

## Introduction

### *New York Stories*

I grew up hearing New York stories. In my Cuban childhood, New York became a city of myths and legends, the setting for all interesting things that ever happened to my family. Back then, I did not appreciate that I was living in a remarkable place and time, the heady Havana of the 1950s. But that was my humdrum everyday childhood world, the one I had always known. By all accounts, New York, which I never visited as a child—now *that* had to be a truly extraordinary place.

My favorite New York family story is the one my father would tell about his first outing in the city. He was thirteen years old and had arrived from Havana on July 1, 1933, on the ship *Morro Castle* with his father, older sister, and one of his younger brothers.<sup>1</sup> The following day, a Sunday, they all found themselves in great seats at the Polo Grounds to watch a doubleheader between the Giants and the St. Louis Cardinals. The scene made quite an impression on my father: it was the Fourth of July weekend and the stadium was festooned with red, white, and blue banners, with a capacity crowd of some fifty thousand cheering on the Giants. It was exactly what he expected the United States to look like. The first game lasted eighteen innings, with Carl Hubbell accomplishing the incredible feat of pitching the entire game, allowing the Cardinals only six hits, no walks, and pitching twelve of the innings perfectly. The Giants won, 1–0. They also won the second game by the same score, but my father did not get to see it.<sup>2</sup> My grandfather stood up at the end of the marathon first game and announced that he had seen enough baseball for one day. They all left for their hotel, the MacAlpin, near Herald Square.

The larger story is how my father happened to be at the Polo Grounds, and in the United States, on that summer day in 1933. He and his brother went to New York to enroll in a private prep school in Long

Island. My grandfather, after whom both my father and I were named, was an orphan from central Cuba who had done very well financially by building a successful leaf tobacco exporting business. By 1933 he was already sixty-two years old and at the height of his business career as the exclusive Cuban exporter for the General Cigar Company in New York. He had just built a spacious home in Havana's most fashionable neighborhood for his wife and ten children, of which my father was the oldest son.

My grandfather's financial connection with New York would have lasting implications for my family, implications that went far beyond economic prosperity. Although one of his daughters was a nun, my grandfather rejected the idea of educating his sons in a traditional Catholic school for boys in Havana. Perhaps because he knew absolutely no English, he was determined to have his children learn the language and the ways of the people in New York with whom he had done business for decades. The location of the school could not have been other than New York, since my grandfather relied on the connections of the president of General Cigar, Bernhard Meyer, the same one who offered the corporate box at the Polo Grounds for the doubleheader. One of Meyer's children, Max, attended Woodmere Academy in Long Island, and so Meyer arranged for my father and uncle to not only enroll there, but also to be boarded at the home of the school's director, Mitchell Perry.

And so it was that my father (and eventually three of his brothers) spent five years studying at a predominantly Jewish prep school, living in a Protestant household, learning flawless English, and accumulating a trove of experiences and anecdotes centered on that other place that shaped his life. That's how I grew up hearing about Sundays in the Polo Grounds or in Yankee Stadium, of the beauty of Penn Station and the majesty of the Empire State Building, of weekend rides on the Long Island Railroad, and about the misery of having to eat beets, cauliflower, and rhubarb pie, but also of the charms of a coed school and especially of one Peggy Cohen.

Years later, when it came time to plan his honeymoon, where else would my father go except New York, to show off the city he knew so well to his bride, who was not Peggy Cohen, but a Havana girl who had never been to New York but had also grown up, as we shall see, with her own set of Manhattan stories. And when it came time to decide on

a school for me, it was not going to be a Catholic boys' school, but one of the many American coed schools that by the 1950s had mushroomed in Havana to serve the huge American community as well as the many Cuban parents such as mine who wanted their children to learn English. It is therefore not difficult for me to see how a New York-Havana business partnership, forged early in the twentieth century, would have a determining effect on my life, embedding in my consciousness a clear personal connection with New York.

