

INTRODUCTION

Metropolitan Debts, Imperial Modernity, and Latino Modernism

It gives us pleasure that with our Latino spirit [*espíritu latino*] we foresee and recommend months in advance what later appears very good to the cerebral and laborious neo-Saxons.—**José Martí**, “Exposición de productos americanos,” *La América*, 1884

Small as they are, their historical origin and development have been such that these Caribbean islands can make highly significant contributions to the economics and politics of a world in torment.—**C. L. R. James**, *The Black Jacobins*, 1963

THIS BOOK is about the translations—in the literal and figurative sense—through which José Martí and other Latin American writers resident in the United States conveyed to readers of Spanish inside and outside Latin America the Anglo-American empire’s new phase of expansion in the late nineteenth century. More free than faithful, these translations of Anglo-American culture into a Latino idiom bring into focus aspects of nineteenth-century history that U.S. scholarship is only today beginning to acknowledge.¹ In the midst of truncated wars of independence and after the gradual abolition of slavery began in Puerto Rico in 1873 and in Cuba in 1880, the numbers of islanders and other Latino Americans in multiracial *barrios* in the eastern United States, especially Florida, swelled to the thousands.² Composed in another language (Spanish), but also in a distinct rhythm, style, and form, such texts parody Anglo conceptions of Latinness that were circulating in the North. However, under the sway of English-

centered literary history, this Spanish-language critique has remained so marginal as to be practically invisible in U.S. American studies until recently. By provincializing the United States as a subculture within the Americas, the translations that are this book's subject stake a claim to define another American modernity beside that of the United States.³

Although in the decade of the 1990s critics began to single out José Martí's "Nuestra América" (Our America) (1891) as a touchstone for re-mapping the field of American studies, Latino migrant writing has helped to define North American culture since the 1880s and 1890s.⁴ Since the late nineteenth century, these texts have defined a North-South axis of power. Within this late nineteenth-century map of the Americas, as Walter Dignolo has argued persuasively, the powerful North projected itself as modern and civilized in relation to a premodern, barbarous South.⁵ Yet José Martí begins to elaborate a Latino modernist form in which to represent distinct American modernities from the heart of the new empire: New York City. Thus, some of the earliest modernist writing was insisting upon another America within earshot of North America's leading authors, and yet remained largely unknown to them. Among the handwritten notes on random sheets of paper that make up volume 22 of Martí's *Obras completas* (1963–73) is a response to a declamation made by a North American about America. In it Martí suggests that the observations of people like himself, a Cuban migrant, never register with the speaker: "He [i.e., the North American] speaks with pride of the American Union, alluding of course to his North America, without thinking that there might be another America" (*Obras*, 22:279).⁶ Martí's quiet, obscure divergence from the unnamed North American's assumptions reveals the thinking process by which a modernist disruption begins. The possibility of another America ruptures the northerner's version of an American union.

In his work as office clerk, journalist, magazine and newspaper editor, translator, and later as a consul for Uruguay, Argentina, and Paraguay, Martí observed U.S. empire in formation from the "cold corner" of his office in lower Manhattan.⁷ Immersed for nearly fifteen years in the Anglo-dominant culture of the United States, Martí ate, spoke, read, and wrote across at least two languages every day, and helped organize the Latino community at night. He made it his business for over a decade to translate the North American misrecognition of itself as the head of a continental body, which it believed itself to be destined to direct. In this book, I follow the course of these translations back to the social texts and scenes that

Martí chose to interpret, and translate them back into English, so that readers of English might apprehend the tactics of U.S. empire that a group of Latino migrants first observed with alarm in the 1880s.

❧ A LATINO PRISM

Drawing on major and minor examples from Martí's voluminous corpus and from other late nineteenth-century Spanish-language migrants and travelers' texts, this book treats Latino writing as a prism through which to reexamine the definition of American literature and of modernity. To read the canonical literature and popular culture of the Gilded Age United States between 1880 and 1895 through Martí's eyes is to see afresh a trajectory of another modernity's emergence. Written from the perspective of a migrant intellectual worker who disidentified with the elite academicism and Eurocentric colonial culture into which he was born, these texts permit us to see the interrelation of a grassroots, anti-colonial movement and the modernist aesthetics that arose in its texts that respond to the threat of response to U.S. expansion.

I borrow the figure of subjectivity as a prism from *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, by James Weldon Johnson, the African American novelist and legendary civil rights activist who also served as a diplomat in Latin America. In Johnson's fictive autobiography, the narrator, a light-skinned African American, fortuitously meets a light-skinned Cuban migrant, who invites him into the tobacco-rolling trade. Thus, the Cuban migrant becomes a lifesaving buoy to the narrator when he finds himself penniless and adrift in the segregated U.S. South. The novel's narrator describes a "dwarfing, warping, distorting influence" (21) that forces the person of color to view the world through the "prism of his relationship to society" (75)." This viewpoint measures the distance between the racialized subject and the ostensibly universal citizen equipped with full and equal rights. It also furnishes him with the gift W. E. B. Du Bois earlier described as "second sight": "the coloured people of this country know and understand the white people better than the white people know and understand them" (Johnson, *Autobiography*, 22). Imbued with this knowledge and insight, the narrator, finding himself adrift and penniless in the segregated U.S. South, finds in the Cuban migrant of the tobacco-rolling communities of south Florida a friend who helps him locate employment and a community. This encounter between two light-skinned people of color—a large-

mustached, small-bodied, proindependence tobacco worker, whose physical description suggests Martí's own, and an African American pianist who discovers a trans-American range of black cultures in the South—evokes a solidarity that has not always endured into the twentieth century, either in the Cuban Republic or in south Florida. Nevertheless it documents an ephemeral historical reality and invites comparison and study of the African American, Latino, Caribbean, Latin American, and other postcolonial theories of subjectivity.⁸ Situated in the midst of the racial violence, urbanization, immigration, and economic disparities of the post-Reconstruction period, Martí interpreted U.S. modernity from the perspective of a multi-racial Caribbean political movement, which, in the U.S. North and South, did not conform to, and even openly resisted, practices of racial segregation, at least in the late 1800s.⁹

The relationship of Martí, a non-Anglo working migrant, to the society of the Gilded Age shaped the prism through which he interpreted the expanding modernity of the United States. Unlike Edgar Allan Poe's "man in the crowd," and Charles Baudelaire's flâneur, who studied with fascination and sometimes terror an urban crowd from a café window, Martí observed the imperial project in the guise of a democratic republic from the perspective of the streetcar passenger, a participant in a demonstration for the eight-hour workday, or a person amid the throngs watching a burning building from the street. His writing makes the effects of empire tangible to Spanish-language readers, who were predominantly, apart from the tobacco workers, a light-skinned, educated minority, who viewed the United States from a distance and in terms of the prosperity and comfort of illustrated catalogues that circulated in conjunction with its commercial expansion into Latin America. Viewing such shiny, novel objects without observing the imperial conditions of production exacerbated these readers' misperceptions. Martí's prolix phrasing and strange images attempted to translate the discrepancy between this "deceptive surface" (*Obras*, 6:22) or "mask" (*antifaz*) (6:52) and the hidden aspects of modernity in the United States. Martí alerted his readers to this tendency of U.S. modernity to hide one face behind the other, and to approach other American nations with "with friendship in one hand and a snake in the other" (12:206).¹⁰

After the annexation of half of Mexico in 1848 and William Walker's claiming of Nicaragua in 1855, U.S. imperialism in Latin America began to adopt less overt shows of force, employing instead such means as political pressure, loans, cultural narratives, and training in order to preserve these

countries' dependence on the United States. Because this tactic of imperialism advances at the invitation of the dependent nation's elite representatives themselves, it effectively claims to benefit the less powerful nation by modeling an exemplary modernization, with the most humane intentions, and in keeping with its God-given civilizing obligations.¹¹ Thus in the 1880s and 1890s, the United States lurched into a new mode of economic and cultural imperialism, with the emergence of what Donald Pease has termed "global domination without colonies."¹²

IMPERIAL MODERNITY AND AMERICAN ALTERNATIVES

I use the term "imperial modernity" to define a political and cultural project in pursuit of political and economic expansion. Martí begins to perceive and theorize this threat to his island shortly after his arrival to stay in New York in 1881. In 1885, Martí observes imperial modernity at work in a new economic agreement with Spain that "in such an absolute way binds the existence of the island to the United States that it is only a step away from the pouring of one country into the other, which may end up, to the great suffering of many Latino souls [almas latinas], with Spanish America losing the island that should have been its bulwark" (*Obras*, 8:88). The term "imperial modernity" refers to just this state of penetration of a country by a proximate and growing imperial power, the United States. We note how Martí associates the experience of vulnerability with the adjective "Latino." The cultural processes of imperial expansion laid the groundwork for annexation of the still colonized islands of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, among others. Perceiving that "modernity" in the singular served to disguise a new U.S. empire, Martí begins to define an American future in which Latin America's self-governing nations might coexist with the powerful northern republic. This other American modernity spurs aesthetic innovation that makes available conflicting and simultaneous interpretations from the perspective of distinct modernities, examples of which we will explore in the chapters that follow. In its literary form, Martí's prose observed and commented on the nonuniversality of the bourgeois individual's self-mastery as it criticized the protection of the interests of a class of such individuals at the head of a national government in the Americas. The formal aspect of Martí's texts, which many have described as modernist, conveys the limited ability of European- or U.S.-identified individuals to adequately recognize and value the heterogeneity

of Latin American cultures. As Raymond Williams has shown, unreflecting celebrations of mastery are inevitably bound up with imperial processes of exploiting material resources and human labor.¹³ Thus, self-mastery and self-transparency are not readily available in Martí's American modernity. Critical self-study and constant translation are vital to the elaboration of another American modernity.

