

pardos and *morenos* the opportunity to voice their concerns to colonial authorities. They could be particularly assertive regarding issues that could erode their group status or challenge their privileges as servicemen. Overall, membership in the militias bestowed honor and social validation upon a sector that experienced persistent racism and marginalization in Cuba's slave regime.

The geopolitical and social struggles of the era, especially the fears of "another Haiti," intensified race relations in the Americas. Cuba's increasing black population escalated these concerns. Moreover, authorities regarded free blacks' legal status, expanding numbers, and military service as dangerous examples for slaves in the colony.³ Officials repressed at least six conspiracies, several involving militiamen, to eradicate slavery and colonialism. Because of their real and potential alliances with slaves and *creole* dissenters, militiamen of color were repeatedly forced to prove their fidelity to the Spanish Crown.

The following document, published under the title "The Exact Sentiments of Havana's Free *Pardo* and *Moreno* Spaniards" in 1823, is a group declaration supported and signed by two dozen prominent militiamen of color. It is a direct response to assertions in

the Spanish American newspaper *La Fraternidad* that accused free people of color of being dangerous and untrustworthy—as much of a threat as the slaves who revolted in Haiti.⁴ The text serves as a window into the overlapping tensions and nuances of freedom, race, and slavery in Cuba during the breakdown of colonialism in the early nineteenth century.

Questions to Consider:

1. What examples did the militiamen of color offer as proof of their loyalty to Spain and their worthiness of respect as free men?
2. What did patriotism and *honor* mean to the militiamen, particularly given how they claimed the newspaper had described them?
3. What did the militiamen say about how they had been compared with Haitians? How did the militiamen characterize slavery in Cuba in comparison to slavery in Saint-Domingue?
4. How did the militiamen describe race relations in Cuba, particularly the relationship between people of African descent and those of Spanish descent?

Declaration of Loyalty by Havana's *Pardo* and *Moreno* Militiamen, 1823⁵

If only the Spanish empire did not exclude Havana's free people of color, and instead admitted them into the society of human beings, opening its doors to the indistinguishable virtue of all who participate [in society]. If, with philosophical eyes, [the Spanish crown] considered Havana's free *pardos* and *morenos* as men endowed with reason, susceptible of all human knowledge, capable of possessing all the skills of learning and

teaching which we used to sustain the dignity, liberty, and defense of the fatherland. Although *pardos* and *morenos* are both denied and governed by the same laws that rule and govern the whites, we are all united without distinction with the bonds of religion. It is under these feelings of unity and allegiance to Spain that we, the free *pardos* and *morenos* of Havana, have read with horror and fear a shocking discussion by a Spanish American in the newspaper, *La Fraternidad*. Since peace and good harmony rule in this land [of Cuba], [the article] can be for no other reason than to induce malice and bad intentions.

We repeat, we have read and were scandalized by the newspaper article and we have been painfully influenced by that which would penetrate any human and sensible heart such as ours. This injury is so notorious because, while others have gained riches through our immense sacrifices, we have contributed our industry, our determination, and our efforts to honor the grand splendor of said land.

How is it possible that a [colonial] subject could have dictated such inflammatory ideas, in spite of the fact that we have repeatedly and unequivocally proven our loyalty and submission to the governing laws and the authorities that dispense them? Why insult us so, when there is not the smallest glimmer of suspicion, nor the most trivial motive of distrust to fear? Weren't we the ones that garrisoned this location [Havana] during times of war with foreign and powerful enemies? Weren't we the ones that cleaned and sustained the fortifications of Florida, Appalachia, and Pensacola, in the midst of misery and hunger, without complaining?⁶ Finally, weren't we the first to rush boldly to garrison the castle of Saint John of Ulua?⁷ We did all of this despite the abject condition in which we found ourselves, even after obediently and lawfully defending the Spanish monarchy. Who (we question the author of the thoughtless article) are the subjects that comprise and form the riches and abundance of this land? We dare the author of such a slanderous essay to make an accurate claim against the *pardos* and *morenos*, especially those who have farms and slaves, and who can be reasonably compared to the wealthy individuals of [Cuba]. We ask, would anyone of his class willingly want to lose their fortunes?

This is something so obvious and so clear to even the most clouded eyes of reason, yet, why does he induce distrust with the reckless publication of an article so inadequate to the ideas of the day such that it is irrelevant to the present circumstances?

By chance, would the author of the article be prepared to lose his properties in the upheaval that

caused the spread of independence? Certainly not, we believe. How, then, does he intend to persuade the free *pardos* and *morenos*, who comprise this dependable class of people that we are, that we should lose our properties and endure the unfortunate effects of independence?⁸ . . .