On my mother's side of the family my ancestral links to New York preceded the twentieth century by quite a bit. My maternal great-grandfather, Ernesto Fonts y Sterling, arrived in New York in 1879 to attend a school in New York's Hudson Valley. He had come under the guardianship of his aunt Hilaria and her husband, the prominent and wealthy Miguel Aldama, who went to New York in 1869 as an exile from the war for independence that had broken out in Cuba.

In the United States, my great-grandfather learned two things that served him well later in life: bookkeeping and, most importantly, English. In 1895 he joined the armed rebellion that started that year against the Spanish, eventually rising to the rank of colonel and serving as the treasury secretary of the government-in-arms. After the war he formed part, as deputy auditor, of the Cuban "sub-cabinet" of Leonard Wood, the U.S. military governor of Cuba, and later as chief auditor of the new Cuban Republic. His English was especially useful when in 1912 he accepted a position as administrator of two U.S.-owned sugar mills, among the largest of the colossal mills that sprung up in eastern Cuba through the investment of New York-based financial concerns.

After a long illness, Colonel Ernesto Fonts died in 1918 at the age of forty-eight, but not before advising his widow, María Luisa, that upon his death she should take their two rambunctious teenage sons (my maternal grandfather, Oscar, was the youngest) to New York and enroll them in New York Military Academy so they would acquire English and discipline. Almost immediately after he died, María Luisa did exactly that. With her pension as a veteran's widow and despite not knowing a word of English, she installed herself in a Manhattan residential hotel and sent my grandfather and his brother up the Hudson River to the military school. She did not return to Havana until the boys had finished high school, some five years later.

During those years my grandfather would spend as many weekends as he could with his mother in Manhattan, where they would take full advantage of the cultural life of the city. Whereas my father's stories were laden with baseball snippets, my grandfather Oscar's tales favored opera and the theater. He would tell me, for example, about going to the Metropolitan Opera House to hear Enrico Caruso sing the role of Radamès in *Aida*. His favorite stage act, however, was one his mother did not care for: the feats of Harry Houdini. My grandfather would also tell the story of how he met my grandmother at a party in Manhattan just before his return to Cuba. She lived in Havana, but was visiting cousins who were longtime residents of New York.

All of those stories of my childhood formed part of an oral family tradition that I can only describe as New York lore and that served to establish my personal connection with the city. It is a connection I have always felt. Several years after my family left Cuba in 1960 and settled in Miami, I took a full-time summer job at a burger place just so I could earn enough extra money to, at last, take my first trip to New York. It was 1968, a tumultuous year, I was nineteen and in college, and I will never forget the mixture of wonder and familiarity I felt during the two weeks I spent exploring Manhattan on my own.

I once regarded my New York connection as unique, perhaps a combination of fortuitousness and my family's socioeconomic status in Cuba. But after some forty years of studying and writing about Cuba, and especially about the Cuban presence in the United States, I have become convinced that my family's experience, far from being isolated or idiosyncratic, was a microcosm of the evolving links between New York and Havana, links that arose early in the nineteenth century and shaped what the Cuban nation had become by the time of the Cuban Revolution of 1959.

When he felt compelled to leave Cuba in 1869, Miguel Aldama, my great-grandfather's guardian, went to New York, a city he had visited many times before and where he sold his sugar and kept sizable financial accounts. The city was already the most important center of the émigré separatist movement and the principal market for Cuban products, especially sugar. With the start of a new century and the Cuban Republic, those well-established nineteenth-century links multiplied as the relationship between Cuba and the United States grew increasingly intimate

in all areas of life: political, economic, social, and cultural. While the political strings that connected both countries were pulled from Washington, the far deeper economic ties, with all their social and cultural consequences, were centered in New York. Manhattan banks, financial firms, and corporations were largely responsible for the vertiginous levels of investment that flowed into Cuba, especially in the decades before the Depression. From the devastation of the conflict against Spain that ended in 1898 arose a new Havana elite buoyed by the capital that U.S. firms started funneling into the island through investment opportunities opened up by geographic proximity and, especially, a political climate whose stability was effectively guaranteed by the U.S. government.

