



HE WHO PROMOTES RACIAL SINS AGAINST HUMANITY

PECA CONTRA LA HUMANIDAD EL QUE FOMENTE EL ODOIO DE LAS RAZAS

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Abstract

Racism is one of the scourges of humanity, the source of multiple conflicts and the cause of great injustices. Hatred of black people is, perhaps, the most widespread form of racism. Martí's anti-racism is spread throughout his work in the most diverse contexts, depending on whether he was given the opportunity to underline his essential idea. The Apostle was aware that it was very difficult to erase from the minds of men the burden of four centuries of infamous slavery and that it was necessary to decisively confront all those who promoted racial hatred.

Keywords: José Martí, hatred of black people, racism

Resumen

El racismo es uno de los flagelos de la humanidad, fuente de múltiples conflictos y motivo de grandes injusticias. El odio al negro es, tal vez, la forma más extendida de racismo. El antirracismo martiano se encuentra diseminado en su obra en los más disímiles contextos, según se le diera la oportunidad de subrayar su idea esencial. El Apóstol estaba consciente de que era muy difícil borrar en la mente de los hombres el lastre de cuatro siglos de infame esclavitud y de que era necesario salirle al paso, con decisión, a todos aquellos que fomentaban el odio de razas.

Palabras clave: José Martí, odio al negro, racismo

Introduction

Racism is one of the scourges of humanity, a source of multiple conflicts in all geographical areas of the planet since ancient times and also a cause of great injustices.

The Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the UN in 1948, in its article 2, establishes that:

“Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”

It should be noted that the attributes race and colour are the first to be mentioned in this document on the list of possible motivations for discrimination, ahead of others such as sex and religion, which are also frequent reasons for discrimination in contemporary times. Racism has been, since ancient times, a cause of hatred among men.

Racism is a historical category that expresses a form of power (cultural, political, economic, epistemic,

psychological) and manifests itself at a structural level (economic, political structures, etc.), institutional level (in educational institutions, health institutions, the labor market, etc.) and everyday level (as a form of physical and psychological violence in the realm of reality and symbols, within the family and in society, in private spheres and in the media).

In addition, there are multiple forms of racism, such as anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, discrimination against indigenous people and, most widely, anti-blackness.

Hatred of blacks is perhaps the most widespread form of racism. Because of this ideology, millions of human beings are discriminated against, undervalued and mistreated in different regions of the world. This fact not only constitutes a flagrant violation of human rights, but also leads to extreme reactions that call into question the rationality of some human beings.

This attitude has been criticized by many personalities around the world and one of the harshest critics of anti-blackness was, without a doubt, José Martí.

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Hatred of blacks found decisive opposition in Martí's work, both in writing (in prose and verse) and orally (his vibrant speeches). The Apostle could not remain indifferent to an injustice of such magnitude that went against the vertical ethics of his thought and action. Martí criticized slavery while it was in force and later criticized the racism that remained as a consequence of such a horrendous institution. The North American society of his time was profoundly racist, which did not escape Martí's gaze and he reflected it in his masterful chronicles, along with his determined rejection of such practices.

Development

The great historical mission of the Apostle of our independence who developed and transmitted the ideology that would allow the Cuban people to achieve their freedom and constitute and sustain themselves as a democratic and progressive republic, necessarily had to consider the problem of races in the formation of Cuban nationality, as Don Fernando Ortiz rightly points out (Ortiz, 2013, p. 119-120).

Martí's anti-racism, as with other dimensions of his vast and profound thought, is not systematized in his work (because he did not have time for it) but is disseminated in the most diverse contexts, depending on the opportunity to underline his essential idea. Nor is it the same throughout his short and fruitful life, but rather it evolved and became more complex as the circumstances that surrounded him opened up new areas of analysis for him.

The first clash with the question of race was the discovery of the horrors of slavery that prevailed in Cuba, where he was born. At the age of nine, during his stay in Caimito del Hanábana, a sugarcane region in the jurisdiction of Matanzas, he saw the mistreatment of slaves. Years later, Martí (1963) would remember:

And what about black people? Who who has seen a black man whipped does not consider himself forever his debtor? I saw it, I saw it when I was a child, and the shame has not yet faded from my cheeks. (v.22, p.189)

So for the young Martí, the black issue was linked to the horrendous system of slavery that dehumanized slaves.

