

Jose mark (1999)
Reader: writing on the
Americas, ocean pass
welcome

The Truth About the United States

Published on March 23, 1894, in Patria, New York, this article reflects Mark's views about the virtues and vices of the Latin and Saxon peoples of the Americas.

In Our America it is vital to know the truth about the United States. We should not exaggerate its faults purposely, out of a desire to deny it all virtue, nor should these faults be concealed or proclaimed as virtues. There are no races; there are only the various modifications of man in details of form and habits, according to the conditions of climate and history in which he lives, which do not alter the identical and the essential. Superficial men — who have not explored human problems very thoroughly, or who cannot see from the heights of impartiality how all nations are boiling in the same stew pot, and how one finds in the structure and fabric of them all the same permanent duel between constructive unselfishness and iniquitous hate — are prone to amuse themselves by finding substantial variety between the egotistical Saxon and the egotistical Latin, the generous Saxon and the generous Latin, the Saxon bureaucrat and the Latin bureaucrat. Both Latins and Saxons are equally capable of having virtues and defects; what does vary is the peculiar outcome of the different historical groups. In a nation of English, Dutch and Germans of similar background, no matter what their disagreements, perhaps fatal, brought upon them by the original separations between nobility and the common man who founded that nation together, and by the inevitable — and in the human species innate — hostility of greed and vanity brought about by aristocracies

confronted with the law and self-denial revealed to them, one cannot explain the confusion of political customs and the melting pot of nations in which the *conquistador's* needs permitted the native population to live. With patricidal blindness the privileged class spawned by the Europeans is still barring the way to those frightened and diverse peoples.

A nation of strapping young men from the North, bred over the centuries to the sea and the snow and the virility aided by the perpetual defense of local freedom, cannot be like a tropical isle, docile and smiling, where the fanned-out growth of a backward and war-minded European people, descendants of a coarse and uncultured tribe, divided by hatred for an accommodating submission to rebellious virtue, work under contract for a government that practices political piracy. And also working under contract are those simple but vigorous Africans, whether vilified or rancorous, who from a frightful slavery and a sublime war have entered into citizenship with those who bought and sold them, and who, thanks to the dead of that sublime war, today greet as equals the ones who used to make them dance to the lash. Concerning the differences between Latins and Saxons, and the only way that comparisons can be drawn, one must study the conditions they may have shared. It is a fact that in those Southern states of the American Union where there were Negro slaves, those Negroes were predominantly as arrogant, shiftless, helpless and merciless as the sons of Cuba would be under conditions of slavery. It is supremely ignorant and slightly infantile and blameworthy to refer to the United States and to the real or apparent conquests of one or more of its territories as one total nation, equally free and definitely conquered. Such a United States is a fraud and a delusion. Between the shanties of Dakota and the virile and barbaric nation in process of growth there, and the cities of the East — sprawling, privileged, well-bred, sensual and unjust — lies an entire world. From the stone houses and the majestic freedom north of Schenectady, to the dismal resort of stilts south of St. Petersburg, lies another entire world. The clean and concerned people of the North are worlds apart from the choleric, poverty-stricken, broken,

bitter, lackluster, loafing Southern shopkeepers sitting on their cracked barrels. What the honest man should observe is precisely that it was not only impossible to fuse the elements of diverse tendency and origin out of which the United States was created, within a period of three centuries of life in common or of one century of political awareness, but that compulsory social intercourse exacerbates and accentuates their principal differences and turns the unnatural federation into a harsh state of violent conquest. It is a quality of lesser people and of incompetent and gnawing envy, this pricking holes in manifest greatness and plainly denying it for some defect or other, or this going to great lengths of prediction, like someone brushing a speck of dust off the sun. But it is a matter of certification rather than of prophecy for anyone who observes how, in the United States, the reasons for unity are weakening, not solidifying; how the various localities are dividing and irritating national politics, not uniting with it; how democracy is being corrupted and diminished, not strengthened and saved from the hatred and wretchedness of monarchies. Hatred and misery are posing a threat and being reborn, and the man who keeps this to himself instead of speaking out is not complying with his duty. He is not complying with his duty as a man, the obligation of knowing the truth and spreading it; nor with his duty as a good American who sees the continent's peace and glory secure only in the frank and free development of its various native entities. As a son of Our America he is not fulfilling his obligations to prevent the peoples of Spanish blood from falling under the counsel of the smirking toga and the skittish interest, whether through ignorance or disillusionment or impatience, in the immoral and enervating servitude of a damaged and alien civilization. In Our America it is imperative to know the truth about the United States.

