

interests were affected opposed him. He would be handed a court summons by day and by that night began leveling the walls. The controversy increased as endless points of law were invoked—but meanwhile the pickaxes did not stop. Without that useful and massive violence he would have failed at the very start—he and Oswaldo Cruz. His heroism consisted in making himself insensible to all protests. President Rodrigues Alves armed himself with the same stoicism. The tactic was a skillful one: first tear down, then be free to rebuild at will. . . .

The first section of the new port at Rio de Janeiro was inaugurated November 8, 1906.

That year electric lights bathed the city in their luminous glow.

The Prefect wanted Rio to be the best illuminated city in the world.

It was the touch of magic needed to make the prodigy visible; from the deep ruins of the year of devastations emerged the modern outlines of the rejuvenated city.

“Rio is becoming civilized,” sang the minstrels of the people. The patriarchal city that on other nights, dimly lit by gas lamps, had resounded with their languid serenades, was fleeing before their eyes. The hills of Rio, the Santo Antonio, the Castelo, the Conceição, the Favela, now ceased to be the refuges of poverty. Down below, swarms of workers advanced over the clouds of dust raised by the demolitions. And from the rubble emerged the shining tracks of the tilbury and the newly-arrived automobile. . . .

## 9. OUR AMERICA

*For Cuban nationalists chafing under Spanish colonial rule and observing the growing imperial ambitions of the United States, the confidence and optimism of turn-of-the-century liberal oligarchs in places like Argentina, Mexico, and Brazil seemed a bit naive. In this 1891 call to arms, exiled Cuban poet José Martí critiques the cosmopolitan pretensions of Latin American elites, calls for a new Latin American solidarity and self-awareness, and sings the praises of “Our America.” He also issues an ominous warning about the need for Latin American countries to join ranks to meet the challenge of the “giants with seven league boots,” in particular the United States. The annexation of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines by the United States in the wake of the 1898 Spanish-American War—or from Martí’s perspective, the U.S. intervention in the Cuban War of Independence—followed by a rash of early-twentieth-century interventions in the Caribbean basin suggests that his warning was timely (if generally unheeded).*

José Martí, *Nuestra América* (New York, 1891). Excerpt translated by the editors.

The vain villager believes that the entire world is his village. And as long as he can remain the mayor or humiliate the rival that stole his sweetheart or augment the savings in his strong box, he sees the universal order as good, knowing nothing of the giants in seven league boots that might crush him underfoot or the celestial battle of the comets that pass through the still air, devouring worlds. What remains of the village in America must awaken. . . .

Peoples who know nothing of each other had better learn quickly—if they are to fight together. Those that shake their fists at each other like jealous brothers who both want the same piece of land, or the same small house, or that envy those with better houses, must join together, their two hands becoming one. Those that hide behind a criminal tradition in order to carve off, with a saber stained with the blood of their own veins, the land of the conquered brother already punished far beyond his crimes, if they don’t want the people to call them thieves: Let them return their brother’s lands. Debts of honor are not paid in money as so much a slap. We can no longer be a people of leaves that live suspended in air, our treetops in full bloom, snapping or rustling in response to the caress of capricious light or the whippings and beatings of tempests. The trees must join ranks so that the giant with the seven league boots cannot pass! It is the time for gathering and marching together, and we must proceed in tight formation, like the silver in the roots of the Andes.

Only the prematurely born are lacking in valor. . . . Because they lack valor, they deny it to others. Because the spindly arm, the arm with painted nails and bracelets, the arm of Madrid or of Paris, cannot climb the difficult tree, they say it cannot be climbed. Ships should be filled with these dangerous insects that gnaw the bones of the motherland that nurtures them. . . . These sons of carpenters who are ashamed that their father was a carpenter! These sons born in America who are ashamed of the mother that bore them because she wears an Indian apron and who renounce—the scoundrels!—their ailing mother and leave her alone on her sickbed! So who is the real man? He who stays to help cure his sick mother, or he who puts her to work where she can’t be seen and who lives from her sustenance in the decaying lands with his worm of a necktie, cursing the womb that carried him, displaying a traitor’s sign on the back of his fancy dress coat? These sons of our America that can only save itself through its Indians and that is improving; these deserters that enlist in armies of a North America that drowned its Indians in blood and that is getting worse! These delicate ones, who are men and don’t want to do men’s work! . . .