The phase of imperial modernity in the United States that concerns us here—the “ruinous times” in which Martí self-consciously launched his manifesto about modernist poetry in his prologue to Juan Antonio Pérez Bonalde's *El Poema del Niágara*—shaped Latino modernist form. In *Translating Empire* I adopt from a heterodox Marxist, poststructuralist, and postcolonial tradition the assumption that aesthetic and social processes are interrelated and mutually illuminating. If the U.S. Declaration of Independence in 1776 was signed on the backs of slaves—as Martí famously noted in “Madre América” (Mother America)—the radical ambiguity of Latino modernism emerges in conjunction with the foreign and domestic crises of the age. The time of Martí's sojourn in New York opens with the United States' botched embroilment in the War of the Pacific (1879–83) and concludes with the first Pan-American conferences (1889–91) and the start of the second strike for Cuban independence in 1895. It coincided with the failure of post-Civil War Reconstruction and lynch law's harvest of strange fruit across the South and Midwest; the economic stratification and political corruption of the Gilded Age; the exclusion of Chinese immigrants and the concomitant anti-Asian violence; massive immigration and anti-immigrant and anti-working-class violence, especially the hanging of labor activists who were leaders of the movement for an eight-hour workday and who demonstrated in Haymarket Square, Chicago; and the military subordination of Native Americans as part of the forceful appropriation of remaining Indian territory. *Translating Empire* rereads Martí's journalism and other writings in relation to the cultural, literary, and political material of this period with the hope that readers in the United States, cultural brokers and designers of curriculum, students of American literature and politics—in the broadest sense—may see how the writing and redefinition of America by Martí and his contemporaries seek to revise our understanding of the late 1800s. The gap between the original texts and Spanish translations, and between U.S. imperial modernity and another American modernity, invites new and sustained reading and interpretation, with an eye to how the migrant Latino text maps different possible futures.

Both Mary Louise Pratt and Frederic Jameson note that the term “modernity” is defined in contrast to a premodern realm of unfreedom, barbarian irrationality, slave mentality, backwardness, or incapacity for self-government, across a wide range of periods.¹⁴ With decaying European monarchies and the barbarous “subaltern” as foils, modernity in the service of empire functions as a transhistorical identity discourse for a European-derived, bourgeois, “white world,” without acknowledging its investment in either whiteness or empire.¹⁵ In conceptualizing modernity as a parri- cidal rupture and a new beginning in a virgin land, European philosophical perspectives have historically interpreted colonization as a discovery that gently pushes “primitive” cultures or groups toward “advancement” and efficiency.¹⁶ Martí questions this Hegelian, stagist understanding of history, and challenges the view of North America leading the continent with a European torch and generously extending its technology and saving ideals to immature, unfit, native and mestizo cultures.¹⁷

Latino/a migrants represent a threatening variable if they do not conform to the progress narrative associated with imperial modernity. The assumption held by those at the center of imperial power (the “metropolis”) that non-European arrivants must desire to become absorbed into a “universal” European-identified culture obscures from metropolitan view the history of violence toward migrants. By contrast, migrants’, especially Latinos’, marginal texts and ironic reactions, often in popular genres, such as the newspaper column, bring into relief the tense relations between center and periphery, and thus make it possible to read these differences.¹⁸

The now commonplace spatial metaphor of a “contact zone” suggests a means by which peripheral cultures launch self-critical, self-interrogating alternative modernities. Mary Louise Pratt, in her theorizing of the “contact zone”—which (as I argue in chapter 1) is indebted to the Brazilian Silviano Santiago’s concept of a Latin American “space in-between”—reveals how metropolitan literary history, institutions, and genres help blind the dominant culture to the multiple ways that, in fact, “the periphery determines the metropolis.”¹⁹ Pratt’s groundbreaking essay on travel writing and imperialism notes that a European tradition of travel writing obsessively focused on the periphery and thus distracted the metropolitan culture from its dependence on the resources, techniques, and labor from such places as Latin America. As a Latino migrant in the North, Martí thwarts the notion of progressive radiation from center to periphery or through stages of upward development from the barbaric South to the

civilized North. In his reading, the North's impositions on the periphery in the colonizing process become objects of critical inquiry. What often figure officially as civilization's "gifts" to the colonizing world here appear as products of the periphery's transformation of the metropolis.²⁰

Martí regularly called his readers' attention to inversions of the assumed vectors of imperial modernity in the Americas. He and the books he reviewed in his journalism gleefully demonstrate the colonial powers' belated arrival to and appropriation of the ideas or practices of their peripheral modernity.²¹ In his 1880 review of Gustave Flaubert's posthumously published work *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1880), Martí announces in English that readers of the review will be indebted to him for the advance notice of the work's publication: "[Flaubert's last work] may soon be translated and the public will be obliged to us for noticing it beforehand."²² According to Martí, Flaubert's novel depicts two copyists in terms that suggest a "bourgeois Quixote" making his way through modernity, only to find the limits of the march of progress and the evanescence of the master narratives of enlightenment. The novel that Martí regards as a quintessentially modern text interrogates a key assumption of such narratives: "Bouvard thought: 'Ah, progress, what a farce!'"²³

In the realm of legal theory, we find similar evidence of belated arrival of the colonial centers. The Argentine jurist and early crime fiction writer Luis A. Varela argues that the American republics of Argentina, the United States, and Chile can all claim the "glory" of having already put into practice what the European capitals of the nineteenth century were merely beginning to discuss in the 1870s. Varela's treatise *Democracia práctica* (Practical Democracy) (1876) favors the safeguarding of minority viewpoints within the seat of government. Martí, in reviewing the book, would have relished Varela's comment concerning European attitudes toward South American nations: "The sages of Europe, who once looked upon South-American Republics as savage because in their modest poverty they could not send them large embassies, today react to these Republics' opinions, when they study political and constitutional law" (xv). Varela notes his happiness at being able to make this point concerning South America's exemplary role as model for Europe in Paris, the glorious City of Light, where "everyone seems to be ignorant of this fact" (xv). After living in the United States for a few years, Martí diverged from Varela's inclusion of the United States as a model for Latin America (Varela 123), but he shared with Varela the goal of correcting the misperception of Europe as autonomously

initiating modernity and generously extending its civilizing light to the rest of the world.²⁴

Martí's goal is to provincialize not just Europe, but also the United States. He proclaims this agenda in New York, where many regularly demonstrated ignorance of Latin America's independent, creative aesthetic, theoretical and technological capabilities. Martí makes his review of Varela's book an occasion to celebrate the "ambitious imaginative faculties of America's sons" and to call for further theorizing from the distinct perspective of a "heterogeneous" America (*Obras*, 7:347). In his review, Martí associates liberty with acts of critical interpretation, especially self-interpretation. Varela's treatise, in his reading, defines a crucial condition of modern self-government as the "pacific practice of critique" (*ejercicio pacífico del criterio*) (7:347). The term "criterio," from the Greek noun *kriterion* and its root in the verb *krinein*, to judge, refers to a regularly repeated *exercise* or a *practice* in judgment. It suggests a critical subjectivity in formation. Martí was to engage in this practice and to enjoin others to develop this faculty throughout his life.

Against a common misreading of Martí as an uncritical celebrant of Euro-American modernity and technique, I hope in *Translating Empire* to demonstrate Martí's imagining of alternatives to the cultural models of progress available in the United States and Europe.²⁵ Martí in fact envisions an "alternative modernity" that acknowledges different cultural locations in the Americas, and rejects the idea that modernity is of strictly European origin. Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, in his edited collection *Alternative Modernities*, draws on Michel Foucault and Walter Benjamin's interpretations of Charles Baudelaire's essays to define modernity as an attitude of questioning the present, pertaining to an individual or a people. Alternative modernities follow from an attitude and a relative location rather than from a specific content or essence. Indeed, Martí's time and place, especially for a colonial subject in the ostensible cradle of democracy, led him to constantly pose questions about his present: "in this epoch of the renovation of the human world, disconsolate eyes turn full of questions toward empty skies and moan alongside the cadavers of gods" (*Obras*, 10:226). Even Martí's famously paradoxical definition of "patria" as "that portion of humanity that we see more closely and in which it was our fate to be born [nos tocó nacer]" (5:468) attributes the given quality of nationality to an attitude and a perspective rather than a fixed content. Following Gaonkar's formulation, we might say that Martí demands that his Latino community,

the island of Cuba and Latin America as a whole, be able to “‘make’ themselves modern, as opposed to being ‘made’ modern by alien and impersonal forces,” in keeping with their distinct culture and history.²⁶

Like Gaonkar, Roberto Schwarz, in his essay “Pressupostos, salvo engano, de ‘Dialética da Malandragem’” (commenting on Antonio Candido’s essay “Dialectics of Malandroism”), nuances the relation between modernist literary form and politics. I will draw on Schwarz’s argument in framing my book in terms of conflicting American modernities rather than in terms of a single hemisphere or a single modernity. On one hand, Schwarz concurs with most scholars of modernism that the social processes that most illuminate it are not national, even though nations then and now constitute the primary form of political and cultural representation. Imperial expansion and transnational exploitation provide the backdrop for the emergence of modernism in various parts of the globe, and the Americas are no exception. On the other hand, seemingly against this transnational political and economic frame, Schwarz stakes a claim and valorizes the knowledge available through a nondominant (national or regional) culture and literary tradition. Through “*nossa literatura*,” says Schwarz in 1979, it is possible “to inaugurate a critical inquiry of the contemporary world.”²⁷ To what does the “our” in “our literature” refer, so as to define a way of reading rather than an essential cultural content? This use of “our” stakes a Brazilian claim to read and define themselves in the world, as the Trinidadian historian C. L. R. James describes the West Indies as a quintessentially modern, *sui generis* culture that evades entirely the West’s racial categorization.²⁸

Similarly, Martí’s “our” in “Our America” refers to heterogeneous, transnational migrant Latino and Latin American cultures that interpret and redefine America. In his essay “The Argentine Writer and Tradition,” Jorge Luis Borges associates an Argentine perspective with an irreverent and intimate way of reading the Western European literary tradition. He takes the universe as the Argentine writer’s subject and field, and does not restrict him or her to descriptions of a national picturesque, local color, or customs of the country (425–26). Martí similarly defines the collective Latino and Latin American subjectivity as amounting to nothing more—and nothing less—than constructions based on distinct historical conditions. Decades before the Martinican poet and political leader Aimé Césaire’s influential assertion that “no race possesses the monopoly of beauty, of intelligence, of force,” Martí declared that “no nation on earth has a

monopoly on human virtue” (*Obras*, 8:381).²⁹ Like James, Borges, Schwarz, and Césaire, Martí strategically deploys antiessentialist concepts of nationality, *raza*, or group particularity to problematize and redefine Enlightenment claims to universality.

