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State of Ambiguity

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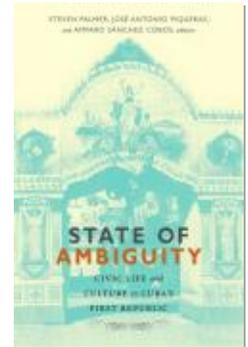
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CHAPTER I



A Sunken Ship, a Bronze Eagle, and the Politics of Memory

The “Social Life” of the USS *Maine* in Cuba (1898–1961)

Marial Iglesias Utset

In June 1961, at the age of 106, María de la Cruz acquired sudden notoriety. Learning to read and write at such an advanced age, as part of a major literacy campaign, turned this elderly woman into a public celebrity.¹ Born as a slave on a Havana sugar plantation in 1855, María de la Cruz Senmanat witnessed the wars of independence, the emancipation of slaves, and, in 1898, the U.S. intervention that helped put an end to four hundred years of Spanish domination in Cuba. Like so many thousands of other residents of Havana, she probably saw the U.S. flag raised in the Explanada del Morro, only to see it, with exultation, lowered and replaced with the Cuban national flag in 1902. The Cuban Republic, formally inaugurated as an independent state, was nonetheless tied by “bonds of singular intimacy”—seemingly unbreakable—to the new imperial power in the region: the United States of America.²

Nearly six decades later, María de la Cruz would witness another exceptional event: the symbolic rupture of those bonds. In January 1961, Cuba and the United States severed diplomatic relations. Three months later, in the early hours of May 1, in accordance with the declaration of the socialist character of the Cuban Revolution, a large crane from the Ministry of Public Works knocked down from its pedestal the bronze eagle that had adorned the monument dedicated to the victims of the explosion of the battleship *Maine*. Soon after, the former slave famed for the extraordinary longevity of her life recalled the event commemorated by the monument. On the night of February 15, 1898, while working as a servant in the house of her former

masters—where, like many other ex-slaves in urban areas, she had continued to reside many years after her emancipation—she heard the explosion that sank the ship reverberating from the Bay of Havana. According to her testimony, she knew immediately that “the culprits of the explosion had not been the Spanish but the Yankees themselves.”³ María de la Cruz likely adapted her account of the *Maine* explosion, which had occurred sixty-three years earlier, to accord with the nationalist and anti-imperialist reinterpretations of this event in the context of the Cuban Revolution. The interview took place in April 1961, when ardently anti-U.S. rhetoric permeated all media and public opinion, only days after the unsuccessful invasion of CIA-backed Cuban exiles at the Bay of Pigs.

The story I wish to narrate here takes place precisely at a time that is either omitted or demonized in the version of national history that begins to impose itself at the same moment in which María de la Cruz is called upon to recount episodes from her long life. Somewhere between the two most symbolic caesuras in Cuba’s contemporary history—1898: the end of the “time of Spain,” and 1959: the “time of revolution”—a republic emerges, flourishes, and perishes, marked from its birth by traces of its ambiguous conception. It was at once the legitimate child of the Wars of Independence and the bastard of U.S. intervention.

The sudden explosion and sinking of the battleship USS *Maine* in the Bay of Havana on February 15, 1898, was the singular event that gave rise to the first of these caesuras. The catastrophe provoked an impassioned reaction against Spain within U.S. public opinion that acted as a catalyst for the intervention of the United States in the war between Cuba and Spain. A few months later, Spain laid down its arms before the overwhelming military superiority of the United States, and the remainder of its once great colonial empire—Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines—was handed over to form part of the territories then under U.S. control. The U.S. Congress, nonetheless, approved a historic agreement known as the Joint Resolution due to strong sympathies and a sense of solidarity toward Cuba among the public, pressure from anti-imperialist circles, and the influence of Cuban émigré lobbyists. This resolution ultimately obliged the United States to concede to Cuba its much sought after independence in 1902, though it would be an independence circumscribed by the Platt Amendment.

The sinking of the *Maine*, the intervention of the United States in the war, and the birth of the republic have been subject to contradictory political interpretations in the Cuban historical memory. According to one interpretation, a young nation is constituted as a sovereign state by the noble gesture

of a powerful state that, by intervening in the war against the old Metropole, lends a helping hand in eliminating the colonial yoke. In another version of these events, the U.S. intervention is condemned: the republic—an aspiration that had motivated more than thirty years of fighting over the course of two independence wars—was born deformed, bound as it was to the United States by neocolonial political ties that de facto prevented the exercise of full sovereignty. In other words, accounts of the factors behind the explosion of the battleship *Maine* are embedded in one or another political hermeneutic—either that of a rhetoric of gratitude for Uncle Sam’s generosity or a rhetoric of nationalism denouncing imperialist intervention.⁴

My text, however, is certainly not a historical investigation of the “real” causes of the explosion and sinking of the battleship, an issue that is in dispute even today, despite the sheer quantity of research and superabundance of literature on the catastrophe amassed over the course of a century. Rather than try to establish a history of “what really occurred” with the *Maine*, I am interested in exploring the politics of memory around this event, the ways in which it was remembered, reconstituted, and forgotten in different political contexts. Accordingly, this is a history of a *lieu de mémoire*, to use loosely the expression coined by Pierre Nora, where “place” is not exclusively a physical site, a material enclave, but a space of representation around an artifact (the contorted remains of a ship), the object of powerful remembrance on both sides of the Florida Strait.⁵

The issue I am tackling here is not just a conventional history of a specific site of commemoration: the monument to the victims of the battleship *Maine* inaugurated at the beginning of 1925. What follows is a history of the “social life” of the *Maine*’s remains: the cycles of “death” and “resurrection” of its memory, cycles spanning several decades, and the dynamics of its sanctification as a relic of patriotism or, conversely, of its mutation into a banal object, rendered as merchandise or souvenir. Finally, I tell the story of its integration into the urban landscape—at first half submerged in Havana’s bay and later incorporated into a collection of monuments at the city’s seafont.

At the same time, as became evident after the mutilation of the monument at the beginning of the Cuban Revolution, the history of the vicissitudes of the sunken battleship and its wreckage is metonymically and inextricably related to the “bonds of singular intimacy” between Cuba and the United States. That is, studying the saga of the multiple political lives of the *Maine*’s “corpse” between 1898 and 1961 is also indirectly a way of contributing to an understanding of the tense, yet fascinating, history of the political and cultural relations between these nations.



Figure 1.1 Destruction of the U.S. battleship *Maine* in Havana Harbor, February 15, 1898.
Source: Library of Congress. Prints and Photographs Division.