In what homeland can a man have more pride than in our long-suffering American republics, raised up by the bloody arms of a hundred apostles, among the mute Indian masses, the din of the struggle between the book and the [religious] candle? Never before in history, have such advanced and united nations been created from such disjointed elements. The arrogant man believes that the earth was made to serve as his pedestal, because he has

a facile pen or colorful words, and he accuses his native republic of being incapable or unredeemable because its jungles don't provide him the means to travel the world like a great lord, riding ponies in Persia and dispensing champagne. Incapacity is not in the nascent country which seeks suitable forms and useful grandeur but in those that would rule unique peoples of singular and violent dispositions with laws derived from three centuries of freedom in the United States or from ten centuries of monarchy in France. . . . Which is to say: to govern [in these republics] one must take care to govern well. And the good governor in America is not he that knows how they govern in Germany or France, but he that knows what elements his country is made of and how to bring them together in order to arrive at—through methods and institutions born in the country itself—that desirable state in which each man knows and exerts himself, and where everyone enjoys the abundance that nature gave to all the people that they might make it fertile with their labor and defend it with their lives. The government must be born of the country. The spirit of government must be of the country. The form of government must derive from the proper constitution of the country. Government is nothing more than the balance of the natural elements of the country.

For that reason the imported book has been vanquished in America by the natural man. Natural men have vanquished artificial letters. The native *mes-tizo* has vanquished the exotic creole. There is no battle between civilization and barbarism but between false erudition and a state of nature. Natural man is good and respects and prizes superior intelligence as long as it doesn't take advantage of his submission to harm him or offend him by treating him as inconsequential, which is something natural man never forgives, disposed as he is to recover by force the respect of whomever would wound his susceptibility or go against his interests. By pandering to these disdained natural elements, American tyrants have risen to power; and have fallen when they betray them. [American] republics have paid in tyranny for their unwillingness to get to know the true elements of the country, to derive from them the [appropriate] form of government, and to govern with them. "Governor," in a new nation, is to say "creator."

In nations composed of cultured and uncultured elements, the uncultured will govern through their practice of attacking and resolving doubts with their hands in those places where the cultured don't learn the art of governance. The uncultured mass is lazy and fearful of intellectual endeavors, and it wants to be governed well. But if the government harms them, they shake it off and govern themselves. How are universities to produce governors if there is no American university where they teach the rudiments of the art of governance—which is the analysis of the particular characteristics of the American peoples? The young go out in the world to discover these things with Yankee or French eyeglasses and aspire to govern a people they do not

know. Entrance into a political career should be denied to those ignorant of the rudiments of politics. Prizes should not be given for the best ode but for the best study of the country's characteristics. The newspaper, the faculty, the academy should advance the study of the country's real characteristics. To know them is enough, without blinders or ambiguities; because he that willfully or negligently sets aside a part of the truth falls in the end for the lack of that truth which grows if neglected and tears down what was erected without knowledge of it. . . . To know is to resolve. To know the country and govern it according to that knowledge is the only way to free it of tyrannies. The European university must give way to the American university. The history of America, from the Incas forward, must be taught in detail even if it means not teaching about the archons [leaders] of Greece. Our Greece is preferable to the Greece that is not ours. Ours is more necessary. National politics must replace exotic politics. Let us graft the world onto our republics; but the trunk must be our republics. And let us silence the vanquished pedant: there is no homeland of which a man could be more proud than of our long-suffering American republics. . . .

The continent—thrown out of alignment for three centuries by a regime that denied men the use of their reason, then ignored and turned a deaf ear to the ignorant multitude that had helped redeem it—introduced a government based on reason; an all-encompassing reason and not the academic reason of one side over the peasant reason of the others. The problem with independence wasn't the change of forms but the change of spirit. Common cause was needed with the oppressed to ensure a system that opposed the interests and practices of the oppressor's regime. The [colonial] tiger, frightened by the clash, returns at night for its prey. It dies shooting flames from its eyes and clawing the air. Its going is silent; it comes on velvet paws. When the prey awakes, the tiger is on top of it. The colony continues living in the republic; and our America is saving itself from its great mistakes—from the arrogance of the capital cities, from the blind triumph of the despised peasants, from the excessive importation of foreign ideas and formulas, from the iniquitous and impolitic disdain for the aboriginal race—for the greater virtue, paid for by necessary blood, of the republic that fights against the colony. The tiger waits behind each tree, crouching on each corner. It will die, clawing the air, shooting flames from its eyes. . . .