Because alternative modernities follow from a historically structured attitude rather than a fixed or pure essence, they suggest no fixed conception of what will constitute each modernity’s end. Conflicts between American modernities begin, however, with the locked horns of dominant and peripheral societies in this hemisphere. So although there are multiple modernities, empire acts as the connective tissue that shapes the relations of force among them. The profit extracted through the interaction of metropolitan centers and their peripheries entices the builder of empire to the shift from colonization and slavery to the expansion of spheres of influence, which in turn brings industrialization, urbanization, and migration.

Can an alternative modernity exist without ejecting a radicalized abject “nonmodern” from its ranks? Like the Latin American and Caribbean theorists to whom I make reference above, Martí privileges ethical criteria over the physical criteria that predominated in nineteenth-century racial discourse in his definition of an alternative modernity. Martí’s texts raise the question of who gets to define the modern and what counts among the formal qualities of modernist poetics. In raising these questions, he also seeks to wrest the future from imperial modernity. When did Caribbean postcolonial criticism begin to sound out the hollowness of Enlightenment narratives that read the story of capitalist expansion as progress? According to David Scott’s *Conscripts of Modernity* (2004), C. L. R. James, in his book *The Black Jacobins*, presents Toussaint L’Ouverture’s postcolonial predicament as a tragic one, in a self-critical revision of the 1938 edition of his history of the Haitian revolution’s leader, which originally presented a romantic narrative of anticolonial redemption. According to Scott, in the wake of the conference of Asian and African nations in Bandung in 1955, a shift occurred whereby anticolonial nationalisms adopted a tragic, postcolonial skepticism toward Enlightenment narratives of progress. As James notes, this insight follows from Caribbean observation of a colonial power “more naked [there] than in any other part of the world” (*Black Jacobins*, 408). This instructive nakedness shapes what Scott calls the “Caribbean’s modernity” (*Conscripts of Modernity*, 125). In James’s revised version of his argument, Toussaint lives the tragic dilemma of postcolonial Caribbean modernity, including its revolutionary incompatibility with colonial

power. This tragic practice of modernity represents the Caribbean alternative to the homogeneous empty progress of imperial modernity; it is a product of a “peculiar origin and a peculiar history” (*Black Jacobins*, 391). Caribbean modernity constitutes something new that these island cultures bring to the comity of nations. Although belatedly theorized by James and Scott, this condition helps explain the circumscribed revolutionary options available to Toussaint in the age of Enlightenment, and to postcolonial nations such as Cuba.

David Scott’s analysis of C. L. R. James’s revisions of the L’Ouverture story extends the time frame of Caribbean disenchantment with imperial modernity back to L’Ouverture. Although James excludes Martí and the great mulatto military strategist of Cuba’s Wars of Independence, Antonio Maceo, from a tragic postcolonial modernity, a closer look at Martí’s writings reveals his affinities with a tragically modernist—rather than a soteriologically romantic—postcolonial tradition.³⁰ Shakespeare’s tragic figure captivated Martí. He translated *Hamlet* while studying in Cuba, and also offered dramaturgical comments on how to enact Shakespeare’s character as internally divided. Hamlet, he said, ought to be played as wielding the dreadful curiosity that Martí attributed to several other thinkers and inventors, including Charles Darwin, Thomas Edison, and Wendell Phillips, as a daring Promethean who “turned to the sky in demand of its existence and of its secrets” (*Obras*, 22:280). Yet, the tragic hero’s curious questioning begins with a sense of the immensity that escapes human knowing. In 1886, Martí admired Edouard Manet’s *Portrait of Jean Baptiste Fauré as Hamlet*, 1876–77, because it revealed the “eye of someone who wants to know the immensity and does not know it” (*Obras*, 10:440). These phrases relate closely to Martí’s own position. Martí died in the first skirmishes of the 1895 war of independence, without guarantees as to the future status of Cuba. Another reading in terms of the tragic postcolonial present in which he lived and died, rather than in terms of a triumphant romantic nationalist narrative, mitigates the smoothing over of vexed ambiguities related to his position as a migrant from a colonized culture who lived all his life outside the framework of national sovereignty.

Like Scott, Sibylle Fischer conceives of a single modernity with a double face that comes from its inception in Hegel, and she agrees that ambivalence about it arrives belatedly, “probably with World War II and Nazi rule,” also in the wake of which James revised his *Black Jacobins*.³¹ Underlining the doubleness of modernity as both a project of genocidal Euro-

pean expansion and racialization, and as a means to emancipation and democratization, Fischer depicts radical black antislavery as a disavowed part of a whole, as the hidden face behind the smiling mask of a dialectical Enlightenment. Martí denounces precisely this masked, duplicitous quality of imperial modernity in order to make space for another practice of American modernity—and he does this in the 1880s, long before the time that Fischer suggests as the beginning of such ambivalence. His alternative America takes shape in intimate proximity to imperial modernity: his position is that of a translator inside the empire’s belly.

CREOLE MODERNIZATION AND BLACK ANTISLAVE INSURGENCY

In the racially charged environment of the post-Reconstruction U.S. South, and post-emancipation Cuba, the struggles between racism and anti-racism preoccupied Cuba’s pro-independence movement, as Ada Ferrer has shown. What was Martí’s relationship, on the one hand, to the light-skinned Creole elite in exile and in Cuba and, on the other, to black insurgent subjects? To what extent does Martí’s revolutionary project resemble earlier Creole-led modernization and national integration movements that came into existence through the suppression of black aesthetic and political practices that carried forward the explosive effects of the Haitian revolution? In *Modernity Disavowed*, Fischer raises questions about white Cuban abolitionism of the early nineteenth century as she documents the autonomist, integrationist Creole elite’s fantasies about and disavowals of a radical antislavery project commanded by black people themselves—the subjects that Toussaint L’Ouverture led to victory or inspired to revolt elsewhere in the Caribbean. These questions become especially urgent given assertions from various quarters that Martí’s revolution was neither antiracist nor anticapitalist.

For example, in response to British historian Raymond Carr’s laudatory review of Phillip Foner’s multivolume edition of Martí in English, Carlos Ripoll claimed that “Martí’s political writings give the lie to [Carr’s] assertion and the notion that Martí gave ‘social content’ to the war.”³² Ripoll—a leading scholar on Martí—tells us that Carr, like many others, has been duped by the regime in Havana into endorsing what Ripoll calls the “Marxification of Martí.” In Ripoll’s view, a sustained ideological campaign on the part of Havana has implanted in Carr the “misconception” that

Martí struggled against racial and economic inequality. Ripoll's comments invite the reader to infer that Martí went so far as to promote racial inequality and that Martí envisioned an anti-Marxist revolution *avant la lettre*. Ripoll notes, for example, that Martí volunteered nights at La Liga, the night school for Afro-Antilleans founded by Afro-Cuban educator, independence movement leader, and journalist Rafael Serra during his final years of full-time revolutionary organizing—not, he claims, in order to train future citizens for participation in a self-governing, newly multi-racial nation (which would have furthered the fight for equality) but with the “only purpose” of offering charity to “a small number of poor Cuban and Puerto Rican workers.”³³

Why does Ripoll insist that Martí did not have motives with social content in educating recently emancipated and working-class Afro-Antilleans? Why would he classify Martí's friend Rafael Serra, a member of Martí's revolutionary organization and a leader of a school designed to aid Afro-Antillean workers, as “ultra-conservative,” on the one hand, and an object of Martí's pity, on the other?³⁴ This debate over the interpretation of Martí's relationship to a mostly black Cuban and Puerto Rican migrant working class becomes clearer if we examine his relationship to several generations of a light-skinned Creole elite.

Books by Kirsten Silva Gruesz, Anna Brickhouse, and Rodrigo Lazo illuminate the multilingual and deterritorialized routes and roots of Latino or trans-American writing in the work of mainly light-skinned Creole elites of early to mid-nineteenth-century Cuba. They shed light on the question of Martí's relationship to earlier generations of Latino and Latin American writers, and especially to former slaveholders from the islands. As Silva Gruesz has it, the earlier generations in New Orleans, Philadelphia, New York, and San Francisco were “ambassadors,” well-heeled diplomats, translators, generals, and expeditionaries who advocated Cuba's freedom from Spain. However, with some important exceptions—among them Félix Varela, a Cuban Catholic priest, pedagogue and philosopher who lived in exile in the United States between 1823 and 1853, favored independence for Cuba, and called for indemnification of slave owners to end slavery—many newspaper editors, politicians, and statesmen did not see the danger of imitating or extending the United States and its racial system to the Hispanic Caribbean.³⁵ By contrast, in Martí's generation, the proindependence movement was constituted by a largely multiracial, working-class group of *tabaqueros*—crafters of Cuban cigars—who forged



José Martí in Jamaica, ca. 1892. Photograph by Juan Bautista Valdés. By permission of the Centro de Estudios Martianos, Havana.

an antiannexationist and antiracist opposition to the imperial modernity of the United States. In the 1880s, many migrant Latino texts and practices increasingly questioned progressive assimilation and naturalization to a bourgeois, Anglo cultural norm.

Different Latino migrant periodicals reflect successive generations' distinct political commitments. *La Verdad*, the longest running of the newspapers published by Cuban exiles in the United States in the 1850s, was founded through a \$10,000 donation from an association of wealthy Cuban Creole planters, slave owners, and slave traders in conjunction with proannexation U.S. journalists. Although literary contributions by exiled Cuban poet Pedro Santacilia diverged from this view, and a competing short-lived Cuban exile newspaper, *El Mulato* (1854), attacked the New York leadership's frequently proslavery and proannexation positions, *La Verdad* reflected and disseminated the interests of its founders.³⁶ Planters such as the Cuban Gaspar Betancourt Cisneros, key U.S. ideologues of "manifest destiny" (including the phrase's author, the journalist John L. O'Sullivan, and the powerful newspaper editor Moses Yale Beach of the proannexationist newspaper *The Sun* in New York), joined forces to found and print *La Verdad*.³⁷ By contrast, the newspaper associated with the Cuban Revolutionary Party, *Patria*, began publication in 1892, in conjunction with a meeting of the party's founders in a New York-based, multi-racial Caribbean Masonic lodge, one of whose members became renowned



Rafael Serra y Montalvo, Cuban migrant and founder of *La Liga*, a night school for Afro-Antilleans in New York, and editor of *La Doctrina de Martí*. By permission of the Centro de Estudios Martianos, Havana.