“Remember the *Maine*”

It is quite possible that there is no other event over the long course of Cuban history that so immediately became “immortalized” in countless illustrations, photographs, films, and resurrections by way of a series of invocations and commemorations. Sent to the Cuban coast to protect “American life and property,” the USS *Maine*, according to Fitzhugh Lee, the U.S. consul, entered Havana “gliding smoothly” into port on a peaceful winter morning on January 25, 1898. “It was a beautiful sight and one long to be remembered,” Lee wrote in a letter to William R. Day, the U.S. assistant secretary of state.⁶ The consul was quite satisfied: since his appointment in 1896, he had pressed his superiors on the issue of taking part in the conflict between Cuba and Spain. His contentment, however, was not long lasting. Within a few weeks, the arrival of the *Maine* in Havana became, as Lee had predicted, an object of powerful remembrance. Nevertheless, the *Maine* was less remembered for the spectacle of its graceful entrance into the bay of Havana than for the terrible explosion that sank it and killed 266 members of its crew.

The day after the explosion, although news of the tragedy had only barely reached its destinations by telegraph, myriad accusations were published. The coverage of the *Maine* incident is a paradigmatic example of the kind of sensationalist and aggressive journalism that proliferated in the United States

in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The industry fiercely competed for the attention of millions of readers that constituted the new urban public. People who had only recently gained access to the printed word augmented, without precedent, literacy rates: recent immigrants, women, migrants from the countryside, and descendants of slaves newly resident in large cities because of the start of the Great Migration. They seemed to enjoy sensational headlines, simple and emotive language, abundant illustrations, the comics, and numerous commercial advertisements. This new style of journalism also required bold journalists who could immediately mobilize to the site of action and telegraph dramatic accounts that, at times, although plagued by exaggeration or conveniently “fabricated,” were nonetheless convincing and compelling. The coverage of the war in Cuba—especially the explosion of the *Maine* and the reactions to it—cannot be understood apart from this era of sensationalist journalism, boosted by the fierce war that sustained the New York press barons, Joseph Pulitzer of *The World* and William Randolph Hearst of the *New York Journal*.⁷

As for the *Maine*, the magnitude of the disaster and the substantial loss of life, in addition to the mystery surrounding the explosion, turned this event into a news story of the first order.⁸ The sinking of the battleship raised the print run of newspapers to record numbers. *The World*, which sent divers to Havana to “cover the story” in situ, and the *Journal*, which first coined the slogan “Remember the *Maine*, to hell with Spain,” and offered \$50,000 to those who found the “perpetrators of this outrage,” managed to sell 1.5 million copies in a single day. In turn, the coverage of the catastrophe provided a unique occasion to mobilize public opinion in favor of U.S. intervention. Despite a lack of evidence, most articles accused Spain of being responsible for the explosion. Within days, the headline “Remember the *Maine*!” put the entire country on the warpath. The promptness and enormity of this mobilization of popular opinion in favor of war with Spain, which ultimately developed into a national cause, was most certainly an expression of solidarity with the cause of a small populace confronted with a tenacious colonial power refusing to grant independence. Nevertheless, it revealed the strength of latent expansionist longings of a nascent U.S. imperialism that, with the closing of the western frontier, searched for new horizons to conquer abroad.

The image of the battleship was transformed into a powerful icon, whether accompanied by narratives of solidarity that emphasized Uncle Sam’s responsibility to a nation struggling to free itself from the yoke of Spanish imperialism, or employed as an instrument of jingoist propaganda. It was reproduced, until thoroughly exhausted, in drawings, engravings, photo-



Figure I.2 Wm. H. West's Big Minstrel Jubilee (formerly of Primrose & West).
Source: Library of Congress. Prints and Photographs Division.

graphs, and stereoscopic pictures. The scenes of the *Maine*'s catastrophe were represented in theatrical reenactments as well as in the short current-event documentaries with which the film industry made its debut.⁹ The silhouette of the USS *Maine* became a kind of *trademark* of the year 1898, permanently marking the memories of those old enough to remember it, both in the United States and, of course, in Cuba.

Perhaps surprisingly to us today, because of its popularity and resonance, the saying "Remember the *Maine*" was almost immediately turned into a slogan used to attract the attention of consumers. Employed so widely in solemn editorials, fiery news reports, and countless patriotic songs, poems, and hymns, it also appeared in enticing advertisements for merchandise as diverse as books, furniture, clothing, jewelry, dishes, and even pianos.¹⁰ The tension between the "sacred" and the "profane" manifested itself in a fascinating conjunction between the sacrificial rhetoric of editorials on the catastrophe, appearing in the first few pages of newspapers, and the references to it featured in the papers' advertisement sections at the back, is a vivid testimony to the complex ways in which nationalism was converted into a mass phenomenon and "consumed." By the end of the nineteenth century the rapid development of industrialization had lowered the prices of manu-

factured goods and hence broadened the consumer public; new practices of retailing, of advertising, and of extending credit all transformed the consumer landscape. If saving, abstinence, and frugality (associated with puritan creeds) still represented the ideal values of the Victorian generation, at the gates of the twentieth century, advertisement and the growth of a “shopping culture” were turning the increasing capacity to consume into one of the foremost indicators of success within the American Dream.

A profusion of merchandise—including spoons, dishes, buttons, clasps, brooches, ashtrays, paperweights, matchboxes, cards, and children’s toys—began to appear stamped with the image of the battleship. Even biscuits were imprinted with the words “Remember the *Maine*.” This abundance of representation certainly serves as a testimony to the popularization of a culture of nationalism, one that not only invaded public spaces but also penetrated the interstices of the domestic sphere as well, embodied as it was in the lure to purchase countless objects for daily use.¹¹

A Monument to the Memory of the *Maine*: The First Proposals

In contrast to the U.S. public, whose accounts of the sinking of the ship were received entirely through media, residents of Havana had been firsthand witnesses. Within barely half an hour of the explosion, even as desperate rescue measures were in place, the police battled with hundreds of onlookers. Attracted by the roar of the detonation that shattered the windows of neighboring buildings and rumors of the event that quickly traveled across the city, residents of Havana congregated near the bay, conjecturing over the causes of the explosion. When the sun rose, the sheer magnitude of the catastrophe, in all its dimensions, could finally be observed: that which hours before had been an impressive military gunboat was now reduced to a heap of twisted, blackened iron, half-submerged at one side of the city’s bay.

Two days later, more than 50,000 residents of Havana, hundreds of *reconcentrados* among them, congregated in the streets to see the funeral procession on its way to the Cementerio de Colón. There the corpses of the first nineteen marines recovered from the bay received provisional burials. Among those present at the ceremony were the Spanish military and civil authorities, the captain of the *Maine*, Charles D. Sigsbee, his chaplain, Father John Chidwick, the surviving sailors, Clara Barton, founder of the American Red Cross, and Fitzhugh Lee, the American consul in Havana.¹² The funeral on February 17 was only the first of a series of interments and disinterments that—accompanied by public ceremonies that were at times modest and at other times spectacular, carried out in various locations in-



Figure 1.3 Destruction of the USS *Maine*, Havana Harbor, Cuba, Spanish-American War, 1898. Source: Library of Congress. Prints and Photographs Division.

cluding Havana, Key West, and Washington—kept the memory alive for more than a decade.