Then came the Prison, the exile in Spain which he took advantage of to study at the University of Zaragoza for a degree in Philosophy and Letters (which was his vocation) and in Civil and Canon Law (to please his parents). At the latter he presented a thesis on political and forensic oratory among the Romans, where he spoke of Cicero, who in his time had invoked fraternal equality and love among all human beings.

His passage through Mexico and Guatemala, where slavery had already been abolished, brought him into contact with the post-slavery discrimination of blacks and generous

Indians, who had to be set in motion so that America could move forward.

On January 3, 1880, Martí arrived in the United States, where slavery had been abolished two decades earlier, so that, in theory, blacks had the same rights as whites. However, within society, the issue was far from resolved.

When the industrial North defeated the slave-owning South in the Civil War, a process of national Reconstruction began that was not free of contradictions. On December 24, 1885, the Ku Klux Klan was founded in Tennessee. It was initially intended to be a social club for fun and entertainment, but it quickly became an organization dedicated to repressing the recently freed slaves, promoting feelings of racial hatred based on a conservative past and support for slavery. The organization expanded to all the states of the South with identical objectives and in a single county in Florida the Klan claimed to have killed more than 150 blacks and hundreds in other counties (Newton, pp. 1-30).

The reaction in the Southern states themselves led to the organization's decline and it was formally dissolved by Republican President Ulysses Grant through the "Civil Rights Act of 1871" known as the Ku Klux Klan Act.

However, acts of racial violence continued, with the most notable being the Colfax Massacre in Louisiana on Easter Sunday in 1873, where 150 black men lost their lives. In general, during the following four decades, violent harassment of blacks continued, with such degrading practices as burning them alive, castrating them, leaving their heads on stakes in public places, making postcards with the corpses next to their murderers, etc.

The young Martí, who arrived in the United States shortly before turning 27, was already a precociously mature intellectual, with multiple readings and deep experiences, which allowed him to study the causes of the phenomena he observed, thus gradually outlining the great vision of a statesman that he achieved in the fifteen years he lived in that country.

In the 19th century, it was generally accepted that there was a superior race (the white race) and other inferior races (black people, Indians, mestizos). In addition, it was the era of Darwin's evolutionary theory, which extended to sociology in a kind of social Darwinism that Darwin himself criticized by emphasizing the role of cooperation, and no longer of struggle, in the process of human evolution.

As Lamore (1995) rightly points out:

All these debates that Martí experienced were an effervescent and complex mental environment within which he lived, and from that cultural context he gradually forged a doctrine about man, his unity, and he undertook it decisively against the theories, mentalities and behaviors that are based on the racial fact. (p. 51)

Thus, in 1881, for the readers of *La Opinión Nacional* in Caracas, Martí (1963) wrote:

What can be said, if it cannot be said without pain, that on the very day these lines are being written (...) a black man, guilty of a serious crime, was torn to pieces in front of the officers of justice by the enraged mob? (v. 9, p. 120)

He had not even been in the country two years before he saw the unequal treatment that official justice gave to blacks and whites. And four months later, writing about Henry Garnet, who professed anti-slavery ideas at Canaan Academy, he told the same readership (1963):

... The pro-slavery supporters gathered ninety-five yokes of oxen, yoked them to the Academy, and tore it up by the roots, while deadly bullets sliced through the air in search of 'that bold, high-browed Negro'. (v. 13, p. 236)

It was precisely in this year of 1882 that the Supreme Court determined in the case "United States v. Harris" that the Ku Klux Klan Act was unconstitutional in part, since the fourteenth amendment of the Constitution did not extend the power of Congress to private conspiracies (Balkin, 2016), which in some way legitimized extreme violence against blacks.

In 1884, when writing a chronicle about Wendell Phillips, an anti-racist fighter, Martí (1963) says: "An Austin, a hunting dog and governor of the State, called the blacks beasts..." (v. 13, p. 64), thus showing that the hostile attitude towards blacks comes from the spheres of power and constitutes one of the lines of the official discourse of the nation.