Sotero Figueroa. Puerto Rican Editor and Printer of *La Revista Ilustrada de Nueva York*, and of *Patria*. By permission of New York Public Library, Schomburg Collection.

as a black historian and bibliophile, the Puerto Rican Arturo Schomburg.³⁸ Through tireless efforts of its Afro–Puerto Rican managing editor and printer, Sotero Figueroa, *Patria* raised money for its production largely through advertisements and subscriptions generated by proindependence clubs. Cuban and Puerto Rican members in around one hundred and fifty clubs rolled tobacco and lived in mixed-race communities in south Florida, and in metropolitan centers of Americas and Europe.³⁹

Creole slaveholders and their allies found it difficult to welcome or even to envisage the possibility of Afro-Cubans' active participation or leadership in the revolution—except to imagine with horror the possibility of another Haitian revolution.⁴⁰ Unlike those in the later movement for independence, this earlier generation did not understand that annexation also racialized or stigmatized their position. Martí's own observation of the racialization of Chicano and Latino culture and his careful perusal of current events from the newspapers of the 1880s and 1890s led him to describe the mob killings of Africans, Asians, and European immigrants from the perspective of the victims. His translations of incidents of racial

terror reveal the measured distance from the marauding lynch mobs and border vigilante groups made up of whites, who often tied their racial position to the status and honor of their expanding nation. By contrast, for those annexationist Cuban exiles in the United States who assumed the superiority of white national identity, conscious and politicized freedmen presented a threat.

Whereas the earlier generation had a difficult time shaking off the attitudes and assumptions of the slave owner, African-descended Cubans and Puerto Ricans such as Sotero Figueroa and Rafael Serra y Montalvo in New York, and Juan Gualberto Gómez in Havana, forged alliances and insisted on racial equality as they shared the podium with light-skinned Cubans such as Martí, Gonzalo de Quesada, and Rafael Castro-Palomino. In addition to working in African-centered projects such as La Liga, the night school founded by and for Afro-Caribbeans under the leadership of Rafael Serra, these activist writers were involved in cross-racial cooperation in the editing of newspapers and in the organizing of mostly working-class and multiracial Latino/a supporters of national independence, in violation of Jim Crow law in the South and segregationist practice in the North. Although many white Cuban leaders, especially Martí's successor as spokesperson for the Partido, Tomás Estrada Palma, maintained Martí's antiracist rhetoric while introducing a U.S.-style segregation system, the founders of the 1895 revolutionary movement made the preceding Creole generations' possessive investment in whiteness into a problem.⁴¹ Although Martí could never escape the limitations that his own position imposed, a cross-class, multiracial nationalist movement forced Martí to problematize white privilege in the prevailing white-over-black racial stratification in the United States and in Cuba. Rather than accepting the corralling function of the color line of their day, Sotero Figueroa, Rafael Serra, and Martí analyzed key tensions in Cuba and Puerto Rico's heterogeneous societies as transpiring between annexationists and a revolutionary "race of freedom" that aspires to "absolute emancipation."⁴²

In the first issue of New York's *Patria*, Figueroa published a manifesto in which he defines the "race of freedom" (*raza de la libertad*) of which Martí speaks as being in opposition to a "race for sale" (*raza vendible*), that is to say, persons willing to accept a colonial or imperial pay-off in exchange for compromised liberty: "we should not and we do not want to resign ourselves to the complete absorption of our race by another that does not seduce us to exchange for it, or to forget our language, customs, traditions,

sentiments—all of which constitute our Latin American physiognomy.⁴³ Figueroa's position in *Patria* and elsewhere associate freedom with the antiassimilationist preservation of distinctly Latino cultural practices. This definition of race represents an alternative to an Anglo and white U.S. pigmentocracy and refuses the reigning North American racial definitions based on hypodescent or the “one drop” rule, by which a person of any African ancestry was racialized as black under the law.⁴⁴ Insofar as Martí adopted a critique of racism, he defined this “race of freedom” through comparative thinking and in protest of the increasing incidence of white working-class and state-sponsored violence against workers and immigrants of color during the 1880s and 1890s. Had Martí lived anywhere besides the racially terrifying center of imperial modernity, Martí may not have assumed the explicitly antiracist stance that Afro-Antilleans such as Rafael Serra, Sotero Figueroa, Antonio Maceo, and Juan Gualberto Gómez included at the heart of their proindependence organizing.⁴⁵

In Rafael Serra's newspaper, *La Doctrina de Martí* (Martí's Doctrine), Sotero Figueroa wrote a serialized article in defense of Martí and against posthumous insinuations made by Enrique Trujillo in his book, *Apuntes históricos* (Historical Notes) (1896). Figueroa's articles and Serra's newspaper suggest that Afro-Latinos attempted to use Martí's antiracist doctrine against the “myth” of the martyred saint who sought to prohibit discussion of race and racism, a myth that, as Lillian Guerra has argued, undermined antiracist efforts in the Cuban republic during Tomás Estrada Palma's presidency. In the face of this myth, Rafael Serra and Sotero Figueroa sought to push the Cuban republic to resist policies of marginalizing people of color and of pretending racism did not exist. In 1898, for example, Serra warned Cubans about the negative implications of annexation to the United States and especially of the U.S.'s segregationist racial system, as exemplified in the views of U.S. newspapers: “for the [New York] *Herald*, the black does not belong to humanity. They should be deprived of the protections of human rights. They are inferior to all others. Then, if Cuba is a country of blacks, when it joins this people of whites, what hope for happiness remains for us, when already the Americans announce the esteem that they have for us?”⁴⁶ Serra makes this argument about U.S. attitudes toward “them,” the blacks, and the implications of such views for the “us,” as a country of blacks, among whom he includes himself and other Cubans. Figueroa tumbled from his position as part of the Partido's leadership after Martí's death and also struggled to make ends meet as a printer in the new republic despite his years of organizing the revolution and

publishing *La Revista Ilustrada de Nueva York* and *Patria*.⁴⁷ In January 1892, Serra defended Martí against attacks by the veteran Mambí Enrique Collazo by associating Martí with democratic participation and opposition to the disenfranchisement or exclusion of “disdained” groups.⁴⁸

In the name of Martí’s antiracist and pro-Latino doctrine, Figueroa similarly criticized Enrique Trujillo’s portrayal of the Latino migrant community as sharing the predominant racial attitudes of the United States and Spain.⁴⁹ Figueroa implies that unlike Martí, Trujillo shared the Spanish consul’s disdain for people of color in the independence movement. When the consul, Suárez Guanes, denounced a meeting to be held in honor of General Antonio Maceo to the U.S. authorities, he warned that it would be “a meeting of blacks, and that it would be disorderly [se iba a alterar el orden].” Figueroa notes that Trujillo reported on the meeting by noting the “absence of people of good appearance in the gathering” (“Calle la pasión,” 204). Similarly, in the March 2, 1897, installment of his vindication of Martí’s doctrine, Figueroa specifically contests Trujillo’s description of the Sociedad Literaria Hispano-Americano de Nueva York as an “oasis” that promoted the “union of our race in America,” along with the independence of Cuba (*Apuntes históricos* 53). Martí—who for a period assumed the presidency of the Society in hopes of securing a source of support for the Cuban cause, and who in that capacity organized a series of meetings in honor of Latin American culture—had to step down in part because on the night the Society celebrated the Hispanic Caribbean, it refused to fly the flags of Puerto Rico or Cuba. Figueroa emphasizes the racist implications of the Society’s affiliation with Spain: “The union of our race is not promoted where the presumption of Spanish habits imposes itself on virtue and modest knowledge, where the sovereignty of intelligence has no value if it is not accompanied by physical exteriorities, such as a certain miserable level of pigment in the skin” (“Calle la pasión,” 223). Both Serra and Figueroa take pains to show Martí’s divergence from other light-skinned leaders in the Cuban independence movement. Neither Serra nor Figueroa implies in his writings that Martí participated in La Liga or worked alongside them with the arrogance of someone engaged in mere charity for the “poor,” as Ripoll’s article suggests.

Although a complete discussion of the social content of Martí’s revolutionary vision exceeds the scope of my argument here, I will briefly examine Ripoll’s evidence and then consider one piece of counterevidence. Ripoll, in his effort to demonstrate a lack of commitment in Martí to social content in the war of independence, cites a letter from Martí to his child-

hood friend Fermín Valdés Domínguez in which Martí affirms his friend's respect and affection for "those Cubans who are sincerely searching, under one name or another, for a bit more cordial order and indispensable equality, in the administration of the things of this world" (*Epistolario*, 4:128). Implying, anachronistically, that Martí stood against the kind of revolution propounded by Fidel Castro, Ripoll's article quotes Martí as criticizing the "arrogance and hidden rage" of "socialist ideology," whose adherents, "in order to climb up in the world, pretend to be frantic defenders of the helpless."

In fact, Martí was writing to affirm an activity that his friend Valdés Domínguez had planned in relation to May 1, 1894—a day that like all subsequent May Days—commemorated the martyred Chicago anarchists of Haymarket Square, who led the protest of hundreds of thousands of workers in order to achieve better working conditions. Valdés Domínguez had written a letter to Gonzalo de Quesada that appeared in the Tampa newspaper *Cuba* in May 1894, outlining his proposal for the creation of a new club in support of both Cuban independence and a more equitable distribution of wealth. Martí's own letter of congratulations reveals not so much a total rejection of socialist ideas as a cautious openness to them. It acknowledges that despite the inevitable risks of socialism or other ideologies, the risks that might accompany socialism are not so great in Cuba as in other, more wrathful societies:

For its nobility we should judge an aspiration, and not for this, that, or the other defect that human passion attaches to it. The socialist idea, like so many others, has two dangers: alienating, confused, or incomplete foreign interpretations, and the dissimulating haughtiness and anger of the ambitious, who raise themselves up in the world first by acting the part of the frenetic defenders of the homeless, in order to find shoulders on which to prop themselves up. Some go from pestering the queen—like [Jean Paul] Marat, when he dedicated to her his green-covered book—to Marat's bloody flattery, with its egg of justice. Others change from fanatics to charlatans, like those whom Chateaubriand discusses in his *Memorias*. But in our nation the risk is not so great, as compared to more wrathful societies, and those of less natural clarity. (*Epistolario*, 4:129)

The process of extracting and relocating passages always reorients a text's meaning. My fuller quotation shows that Ripoll's interpretation occludes the spirit of reconciliation with which Martí notes the risk of bad transla-

tions and of ambitious charlatans in order to applaud Valdés Domínguez's socially minded proposal. As Philip Foner and Carr both note, Martí never explicitly endorsed any existing forms of socialism, Marxism, or anarchism, despite his respect for Marx's commitment to remedying capitalism's effects on the poorest, and despite the fact that many others in the independence movement, such as Diego Vicente Tejera or Carlos Baliño, did openly advocate socialism and anarchism.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the "social content"—or worker-identified and antiracist consciousness—of Martí's definition of an alternative American modernity becomes clear in this letter to Valdés Domínguez, as in many of the other essays that *Translating Empire* sets before the reader.