The remains of the victims were buried in a plot in the *Cementerio de Colón*, donated and designated for this purpose by the Roman Catholic bishop of Havana, and the idea of building a monument dedicated to the memory of the destruction of the battleship was born, literally, on the tombs of these victims. On March 4, 1898, on the occasion of another interment of sailors belatedly recovered from the bay, one attendee mentioned the idea of inaugurating a monument: “flowers were the only tribute possible at present to the poor fellows who died in the line of duty, but [it is hoped] that someday a shrine would rise there, to which Americans visiting Cuba would come to pay honor to the dead.”¹³ Nevertheless, for the moment, in the absence of a definitive monument, the modest wooden crosses in the Havana cemetery would stand in place of a tribute.

In the United States, the mobilization to raise funds for a commemorative monument had begun within a day of the sinking. On February 19, one of Hearst’s newspapers, the *Journal*, published a call to the generosity of all social classes to support the campaign for the construction of a monument to the *Maine*. “Send a dime, a dollar, a hundred or a thousand or five thousand dollars. Send your tribute, no matter how small, to the memory of the 250

men who typified all that is most admirable in American manhood.” The appeal was warmly received and, by June, the “*Maine Memorial Fund*” headed by Hearst had raised over \$100,000.¹⁴

Nevertheless, not all “popular voices” in the United States joined in this patriotic chorus. A meeting of the Central Labor Union, an organization that consolidated labor unions in New York, Brooklyn, and New Jersey, was the scene of a debate. Many delegates from unions with anarchist and socialist leanings voiced their objections to the memorial project. One worker, representing the Cornice and Skylight Makers Union, stressed, “I do not believe in this talk about pride of country and patriotism. The soldiers and marines are not our friends. They are hirelings of monopolies and corporations. I do not believe in a monument to the lost sailors and marines, for they are not producers.” His delivery was met with a mixture of applause from among the ranks of anarchist delegates and cries of disapproval from a large majority of those present in the meeting. In the end, nationalist workers won, and a resolution was approved to support the collection of funds for the future construction of a monument to honor the victims of the explosion.¹⁵

In the meantime, hundreds of residents in Havana, both the curious and the dismayed, watched, over several days, the work of U.S. Navy divers, submerged in the dirty waters of the bay in attempts to recover the bodies trapped in the ship’s hull. The work was compelling. The divers, wearing two-hundred-pound suits, dove for hours into the dark waters of the muddy Havana harbor. Charles Morgan, an official of the USS *New York* and also a trained diver, left a stunning account of the experience:

It was horrible! . . . As I descended into the death-ship the dead rose up to meet me. They floated toward me with outstretched arms, as if to welcome their shipmate. Their faces for the most part were bloated with decay or burned beyond recognition, but here and there the light of my lamp flashed upon a stony face I knew, which when I last saw it had smiled a merry greeting, but now returned my gaze with staring eyes and fallen jaw. The dead choked the hatchways and blocked my passage from stateroom to cabin. I had to elbow my way through them, as you do in a crowd. While I examined twisted iron and broken timbers they brushed against my helmet and touched my shoulders with rigid hands, as if they sought to tell me the tale of the disaster. . . . From every part of the ship came sighs and groans. I knew it was the gurgling of the water through the shattered beams and battered sides of the vessel, but it made me shudder; it sounded so much like echoes of that awful February night of death.¹⁶



Figure 1.4 Stereoscopic photo of American divers at work, exploring the *Maine* wreck, Havana Harbor. Source: Library of Congress. Prints and Photographs Division.

While the remains of the sailors were recovered and buried, arms and other personal belongings of the crew, remnants of furnishings and dishes, and fragments of the ship's hull were carefully packed and sent to the United States to begin a new life as "relics" displayed in public exhibitions or hoarded in private collections.

However, in April recovery efforts suddenly ceased. The U.S. flag that had been lowered at half-mast by the captain the day following the explosion was taken away. The rescue fleet of tugboats and barges headed back in the direction of Key West. The official explanation was that, after many days of hard work, there remained nothing left to do, faced with the impossibility of recovering the remains of crew members whose bodies were likely already completely decomposed or were trapped in the sunken hull of the ship out of reach of the rescue boats.¹⁷

Days before, on March 25, the results from the U.S. investigative commission had been released, concluding that the explosion that destroyed the battleship was provoked by external causes, presumably an explosive mine. This statement confirmed the culpability of the Spanish, an assumption that had already been declared by the press.¹⁸ In consequence, the suspension of the recovery mission and the subsequent retreat of the U.S. consul from Havana was a clear sign to Havana residents of the imminent outbreak of hostilities. They were not mistaken: on April 14, Henry Cabot Lodge, advocating for the declaration of war in the Senate, temporarily closed the debate on the memorial to the victims of the *Maine*. "There is only one monument to raise over that grave, and that is free Cuba and peace in that island. That

is a worthy monument, worthy of men who died under the flag they loved, died in the cold language of the law, in the line of duty.”¹⁹

Forgetting the *Maine*

In the end, as a result of the war’s outcome, the withdrawal of Spanish troops from Havana, thereafter in the hands of U.S. military authorities, provided the first opportunity to pay homage to the victims of the *Maine* at the original site of the explosion. With the military occupation barely under way, a group of women—wives of American officials based in the city—initiated the first celebration of “*Maine* day” in Havana. Thus in February 1899 the appropriation of \$10,000 for the construction of a granite monument in the Cementerio de Colón was debated and eventually approved.²⁰ On February 15, the first anniversary, the ship’s wreckage was adorned with flowers, a U.S. flag was raised on its mast, and U.S. troops congregated in the cemetery to pay their respects.

Nevertheless, at the request of the victims’ families, it was later decided to exhume the bodies of the sailors in order to bury them in the National Cemetery at Arlington, Virginia. The project for a Havana monument was promptly abandoned. After the bodies were transferred to Washington at the end of 1899, all that remained to recall what had happened were the bare remnants of a blackened ship, half sunken in the middle of the city’s port. Over time, the “corpse” of the ship integrated into the familiar landscape of the bay and was eventually transformed, as all quotidian things are, into an almost invisible presence for those who lived in Havana. Only flocks of travelers from the United States convened at the site. Colorful postcards, mostly printed for tourists, and stereographs (an early form of three-dimensional photographs) perpetuated the image of the *Maine* in the waters of the bay as one of the first stereotypical images of the city created for the tourist market, a market that began to develop as an industry in the United States. In those years, the emphasis upon the project of memorializing the war of 1898 was moved to Santiago in eastern Cuba. This was the site of the “splendid little war” to which, in 1901, the military occupation government inaugurated a monument on San Juan Hill. Three years later, the “First Landing Monument” was erected in Daiquirí to mark the site in which marines disembarked in July 1898. In 1908, a bronze plaque was mounted in Siboney to commemorate the ten-year anniversary of the taking of Santiago. The space around the enormous tree where the armistice with the Spanish was signed was converted into a public park. At the foot of the tree, in a bronze book,

were the names of the U.S. soldiers and sailors who had fallen in battle during the capture of the city.

