commercial attaché to Belgium, Great Britain, Germany, France and Spain, and resided in Paris. This lasted till 1933. In 1932, he visited the Soviet Union, but he never had leftist political leanings. He presided over the Liberal Party (1932-1940) and was a Senator from 1936-1948. His contributions were many, even as a professor at the Manuel Márquez Sterling Professional School of Journalism.

In 1942, Vasconcelos Maragliano was named Minister of Public Education, a position from which he advocated for the acknowledgment of the National Confederation of Workers of Cuba in the Journalism Conference in Bogotá, in 1946. From 1949-1957, he owned and directed the *Alerta* newspaper, which became one of the most widely read in the country. In 1948, he visited Holland as president of a governmental, goodwill commission.

His name became well known among Republican Cuba's political essayists; he is considered among the best lampoonists in all of Latin America. His political activity was prolific, as was his work as a sharp polemicist. Vasconcelos Maragliano devoted many pages to the topic of race in Cuba. In 1952, he was named consulting advisor to the government of Batista, for whom he also served as Minister of Communications from 1954-1958.

Vasconcelos Maragliano interceded in the Foundation and Board of the National Theater, and belonged to other prestigious institutions such as the *Círculo de Bellas Artes de La Habana* and the National Academy of Arts and Letters. After the Revolution's triumph in 1959, he decided to leave Cuba, but

returned in 1964, and remained in Havana, till his death in 1965.

Salvador García Agüero's history begins in Havana, where he was born on August 7, 1907. He studied at a Baptist college-academy, and in around 1919, he became president of the *Sociedad Infantil Fraternidad*. After that, he was admitted to the Normal School for Teachers, and was first in his class in his third year. He was chosen to speak at a student political event at the University of Havana organized by Julio Antonio Mella, founder of the internationalized Communist Party in Cuba. By November 1923, García Agüero was a member of the Executive Board of the *Asociación de Alumnos Normalistas* [Association for Students of Teaching]. He graduated in 1925 and started his Master's Degree, by which time he had embraced communist ideology and opposed racial discrimination.

He wrote poetry ever since his student days, probably under the influence of José Manuel Poveda, who visited his home and who he greatly admired. Much of his poetry, between 1927-1930, and published his work in the "Ideales de una Raza" section of the *Diario de la Marina*, which was directed by engineer and journalist Gustavo Urrutia. García Agüero participated in groups and brotherhoods for young black men who were fighting for their rights and freedoms.

Around 1933, he became a member of the *Sociedad Adelante*, made up of progressive, black students, and of the Committee for Black Rights, whose membership included delegates from other societies and unions. His fame as an orator, and as a eulogizer of Antonio Maceo, increased in 1934. García Agüero served as treasurer for the *Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos*, led by Fernando Ortiz, and was the founder and vice-president of the

Hermanidad de los Jóvenes Cubanos, and of its publication, *Juventud*.

In June 1937, García Agüero was invited to the Fourth Congress of American Youth (in the U.S.). While there, he delivered talks about democratic freedoms and peace. Upon his return to Cuba, he shared the experiences he had at this event at the Municipal Amphitheater in Havana. He then visited eastern Cuba, where his presentations were warmly received. García Agüero also spoke about black poet Juan Francisco Manzano.

He was elected Senator, and in 1944, held the presidency of the Second National Congress of Teachers. In 1945, he participated in the Congress of United Teachers, and founded the Teachers' College of Cuba. At the Fifth American Congress of Teachers, he served his third presidential commission. The congress's topic was the problems of democracy in America, and their influence in education. That very same year, García Agüero served as a delegate to the Congress of the American Confederation of Teaching, in Mexico.

García Agüero was a member-contributor at the Cuban Society of Historical and International Studies, director of the radio news program *Mil Diez*, and gave multiple talks about national culture and teaching at diverse institutions.

He not only distinguished himself in his professional life, but also was also very politically active. In opposition to the government of General Gerardo Machado, he participated in a general strike in March 1935, and in the 1937 campaign for amnesty for political prisoners. García Agüero attended the National Convention of Cuban Societies of People of Color, in 1938, and was a member of its National Board and Vice-President of the Provincial Federation of Havana. With Lázaro

Peña, he marched in front of the Presidential Palace on May 1st (May Day), and closed the event by giving a talk at the Colón Cemetery, right in front of the tomb of Rubén Martínez Villena. He traveled to Paris as a delegate at the World Congress for Peace in 1938. He received a simple homage when he visited Spain, and then went on to Second World Youth Congress in the United States.

García Agüero was Vice-President of the Communist Revolutionary Union Party (PURC), and was elected to be delegate at the Constituent Assembly in 1940. García Agüero presided over the PURC's Parliamentary Committee; the PURC was renamed the Popular Socialist Party (PSP). In September 1944, he was elected Senator for the Province of Havana. He opposed the *coup d'état* of March 10, 1952, and was imprisoned in 1954 after being charged with conspiracy. He was set free after he was given political amnesty in 1955, and went underground.

Upon the Revolution's triumph in 1959, he became a member of the National Committee for National Orientation and Integration, and was responsible for the commission that struggled against racial discrimination. García Agüero distinguished himself as Ambassador to Guinea and Bulgaria, the latter being the place he died while carrying out his duty on February 13, 1965.

Cuba's history is rich and diverse, but many dignified Cubans have been relegated. This is even more of a contradiction when it happens solely because of skin color. Salvador García Agüero and Ramón Vasconcelos Maragliano are prime examples of what black men have done for Cuba's intellectual and political trajectory, and they deserve all our acknowledgment and respect.