That Martí infused his Latino modernism with an uncompromising ethical or social content is supported by the assessment of a former classmate of Martí's, José Ignacio Rodríguez, in the years just after Martí's death. After studying with Rafael María Mendive and becoming a widely published teacher and scholar in Havana, Rodríguez traveled to the United States in 1860 and adopted U.S. citizenship in 1863. Rodríguez became the bilingual secretary of the Pan-American conferences, and continued thereafter as an employee of the U.S. government in the Bureau of American Republics. His study of and argument for the annexation of Cuba to the United States reveal a forceful animus against Martí, which indirectly underscores the fact of Martí's radical social commitments:

Everyone believed that this improvised movement, made up only of Cuban migrants, the majority of whom were working-class, whites and blacks, from Key West, Tampa, New York, Philadelphia and several other cities of the Union, and possessing neither the money, nor the other elements that we had always believed to be indispensable to this sort of enterprise, was destined to miserably fail. . . . [Martí] hated the wealthy, cultivated, conservative man, and thus introduced into the Cuban problematic an element until then unknown, because all the country's movements had always been drawn from the upper and comfortable classes: and he hated the United States of America, which he accused of being egotistical and which he viewed as represented by an insolent race, against which the other race that dominated in the rest of the countries of continental America had to struggle unceasingly.⁵¹

Although Martí wrote amiable letters to and visited Rodríguez during his stays in Washington, D.C., in 1889, Rodríguez accused Martí of fostering a

self-defensive pride in a group that constituted the majority in the other Americas but was a minority in the United States. Rodríguez goes on to define these two “races” as “la raza latina de América” (the Latino race of America), in contradistinction to the race of the “hombre del norte” (man of the North).⁵² The elder Cuban could not believe that an integrated, multiracial, mostly working-class movement could actually succeed, especially because it differed so dramatically from the earlier political movements of the elite on behalf of the island. Even if Martí neither hated the United States, nor had the space to publicly express hatred for an elitist or white supremacist tendency therein, Rodríguez here tells us in no uncertain terms that Martí loathed this elitist tendency. Rodríguez also notes that Martí employed, with remarkable ease, an unusual figurative language characterized by sonorous, feverishly colorful words, replete with “monstrous strangeness” (*extrañezas monstruosas*).⁵³ In other words, someone who disagreed with Martí’s political views, who was an employee of the United States, offers the soundest evidence to contest Ripoll’s claim that Martí’s politics had no social content; Rodríguez in fact demonstrates not only that its social content was well known but also that he used an innovative literary form to give it life on the page.

❧ LATINO MODERNISM

Martí’s early, aesthetic innovations occur within the wide-ranging transnational literary movement that we know as modernism. My claims resemble Ramón Saldívar’s argument to recognize Américo Paredes’s border writing as modernist, Simon Gikandi’s redefinition of Caribbean writing, Houston Baker’s association of the Harlem Renaissance with modernism, and Roberto Schwarz’s case for reading Joaquim María Machado de Assis as making an inaugural shift into modernist prose in 1880.⁵⁴ Octavio Paz, in his essay on the emergence of modern Latin American poetry, also affirms Martí’s influence on twentieth-century poetry, though in an argument that appears to affirm a conventional definition of modernism, while troubling it at the same time. In his essay, Paz carefully distinguishes the symbolist-influenced poetics of late nineteenth-century Latin American *modernismo* from the transnational Anglophone modernism (parallel to *vanguardismo*) that emerges after 1910. He bases his distinction between modernismo and vanguardismo on the fact they are separated by the space of a few decades, but this distinction breaks down later in his argument when he

attributes to Martí's poetry a harnessing of "the secret power of colloquial language."⁵⁵ Making this late nineteenth-century poet who initiated modernismo in 1882 into the harbinger of Latin America's modern avant-garde poetry in the twentieth century, Paz undermines his own strict temporal division.⁵⁶ In this light, Paz's reading prefigures Ivan Schulman and Evelyn Picón-Garfield's, which emphasizes formal and political continuities across the decades and schools of Latin American modernismo and the period ranging from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century that we assign to European, Brazilian, and Anglo modernism.⁵⁷ The expansion of the temporal period of modernism makes it possible to see continuities between Latino migrant poetry and prose of the 1880s and 1890s, and a later, widely disseminated high modernism of the United States and Europe.

According to the first Spanish definition of the literary aesthetic of modernismo by the Salamanca-born editor of a collection of Martí's writing, Federico de Onís, Martí's distinct and innovative sensibility resulted from a profound consciousness of his historical moment and of the future, which imprinted itself in the modernism that gave "Hispanic form" to a global "crisis" beginning in 1885.⁵⁸ We traditionally associate modernismo with elaborate, carefully wrought language that focuses on the decorated aesthetic surface; I will comment on these associations by examining elements of Martí's combative mimicry of emergent forms of imperial expansion. My argument challenges the persistent exclusion of nineteenth-century Latino migrant writers from the history of modernism, and aligns itself with other critical efforts to debunk the view that modernism is politically regressive, as compared, for example, to realism.⁵⁹

The Cuban literary critic Roberto Fernández Retamar lamented in 1995 that although Martí has received recognition and honors from the greatest poets and critics in Latin America, in the United States "the real Martí is almost forgotten."⁶⁰ Now a veritable renaissance of literary critical anthologies, translations, and studies that draw on Martí's "Nuestra América" and others of his texts in the new millennium is propelling Martí's literary contributions and historical interpretations into the forefront of a current remapping of American studies.⁶¹ While I share Fernández Retamar's dismay with the amnesia that has limited or distorted our knowledge of Martí, I do not, however, presume to offer a definitive Martí, for his writing generates, and to an extent demands, different interpretations for each historical moment.

How would it possible to grasp the real Martí, when, as his contemporary and fellow revolutionary Manuel Sanguily observes, we find in Martí's "original prose, palpitating with life, scenes taken from reality that his powerful genius transformed into fantastic or quasi-Dantesque situations"?⁶² Even while documenting quotidian events as a freelance journalist in New York, Martí's texts often represent scenes in figures that seem unreal. Gesturing with flourishes to what it cannot represent in the mode of a photographic reproduction or copy, Martí's modernism rebels against the dominant literary ideology of realism in the United States of the 1880s. Hermetic rather than transparent, Martí's writing conforms neither to romanticism nor to realism, decades before the official arrival of modernism to the Anglophone literature of the United States. Martí, who was familiar with the prose of the prominent and well-paid professional author William Dean Howells, notes with praise Howells's courageous letters in defense of the Chicago anarchists.⁶³ However, Martí refuses to imitate Howells's "false literary code" (*falso código literario*) of realism: "his novels are clumsy [*burdas*]. . . . To reproduce is not to create."⁶⁴ If realism only copies, naturalism "is nothing more than a pompous name for a defect: the lack of imagination" (*Obras*, 22:71). Instead, Martí's modernism uses willfully opaque, imaginative language that refuses to hand over a positive meaning and thus calls into question the very possibility of mimetic representation.⁶⁵ Martí's modernist form disproves assumptions that Latin America must follow the cultural example set by the United States. Moreover, it awakens his readers to their role in defining America through criticism of it.

Although it would be interesting to make a full comparison between Latin American modernism and other later modernism, such a project is beyond the scope of this book. Instead, I take Perry Anderson's and Fredric Jameson's indictments of a scandalous critical blindness to Hispanic modernism's historical antecedence in modernist studies as a point of departure for my consideration of Martí's form, tone, and style.⁶⁶ Martí's vatic prose and poetry grapples with the dynamics of reification in the rapidly modernizing metropolis and responds to the geographical dispersal of imperialism. According to Jameson, modernism records a constitutive absence in its form: the motor and the condition of modernity's economic existence—imperial exploitation of resources and lives—remain screened from the metropolitan subject's view. The modernist literary text, in Jameson's definition, formally mediates this absent, yet indispensable history:

modernism is “the new kind of art” that encodes “this formal dilemma.”⁶⁷ Martí’s texts call attention to unspeakable sources of imperial wealth from the peripheral angle of the still colonized and potentially annexed Caribbean islander.

Without a single national audience, Martí’s modernism addresses and represents reading communities on the borders of the bourgeois industrial civilization that imperial modernity sought to extend throughout the hemisphere. The poet on the periphery creates extravagant metaphors to confound the logic by which liberty has begun to mean its opposite, especially for a large sector of workers and migrants of color. For example, the unexpected, shocking, or astonishing events that occurred in U.S. cities in May 1886 in the wake of the Haymarket affair pushes available forms of representation to their limit: “To put the events of these days into a newspaper chronicle is like trying to gather lava from a volcano into a coffee cup.”⁶⁸ Similarly, the “modern poem,” which Martí began to conceptualize in a prologue (published in 1882) to *El Poema del Niágara* by the Venezuelan poet Juan Antonio Pérez Bonalde, draws formal inspiration from the flowering of popular multilingual forms in the city.