Thus, in 1906, the eighth anniversary of the sinking of the battleship was not celebrated in Havana but in Santiago with the inauguration of a memorial in El Caney. Speeches exalted the bravery of the U.S. soldiers who seized the city and emphasized the protective role of the “great nation to the north” for a young Cuban republic. According to General Samuel B. M. Young, who traveled to Cuba expressly for this occasion, the United States intervened in 1898 to guarantee Cubans “a fair, square deal and a chance to play their own hand at the game of self-government.” “You, my Cuban friends,” asserted Young in a paternalistic tone, “have shuffled and dealt the cards and you are happily playing the game well for beginners.”²¹

However, the “beginners” soon failed to meet their mentors’ expectations in the game of self-government. Riots provoked by a dispute between the liberals and conservatives over fraudulent presidential elections marked by caudillismo set the stage for a new military occupation. The failure of the first attempt to stabilize a Cuban republic made it immediately evident that “the bonds of singular intimacy and force” that united Cuba and the United States, far from a metaphorical expression, held real consequences, certainly with respect to force. It also demonstrated that the controversial Platt Amendment was no dead letter. If there remained any doubt about this, the 5,600 U.S. soldiers that invaded Cuba in order to “pacify” the country in 1906 were proof enough.

“Remember the *Maine* II”: The Remake

Charles Magoon, a lawyer from Minnesota, was an official of the Bureau of Insular Affairs in the U.S. Department of War; as the ex-governor of the Panama Canal Zone and an expert in the legal management of “territories under occupation,” Magoon was appointed military governor of the island in September 1906.²² When the second U.S. occupation came to an end and self-government returned to Cuba in 1909, Magoon’s activities while military governor became a topic of controversy. Although congratulated by his government for the success of an extensive public works program, as well as the sanitization of Havana and other regions, he was nonetheless unfavorably remembered in Cuba. Magoon was accused of squandering the island’s treasury and opening the door to U.S. investors with contracts and unscrupulous tenders that only served to aggravate the dependency of the Cuban economy on U.S. capital.

One of the governor's proposals, included in the 1908 annual report, reopened the polemic surrounding the now "slumbering" memory of the *Maine*. According to the testimony of a U.S. official, a decade after the sinking of the vessel, a sandbank had formed around the ship that was presenting a significant obstacle to the navigation in the bay; the problem was exasperated by an increase in commercial traffic within the harbor. What was worse, affirmed Magoon, was that the public as much as the government had forgotten about the wreckage, despite the fact that it still harbored the bodies of more than sixty sailors. Magoon's report, which recommended proceeding without delay to remove the *Maine*'s frame from the bay and put an end to the "deplorable spectacle" of its abandonment, received ample publicity in the United States. His report was followed by an extensive debate over the fate of the remains of the ship.²³

As could be expected, the suggestion to flood the vessel so that it might finally meet its definitive end in the coastal waters of Cuba was met by opposition that considered this inappropriate and almost "sacrilege." An engineer from New York proposed building a monument in its place: an artificial island in the bay of Havana, "properly decorated with roses and palm trees, could be arranged so that people could promenade there and rest on settees while they meditated over the fact of the gallant sailors entombed below."²⁴ Others proposed raising the ship to recover the bodies and inspect the remains one last time. This was nothing new: in 1900, Beach & Co. in Washington had tried to obtain authorization from the navy to undertake a project to extract, reconstruct, and sail the boat from one port to another throughout the United States—a kind of patriotic "pilgrimage" that would keep the (itinerant) memory of the victims alive.²⁵

A decade later, some still attempted to take advantage of the wreckage. Engineer John O'Rourke offered his services in retrieving the remains. After a detailed explanation of the technical procedures necessary to accomplish the task, O'Rourke demanded a high price—affirming, however, that no amount of money would be sufficient for the task of retrieving not simply a ship but the very "historical truth" whose secret is guarded by its remains. He added that one could only imagine the patriotic rapture that the very sight of this mythical craft, entering New York harbor, would arouse: "That day of patriotic hysteria will do us a tremendous lot of good."²⁶

In Congress, the topic was the subject of lively deliberations. William Sulzer, U.S. representative from New York, advocated the approval of the sum of money necessary to retrieve the ship. "It was a national disgrace to allow the wreck to remain and not take out the 63 bodies still in the hulk," declared the

congressman. On the other hand, Albert Douglas, U.S. representative from Ohio, made a call for laying the memory of the *Maine* to rest. “We would better quit remembering the *Maine*,” he announced. In the end, he felt, the corpses that could not be recovered in 1898 were no longer bodies but food for fish, so that bringing home the hideous remains would serve only to reopen old wounds.²⁷ Finally, in early May 1909, both the House of Representatives and the Senate approved the allocation of funds necessary to retrieve the ship, recover the remaining bodies, and give them an honorable burial in Arlington. The principal mast of the ship would be preserved and added to the pantheon of the *Maine* located in the Arlington National Cemetery. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, not a private institution, took charge of retrieving the ship while the federal government covered the costs of this complicated task.²⁸

The Cuban government immediately stepped forward to collaborate. In a letter to President Taft, José Miguel Gómez conveyed the desire to conserve a part of the ship’s wreckage in Cuba in order to preserve its memory. “On the eve of the raising of the remains of the *Maine* whose sad fate is so closely connected with the history of the independence of Cuba, I desire, voicing the general sentiment of the Cuban people, to ask the American people to let us have one part of the ship with which to erect a plain and shining monument that will forever recall the union of love between the great Republic of the United States and the Republic of Cuba.”²⁹ In the meantime, a permanent guard stationed by the authorities of the port of Havana would avoid the potential of “depredations” from souvenir and relic hunters.³⁰

The Cadaver of the *Maine*: Exhumation, Autopsy, and Burial in the Waters of the Gulf

Thus in February 1911, on the thirteenth anniversary of the sinking of the battleship, a celebration was organized with a ceremony in the bay, where memorial services were carried out near the remains of the ship. A corps of Spanish-American War veterans and the Havana chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution organized the event. Cubans were included in the official delegation for the first time. Among those present were Alfredo Zayas, the vice president of the republic, as well as veterans of the Liberating Army and representatives of different associations and political parties.³¹ As a result of a year of strenuous work and the construction of an enormous cofferdam around the wreckage, which was itself an extraordinary work of engineering, the hulk of the battleship partially resurfaced. Between November and December 1911, a new investigative commission inspected the remains



Figure 1.5 *Maine* in cofferdam, Havana. Source: Library of Congress. Prints and Photographs Division.