That massive infusion of capital, engineered in New York, had a multiplier effect in all areas of Cuban life, from the development of Havana's extraordinary architecture and infrastructure, to the arts, music, and sports, political culture and social stratification, and even to the core of Cuban national identity.<sup>3</sup>

My family's experience was part of that broader process. My great-grandfather's education in New York prepared him to serve in that new Cuban world of the twentieth century. Ernesto's English and understanding of U.S. culture and business enabled him to form part of the U.S. administration of the island and later work as a manager for U.S.-owned sugar properties in eastern Cuba, working jointly with a friend from his war days, Mario García Menocal, a Cornell engineering graduate who would become Cuba's third president. Little wonder that Ernesto's dying wish was to have his sons attend school in New York, perpetuating further the family's cultural connection with the city. When his widow made the bold move of taking her sons to New York, she had many Cuban neighbors to keep her company. The residential hotel where she lived, the Walton, on the southwest corner of Columbus Avenue and 70th Street, was owned and operated by the Quevedo family of Havana, who lived in the hotel, along with nine other Cuban families, most of them with last names that were common among the island's elite.<sup>4</sup>

My father's education in New York was also a product of that reality of twentieth-century Cuba. His father's business acumen in the tobacco industry would never have paid off so handsomely without the capital U.S. buyers took to the island, allowing him to greatly expand his market. Eventually, General Cigar would enter into a corporate partnership

with him, investing in upgrading and expanding his processing and storage facilities and increasing his payroll. That permitted him to build that spacious home in the Vedado district of Havana, a home designed and constructed by a prominent New York engineering firm. In sending his sons to study in New York, he was following a well-established pattern among Havana families of the time. And it was not at all unusual to take one's bride to a honeymoon in Manhattan, as did my father, and also Fidel Castro.

This book originated in the realization that my family's experience formed part of a much larger and intricate web of New York-Havana connections. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, New York started replacing Spain as that "other place" in the Cuban consciousness, that place beyond an island's constraining boundaries that sparks the imagination and becomes the primary destination, real or imagined, for those who seek, for whatever reason, to escape or assuage their insularity. It became the place of reference for style, ideas, progress, culture, and economic advancement—in short, the place where horizons could be expanded beyond the possibilities available in a tropical island.

The process of Cuban nation building, which started fairly early in the nineteenth century, was characterized by a distinctly modernist, progressive, and secular orientation. Spain, the colonial oppressor, could not be the model for that process. One revealing symbol of that fact was the triumph in the late nineteenth century of baseball over bullfighting in the scheduling competition for Havana's public arenas. Baseball was embraced by Cubans because it symbolized American modernity.<sup>5</sup>

New York's role in that process was of critical importance to understanding the creation and development of the Cuban nation during the second half of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth century. Establishing the role of New York in the development of Cuban culture and society requires detailing the links by which New York exercised that influence. The Cuban community in New York was not only a result of, but also a critical contributor to, the weaving of a dense and complex web of political, economic, and cultural networks that made New York the critical place of reference for the Cubans' sense of modernity and nationhood. "Emigration," as Louis A. Pérez Jr. wrote, "served as the crucible of nation, for many vital elements of Cuban nationality were forged and acquired definitive form in North America."<sup>6</sup> New York, I argue, was

the most important “crucible” of Cuban emigration and nationhood in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Starting fairly early in the nineteenth century and for more than a century thereafter, virtually all significant intellectual, artistic, business, and political figures associated with the construction of the island nation went to New York, some for a lifetime, others for defining sojourns. And it was not just any city, it was New York. From democratic culture, corruption, stark social contrasts and social justice, to jazz and baseball, Cuban New Yorkers were exposed to what New York had to offer: a look at the new patterns of modernity. As Thomas Bender has argued,

It was in New York . . . that advanced culture and learning first confronted modern urban conditions. Before their counterparts in any of the great European capitals, men and women of learning in New York had to confront the ideology and practice of democracy and unprecedented social heterogeneity.<sup>7</sup>