What are the formal characteristics and rhetorical strategies of Latino modernist writing? Martí’s prologue to Pérez Bonalde’s poem, which Julio Ramos has taught us to read as a manifesto on “the relationship between literature and power in the modern age,” invents phantasmagoric images that do not belong in realist or naturalist writing.⁶⁹ Addressed to a passenger in a modernizing metropolis, the prologue observes that instead of being enslaved to kings, the citizens of the imperial republic actually were “gilded cadavers” whose wings only appear to make liberty possible. In fact, the wings themselves are made of heavy chains, because the citizens had become degraded “slaves of Liberty” (*Obras*, 7:237–38; *Selected Writings*, 51). Although Martí adopts a favorite figure of the romantics, the enchained slave, his theory of modern poetry does not imagine it releasing the “empire of man over the external world,” as Percy Bysshe Shelley did.⁷⁰ The modernist poet is not a lonely genius creating a single, culminating work; rather this poetry begins with many common people speaking, reading, and writing myriads of “small shimmering works” (*pequeñas obras fúlgidas*) (*Obras*, 7:227).⁷¹ Martí listens for and gives form to the “dialogue of the large cities composed of fragments of sparks flying from everyone, and passing through common spaces . . . the public butterfly and flower of a common genius [*mariposa pública y flor del genio común*] that flits from

mouth to mouth. From the common people and from life come the words that last” (*Obras*, 12:158). Fully aware of Baudelaire’s celebration of the modern artist’s need to distill the eternal within the transient, Martí draws on popular speech and hermetic imagery, which, in their zigzag dance, convey hope in a process of becoming: “the imperfection of human language to express with precision the judgments, affections and designs of a person is a perfect and absolute proof of the need for a coming existence” (*Obras*, 7:235–36). The colloquial, popular language that Octavio Paz identifies as a vanguardist, modern element in Martí’s poetry is also what Martí makes into his own muse: the enduring element of the transient defines this peripheral modernist aesthetic.

Edward Said has noted that an emergent modernist sensibility responds to imperialism, and that it does so “not oppositionally but ironically.”⁷² Martí’s literary style responds to the supposed progress of empire with an irony like that of Herman Melville and with witty puns reminiscent of Emily Dickinson. As with both of these U.S. writers, whose significance did not become visible in the mainstream of U.S. literary history until long after their deaths, Martí emerges in that same history belatedly, when imperial centers begin to take stock of themselves as hearts of darkness. Irony, satire, and farce undercut the center’s triumphant self-projection as a force charged with liberating the rest of the world.

If a persistent coloniality resulted in an imitative copying in Latin American romanticism, Martí responded by appropriating masquerade to invert the Western claim to universality and mastery. To show how the United States “wears liberty as a mask for the conquest it nurtures in its bosom” (*Obras*, 3:48; *Selected Writings*, 323), Martí’s texts make fun in the vernacular style of Cuban *choteo*, or merciless, playful ridicule. One local target of such joking is the Latin American elite’s tendency to adopt foreign styles and repudiate the homegrown, provincial, or indigenous culture. Martí also attributed to modernist art this quality of postcolonial mockery. In a report on an exhibition of art on display to raise money to fund construction of the base of Frédéric Bartholdi’s Statue of Liberty, Martí defines the indigenous art in the exhibition as thoroughly “modern” (*Obras*, 8:329; *Selected Writings*, 146). Characterized by abstract design of surfaces, these aesthetic objects confound European or North American claims that theirs is a superior civilization, for these Amerindian objects exhibit equal, if not superior, elegance, imagination, and intelligence. A small figurine entitled the *God of Pain*, with a flaxen mustache, naked body, and a large belly,

reveals “extremely modern artistry” (*de arte modernísimo*). This object revises the myth that non-Europeans sat reverently in awe of Europeans, by offering a “sparkling and felicitous mockery of the white man” (*Obras*, 8:331; *Selected Writings*, 148). Enriched by Caribbean, African-diasporic, Amerindian, and Latin American popular forms, Martí’s modernism too performs its own carnival of masks, in which subterfuge, mockery, camouflage, and biting wit play a role. The mask has the further advantage of providing cover for a rebellious Cuban community involved in clandestine organizing against absorption of the island by the United States.

MODERNISM AS TRANSLATION OF IMPERIAL MODERNITY

My title, *Translating Empire*, cites the Uruguayan essayist and critic Angel Rama, who defines modernism in Spanish as a translation of late nineteenth-century imperial expansion.⁷³ In his neglected essay “La dialéctica de la modernidad en José Martí” (The Dialectic of Modernity in José Martí), which Rama developed and presented in the liminal space of Puerto Rico in 1971, he clarifies the relation between Latin American modernism and imperial modernity: “Modernism is nothing but the collection of literary forms that *translate* the different forms of incorporation of Latin America into modernity. Modernity is a sociocultural concept generated by the bourgeois industrial civilization of the nineteenth century, with which our America was rapidly and violently associated in the last third of the past century through the economic and political expansion of European empires, including that of the United States” (129). As a distinguishable set of literary forms, modernism developed an elaborately stylized technique in order to “translate” the economic and political prostration that resulted from the incorporation of Latin America into imperial formations of Europe and the United States. Martí’s complex, sometimes hyperbolic figurative language and multilayered, labyrinthine sentences fit squarely in this pattern, by abandoning realism’s pact of reporting on objective fact. Marked by a necessarily camouflaged radicalism inside the United States, Martí’s modernism features an intensely self-referential, often self-deprecatingly ironic form that flaunts its literariness and unseats the authority of imperial modernity.

The long-standing and incompletely acknowledged imbrication of imperialism and modernity has deprived the abstract Enlightenment terms of

liberty, equality, and self-government of adequate referents in many post-colonial contexts, including Latin America, the Caribbean, and parts of the United States.⁷⁴ The task of translating these terms becomes urgent in order to highlight insufficiencies within the existing language of imperial modernity. José Martí and others in his cohort aimed with precision an intellectual blow to the conceptual structures they inhabited.⁷⁵ Upon recognizing the incommensurability between northern and southern cultural systems and languages, Martí makes an antinomian claim to similarity and difference in relation to the North American culture. For example, in November of 1892, months after the founding of the Partido Revolucionario Cubano, a Key West newspaper summarized a speech that Martí made in English, in Key West, Florida, before a mixed audience of some seven hundred people, in which the “great majority” were North Americans (*Obras*, 4:333). On a stage filled with Anglo dignitaries in the enormous San Carlos lecture hall, Martí adapted Patrick Henry’s call for liberty or death to the circumstances of the Cuban war of independence. In decrying colonial conditions in Cuba and proclaiming the island’s destiny to be as independent and sovereign as that of the United States, Martí sets his people and island on par with the founding fathers of the United States. But here is the antinomy: immediately after this claiming of the two peoples’ equal standing, Martí calls attention to his own difference. He notes how difficult it is for him to express himself in a foreign tongue.

In a no doubt accented English, Martí calls his listeners to account for North America’s “disdain of Cuba because she has not achieved what they achieved a century ago.”⁷⁶ In a brief article on this speech that appeared in *Patria*, a statement by Martí attributes the North American misunderstanding of the Cuban’s struggle to “language difference” (*diferencia del idioma*) (*Obras*, 4:333). Based on this difference, North Americans had not been able to see the continuity between the revolutionary war waged by the United States against Britain and the new phase of the Cuban war of independence then in preparation. The negative depiction of Cubans in light of the small island nation’s colonial status and cultural differences reveals the long history of U.S. misunderstanding of its debts to Latino/a migrant creativity.⁷⁷ Although the United States had not yet militarily invaded and claimed a tutelary relationship to Puerto Rico, Cuba, Hawaii, and the Philippines, U.S. politicians had repeatedly offered deals and campaigned on the goal of annexing Cuba. Within the decade, the United States achieved its goal of expanding into Asia and the Antilles. In his

speech, then, as in his other writings, Martí was taking on the peculiar task of translating this U.S. misprision of its empire as democracy for potentially and already annexed Spanish-language readers and audiences, but also for North Americans.

In the context of the Americas, translation replaces the outmoded concepts of autonomous originality and novelty as the basis of modern American literary technique. Translation in this sense refers to a creative transformation that enriches the North American text in keeping with limits imposed by the translator's cultural location and by a range of meanings available in the original. In addition to the labor of recreating an original text in another language, which was a common source of employment for educated nineteenth-century Latino/a writers in New York, including Martí, I use "translation" to refer to an unavoidable, absolutely necessary shuttling between cultures. These movements transform the source and the target language texts, and, in turn, reshape our understanding of their contexts. Although tied to the original, a translation opens hidden aspects of the source text's historically constrained and changing significance. Walter Benjamin defines the distance between languages (by extension, between cultures) as insurmountable in the same way that a universal history is impossible.⁷⁸ According to Benjamin, because translation will never be able to fully represent the incalculable, not fully translatable element that is lodged in the idiom and historicity of the text, the translator's task is to supplement the original's life.⁷⁹ As Martí puts it in his brief introduction to Gabriel Zéndegui's translation of Hjalmar Hjørth Boyesen's poetry in *La América*, "to translate is virtually the same as to create. . . . [T]he translator must go outside himself and put himself in the place the author occupied" (*Obras*, 28:243). Like the impossible and necessary task of seeing from another's point of view, the translator encounters on a daily basis formal elements that she or he is incapable of conveying in the target language. This untranslatable element stimulates the renovation of language and reveals the mutability of the original over time.

Translation by migrants from Latin America in the United States played a crucial role in articulating what Julio Ramos has called "divergent modernities." *Modernidad*, a key word in the title of Ramos's classic study, becomes plural in John D. Blanco's translation of it into English, a change that illustrates the generative potential of translating Spanish-language Latino theoretical formulations into English. Whereas Ramos's *Desencuentros de la modernidad en América Latina: literatura y política en el siglo XIX*

(1989) might literally be translated as “Missed Encounters [or Disagreements] in the Modernity of Latin America: Literature and Politics in the Nineteenth Century,” Blanco’s translation, *Divergent Modernities: Culture and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Latin America*, adds the sense of multiple modernities and their distinct possible routes through nineteenth-century Latin America. In keeping with Martí’s influential references to “two Americas,” in which “our” and “the other” America grate against each other, “divergent modernities” directs the reader to the implications of this debate not only for Latin America, but also for its powerful neighbor to the north.⁸⁰