Wrongs must be abhorred, whether or not they are ours. The good must not be hated merely because it is not ours. But it is worthless and irrational and cowardly for inefficient or inferior people to aspire to reach the stability of a foreign nation by roads other than those which brought security and order to the envied nation, through individual

effort and the adaptation of human freedom to the forms required by the particular constitution of that nation. With some people, an excessive love for the North is the unwise, but easily explained, expression of such a lively and vehement desire for progress that they are blind to the fact that ideas, like trees, must come from deep roots and compatible soil in order to develop a firm footing and prosper, and that a newborn baby is not given the wisdom and maturity of age merely because one glues on its smooth face a mustache and a pair of sideburns. Monsters are created that way, not Nations. They have to live of themselves, and sweat through the heat. With other people, their Yankee mania is the innocent result of an occasional little leap of pleasure, much as a man judges the inner spirit of a home, and the souls who pray, or die therein, by the smiles and luxury in the front parlor, or by the champagne and carnations on the banquet table. One must suffer, starve, work, love and study, even in vain, but with one's own individual courage and freedom. One must keep watch with the poor, weep with the destitute, abhor the brutality of wealth, live in both mansion and tenement, in the school's reception hall and in its vestibule, in the gilt and jasper theater box and in the cold, bare wings. In this way a man can form opinions, with glimmers of reason, about the authoritarian and envious Republic and the growing materialism of the United States. With other posthumous weaklings of Second Empire literary dandyism, or the false skeptics under whose mask of indifference there generally beats a heart of gold, the fashion is to scorn the indigenous, and more so. They cannot imagine greater elegance than to drink to the foreigner's breeches and ideas, and to strut over the globe, proud as the pompon tail of the fondled lap dog. With still others it is like a subtle aristocracy which, publicly showing a preference for the fair-skinned as a natural and proper thing to do, tries to conceal its own humble half-breed origins, unaware that when one man brands another as a bastard, it is always a sign of his own illegitimacy. There is no more certain announcement of a woman's sins than when she shows contempt for sinners. It matters not whether the reason is impatience for freedom or the fear of it, moral sloth or a

laughable aristocracy, political idealism or a recently acquired ingenuity — it is surely appropriate, and even urgent, to put before Our America the entire American truth, about the Saxon as well as the Latin, so that too much faith in foreign virtue will not weaken us in our formative years with an unmotivated and baneful distrust of what is ours. In a single war, the War of Secession, more concerned with whether the North or the South would predominate in the Republic than with abolishing slavery, the United States lost more men per capita than were lost in the same amount of time by all the Spanish republics of America put together, and its sons had been living under republicanism for three centuries in a country whose elements were less hostile than in any other.

More men were lost in the United States Civil War than in Mexico to victorious Chile in the naturally slow process of putting upon the surface of the New World, with nothing but the enterprise of popular instinct and the rhetorical apostolate of a glorious minority, the remote peoples of widespread nuclei and contrary races, where the rule of Spain had left all the rage and hypocrisy of theocracy, and all the indolence and suspicions of a prolonged servitude. From the standpoint of justice and a legitimate social science it should be recognized that, in relation to the ready compliance of the one and the obstacles of the other, the North American character has gone downhill since the winning of independence, and is today less human and virile; whereas the Spanish-American character today is in all ways superior, in spite of its confusion and fatigue, to what it was when it began to emerge from the disorganized mass of grasping clergy, unskilled ideologists and ignorant or savage Indians. And to aid in the understanding of political reality in America, and to accompany or correct with the calm force of fact, the ill-advised praise (pernicious when carried to extremes) of the North American character and political life, *Patria* is inaugurating, with today's issue, a permanent section devoted to "Notes on the United States." In it, we will print articles faithfully translated from the country's earliest newspapers, without editorial comment or changes. We will print no accounts of events revealing