The Cuban community of New York arose within a broader context of economic and political connections between New York and Havana in the nineteenth century. The volume of ship traffic between the two cities increased tremendously. Cubans went to New York not only to plot revolution against Spain, but also to make a living, importing sugar and tobacco from Cuba, manufacturing or selling cigars, refining sugar or a myriad of other activities, including real estate investment. The separatist war that started in 1868 led to the massive exodus of elites, especially the landed aristocracy, whose lives and properties were threatened by Spanish repression. Their political and economic pursuits maintained them in contact with the homeland at the same time that they became fixtures on the New York social and economic scene. Their weddings and baptisms were lavish events, even by New York standards. Passengers arrived daily from the island to visit their New York relatives and to shop for the latest in manufactured goods and fashions in Manhattan’s unparalleled retail emporia. Insurrectionist leaders raised money to outfit expeditions to the island to fight the Spanish. Havana lottery tickets were sold freely on the streets of Manhattan and Brooklyn. Those who in Cuba ran afoul of the law or of creditors were likely to turn up in New York. Decades before Cuban cigar workers rolled cigars in Tampa, they

were laboring at their craft in lower Manhattan using imported Cuban leaves.

Near the close of the nineteenth century, New York's Cuban community became the political and intellectual center of the definitive independence movement organized by José Martí. It was a time and a place that defined the future course of the nascent nation. While the community overwhelmingly supported the Cuban struggle for independence, it endured beyond that struggle, into the twentieth century and into another phase of Cuba's—and New York's—history.

The twentieth century brought inextricably close commercial, political, and cultural ties between the United States and Cuba, and New York remained, until 1960, the most important U.S. city for Cubans, drawing to it those who helped shaped the cultural, economic, and intellectual institutions of the young Republic. These included writers, academics, intellectuals, businessmen, artists, sports figures, and, perhaps most importantly, musicians. Cuba's foremost contribution to universal culture was indelibly affected by performance venues and record companies in Manhattan. The busy ship traffic between New York and Havana was soon complemented by air service, one of the busiest of all air routes in North America.<sup>8</sup>

New York's Cuban community had many features of what we now call a “transnational community.” The term came into vogue as a major conceptual tool in the study of contemporary U.S. immigration to describe the networks of social, political, and economic relations that immigrants construct that link their societies of origin and destination. “Through these networks,” wrote Alejandro Portes, “people are able to lead dual lives. . . . [They] are often bilingual, move easily between different cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries, and pursue economic and cultural interests that require their presence in both.”<sup>9</sup> Challenging the notion that immigrants become “uprooted” when they migrate, the concept of transnationalism recognizes the many ways migrant communities remain connected, on an ongoing and evolving basis, with their locales of origin.<sup>10</sup>

Although this conceptual framework has been applied almost exclusively to contemporary immigrants, some attention has also been paid to the existence of transnational ties between earlier immigrants and their homelands. Nancy Foner looked at how Russian Jews and Italians in New

York at the end of the nineteenth century sustained a myriad of ties with their societies of origin.<sup>11</sup> Nina Glick Schiller recognized the importance of U.S. immigrant communities in shaping and consolidating nineteenth-century nation-states in Europe and Asia.<sup>12</sup> In an edited book entitled *Chinese American Transnationalism*, a group of scholars of the Chinese presence in the United States examine the many ties between Chinese Americans and their homeland during the Exclusion Era.<sup>13</sup>

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In this book, I seek to correct some of the imbalances in what we know about the history of Cubans in the United States before the 1959 Revolution. Essentially, I seek to give New York its due, and place the better-known history of political activism within its broader and lesser-known social, cultural, and economic context. There is an impressive bibliography on the Florida cigar making communities, especially Tampa, and there is an even larger bibliography on the political activities of Cuban émigrés, especially the life and work of José Martí, who lived in New York during the last fifteen years of his life.<sup>14</sup>