In 1886 slavery was abolished in Cuba, when the regent María Cristina signed the Royal Order that put an end to this shameful institution, since the Law signed in 1880 by King Alfonso XII and his Minister of Overseas José Elduayen supposedly abolished slavery, but the freed slaves had to remain under the "patronage" of their owners, which in practice only constituted a change of name.

But by that time, the Master had realized that the abolition of slavery was not enough. As Lamore (1995) points out:

But from 1885 onwards he felt the acuteness of the problem he thought had been solved: that of the oppressed and marginalised race within the society that had abolished its slavery. It was then that he attacked racial discrimination, realising that after abolition a radically racist discriminatory system was established (p. 54).

Thus, 1887 will be a year in which the Apostle will repeatedly denounce these racist attitudes in North American society in his chronicles.

February 1887:

A poor black woman was thrown off a tram, and Arthur obtained, amid great celebration, the decision

that for the first time authorized blacks in New York to enter everywhere by their own right on a par with whites (v. 13, p. 158).

May 1887, describing the first time women voted in Kansas, says:

Hatred, an inevitable remnant of slavery, poisoned the battle. "Those below," the black women, how could they not take advantage of the opportunity to join forces with those who once whipped them and today scorn them? "Those above," the "owners," how could they bear in peace that their washerwoman, their cook, their slave of yesterday, could, for at least one hour, do the same thing that they can? (v. 11, p. 186)

August 1887:

They look like bandits, but they are the mayor and his patrols, who have come to kill the blacks of Oak Ridge, as punishment for a black man there living in love with a white woman.

What are blacks to do, persecuted everywhere in the South in the same way, (...) shunned and persecuted in the country where they were born?

(...) The mayor arrived at the town: he demanded surrender from the inhabitants: gunpowder answered him: there were dead on both sides: the defeated blacks scattered: four remained on the field, and eight were killed, without trial, by hanging. Who will punish the mayor, if he is the Law? (v. 11, p. 237)

September 1887:

The blacks, sad because there is no longer a sun that does not rise over the corpse of one of them, killed at the hands of the whites of the South for having friendship or consortium with white women... (v. 11, p. 264)

October 1887:

... In the South, the question in Georgia, whether blacks and whites should be educated together, or whether each race should be educated in its own university, as has now been decided, ended with a peace that seems like war (v. 11, p. 289).

But it was not enough to denounce the visible evils in American society for the readers of *Nuestra América*; an infinite labor of love was needed to smooth out those same rough edges in Cuban society, and in particular, in the part of that society closest to him: Cuban emigration in the United States.

A few days after his arrival in the northern country, on January 24, 1880, he gave his famous speech "Steck Hall Lecture" where he analyzed in detail the causes of the failure of the Ten Years War, and attacked those who proclaimed fear of blacks:

Are they [the colored men, the blacks and the mulattoes] a bloodthirsty cohort, who will, with hurricane blows, tear out by the roots everything that

today sustains the soil of the country? Ah! This is what the Spaniards said about the Indians, as offended, as scourged, as longing as the blacks for their immediate emancipation...! (v. 4, p. 202)

Stubborn history soon proved him right and the Little War that took place that same year of 1880, and which by historical chance Martí himself had to end, failed, among other reasons, due to the skillful handling that the colonial government, in complicity with the autonomists, knew how to do, by showing the libertarian war as a "race war", in which the blacks tried to take power against the whites, managing to confuse and disunite the patriots.

It was in 1887 that Martí began his series of speeches commemorating the beginning of the liberation struggles on October 10, 1868. In the speech given that same year, he stated: "Here we have learned to love that sincere homeland (...) where the whipped slaves and those who whipped them will be able to live in love!" (v. 4, p. 224) and he said this one year after slavery was abolished in Cuba.