that were now exposed to the light of day, only to concur with the expert conclusion of 1898, which had determined that an external cause (such as a mine or torpedo) had destroyed the navy ship.³²

The recovery project in Havana more than ten years later, and the results of the new investigation, revived the memory of the event, provoking as a result a “remake” of the 1898 “Remember the *Maine*.” The discovery of the victims’ remains and some of their personal belongings, as well as a number of objects in the hull that had formed part of the ship’s equipment, aroused once again an emotional reaction that harkened back to the impact of the first news in February 1898. Scores of articles reclaimed the pages of U.S. newspapers with the stories of survivors and nostalgic accounts of the event. The idea of building a commemorative monument resurfaced to enthusiastic support and, in a matter of months, the *Maine* Memorial Committee had collected over \$100,000 to construct a monument in New York City’s Central Park.³³

However, just as in 1898, the explosion of nationalist fervor quickly drew commercial interest that manifested itself in a veritable avalanche of “patriotic” merchandise and advertisements, which profited from the kind of public interest the shipwreck aroused. A decade later, the deliberation in Congress over the fate of the *Maine*’s remains would once again provide evidence

of the tension between, on the one hand, the impulse toward a “sacred” cult of heroes and nationalist symbols of a “civil religion” and, on the other, the incorporation of this memory and nationalist symbolism into the everyday circuits of mercantile traffic and the entertainment industry.

In December 1911—when the House of Representatives was debating the question of the funds necessary to complete the task of recovering the ship—a sum that in the end reached \$900,000—a group of representatives categorically opposed the idea of making an investment of such magnitude in a process that would end “unproductively” by sinking the remains of a ship that had been so costly to recover in the first place. Robert B. Macon, representative from Arkansas, proposed opening up the sale of the *Maine*’s wreckage to auction. “I believe it would be better for the people to get what we can for the ship,” he declared before the House. “There are plenty of novelty seekers and Coney Islandites who would gladly take the old carcass where it is and pay a good price for it in order to get it over here and charge so much per look at it, or sell pieces of it to curio hunters at so much per curio.”³⁴ Thomas Sisson, representative from Mississippi, also spoke for a group of investors “who desire to exhibit it at various ports of the United States and charge an admission fee to visitors,” and was therefore offering \$1 million for the ship’s remains.³⁵ Both proposals provoked indignant reactions from those who believed that the remains of the ship, especially as it embodied a tragic national memory, deserved to be treated with respect and considered venerable relics rather than merchandise or novelties. “I am surprised that this gentleman has not included in his proposition the selling of the bones of the seamen who died in the *Maine*,” articulated James R. Mann, one of the leaders of the Republican Party.

In the end, taking a clear stand against the commercialization of the wreckage, John J. Fitzgerald, chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations, promptly put an end to the debate. “In my opinion, the American people would not tolerate making a public show of that old vessel. There are some things that are sacred to the people, and among them are the remains of men or vessels lost in defense of the Nation. I would deplore the American Government attempting to make profit out of this ship, merely to gratify the idle curiosity of any people of the United States.”³⁶ The law authorizing the remaining funds required to recover the ship was approved by a majority vote and commercial offers from businessman looking to profit from the memory of the *Maine* were rejected; these offers were considered “unpatriotic” and any attempt to commercialize the ship’s remains was prohibited. As such, this mass of twisted iron attained

the status of “patriotic relic,” sharing a destiny homologous with the bodies of the crew that had remained trapped in its hull. The crew would later be buried with military honors in Arlington, and it was decided that the carcass of the ship would similarly be given an “appropriate grave,” submerged at the bottom of the sea.³⁷

On the island, Havana residents had followed the yearlong developments in the construction of the cofferdam with immense curiosity.³⁸ The “exhumation” of the *Maine*’s “cadaver” together with the publication of the results of the new investigation into the causes of the explosion—a new “autopsy” if you will—succeeded in reopening the public debate over the implications of the U.S. intervention in the conflict between Cuba and Spain, as well as the nature of the relationship of “tutelage” exerted by their northern neighbor. Nevertheless, both the moving tone of the coverage of the “exhumation” of the *Maine* in Cuban newspapers and the emotional reaction of Havana residents—a populace that gathered en masse on the pier and in adjacent streets on the day of the *Maine*’s “funeral” to witness the “farewell” spectacle—speaks to the presence of conflicting feelings with respect to the memory of the *Maine*, experienced as part of a local and rather intimate memory of the city.

It is very likely that, among the thousands of Havana residents who participated in the symbolic funeral of 1912 were many firsthand witnesses to the enormous explosion in the port, such as María de la Cruz Senmanat. Many had also been present at the burial of the first victims in the Cementerio de Colón or seen the impressive spectacle of rescue efforts that, for several days, attempted to recover the corpses of U.S. Marines from the waters of the bay. In contrast to later generations for whom the *Maine* was merely a monument made of marble and bronze in the district of Vedado or a stereotypical narrative in the pages of a textbook, for those who had witnessed the episode it was a highly complicated experience. The sinking of the ship was no doubt associated with memories of the U.S. military intervention and the image of the ominous U.S. flag flying over the fortress of del Morro. But it also undoubtedly evoked a sense of enormous relief provoked by the end of the war and the *reconcentración*. The event was also connected with the modernization of the city on the North American model that started during the U.S. occupation: the expansion of paved streets, electric lighting, and a telephone network, as well as a modern sewage layout and the creation of new public spaces like the Malecón (the seawall along the outer bay), left an indelible physical mark on the landscape of the urban capital.

“The *Maine*, protruding out in the middle of the bay, its mast faded in

color, its corroding bow; this mass of blackened ruins has been a permanent detail in our landscape, it has been truly *ours* for the last 14 years. There is a sincere melancholy in seeing it disappear forever from these greenish waters and blazing skies,” noted a journalist in the pages of the newspaper *La Discusión*. This was published on February 15, 1912, on the occasion of the last commemorative ceremony, which took place in the port of Havana, on the anniversary of the explosion. “This is to be the last February sun [the vessel] will experience, since, in short, it is to take its final resting place at the bottom of the sea, indeed a suitable grave for the greatness of such a powerful ship.”