But aside from the political activism of Martí and his followers late in the century, the history of Cuban New York is far less known, despite its importance. New York's Cuban community is one case in which a transnational community played a determining role in the very creation, and subsequent evolution, of a nation-state. While that role was most evident in the political arena, both its antecedents and consequences were much broader, extending to the cultural, social, and economic. To study Cuban New York as a transnational community, we must therefore go beyond its often-studied political activities and examine the broader community, something that has not been done in a systematic manner in the case of New York.<sup>15</sup>

There is relatively little in the existing literature that tells us about the Cuban merchants, manufacturers, seamstresses, cigar workers, craftsmen, shopkeepers, laborers, artists, writers, and musicians, white Cubans, Afro-Cubans, stalwart women, Catholics, Freemasons, and even Chinese Cubans who inhabited the city even before the arrival of Martí in 1880. We also know relatively little about how Cuban New York originated and how the city served as the stage for the earliest efforts to extricate Cuba from Spanish control. The transnational social, economic,

cultural, and, yes, political connections between Cuba and New York were forged decades before Martí became a New Yorker.

The focus of this book is therefore on what we know least about Cuban New York: its rise and development before it became the stage in the 1890s for the development of the definitive independence movement. I also seek to intertwine the political history with the social and economic forces that continuously shaped the community.

This book represents another of the many studies of how New York developed as an international migration destination and as a global center for commerce, communications, and the spread of modern urban-based values. The story of Cuban New York is therefore not just a Cuban story. It is also a New York story. The importance of New York's trade with the island, the city's cigar and tobacco industry, and the political lobbying and activism on behalf of the Cuban cause gave Cubans a level of visibility within the busy New York landscape, yet their presence in the city has received scant attention in general historical works on New York.<sup>16</sup> In part, this is a function of the absence, as has already been noted, of comprehensive studies of the community. Those writing histories of the city have not had secondary sources on the history of Cuban New Yorkers to draw upon. There is also the perception that during the nineteenth century the story of immigrant and ethnic New York is a European one. Latin Americans only figure into that story toward the middle of the twentieth century.<sup>17</sup> From a demographic perspective, that is fair and accurate, but it shortchanges the full scope of New York's history as a global metropolis.

If the story of Cuban New York is an important New York story, then it is of even greater importance to the history of the Latino presence in the city. The population that has its origins in Latin America will soon account for nearly one-third of New York City's inhabitants, an unprecedented proportion for any ethnic group, even for a city built on ethnic diversity. Cubans, however, now make up less than 2 percent of New York's present-day Latinos. Eight other Latino nationality groups in the city have higher numbers. But, as we shall see, from the time Latin American nation-states were in their infancy, in the early nineteenth century, to the beginning of the twentieth century, Cubans were by far the largest group of Latin Americans in New York. To trace the origins of Cuban New York, therefore, is to uncover the origins of Latino New York.

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The book is divided into two parts, corresponding to the two motors that successively in time were the driving forces in the rise and development of Cuban New York: sugar and war. The first one is sugar, or more precisely, the Cuba Trade, as it was known in New York. I open this first part with my arbitrary starting point for the story of Cuban New York: December 15, 1823, the day Father Félix Varela y Morales arrived at a South Street pier aboard a cargo ship from Gibraltar. During this first period a Cuban community emerged from the flourishing commerce between New York and Cuban ports, trade fueled primarily by Cuban sugar. New York's Cuba Trade preceded U.S. independence, and by the first half of the nineteenth century it was a consequential part of the overall U.S. trade picture. It was this commerce that led to the creation in New York of not only a community of Cuban elites with commercial and mercantile interests, but also a community of craftsmen whose livelihood was connected to the port. This first period also saw the debut of New York as a premier setting for the activities of Cuban separatists, especially those who favored annexing the island to the United States. Some, especially the intellectuals, were exiles, unable to return to the island, but most Cubans, especially the traders in sugar, continually moved back and forth, early examples of true transnational migrants. I close that first part of the book on the day that Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, on his plantation in eastern Cuba, declared the start of a war for independence that was to last ten years.