Translation has a special ability to register the complex responses of the Spanish-speaking migrant writer to an Anglo-dominant environment. Martí had a vexed relationship to the source language of most of his translations. Unlike some Latin American immigrants who adopted U.S. citizenship and effortlessly switched to English upon arrival, Martí and many Latino migrants never abandoned the language and culture that differentiated the group to and for which they spoke and wrote.⁸¹ Even though by the end of his decade and a half in New York Martí became fluent in English as a result of diligent study, his acquaintances report that he rarely used what Martí described as his “barbarous” English.⁸² Martí “trembled” when he first faced the task of writing an article in English, for up until 1882, he claims to have “never written in English,” or to have written in it only in “extreme situations” (*momentos extremos*) (*Obras*, 22:285). This comment illuminates the economic necessity of the “friendless,” “fresh Spaniard,” as he undertook some twenty-nine articles for the New York weekly literary magazine *The Hour* between 1880 and 1881, on topics as diverse as Gustave Flaubert’s novel *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, on Pushkin, and on modern Spanish poetry.⁸³ Unlike English—which he used out of necessity—Spanish represented a lifeline to the intellectual tradition and to the distinct culture of his America. To use it defied the common North American treatment of its speakers with disdain, ignorance, paternalism, or expectations of monolingualist assimilation.⁸⁴

While my retransfer of Martí’s interpretations from Spanish back into English necessarily departs from the Spanish and can never recuperate fully the original, this act of *untranslation* returns us to Latino interpretations of U.S. scenes and texts, which otherwise would have remained unrecognizable or lost to the literary historical record. Untranslation enjoins a North American audience to recognize its historical relationship to Latin

America through the eyes of the anticolonial Latino migrant. I adapt untranslation—the practice of retranslating back from Spanish into the original English—from Martí’s German contemporary Friedrich Nietzsche. He claimed for himself the task of “retranslating man back into nature.”⁸⁵ With this phrase, Nietzsche refers to a biological or organic origin of humans prior to language, which he paraphrases as “the frightful, basic text *homo natura*” (*Beyond Good and Evil*, 160). He is contemplating the idea that the human, which becomes imaginable through language, might trace its origins to a scientifically verifiable or intelligible state before language written in Latin. The original “source” text of *homo natura*, however, also calls attention to its cultural and linguistic construction. Thus Nietzsche does not imagine it possible to return to an unmarked and unmediated, freshly born human who exists prior to the archive.⁸⁶

Translation thus mediates the reader’s access to the human, including the English-language reader’s relationship to Martí. Although Martí wrote for a transnational Spanish-speaking America throughout his residence in New York City, his texts also imagine, demand, and direct their critique to audiences in English and in the United States.⁸⁷ Despite a statement in one of his notebooks that he “would not like to have [his] works translated into English or French,” I believe many of Martí’s works speak to a possible future English-language audience, insofar as they propose to change the northern nation’s imperial trajectory.⁸⁸ Martí derived “extreme pleasure” (*gustazo*) upon seeing his childhood friend Fermín Valdés Domínguez’s name printed “in English letters” (*en letras inglesas*), in an article that Martí wrote about him in the [New York] *Herald*.⁸⁹ Martí also wrote under a pseudonym and under his own name in English, and spoke publicly in English on several crucial occasions, especially toward the end of his life. When these texts or performances are not available in the original language, we can and should reconstruct them through newspaper accounts or by translating them back into English from the Spanish-language newspapers that preserve versions of them in translation. Through untranslation, Martí’s innovative acts of selection, framing, and translation in a Latino/a idiom become legible, and U.S. American studies may give appropriate credit to Latino migrant writers’ contribution to the redefinition of the field.

Although Martí on a few occasions translated himself into English, he primarily translated English-language journalism or literature from English or French into Spanish.⁹⁰ This book presents many of my translations

from his writing in Spanish into English.⁹¹ Metropolitan translation of the peripheral text always potentially serves a disfiguring colonial imperative. I keep this caveat in mind, sharing Alberto Moreiras's opinion that translation is useful above all for carrying out self-study and self-criticism. Translation's constant struggle with an untranslatable excess reminds us of the opacity of what seems familiar and easily known. Across a temporal distance, what we think is "ours," just as much as what is not, demands translation. In defamiliarizing the proximate and bringing near the foreign, translation has the potential to work against the repression of internal homogeneity and to defy colonial or imperial stereotype.

Returning Martí's translations of U.S. culture to contemporary conversations about American studies in English is every bit as much a creative remaking as translation is. Just as Martí added meanings to the social text that many Anglo readers had ignored or disavowed, this book's work of untranslation permits the generative friction of Martí's difference to bring us back to certain unspeakable aspects of U.S. history and culture. This detour through a Spanish-language Latino/a idiom challenges readers of Martí to follow his mercurial movements back in time, in order to imagine the tensions of his present through his eyes.⁹² Martí's interpretations of empire acquaint us with the history of a distinct (and still) possible future.

Given that translation involves a crossing of cultures, what is its relationship to the transnational, another paradigm that has transformed American studies in recent decades? If Carolyn Porter advised us that U.S. scholars don't know enough about external or internal Latin perspectives on the United States, her other claim that "there is nothing inherently socially progressive about transnationalist models, whether they be global or merely hemispheric" bears repeating.⁹³ Translation's bringing into focus the intangible gap between languages may push the reader to attend to relationships among cultures and languages in a way that transnational perspectives do not.⁹⁴ Attending to both translation and transnational frameworks together will enable readers to avoid the pitfalls and shortsightedness of linguistic nationalism. Whereas transnationalism may focus on the gaps and social circuits that straddle national borders as they are traversed on the ground, translation has no choice but to do so. If a transnational perspective makes it possible to read from both sides of the border simultaneously, as if the reader could easily be in both places and languages at once, as in an aerial view, translation can move in only one direction at a time.⁹⁵ Translation forces the reader to traverse fissures,

points of contact and exchanges within the most intimate ligaments of culture. Like transnationalism, it reveals insufficiencies of any single national culture or of cultural nationalism, if accompanied by reflection on the dangerous activity of crossing and on what is inevitably lost or left behind. Attention both to the dynamics of translation and to transnational formations is necessary to reading Latino migrant translation of empire in a reconfigured American studies.

☞ HEMISPHERIC AND TRANSNATIONAL FRAMES
FOR AMERICAN STUDIES

In the post-cold war period of the 1990s, a veritable renaissance in comparative, inter-, trans-, and hemispheric American studies has brought relations among the Americas to center stage. However, even though the academic field and the object of study of “American studies” now refer to a transnational, multilingual crossroads of colonizers, displaced, or marginalized natives, people of various diasporas, settlers, and especially migrants, Martí is still claimed by scholars and politicians, including a president of the United States, as an authorizing figure for pan-American economic, cultural, and political programs.⁹⁶ Such hemispheric or totalizing proposals—announced as they were in English, in the United States, and often with the collaboration of unscrupulous Latin American elites—become key targets of Martí’s critique. Fully thirteen years before 1898, the date usually associated with the U.S. emergence as an imperial power, Martí discerned that imposing influence through ostensibly friendly meetings and the promotion of hemispheric peace and “free” trade was a conjuring trick.⁹⁷ Some of Martí’s most compelling and creative rhetoric translates a scheme to introduce a U.S.-led Pan-American system in the hemisphere. To make Martí a spokesperson of today’s liberal, capitalist democracy, a free-trade area of the Americas, and against the current government and scholarship on Martí in Cuba diverts attention from the kind of unsettling and mind-opening self-criticism of imperial modernity and of U.S. literary history that Martí’s writings model.⁹⁸

In his report on “The Monetary Conference of the Republics of America” that appeared only a few months after “Nuestra América” in *La Revista Ilustrada de Nueva York*, Martí ridicules the idea that geographic proximity in America obliges a single political union.⁹⁹ Neither “geographic morality” nor laws of gravity and maturation, but the human-made history of

Pan-American political and economic relations determine the infeasibility of a single inter-American alliance.¹⁰⁰ The mistake of making Martí into a spokesperson for a hemispheric Pan-Americanism may follow from the eager interest in regionalism and transnationalism that arises as the nation-state wanes in comparison to increasingly powerful global forms of economic governance and administration. Gretchen Murphy's book on the imaginary of the Monroe Doctrine provides a useful warning against a too-quick embrace of Western hemisphericism as alternatives to U.S. nationalism, when Western hemisphericism in an English-dominant U.S. academy may well reproduce the imperialist dynamics it would criticize.¹⁰¹ One of my tasks in this book is to call into question the association of Martí with Pan-Americanism and other forms of U.S.-led economic regionalization.

Although Latino writing has long been marginal in the place of its elaboration and publication, I do not propose to claim a place for these writings within U.S. multicultural canons. The now mainstream discourse of multiculturalism tends to imagine "minority" political and cultural projects inside the borders of the United States and in English. In keeping with ongoing efforts to recover literary texts in Spanish from the colonial period to the present in order to complicate a monolingual U.S. literary history, the Latino writing I consider here reveals the long-standing and influential presence of this migrant community in New York. But Martí's readings of the United States do not merely add to or diversify an existing U.S. national discourse, for they look past the limited goal of equal rights within national boundaries as a remedy for historical legacies of military and economic intervention that continue to prompt inter-American migration. I would not define Martí as a North American or even as a U.S. Hispanic author. In the crowning achievement of over a decade of archival recovery led by Nicolás Kanellos, *Herencia: The Anthology of Hispanic Literature of the United States*, Martí figures in sections entitled "The Literature of Immigration" and "The Literature of Exile." Yet neither of these categories, nor the volume's overarching rubric of "U.S. Hispanic," addresses the way Latino migrants such as Martí slip outside of and challenge the U.S.-derived paradigms for his America. Migrant Latino texts call upon the reader to acknowledge and to grapple with the omnivorous reading, multilingualism, and translations of this nomadic group, without reducing these writings to a detached cosmopolitanism.

❧ AMERICANS WITHOUT A COUNTRY

By reading José Martí within a tradition of economic migrants and non-citizen cultural workers that is also broadly American, this book contributes to a literary history of another America besides the United States. Living in the United States but with his eyes set on the dream of Cuban independence, Martí was, as he puts it in his grief-stricken reports on the Pan-American conferences, “an American without a country” (*sin patria*) (*Obras*, 6:102). Martí’s America lies in and beyond the United States, both geographically and temporally. It is not hermetically separable from this nation of settlers, colonizers, diasporics, migrants, and “natives,” nor is it fully containable within it.¹⁰² The migrant Latino category does not exclude his other historical commitments to nationalism, Latin Americanism, and separatism from Spain. It permits a refusal of a long-standing and counterproductive mutual exclusion between the immigrant and the exile, between the admirer of Abraham Lincoln and critic of the annexationist leader Augustus K. Cutting, between the intellectual author of a Latin Americanist anti-imperialism and the first translator of U.S. literature for Latin American readers.