A sector of the public refused to part with the “cadaver” of a ship that was perceived to be theirs, particularly since it had been so closely tied to the recent history of the republic as well as the memory of the city. “That reddish light of the battleship as it blew into pieces was the resplendency of the dawn of our republic,” an editorial poetically proclaimed in *La Discusión*. “The memory of the disaster must not die alongside the generation of Cubans who were alive during this terrible episode.” For this reason, suggested the author, in place of sinking the ship, “it would be far more agreeable to patriotic Cubans if the cadaver of the ship that with its death gave the republic life were held by a dense layer of our land and sleeping below a monument erected for our republic.” To conclude, the author wrote, “if the miserable remains have for so many years been immovable in the mud of our bay, why not entrust it once again to the genuine earth of this island of tears in whose process of development it has been silently present as a faithful friend?”³⁹ Beyond its political implications, then, the remains of the ship, with its aura of mystery and tragedy, had for Havana residents become an intimate part of the city’s landscape. Indeed, in the days following the final sinking of the *Maine*, a rumor traveled throughout the city: for inexplicable reasons the ship had resurfaced anew, and several people claimed to have seen it floating adrift like a ghostly presence refusing to make its final departure.⁴⁰

A similar reaction occurred in the United States. Patriotic organizations, a handful of senators, and officials from the U.S. Navy made it known that they opposed the decision to sink the ship. Since the government had invested such a considerable sum of money to recover the boat, it seemed almost sacrilege to return it to the sea. Furthermore, it would have looked particularly irreverent if there existed the slightest possibility of returning it to the United States where so many would look on with satisfaction at its conversion into a monument that preserved the memory not only of the victims of the *Maine* but also of all Spanish-American War veterans.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the decision taken by the government and the secretary of the navy was irrevocable, and



Figure I.6 The USS *Maine* going to her final resting place. Source: Library of Congress. Prints and Photographs Division.

on March 15, 1912, the official burial of the USS *Maine*'s "cadaver" took place in Havana.

The final "farewell" to its remains was a theatrical spectacle of grand proportions, carefully conceived down to the minutest detail. Although organized in Washington, Cuban authorities had an important role in the script. The *New York Times* described the ceremony as "the most stately naval funeral in the history of the world." According to the Cuban press, the ceremony witnessed the largest public demonstration in the city since May 20, 1902—the day of the republic's inauguration. It was a great *mise-en-scène* of the "fraternal friendship" of the two nations. The act included the presence of General William Herbert Bixby, chief of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the president of Cuba himself, José Miguel Gómez, who took part in the ceremony from a Cuban naval ship. Furthermore, diplomatic representatives in the city, members of various associations, U.S. veterans of the war of 1898, and veterans of the Cuban independence army were present. The USS *North Carolina* and the USS *Birmingham* arrived in the port of Havana for two purposes: to accompany the remains of the *Maine*'s "cadaver" to the waters of the Gulf, where it would be sunk, and to later escort the bodies of U.S. sailors to the United States, where they would be buried in Arlington National Cemetery.⁴²

Nearly 100,000 people congregated on the seafront to see the departure of the mythical ship, tugged out from the port where it would be sunk at three nautical miles from the coast. According to the *New York Tribune*, around 2 P.M., with her deck "covered deep with flowers and a great American ensign floating from the juremast, where the main mast formerly stood," the *Maine* put to sea on her last voyage. As the wreck passed the American squadrons, "the Marines presented arms and the scarlet coated bandsmen on the quarterdeck played the national anthem, while minute guns boomed a requiem." A large procession of Cuban and American ships followed the vessel until the three-mile limit was trespassed. At 5 P.M., the valves in the carcass were opened and the wreck started to sink. A few minutes later "there was a

flash of blue and white, as the great ensign floating from the mast struck the waves and disappeared. Simultaneously, the decks were blown up by the air pressure, and with incredible velocity the *Maine* plunged down, leaving no trace save flowers tossing on the surface of the sea.”⁴³ But a series of photographs that immortalized her “final moments” were at first abundantly published in the newspapers and then reproduced in postcards, giving a graphic testimony to the burial of the wreckage in the sea. In Havana, a film about the “burial” was created by Enrique Díaz, a pioneer of Cuban cinematography, and premiered to the great excitement of the public in the Payret cinema on March 19, 1912.⁴⁴

Four days later, the last of the sailors’ bodies were buried. President Taft, accompanied by Charles D. Sigsbee and Reverend John P. Chidwick, the captain and chaplain of the *Maine*, were in attendance. The ceremony brought to a conclusion a series of memorial services that had begun in Havana fourteen years earlier when, on February 17, 1898, the first victims were buried in the Cementerio de Colón.⁴⁵

The “Life after Death” of the *Maine*:

The Resurrection as Monumentalization

But the “social life” of the *Maine* did not end the final sinking of its “corpse” in the sea, with the “honors of a soldier who died in combat.” On the contrary. As Katherine Verdery has argued in her book, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies*, often it is just in the moment of “death” that the more significant symbolic life actually begins. Despite an agreement that was passed by Congress in 1911, explicitly preventing the “dismemberment” of the ship for commercial purposes, all that could be detached from the frame was nonetheless taken away: what Havana residents saw submerged in the sea was only the hull of the battleship. Fragments—veritable “relics”—were dispersed and became part of memorials and monuments that preserved the memory of the sunken ship in stone and bronze.⁴⁶

As we have already seen, the “revival” of the memory of the *Maine*—a consequence of a series of campaigns for its “resurrection” from the Havana bay and its subsequent burial—reinvigorated the activities of the *Maine* Memorial Committee. Though the committee was nominally presided over by James Grant Wilson, it was driven and sponsored by William Randolph Hearst from its inception in 1898. On May 30, 1913, a monument to the *Maine*, sponsored by the committee, was inaugurated in Columbus Circle next to Central Park in New York City. The principal sculpture, created by architect Harold Van Buren Magonigle and sculptor Attilio Piccirilli, was

Columbia Triumphant. According to what is said in the description of the project, it was crafted out of bronze cannons taken from the *Maine* itself. A second allegorical sculpture group, named *The Antebellum State of Mind*, featured a female figure representing peace, accompanied by other figures representing courage and fortitude. This sculptural group also included the representation of a young boy who expectantly advances toward the bow of the boat; according to the creators of the memorial, he represented the “new era inaugurated in Cuba through the Spanish War.”⁴⁷

The inauguration of the monument was preceded by a large commemorative Memorial Day parade, which, according to the *New York Times*, was one of the major celebrations in the city. The cost of the monument, \$170,000, was defrayed by contributions from “among the poor and plain people of almost every State of the Union,” which amounted to more than a million donations. Former President Taft was the keynote speaker at the ceremony and succinctly summarized the significance of the memorial: “The monument we dedicate today is an enduring witness of three facts. The first is the gratitude that our country feels towards the men who went down on the *Maine*, in that they gave up their lives in her service. The second is the birth of new people and the founding of a new nation through our disinterested aid and sacrifice. The third is the expansion of this nation into a wider sphere of world usefulness and greater responsibility among the nations than ever before in its history.”⁴⁸ The association that Taft made in his address—the connection between the sinking of the ship and the birth of the Cuban Republic, and the relationship of both to the beginning of an era of imperial expansion by the United States—would eventually be the subject of ardent debate and reinterpretation in Cuba in the years to follow, in a time when anti-imperialist discourse carried increasingly more force.

Two days after the “burial” of the *Maine*, the Cuban press circulated the news of the government’s decision to preserve the memory of the ship with a monument in Havana. The Republic of Cuba obtained its share of the “relics” that were packed and sent to the United States.⁴⁹ It was thus that a secondary mast, some chains, and two of the ship’s cannons remained on the island with the intention of being incorporated into a monument that would be constructed to fill the memorial void left in the city by the absence of the ship’s proper “body.”