In the speech given the following year, he again stressed the idea of the necessary coexistence and brotherhood between whites and blacks, stating:

The word still has a role to take from this beautiful night, and raise as a white banner, the declaration that we are not animated by blind hatred against the Spanish, (...) nor should we continue to enslave with our concerns the black man whom we redeemed yesterday with our bravery, and who died at our side, with no less glory or merit than us, for conquering, for them and for us, freedom! (v. 4, p. 230)

The Apostle was aware that it was very difficult to erase from the minds of men the burden of four centuries of infamous slavery and that it was necessary to decisively confront all those who fostered disunity and hatred of races, which had been fatal in previous exploits. Martí never tires of recognizing the merits of blacks. In his speech of 1889 he will say:

... They were confused in death, because nothing less than death was necessary for the master and the servant to be confused; the woolly man of the Congo and Benin defended with his chest the men of the color of his titans, those who had been his tyrants, and died at their feet, sending them a look of loyalty and love... (v 4, p. 237).

Not only did he defend blacks with his fiery oratory, but he also proclaimed the necessary unity of the races with his pen. In his masterful essay *Our America*, from 1891, he stated: "There is no hatred of races because there are no races" and later he expressed: "He who foments and propagates opposition and hatred of races sins against humanity" (v. 6, p. 22).

And even more so, with his actions, so consistent with his thought and his discourse. As Víctor Muñoz, a Cuban who witnessed Martí's work in Suárez (1998), narrated:

In Tampa, a certain friction began to be noticed between whites and blacks, which was noticed by those who knew the magnitude of the harm that those disagreements, still incipient, could cause, and was brought to the attention of the Master. A short time later, the time necessary for the trip, Martí arrived in Ibor City, coming from New York; he knocked on the door, always open to him, of Paulina Pedroso, the black woman illustrious for her patriotism, and greeting the astonished passers-by with that smile of his enlightened one, and that irresistible and kind gesture before which all pride was abated and all resentment of hatred vanished, he walked her by the arm through the main streets, putting an end, in that subtle way, without saying a word about what had driven him to do it, to what could have been an insurmountable obstacle in the path he had undertaken. The white and black patriots understood him. He did not have to say a word (pp. 129-131).

When Martí denies the existence of races, he does not do so by denying the visible differences between human groups, but rather he tries to eliminate all traces of inferiority that lead to discrimination for this reason. In other contexts he uses the word race, but he does so with another intention, to bring readers under this definition the concept of human groups, more focused on the sociological and closer to what we today call cultures. As Fernando Ortiz (2013) points out:

In any case, Martí tries to deprive the concept of race of a genetic significance of a psychological nature and of a social transcendence, which exceeded the meaning of a mere conventionality of anatomical classification (p. 147).

But while the Apostle defended blacks and called on his readers and those close to him to imitate him, he was also implacable with those who denied their origins:

Life has, among its vile ones, those who deny the womb to the mother, or bear with dull rage the condition that they do not know how to enhance with their virtue, or sell, for the support that will propel them in the world, the honor that can only assure them in it (v. 4, p. 379).

Martí's concern to eliminate, or at least to mitigate as much as possible, the differences between whites and blacks was rooted in the conviction that the solution to the Cuban problem was above all a social question and that building and sustaining a republic, after freeing itself from the Spanish yoke, required the participation of everyone, the effort of everyone. The study of what had happened in the republics of South America after the achievement of independence made him understand that the colony had continued to live in the republic due to social limitations such as regionalism, caudillismo, racism, and this led him

to the conviction that the people had to be prepared for the exercise of responsible citizenship, in which scourges such as racism had no place.

In 1893 he published in *Patria* his essential article *My Race*, in which he again addresses the subject:

To insist on racial divisions, on racial differences, of a naturally divided people, is to hinder the public and individual good fortune, which are in the closest approximation of the factors that must live in common (v. 2, p. 298).

As Don Fernando Ortiz pointed out:

For Martí, the “social question” of the black man was a chapter of the generic “social question.” The former stemmed from a historical and complex economic condition of the blacks, which subjected them to the work of slavery and, once they were freed, continued to humiliate them in all the environments where slavery and its memory extended their shadows. Without a doubt, the social question of the blacks is a problem of money more than of colors; it is not an incompatibility of blood, but a conflict of economies (p. 160).