the crimes or accidental faults, possible in all nations, where none but the wretched spirit finds sustenance and contentment, but rather those structural qualities which, for their constancy and authority, demonstrate two useful truths to Our America: the crude, uneven and decadent character of the United States, and the continuous existence there of all the violence, discord, immorality and disorder blamed upon the peoples of Spanish America.

Fully aware of their obligations to America and to the world, the Cuban people today are bleeding from the Spanish bullet because of their task of opening to three continents the independent Republic which in a land of men will offer to mankind a friendly home and free trade.

We ask for no assistance here from Spanish America, because whatever nation refuses it to us will be endorsing its own dishonor. We silently show to the people of the United States, so they may do what they should, these legions of men who are fighting for what they fought for yesterday — legions marching unaided to the conquest of the freedom which is to open to the United States the island which Spanish interests are closing to it. Certain of the answer, we yet ask the world if it considers indifferent or impious the human spirit by which a generous nation is sacrificing itself to become accessible to that world.

In proof of the high purposes and cultured methods of Cuba's War for Independence, and in testimony of their singular gratitude to the *New York Herald*, the Delegate of the Cuban Revolutionary Party and the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of Liberation, duly empowered until the present date as representatives-elect of the revolution, do hereby affix their signatures.

The Delegate

José Martí

The Commander-in-Chief

Máximo Gómez

To Manuel Mercado

Dos Ríos Camp, May 18, 1895

Mr. Manuel Mercado

My dearest brother,

Now I can write, now I can tell you how tenderly and gratefully and respectfully I love you and that home which I consider my pride and responsibility. I am in daily danger of giving my life for my country and duty, for I understand that duty and have the courage to carry it out — the duty of preventing the United States from spreading through the Antilles as Cuba gains its independence, and from overpowering with that additional strength our lands of America. All I have done so far, and all I will do, is for this purpose. I have had to work quietly and somewhat indirectly, because to achieve certain objectives, they must be kept under cover; to proclaim them for what they are would raise such difficulties that the objectives could not be attained.

The same general and lesser duties of these nations — nations such as yours and mine that are most vitally concerned with preventing the opening in Cuba (by annexation on the part of the imperialist from there and the Spaniards) of the road that is to be closed, and is being closed with our blood, annexing our American nations to the brutal and turbulent North which despises them — prevented their apparent adherence and obvious assistance to this sacrifice made for their immediate benefit.

I have lived in the monster and I know its entrails; my sling is David's. At this very moment — well, some days ago — amid the cheers of victory with which the Cubans saluted our free departure

from the mountains where the six men of our expedition walked for 14 days, a correspondent from the *Herald*, who tore me out of the hammock in my hut, told me about the annexationist movement. He claimed it was less to be feared because of the unrealistic approach of its aspirants, undisciplined or uncreative men of a legalistic turn of mind, who in the comfortable disguise of their complacency or their submission to Spain, halfheartedly ask it for Cuba's autonomy. They are satisfied merely that there be a master — Yankee or Spanish — to support them or reward their services as go-betweens with positions of power, enabling them to scorn the hardworking masses — the country's half-breeds, skilled and pathetic, the intelligent and creative hordes of Negroes and white men.