In fact, receiving notice that the hull was to be submerged at sea, the council of the Asociación de Veteranos de la Independencia de Cuba [Association of Veterans of the Cuban Independence War] agreed to compose a letter to President Taft, requesting that the cofferdam, built to extract the

hull of the ship, be preserved once the ship's remains were removed. The intention was to refill the cofferdam so that a monument could be built on it to perpetuate the memory of the ship in the very location of the bay where it had lain for so many years.⁵⁰ Days later, in the Cuban House of Representatives, a similar proposal was forwarded. The senator for the province of Oriente, Erasmós Regueiferos, proposed a bill that would supply funds for the erection of a monument on the cofferdam. Its surface would be filled in with earth, creating a small artificial island upon which the monument would be constructed just as the senator in question had imagined it: a lighthouse with a Statue of Liberty carrying a torch and accompanied by two effigies, one of José Martí and the other of George Washington.⁵¹

Nevertheless, despite the initial enthusiasm of the newspapers and a presidential order signed on December 6, 1913 by Mario García Menocal, which created a committee to design the monument and allocated the initial funds for its construction, the project eventually fell into oblivion. In September 1915, nearly two years later, the newspaper *La Noche* reported that the cannons and the mast of the *Maine*, which had been donated by the United States to be used in a memorial, remained abandoned in the same warehouse on the harbor where they had been left the day the ship was sunk in 1912. This report had repercussions in the U.S. press, and many papers demanded the return of "relics" that were so underappreciated by the Cuban government.⁵²

Under the pressure of public opinion, the committee in charge of the creation of the monument decided to hold an international competition for the design of the future memorial to the *Maine*. Engineer and architect Félix Cabarrocas won the contest with a plan in a neoclassical style that combined both the cannons and chains from the ship. However, it was not until 1918 that the Secretaría de Obras Públicas decided to begin construction on the monument in the designated site: the Avenida "Antonio Maceo." The avenue, known as "el Malecón," is located near the headland where the Santa Clara battery was situated, at the gates of Vedado. Despite good intentions, the commencement of construction was once again delayed by problems with the budget and a conflict between Cabarrocas, the designer of the monument, the organizing committee, and the Ministerio de Obras Públicas. In 1924, the government of Alfredo Zayas resolved to execute the project anew and allocated a budget of 116,000 pesos for that purpose.⁵³

Finally, on February 15, 1924, on the twenty-sixth anniversary of the catastrophe, the first stone was laid.⁵⁴ This monument to the victims of the *Maine*—the work of sculptor Moisés de la Huerta and Cabarrocas—was inaugurated by Zayas a year later on March 8, 1925, when he was nearly at the

point of handing over power to the succeeding president, Gerardo Machado. Nevertheless, just as his presidential authority had been consistently put into question by the presence of Enoch Crowder, the U.S. consul in Havana, the speaker at the ceremony was not the Cuban president but U.S. General John J. Pershing, who had come explicitly from the United States for the commemoration. More than a quarter century after the catastrophe—a catastrophe that with the intervention of the United States in the war between Cuba and Spain inaugurated the imperialistic expansion of the United States within the Americas—the tone of U.S. discourse had changed slightly. If, with the first commemorations of the *Maine*, the role of tutelage was repeatedly claimed by the United States in relation to the small and emerging Cuban Republic, this time, at the height of pan-Americanism, the “moral obligation” of the United States to watch over the development of democracy went far beyond Cuba and extended to all its “little sisters” in Latin America.⁵⁵ An interesting detail about the commemorative inauguration of 1925 was the participation of the Spanish ambassador to Cuba, who rendered homage to the victims, leaving an offering of flowers.⁵⁶

The monument’s base, built of granite, was adorned with the cannons and chains procured from the remains of the ship; two twin marble columns emerged from the base to support a bronze eagle with extended wings, an image whose imperial symbolism was poorly received by Cubans from its inception. It seemed born for a tragic fate. Indeed, within a year of its inauguration, a fierce hurricane hit Havana, leaving more than \$1 million worth of damage, destroying the columns, and shattering the eagle.

Nevertheless, the memorial was restored. The marble columns were replaced, and the original eagle was substituted for another with a slender and more aerodynamic body in order to better resist the battering of the winds.⁵⁷ In 1928, the area was significantly beautified with the building of the Plaza del *Maine* around the monument. A series of esplanades and gardens added not only equilibrium and beauty but also symbolic connotations to the site: the plaza was complemented by the busts of former U.S. presidents William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt, as well as that of Leonard Wood, who had been the U.S. military governor in Cuba during the first intervention. These busts were the creations of U.S. sculptor Gutzom Borglum.⁵⁸ The design of the plaza and the gardens bordering it were the work of the prestigious French architect and landscapist Jean Claude Nicolas Forestier. Forestier had been expressly invited to Cuba to act as a consultant on an urban renewal project for Havana, launched by President Gerardo Machado and his minister of public works, Carlos Miguel de Céspedes.



Figure I.7
Bronze eagle from
the monument to
the victims of the
Maine. Photograph
unknown. Courtesy
of Marial Iglesias
Utset.

Forestier designed the plaza as a gateway that connected the old part of the city, across from the Malecón, with Vedado. As previously mentioned, both the Malecón—an avenue built during the first U.S. intervention that, with each new government, stretched out further west along the coastline—along with Vedado—a neighborhood made up of straight tree-lined streets, main avenues, parterres, and public parks, as well as chalets and cottages built in the style of U.S. suburbs—were paradigmatic models of the spatial transformation of the city on a U.S. model.⁵⁹ Early in 1928, motivated by both the celebration of the sixth international Conference of American States in Havana and a visit from the president of the United States, Calvin Coolidge, Gerardo Machado ostentatiously inaugurated the plaza.⁶⁰ In what largely resulted in an insult to the memory of nationalist patriots, the commemorative ceremony, which took place on October 10, the anniversary of the declaration of the war of independence against Spain, was celebrated in the Plaza del *Maine* with an impressive military parade.