In the *Manifiesto of Montecristi*, the program of the revolution that was restarting, he made clear once again his ideas on the racial question: “Cowardice might wish to use another fear today, under the pretext of prudence: the senseless fear of the black race, never justified in Cuba.” (v. 4, p. 96)

And in his last correspondence to a newspaper, this time to the *New York Herald*, already from the jungle, he states:

From the free Cuban fields, at the edge of the grave where we buried together the white and black heroes, we proclaim that it is difficult to breathe in humanity a healthier and more vigorous air of guilt than that which with a spirit of reverence surrounds blacks and whites on the path that leads from common merit to love and peace (v. 4, p. 159).

With his extraordinary political vision, the hero of Dos Ríos appreciated the importance of resolving the racial question for the stability of the future republic. He also knew that the battle would be long and difficult, but absolutely necessary. The topic was so relevant to him that we find this concern in the Notes he left in his Notebooks. Thus, he planned to write a book entitled “*The Battle of Souls*”, a series of studies on Cuba, where one of the topics to be addressed would be, among others, “The black race - Its constitution, currents and tendencies. How to make it contribute to the common good, for its own good” and another topic “Blacks-” (v. 18, p. 283-284)

He also planned to write a book, “*My Blacks*” and left a list of the blacks he planned to talk about, the first of them on the list being: “I.-The one upside down in Hanábana”,

which made such a deep impression on him in his childhood (v. 18, p. 285).

Another important note refers:

I wake up today, August 20, formulating in words, as a summary of ideas matured and elucidated during sleep, the social elements that the black race will put in place after its liberation on the Island of Cuba. Not appearances, but living forces. Not the black race as a unit, because it is not, but studied in its various spirits or forces, ... (v. 18, p. 284)

Even while asleep, the Master thought about the Cuban racial question! And in another of his personal notes, he asks and answers himself a question that is still valid today, like everything expressed by Martí (1978):

And would you marry your daughter to a black man? If I found in a black man the desirable conditions to give him this glory and consolation of my life (...) I know that I would have the good sense and courage to face social isolation, and to consent for my part to accede to my daughter's will (v. 1, p.33).

Note that it is clear to the Master that the racial problem would continue to exist in the minds of people and would still generate conflicts such as the social isolation of those who decided to break the barriers established by conventions, but he was willing to face them even on a personal level. Again, the absolute coherence between thought, discourse and conduct. It could not be otherwise, in the case of Martí.

And aware that the elimination of these racial prejudices necessarily involved a process of education, in his most prized educational project, *The Golden Age*, he includes for the boys and girls of *Our America* the story *The Black Doll*, which presents the contrast between Leonor, the rickety black doll “with eyes that talk” and the blonde new doll with her blue eyes “that don’t talk.” The final phrase that Martí puts in the mouth of Piedad, the little girl protagonist who prefers the black doll, is the expression of the feeling towards the black man that animated him from his earliest childhood: “I love you, because they don’t love you!” (v. 18, p. 484).

Conclusions

Martí's concern (and occupation) with the racial issue in *Our America* and particularly in Cuba, was present throughout his life in his writings, speeches, letters and above all, in his actions, loyal and sincere, without demagoguery or falsehoods.

An exceptional witness to the rapid economic development of the United States, he also became aware of the brutal inequalities that were generated within that society, with the corresponding burden of social violence that was exercised on vulnerable sectors: blacks, Jews, immigrants, defenders of civil liberties.

Racial discrimination, inherited from the ideology of slavery, finds in José Martí a formidable enemy who will fight it in every possible forum. The legacy of love that he left us is still valid today: racial violence has not ceased to exist in American society and is now taking on a new dimension thanks to the racist and xenophobic discourses of the United States' power circles. Cuba is not exempt from racial prejudices either, a sad legacy of a past of colonial slavery and neocolonial discrimination.

From his century and for all times, the Master calls us to fight against all racisms, against all discriminations, against all injustices and reminds us that: "He who fosters (...) hatred of races sins against Humanity" (Martí, 1963, v.6, p. 22)

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