Just when the Cuba Trade was waning, the war that started in 1868 powered the continued development of Cuban New York. That is the subject of the second half of the book. Many of the former transnational elites became exiles, forming part of an exodus that brought some of Cuba's most prominent *criollo* families to New York escaping the repression and uncertainties that characterized the conflict between Cubans and Spaniards. That exodus exploded the city's Cuban population, making it far more numerous than any of the other Latin American nationalities. The decade of the 1870s represents the demographic high-water mark for the presence of Cubans in New York in the nineteenth century. The efforts of the elite émigrés to help the fighters in Cuba became highly contentious, with the exiles bitterly divided over strategies and personalities as the military situation on the island turned desperate.

Eventually, the deterioration of the island's economy because of the war pushed many Cubans from humbler social origins, especially cigar workers, to migrate to New York. The war lasted a long ten years, and although many Cuban New Yorkers returned to the island after the end of the conflict in 1878, most had already sunk roots into the Manhattan bedrock and stayed. The second part of the book includes a look at Cuban New York in the 1880s, a heterogeneous and seasoned community of cigar workers, craftsmen, and laborers, but also of elites, many of whom had invested their wealth in New York real estate. It was also a community scarred by war, with a notable presence of veterans and widows.

The second part ends with the story of the man who, from New York, organized the next, and definitive, war for Cuba's independence: José Martí. In chapter 8 I insert Martí into the story of Cuban New York with his arrival in the city in 1880 and his subsequent activities during that decade. But I stop short of delving into the well-known story of his activism after 1891 when, through the founding of *Patria* and the Partido Revolucionario Cubano, he intensively dedicated himself to organizing the independence movement that immortalized him in Cuban history. That story has already been extensively documented and I could not possibly do it justice here within the scope of this book. I am more concerned with placing Martí in his New York milieu and, especially, viewing what he did in the city as the final chapter in the long history of Cuban New York in the nineteenth century. That perspective yielded what, to me, turned out to be one of the most revealing results of my research: the exceptional role José Martí played within the entire history of Cuban émigré activism in New York. I personally rediscovered Martí through my work for this book. Let me explain.

In many ways, this book was going to be the not-Martí book. The history of Cubans in New York has been so dominated by the story of Martí, the Partido Revolucionario Cubano, *Patria*, and all the well-known activities surrounding the final independence movement that I felt strongly that the story of the earlier development of Cuban New York needed to be told. This was reinforced when I replied to questions about what I was working on: "I am looking into the history of Cuban New York." The usual response was "Oh, Martí, right." Actually, no, I would counter: Martí was certainly not the first Cuban to live in New York;

he was in fact preceded by a larger and very interesting community of Cubans whose origins say a lot about early Cuba-U.S. ties and about the beginnings of Latino New York. That's the untold story I wanted to tell.

But my intent on leaving Martí out of this story was also rooted in a reaction to what I had been taught as a Cuban schoolboy, that is, that the man was a demigod. I was in kindergarten when Cuba celebrated the centennial of his birth in 1953. In my class in *artes manuales*, we had to cut out a picture of Martí, place it in a frame, and decorate the frame. When I got home, I held the picture behind my back and approached my mother: "I have a picture here of someone; guess who it is." "Is it a picture of a woman or a picture of a man?" my mother asked. I thought for a moment. "No," I replied, "it is not the picture of a woman or of a man . . . it is a picture of José Martí." From what I had been taught, this Martí could not have been a mortal; such was the magnitude of his myth among Cubans. I do not remember a time in my life when I did not know how to recite from memory his poem "La rosa blanca" as well as many of his *Versos sencillos*, yet I do not recall ever having consciously memorized them. It's as if I had been born knowing every word of those poems.