To expect that the free *pardos* and *morenos* of Havana are of the same condition as the independent *pardos* and *morenos* of the Island of Saint-Domingue, in the reckless majority, should be addressed. We are indeed free and do not have that yoke to break. The *mulatos* and blacks of Haiti were all slaves.⁹ They were servants of tyrannous and cruel masters. We have not all been slaves, and perhaps the majority of us enjoyed the condition of free men; among our generation, many of us have never been slaves. Those who have been slaves had compassionate owners who treated them as sons. The French government did not allow its slaves their basic needs, much less their own goods. This was not so in Havana where the masters hired out their slaves, enabling them to save a proportion of their earnings to rescue themselves from slavery.¹⁰ Perhaps this was the balance that kept our situation from being like Haiti.

Where did the author's fears originate to induce such distrust? Has he seen movements among Havana's free *mulatos* and blacks that made him suspicious? How can he be so reckless as to form such an unjust judgment of men who have not been involved in anything, although we have seen machinations of other Americans and Europeans? Who has seen us make but the slightest investigation of their

⁸To avoid confusion with italicized Spanish words, underlined phrases denote material italicized for emphasis from the original text.

⁹In reality, not all blacks and *mulatos* in Haiti were slaves. Records from 1789 calculated the population of Saint-Domingue at approximately 28,000 free people of color, 31,000 whites, and 465,000 slaves. See Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 30.

¹⁰This refers to the legal practice of *coartación*. In this process, typically requested by a slave and accompanied by an initial down payment, local authorities established a fixed price at which a slave could obtain freedom through self-purchase. Alejandro de la Fuente, "Slaves and the Creation of Legal Rights in Cuba: Coartación and Papel," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 87 (2007): 659–692.

³The census of 1817 listed 114,058 free people of color, 199,145 slaves, and 239,830 whites out of total population of 553,033. Kenneth F. Kiple, *Blacks in Colonial Cuba, 1774–1899* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida 1976), 86.

⁴The militiamen did not specify which South American country published the newspaper. However, several newspapers circulated in the early 1820s, including one in Colombia named *La Fraternidad*.

⁵Source: Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Havana, Cuba, Comisión Militar, Legajo 60, No. 2, fols. 208–210.

⁶This is a reference to free *moreno* and *pardo* involvement in Spain's conflict against England during the American Revolution.

⁷Spain controlled the fortress of Saint John of Ulua, situated in the port of Veracruz, Mexico, until the early nineteenth-century wars for independence.

disagreements? On the contrary, we have kept the most religious silence, calmly practicing [our military drills]. We have retired to our homes and avoided even the smallest gatherings so that no one could be persuaded that we had the slightest influence in the disagreements [between the creoles and the Europeans]. Our credo, according to the country's adage, is *Lazarus is the one who suffers*.¹¹ This is the irrefutable proof that we value our own interests and want to conserve our properties.

Returning to the article's comparison of us to the *pardos* and *morenos* of Saint-Domingue, we fearlessly say that, although the author is native-born [in South America], he has very little knowledge of his mother country. As such, he ignores the reasons that induced the *mulatos* and blacks of the old French colony to shake off the yoke of their dominators. The same circumstances did not occur here. We, the *pardos* and *morenos* of Havana, have been treated in such a way that there is almost no differentiation between us and the whites. The natives of this land can say that they are our brothers because we have been suckled from the same breasts. Our mothers wet-nursed and raised them with the same love as their own children. The [masters] freed them zealously. Indeed, most obtained their freedom after being treated with the highest gifts and esteem of their owners. We learned the first rudiments [of education] with them in the same schools, experienced childhood with them, blushed in the childish pastimes, and we have always been appreciated. We have received privileges and distinctions from these esteemed men. Commissions of high importance have been trusted to us, and we have fulfilled [our military duty] with precision, *honor*, and the appreciation and recommendation of the Leaders and the Magistrates.

We *pardos* and *morenos* are the ones who carried out the skilled arts in the highest degree of perfection with the admiration of teachers from other learned nations. We have properties necessary to provide for our families, to run our businesses, and to rent indiscriminately to those who need shelter. We have farms and slaves just like others [whites] who own such properties in Havana. And taking these things into consideration, how dare the author of the article announce [his opinions] in order to foster distrust and alarm the peaceful residents of this land?