These countries will save themselves because a moderate temperament that comes from the harmonious serenity of nature seems to prevail in the continent of light and because the influx of a critical philosophy [positivism] from Europe has replaced the guesswork and utopianism that saturated the previous generation. A real man for real times is being born in America.

We were a vision, with the chest of an athlete, hands of a dandy, and forehead of a child. We were a mask, with English trousers, Parisian vest, North American jacket, and Spanish cap. The Indian—mute—circled around us and

went off to the mountain, to the mountain peak, to baptize his children. The black—indolent—sang his heartfelt night songs, alone and unseen, between the surf and the wild beasts. The peasant—creator—aroused himself, blind with indignation, against the disdainful city, against his child. We were men of epaulets and robes in countries that came to the world with sandals on their feet and headdresses on their heads. The mark of genius would have been in joining together, with the charity of the heart and the daring of the founders, the headdress and the robe, in empowering the Indian, in incorporating the competent black, in bringing liberty to the bodies that rose up and conquered for it. Instead, we ended up with the general, the scholar, and the sinecure. Angelic youth, caught in the arms of an octopus, launched themselves into the sky, only to fall back in sterile glory, their heads crowned with clouds. The natural people, pushed by instinct and blinded by triumph, overwhelmed the golden staffs [of Spanish imperial government]. Neither the European book nor the Yankee book held the key to the Hispanic American enigma. Hate was tried, and each year the countries were worse off. Tired of useless hate, of the struggle of the book against the lance, of reason against the candle, of the city against the countryside, of the impossible dominion of the divided urban classes over the natural nation (tempestuous or inert), an attempt is being made, almost without realizing it, to try love. Nations stand up and greet each other. “How are we?” they ask, and with one another they talk about how they are. . . . The youth of America roll up their sleeves, sink their hands in the dough, and raise it up with the yeast of their sweat. “Create” is the password of this generation. The wine is plantain wine; and even if it comes out bitter: it is our wine! . . . [T]o be viable, liberty must be sincere and full. And if the republic fails to open its arms to everyone and move forward with everyone, the republic dies. The tiger within enters through the cracks, so does the tiger from without. The general makes the cavalry march at the pace of the infantry because if the infantry is left behind the enemy will surround the cavalry. [In Spanish the word *infantes* can mean both infantry and infants.] Strategy is politics. The nations must go on criticizing each other and themselves because criticism is healthy but with a single breast and a single mind. Let us reach down to the unfortunate ones and raise them in our arms! Let us melt a frozen America with the fire in our hearts! Let us send up, bubbling and ricocheting through the veins, the natural blood of the country! On their feet, with the happy eyes of workers, they greet each other, one people to another, the new American men. The natural statesmen arise from the direct study of nature. They read in order to apply but not to copy. The economists study the problems at their roots. Orators moderate their speeches. Playwrights bring native characters to the stage. Academics discuss viable subjects. Poetry cuts off its flowing locks and hangs its blushing vest on the glorious tree. Prose, sparkling and discerning, goes forth charged with ideas. The governors in the Indian republics learn Indian. . . .

But perhaps our America runs another risk that comes not from within but from the difference in origins, methods, and interests between the two continental factors. And soon an enterprising and energetic nation that dismisses and disdains [our America] will approach demanding intimate relations. And like all virile nations that have made something of themselves with shotguns and laws, they only love other virile nations. . . . The urgent duty of our America is to reveal itself as it is, united in soul and intent, swift conqueror of a suffocating past, stained only with fertile blood drawn from our hands by the struggle to clear away the ruins and from our veins by the pricks of our masters. The disdain of the formidable neighbor that does not know us is the greatest danger to our America. And because visiting day is at hand, it is urgent that our neighbor know us, and soon, so that it does not disdain us. Through ignorance, it would covet us. Through respect—once it knows us—it would release us from its grasp.