The term “migrant,” without the inward moving and settling prefix of the term “immigrant,” signals to the reader that not all alien residents in the United States inevitably identify with or yearn for naturalization in the United States, even when they may seek equal protections based on personhood and presence within the national jurisdiction where they work and live, and even when or if they find it necessary to adopt U.S. citizenship. I use the nomadic and unsettling term “migrant” to refer to a body of writing that is finally beginning to assume its proper place in contemporary discussions of the postcoloniality and planetarity of American cultures.¹⁰³ Following Mae Ngai’s usage, “migrant” challenges the assumption that the only logical telos of migration is naturalization and U.S. citizenship, an enduring myth that obscures critical perspectives and trajectories of many migrants such as Martí, Serra, and Figueroa, all of whom left the United States.¹⁰⁴

In addition to affiliating with a not-yet-formalized nation, Martí positions himself among a diverse group of migrants he refers to as “southern peoples.” He claims that these migrants do not come by choice to the United States in order to acquire wealth or even to gain citizenship, but rather to defend the interests of their “South” in northern spaces (*Obras*,

13:394). Martí distinguishes broadly between “northern” immigrants who were arriving by the thousands each day in search of economic wealth, and those who left their countries reluctantly or unwillingly, through forced abduction and enslavement, as refugees from political persecution, bound by deceptive contracts, or impelled by stark necessity. The latter, which Martí refers to as the “faithful peoples of the South,” would prefer “a shack on their piece of land to a palace in a foreign country” (*Obras*, 9:224). This capacious self-characterization of the “southern” migrant includes the disdained southern European or Jew, the displaced Amerindian, castoffs of colonized territories, formerly enslaved Africans, and Asian laborers. Pre-figuring contemporary discussions of a global south, this identification with the south warns the Latino American reader of the perils of assimilation to a European-identified American culture.¹⁰⁵

Rejecting English as a primary language and opting not to make the United States a final destination, some of the migrants of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and other parts of Latin America lived as political exiles yet also became profoundly entangled with their culture of residence.¹⁰⁶ Julio Ramos’s essay “Migratories” acknowledges the extent to which Martí fits Theodor Adorno’s descriptions of exile, but still he defines Martí as a migrant. Edward Said defines “exile” as a lonely foreignness, an impossibility of return, and as cause for a scrupulous subjectivity.¹⁰⁷ These are qualities that we certainly find in Martí’s writings. To Martí the exile is a person who is out of place in an uncomprehending society and cut off from the possibility of home. Martí’s interactions in English with neighbors and hotel employees who ridiculed his accent impressed upon him the stigma of being racialized in a xenophobic society.¹⁰⁸ While Martí left his island because the Spanish government deported him, he transgressed the stipulations of his exile and journeyed to New York from Spain and from Venezuela after temporary residences in Europe, and South and Central America. The term “migrant” acknowledges Martí’s longing to engage critically in American cultural definitions and leaves open the possibility of a long-standing lack of affinity with U.S. politics and policies.¹⁰⁹ To refer, as I do, to nineteenth-century Cubans as migrants, not as immigrants or exiles or even *émigrés*, is to suggest that the United States did not offer an unbiased refuge or a society with only benevolent concern in the struggle over Cuba’s future.

Noting how the concept of exile often represents only a temporarily interrupted narrative of return to the native land, Ramos’s essay “Migrato-

ries” argues that to describe extended residence as exile diverts attention from significant interactions and invention that take place outside the nation.¹¹⁰ For this reason, Ramos claims Martí as “one of the first intellectuals of the Latino community in New York” (281), and places him at the forefront of a migrant tradition in which home becomes a portable cultural tradition to be cited, sung, or constructed. These portable roots do not depend upon permanence in a single, solid, territorial space. I follow Ramos in privileging the term “migrant” over “exile,” in order to read Martí’s decade and a half in New York in relation to the cultural history that Latino migrants have built up in these metropolitan spaces since the nineteenth century.¹¹¹ In their bodegas, tobacco workshops, Spanish-language newspapers, volumes of poetry, boarding-house foyers, political speeches, and *veladas* (or evenings of speeches, poetry, *danzón*, and other Caribbean music), the labor and culture of Latino/a migrants have transformed the metropolitan cityscape.¹¹² Rather than limit our concerns to Martí’s fathering of the national homeland, conceiving of Martí as a migrant reverses the erasure or marginalization of Latino migrant influence on the culture and theorizing of the United States and upon this country’s narratives about itself.¹¹³ As the field that calls itself variously comparative, trans-, or inter-American studies is taking form and scholars are struggling over its definition, this book highlights the way Latino migrant writers’ interpretations reveal U.S. literature and culture to be subsets and effects, rather than defining models, of a larger field.¹¹⁴ Without a nation-state that represents him—for he never exchanged his Spanish passport for a U.S. one—Martí has no option but to initiate his cultural and political rebellion within the compromised space of imperial modernity.

The chapters that follow proceed roughly in chronological order in order to convey to the reader a sense of the duration of Martí’s residence and its accumulated effect upon him. Like the structures of feeling in a social formation that are haunted by residual and emergent sensibilities, the well-documented shift in Martí’s consciousness toward a more openly critical view of the United States emerges through wide oscillations. Pécuchet (of Flaubert’s *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, which Martí reviewed) saw progress as a wavy line; so also Martí wavered in relation to his place of residence: “Anyone who followed [this wavy line] would lose sight of the horizon every time the line dips.”¹¹⁵ A fierce mixture of attraction, ambivalence, and critical distance characterize Martí’s readings of U.S. literature, culture, and politics. Never enjoying certainty about the outcome of his

radical project, his tragic course made it possible—and unavoidable—for him to turn the literary journalism that served as a principle source of income into a venue for his most incisive critique.

Martí the prisoner, the deportee, and the migrant is the subject of my study, rather than the exile who loved Lincoln, the apostolic father of the Cuban nation, or the poet-politician who forged Latin American literary forms and identity. The first chapter of this book, “Latino-American Postcolonial Theory from a Space In Between,” defines the theoretical framework through which this book reads Martí’s translations and shows his inaugural contribution to postcolonial American cultural histories and theoretical frameworks. Drawing on Latin American, Caribbean, and especially Brazilian cultural theory, I suggest how Martí’s belated incorporation adds to these fields. Chapter 2 focuses on Martí’s first editorial enterprise in New York and argues that Martí’s translations of North American culture use the porous space of late nineteenth-century print culture to develop a strategy for reading imperial modernity in the United States. *La América*, the New York-based magazine of modern technology, culture, and ideas; a projected volume of critical studies entitled “Norteamericanos” (North Americans); and Martí’s neglected 1883 prologue to the Cuban migrant writer Rafael Castro-Palomino Jr.’s short fiction reveal the emergence of another America in between the lines of writings about North American authors and European cultural models. Martí differs from an older generation of Cuban migrants, including his editor at *La América* and compatriot Rafael Castro-Palomino. Unlike Martí’s prologue, Castro-Palomino’s little-known stories contrast the failure of Paris Commune revolutionaries’ radical egalitarianism with the promise of New England capitalism, in order to praise the latter as a model for Latin American development. Chapters 3 and 4 explore Martí’s differences from such classic U.S. writers as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman. Chapter 3, “The ‘Evening of Emerson’: Martí’s Postcolonial Double Consciousness,” questions the view that Martí identified totally with Emerson and teases out the Latino migrant’s process of taking distance from the New Englander over a period of several years. This divergence culminates with Martí’s sense of the failure of Emerson’s “Man Thinking” to address racial violence and legal exclusions of racialized migrant workers, including the Rock Springs, Wyoming massacre of Chinese laborers in 1885 in the wake of the Chinese Exclusion Act. In chapter 4, “Martí’s ‘Mock-Congratulatory Signs’: Walt Whitman’s Occult Artistry,” I describe the Cuban’s ritual eating

and regurgitation of the “angelic” poet of democracy Martí responds to Whitman’s naturalizing of imperial expansion with artfully duplicitous rhetoric. In the manner of Whitman’s own self-parody with “mock-congratulatory signs,” Martí distances himself from the North American poet by parodying the beatification of Whitman, who chanted the incorporation and annexation of the hemisphere to the United States. Drawing on intertexts by the antiseparatist Cuban planter Ricardo Rodríguez Otero and the Spanish literary critic Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, I suggest that Martí’s 1887 interpretation of Whitman problematizes this celebrated figure’s complicity with U.S. expansion. Contemporary criticism that has begun to address Whitman and Emerson’s condoning of manifest destiny retains an unacknowledged debt to Martí, who anticipates the use of “empire,” “race,” and “language” as categories of inquiry in American studies research. Chapter 5, “Martí’s Border Writing: Infiltrative Translation, Late Nineteenth-Century ‘Latinness,’ and the Perils of Pan-Americanism,” plots the twinned emergence of the terms “Latino people” (*gente latina*) and the “American imperial system.” Martí’s critical analysis of late nineteenth-century popular culture, including travel writing, expositions, popular fiction, and politics, illustrated for his readers the vulnerable position of the “Latino” in the U.S. racial and hemispheric system. Historically sedimented categories of displaced Native Americans, annexed Chicanas/os, lynched or fleeing Africans and Italians reveal the racial logic through which travel writers or people on the street “read” migrants from the Hispanic Caribbean, including Martí. In his interpretations of Buffalo Bill and other ritual reenactments of westward expansion, in his self-published translation of Helen Hunt Jackson’s popular romance novel *Ramona*, and in his comments on travel writing and journalism about Latino/a Americans as inherently unfit for self-government, Martí undermined racialized and sexualized representations of his America.

Unlike Herbert Bolton, who saw the Spanish borderlands as a new archive for U.S. scholarly exploration, Martí approaches this region by asking his readers to imagine the United States from the position of the annexed Mexican living in what used to be northern Mexico. In the aftermath of the border’s violent redrawing, he defines his America in terms of its cultural difference from both Europe and the United States, and through its structural parallels or connections to Amerindian, African American, or Asian diasporic and migrant cultures.

Translating Empire tells the story of Latino migrants’ remarkable pre-

science about the United States' imperial future. It retells this story when U.S. scholarship across the disciplines is reckoning at last with the imperial trajectory of the United States. Latino migrant writers' critical foresight and formal bending of existing literary form to represent this imperial future derives in part from their location as translators in the space between American modernities, a space to which I turn in the first chapter.