Generally speaking, he neither qualifies his reckless comparison of Havana's free *pardos* and *morenos*, nor does he rigorously respect those of equal class from the island of Saint-Domingue. It is necessary to explain with which *mulatos* and blacks of that Island he is comparing us, and it is commonly known that the *pardos* and *morenos* from the French part suffered a shameful, cruel, and tyrannous yoke. But it did not happen this way with those from the Spanish territory [present-day Dominican Republic] where the majority were free and native-born in the interior and bordering towns where they lived, and where they possessed so much wealth that they were treated accordingly [with respect].¹² . . . The slaves who belonged to charitable masters, people who treated them with as much love and gentleness as they would towards their own family (witnesses of this assertion are innumerable among those of both sexes, regardless of color). [The author of the article, however,] offers no verification or motive why free blacks who belong to the Spanish empire would embrace the system of conspiracy then or in the future. Rather, we offer our commitment and indelible love of the mother country as the ultimate evidence of our loyalty. The slaves [in Santo Domingo] renounced freedom in order not to abandon their masters whom they looked upon as

¹¹Lazarus became an important figure in Catholicism and in some Afro-Cuban religions, particularly in the Yoruba-derived faith known today as Santería. A Catholic saint linked to skin diseases and healing, the Afro-Cuban Lazarus is associated with the Yoruba deity Babalú Ayé, who is also connected to illness and curing, Christine Ayorinde, *Afro-Cuban Religiosity, Revolution, and National Identity* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004), 22; and Mercedes Cros Sandoval, *Worldview, the Orichas, and Santería: Africa to Cuba and Beyond* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006), 252–263.

¹²France and Spain both established colonies on the island of Hispaniola, Saint-Domingue (present-day Haiti), and Santo Domingo (present-day Dominican Republic). In 1790, the population of Santo Domingo comprised approximately 40,000 whites, 25,000 free people of color, and 60,000 slaves. Saint-Domingue contained roughly 30,000 whites, 27,000 free people of color, and 500,000 slaves. See "A Country Study: Dominican Republic," Library of Congress, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/doroc.html>.

parents. They constantly followed their masters wherever they emigrated, [remaining with them] up until the Spanish part of the island was taken over by Toussaint Louverture's troops.¹³ They escaped and hid between the luggage and mattresses [onboard the ships that had] already embarked, in order to join their masters at sea. The author of the injurious article must have known of all this. No one can ignore such insurmountable evidence of pure loyalty and patriotism. There has never been such an example of resisting a government that offered freedom.

Nevertheless, our condition surpasses the highest level of the *pardos* and *morenos* of Saint-Domingue because each one's condition is at the grace of his beloved country. Dessalines, the cruel and tyrannous monster who aborted peace, set his sights on the capital [Santo Domingo] with twenty-seven thousand soldiers.¹⁴ Only the *pardos* and *morenos* of that jurisdiction, in very small numbers, resisted the forces, sending them in shameful flight with the loss of eleven thousands of its combatants. Given the servitude in which the others [the Haitians] were born, they [the *pardos* and *morenos* of Santo Domingo] preferred their own state of hopelessness to the flattering offerings made by the bloodthirsty conquerors. It is impossible that they [the Haitian forces] would have attempted this with the *pardos* and *morenos* of Havana, so favored by the government and esteemed by the whites. We repeat, we oppose the excessive and highly offensive terms used to induce alarm in the city that has witnessed our fidelity and patriotism. [In other words,] our accusers are coconuts; those who observe silently and rejoice internally over other's disagreements, looking forward to the approaching day in which [the dissenters] might be exterminated. When or how has the antagonistic author been aware of a similar situation in which the *pardos* and *morenos* of Havana paused to observe the disagreements of whites in order to take advantage of the

moment in which we would exterminate them? If he has information, he should present it.

If we, the *pardos* and *morenos* of Havana, were not so satisfied with our loyalty, fidelity, patriotism, and adherence to the governing system, persuaded as we are by all the inhabitants that have placed their confidence in us and, according to the irrefutable evidence of our love and submission to the laws and the mother country, we would think, without recklessness, that this has been an invention to afflict, distress, and demolish us. Fortunately, we all know that this [article] has not been anything more than the ponderings of an emotional, uninformed mind.

How can the author say so decisively that we are of no better condition than the *pardos* and *morenos* of Haiti; that what happened there will happen here? Who would want to ring the bell to signal battle? It would be unprecedented recklessness. Only a man who sets out to offend us and who views us with so much horror could be capable of inventing such atrocious slander.