And that *Herald* correspondent, Eugene Bryson, told me more: about a Yankee syndicate, endorsed by the customs authorities who are too closely associated with the rapacious Spanish banks to be involved with those of the North, a syndicate fortunately unable, because of its sinewy and complex political structure, to undertake or support the idea as a government project. And Bryson continued talking, although the truth of his reports could be understood only by a person with firsthand knowledge of the determination with which we have mustered the revolution, of the disorganization, indifference, and poor pay of the untried Spanish army, and of Spain's inability to gather, in or out of Cuba, the resources to be used against the war, resources which it had obtained the time before from Cuba alone. Bryson recounted his conversation with Martínez Campos,² at the end of which Martínez Campos gave him to understand that, at the proper time, Spain would doubtless prefer to come to terms with the United States than hand the island to the Cubans. And Bryson had still more to tell me: about an acquaintance of ours whom the North is grooming as a candidate from the United States for the presidency of Mexico when the term of the president now in office expires.

I am doing my duty here. The Cuban war, a reality of higher priority than the vague and scattered desires of the Cuban and Spanish annexationists, whose alliance with the Spanish government would

only give them relative power, has come to America in time to prevent Cuba's annexation to the United States, even against all those freely used forces. The United States will never accept from a country at war, nor can it incur, the hateful and absurd commitment of discouraging, on its account and with its weapons, an American war of independence, for the war will not accept annexation.

And Mexico, will it not find a wise, effective and immediate way of helping, in due time, its own defender? It will indeed, or I shall find one for it. This is a life-and-death matter, and there is no room for error. The prudent way is the only way worth considering. I would have found it and proposed it. But I must have more authority placed in me, or know who has it, before acting or advising. I have just arrived. The formation of our utilitarian yet simple government can still take two more months, if it is to be stable and realistic. Our spirit is one, the will of the country, and I know it. But these things are always a matter of communication, influence and accommodation. In my capacity as representative, I do not want to do anything that may appear to be a capricious extension of it. I arrived in a boat with General Máximo Gómez and four others. I was in charge of the lead oar during a storm and we landed at an unknown quarry on one of our beaches. For 14 days I carried my rifle and knapsack, marching through bramble patches and over hills. We gather people along the way. In the benevolence of men's souls I feel the root of my affection for their suffering, and my just desire to eliminate it. The countryside is unquestionably ours to the extent that in a single month I could hear but one blast of gunfire. And at the gates of the cities we either won a victory, or reviewed 3,000 troops in the face of an enthusiasm resembling religious fervor. We continued on our way to the center of the island where, in the presence of the revolution which I instigated, I laid aside the authority given me by the settlements abroad and acknowledged by the island, and which an assembly of delegates from the Cuban people — revolutionaries in arms — must replace in accord with the new conditions. The revolution desires complete freedom in the army, without the obstacles previously raised by a Chamber without real

sanction, without the distrust of its republicanism by a suspicious faction of the young, and without the jealousy and fears, which could become too great a threat in the future, of a punctilious or prophetic leader. But at the same time, the revolution is eager for a concise and respectable republican representation — the same decent spirit of humanity, filled with a desire for individual dignity in representing the Republic, as that which encourages and maintains the revolutionaries in this war. As for me, I realize that a nation cannot be led counter to or without the spirit that motivates it; I know how human hearts are inspired, and how to make use of a confident and impassioned state of mind to keep enthusiasm at a constant pitch and ready for the attack. But with respect to forms, many ideas are possible, and in matters of men, there are men to carry them out. You know me. In my case, I defend only what I consider a guarantee of, or a service to, the revolution. I know how to disappear. But my thoughts will never disappear, nor will my obscurity leave me embittered. The moment we take shape, we will proceed; trust this to me and to others.

And now, having dealt with national interests, I will talk about myself, since only the emotion of this duty could raise from a much-desired death the man who, now that Nájera does not live where you can see him, knows him better and cherishes as his heart's delight that friendship with which you fill him with pride.

I know his silent gestures of annoyance, after my voyage. And however much we told him, from the bottom of our hearts, there was no response! What a fraud he is, and how callous that soul of his, that the honor and tribute of our affection has not moved him to write one more letter on the paper of the maps or newspapers that fill our day!

There are affections of such fragile honesty...²

PART 3



VERSE