During my undergraduate college years I became interested in the study of Cuba, which led me to reexamine and question all preconceptions of Cuban history that I had acquired in my childhood in Cuba and especially during my teenage years in Miami, where I lived after leaving Cuba with my parents. Miami is an émigré community that has idealized the lost homeland. With the intellectual hubris typical of many college students, I was intent on casting aside what seemed like myths about the island's exceptionalism and the prowess of its revered historical figures, Martí foremost among them. I saw the existing biographies of Martí as outright hagiographies and I tried to take a more critical, or at least more realistic, view of his life and work. When I started the Cuban New York project years ago I therefore had no predisposition to center it on Martí. I perceived there was a much larger and older story besides his, and that was the story I wanted to tell. Besides, as I mentioned previously, enough has already been written about his revolutionary activities in the city, leaving little possibility of adding any new scholarship.

I am glad I made that choice and that the book centers on that earlier, largely untold, story. But I discovered that in the story of Cuban New

York there is no ignoring Martí, despite my efforts to do so. My research on the decades prior to Martí's arrival led me to appreciate the political and social tradition in which Martí labored and just how much he creatively and drastically departed from it when he crafted his historical movement for Cuban independence. As I traced the patterns of émigré activism that preceded and followed him, I realized that Martí's political work and thought were truly extraordinary and stand out as unique exceptions to those patterns. To be sure, the man was no demigod, but he combined an unwavering commitment to a cause, one for which he was willing to sacrifice literally everything, with an exceptional talent for communicating and organizing, and one additional and critical element: a gift for political analysis and foresight. He was unlike any Cuban exile who preceded him and who followed him in the quest for a better Cuba. I fully admit that as a result I have now come full circle on Martí, somewhere close to the sense of awe I felt about him when I was in kindergarten.

I am telling a story, so I decided that an epilogue was more appropriate than a conclusion. Rather than attempting all-encompassing generalizations or observations, I opted for an epilogue to tie up the loose ends of the nineteenth-century story of Cuban New York. As the century was coming to a close, Spanish colonialism ended and Martí's worst nightmare was under way. I have entitled the denouement of the story "Martí Should Not Have Died," after the popular song of the same title, because that is the theme that best ties the loose ends together as events clearly demonstrated Martí's exceptional foresight.

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As with any book with a broad scope, this book will no doubt disappoint readers who may have wished to see this or that aspect of the story of Cuban New York receive more extensive treatment in the book. I am cognizant that in telling this story I have had to be selective and limit the coverage of some historical figures and events that were part of this period of Cuban and New York history and that admittedly deserve more attention. For example, I researched the stories of more Cuban New York families than those I finally included in the book. To include them all would have taken the narrative into too many byways, disrupting its flow.

That the book cannot possibly capture the full richness of the story of Cuban New York in the nineteenth century may be one of its greatest contributions. My hope is that this sweeping account of the development of this important yet neglected community will provide a strong foundation upon which further research and writing can be based. There are indeed many more stories to be told of Cuban New York, many more investigative avenues that flow from this book that need to be pursued. There are some gaps that can be filled with research into collections I have not tapped, especially those in Cuba. This book will have served an important purpose if it stimulates more research on Cuban New York and the origins of the Latino presence in the city.

One of the reasons I was attracted to this topic was precisely its freshness. There is a huge scholarly bibliography on Cuba in almost every humanities and social science discipline. As someone who has been studying the island and its diaspora for more than forty years, I found it invigorating to enter an area of research in which I learned new things every day, things that I never knew and that apparently no one else knows either, or, at least, no one has written about them. As if clamoring to have their story told once I started looking for them, Cuban New Yorkers have started popping up everywhere: musty books, microfilms, brittle newspapers, historical markers, digitized collections, archives and manuscripts, legal proceedings, cemetery records, real estate transactions, passenger lists, census questionnaires, baseball box scores, advertisements, directories. I found evidence everywhere that more than a few Cubans walked the streets of the city in which I now live and did things that ranged from extraordinary to banal, from comic to tragic, and from noble to criminal. And their presence in the city needs to be told, for it is part of the history of Cuba and the history of New York.