We, the *pardos* and *morenos* of Havana, leave our cause in the hands of all those who comprise this town. Do unto us the justice that is demanded, and if the judgment turns out to be that we have been reckless, the entire world knows that we will forever deny and dispute these vain suspicions. We swear on the coffers of the mother country that we belong to the same nation as the city of Havana, which we belong to and complement. And so, with these indissoluble connections, we constitute a family, and thus we all have the same desires and feelings. To persuade one otherwise is madness, a crazy presumption of whoever imagined it. We place our forces and bravery against any invasion that might rashly set foot on our ground with depraved visions of domination.

[Havana], despise the impertinent fears of cowards, those frauds void of truth and reason, put to rest any future neglect of your families because we remain in the shadow of good faith and love that you have always shown us. Be persuaded firmly of the fidelity in our hearts and our everlasting loyalty to the mother country.

The *Pardos* and *Morenos* of Havana
Havana, 1823

From the senior officials to his Majesty,

¹³In 1801, after conquering Saint-Domingue, Haitian revolutionary leader, Toussaint Louverture, invaded Santo Domingo and abolished and consolidated his authority over the entire island.

¹⁴After the death of Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines continued as the leader of the Haitian Revolution, became the new nation's first president, and eventually proclaimed himself emperor. To defeat the French and Spanish, he fought fiercely, blockaded cities, and burned towns.

Captain Monico de Flores
 Lieutenant Francisco Abrahante
 Lieutenant Marcelino Gamarra
 Lieutenant Gabino Biera
 Lieutenant Diego Analla
 Lieutenant Joaquin Lopez
 Second Lieutenant Damian de Soto
 Second Lieutenant Pedro del Rey
 Second Lieutenant Carlo de Flores
 Second Lieutenant José de la Salud Martinez
 Second Lieutenant Juan Enriquez
 Second Lieutenant Lorenzo Pobeá
 Second Lieutenant Julian Parica
 Second Lieutenant Matia Santa Cruz

Second Lieutenant Manuel Martinez
 Second Lieutenant Elia Menendez
 Second Lieutenant Juan Sedeño
 Second Lieutenant Rafael Santa Cruz
 Second Lieutenant Eusebio Marrero
 Second Lieutenant Antonio Escobal
 Second Lieutenant Santiago Bechomy
 Second Lieutenant Simeon Pirmienta
 Second Lieutenant Domingo Bandez
 Second Lieutenant Claudio Brindis¹⁵

¹⁵They represented the highest militia rankings available for colonial Cuba's free *pardos* and *morenos*.

Suggested Sources:

Haiti's revolution changed the balance of power in the Caribbean and influenced economic trends and political movements throughout the hemisphere. See David Geggus, ed., *Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Charleston: University of South Carolina Press, 2001). Matt D. Childs, *The 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba and the Struggle against Atlantic Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) addresses black militiamen's involvement in one of Cuba's major slave revolts. Several studies examine the creation and varied roles of militias and Afro-Latino militias in Spanish America: Peter Blanchard, *Under the Flags of Freedom: Slave Soldiers and the Wars of Independence in Spanish America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008); Allan J. Kuethe, "The Development of the Cuban Military as a Sociopolítico Elite, 1763–83," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 6, no. 4 (November 1981): 695–704; Ben Vinson III and Stewart King, eds., "Introducing the 'New' African Diasporic Military History in Latin America," special issue, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2004); and Peter M. Voelz, *Slave and Soldier: The Military Impact of Blacks in the Colonial Americas* (New York: Garland, 1993).

Related primary sources, novels, and films also illuminate the African experience in Cuba. Principal

among these is Juan Francisco Manzano's account of his childhood in captivity, Juan Francisco Manzano, *Autobiography of a Slave*, trans. Evelyn Picon Garfield (Detroit: Wayne State Press, 1996). Travelers from Europe and the United States also detailed nineteenth-century Cuban slave society. For an array of descriptions, see Louis A. Pérez, Jr., ed., *Slaves, Sugar, and Colonial Society: Travel Accounts of Cuba, 1801–1899* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1992). Karen Robert, ed., *New Year in Cuba: Mary Gardner Lowell's Travel Diary, 1831–1832* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003) offers a rare glimpse of Cuba from a female perspective. Cirilo Villaverde's classic novel on nineteenth-century Cuba lends additional insights in *Cecilia Valdés or El Ángel Hill*, trans. by Helen Lane (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Cuban filmmakers excelled in examining historical themes on the screen. *La última cena* [The Last Supper], dir. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea (Cuba, 1976), is based on an actual revolt. Cuban filmmakers also presented the lives of free people of color in *Cecilia*, dir. Humberto Solas (New York: Latin American Video Archives, 1998); and *Plácido: The Blood of the Poet*, dir. Sergio Giral (Cuba, 1986).