In later years the monument would be strongly associated not only with U.S. presence in Cuba but also with the unfavorably remembered Machado



Figure 1.8 Monument to the victims of the *Maine*. Photograph by Marial Iglesias Utset.

dictatorship. In 1930, with the construction of the deluxe Hotel Nacional next door to it, the monument became a site of obligatory pilgrimage for the hundreds of U.S. tourists who came to Cuba each winter. In 1953, the inauguration of a new building for the nearby U.S. embassy, a seven-story modernist building designed by Leland W. King, completed the definitive “Americanization” of the area.⁶¹

At the same time, police and military parades, organized for the anniversary of the *Maine* in the esplanade facing the plaza during the 1940s and 1950s—particularly during the years of tyranny under President Fulgencio Batista—contributed to endowing the site with repressive and pro-government affiliations. As a result, this site frequently became the scene of nationalist and anti-government protests. In March 1949, the monument to the victims of the *Maine* was vandalized in reprisal for the desecration of the José Martí monument in Parque Central by a group of drunken U.S. Marines who urinated on the statue.⁶² Carlos Franqui, a veteran of the revolutionary underground in Havana, relates in his memoirs how July 26 Movement at-

tempted in vain to explode the monument. The structure was so solid that the endeavor was impossible: “more dynamite was needed to knock it down than [to depose] the Batista regime itself.”⁶³

The Fall of the “Eagle of Imperialism”

It is not surprising that with the triumph of the revolution in 1959, the monument, with its imperialist symbolism and unfavorable memories that associated it with both the Machado and Batista dictatorships, was bound to disappear. As if that were not enough, in March 1960, *La Coubre*, a Belgian commercial freight ship transporting arms, exploded in Havana Harbor, killing more than seventy-five people. The revolutionaries immediately claimed the blast was an act of terrorism, and Fidel Castro blamed the United States and compared the incident to the sinking of the *Maine*, though acknowledging that there was no material evidence for this accusation. So this unfortunate event conjured up the ghost of the *Maine*, which resurrected again to become a symbolic trope in the aggressive anti-U.S. rhetoric of the early 1960s.⁶⁴ It was in Castro’s speech at the funeral of the victims of the explosion of *La Coubre* where the slogan of the July 26 Movement, “Patria y Libertad,” was replaced by “Patria o Muerte,” a pivotal point in the process of radicalization of the revolution.

A few months later, in August 1960, the nationalization of U.S. property in Cuba provoked an enormous demonstration by Havana residents in the city streets heading toward the Malecón. They intended to “bury,” by throwing into the sea, coffins made of cardboard that symbolically represented the “corpses” of U.S. corporate monopolies. Henceforth, tensions escalated and relations deteriorated between the United States and Cuba until the complete rupture in diplomatic relations in January 1961.

And so, immediately after the defeat of a U.S.-backed invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs, and in the early morning of May 1, 1961, the eagle that topped the monument was pulled down by a Cuban government crane—made to fall once again, only this time by force of the overwhelming gale of the revolution.⁶⁵ The initial suggestion to substitute it with a cubist sculpture, a peace dove designed by Picasso (“a picassian symbol of liberty atop the decapitated columns of the old *Maine*,” according to Carlos Franqui, the mastermind of the proposal) was never realized.⁶⁶ Half a century after the mutilation of the monument, its pinnacle still remains vacant. The marble and bronze structure stands as silent witness to the profound political disagreements between the nations.⁶⁷

This very same marble surface of the monument is today a kind of palimpsest, bearing visible traces of the rewriting of the meaning of the event that the monument commemorates. The simple inscription, “To the victims of the *Maine*. The people of Cuba,” that originally appeared on the front of the monument was, in 1961, traded in for an accusatory, “To the victims of the *Maine* who were sacrificed to a voracious imperialism in its eagerness to seize the island of Cuba.” The text of the resolution approved by the U.S. Congress in 1898 that affirmed that Cuba is and, by right, ought to be free and independent was preserved on the other side; nevertheless, as a nationalist gesture, the cast text that was originally in English was replaced by a Spanish translation.

The singular destiny of the three-ton imperial eagle that was “overthrown” in 1961 can also be read as a metaphorical rupture of the “bonds of singular intimacy” between both nations. The body and wings of the eagle were exhibited for many years in the Museo de la Ciudad (Museum of the City of Havana) as trophies won in the “defeat of imperialism.” Meanwhile, the head of the bird was stolen in 1961 by an anti-Castro group from a warehouse of the Ministry of Public Works where it was stored and later returned to U.S. diplomats as a symbolic gesture of making amends. It now hangs on the wall in a conference room in the United States Interests Section in Havana.⁶⁸

“I have been the faithful custodian of the body,” the director of the museum and Havana’s city historian, Eusebio Leal, recently told Peter Orsi, the Associated Press correspondent in Cuba. After half a century of abandonment and dilapidation, the monument is now being restored, due to the initiative of Leal, who is also president of the National Commission of Monuments. “Gone are the rusty stains beneath the two 10-inch guns that were salvaged from the *Maine*. The statues are a lustrous bronze again after corrosive salt air turned them bright green,” wrote Orsi in a piece published on the occasion of the 115th anniversary of the sinking of the *Maine*. But there seems to be little hope that the body and the head of the bronze eagle will be reunited soon, since the normalization of relations between the two countries is unlikely in the near term.⁶⁹

However, in spite of the fifty years that have transpired since the mutilation of the monument, the “social life” of the remains of the battleship *Maine* is not over. Silent witnesses of the encounters, conflicts, and misunderstandings that have marked the tense relationship between Cuba and the United States, from its granite and marble niche on the Havana’s Malecón, the cannons and chains of the warship have resisted the battering and corrosion

of the sea and the passage of time, awaiting the next stage of the intimately fraught kinship between the two nations.

Notes

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1. *Revolución*, no. 779 (La Habana, June 19, 1961): 1, 6.

2. The phrase, used by President William McKinley, would become the euphemism par excellence to describe Cuba's dependence on the United States during the better part of the twentieth century. It is part of McKinley's Third Annual Message, December 5, 1899: "The new Cuba yet to arise from the ashes of the past must needs be bound to us by ties of singular intimacy and strength if its enduring welfare is to be assured. Whether those ties shall be organic or conventional, the destinies of Cuba are in some rightful form and manner irrevocably linked with our own." <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29540>, accessed May 2, 2013.

3. *Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria*, no. 7 (July 1961): 16.

4. On the importance of the *Maine* incident as the causal explanation for the U.S. decision to intervene in the war between Cuba and Spain, and on the rhetoric of Cuban gratitude to the United States, see Pérez, "The Meaning of the *Maine*" and "Incurring a Debt of Gratitude." In Cuban historiography the work of Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring offers the most consistent attempt to refute, from a nationalist perspective, the interpretation that attributes to U.S. intervention the merit for having contributed in a disinterested manner to the founding of the Republic of Cuba. See Roig de Leuchsenring, *Por su propio esfuerzo conquistó el pueblo cubano su independencia* and *Cuba no debe su independencia a los Estados*.

5. Nora, "Between Memory and History," 7-24.

6. Fitzhugh Lee to William R. Day, January 26, 1898, cited in Eggert, "Our Man in Havana: Fitzhugh Lee," 481.

7. Wisan, *The Cuban Crisis as Reflected in the New York Press, 1895-1898*, 46-83; Mott, *American Journalism*; Campbell, *Yellow Journalism*; Goldenberg, "Imperial Culture and National Conscience."

8. One month after the sinking, *Collier's Weekly* reported that the photos of the *Maine* were selling "better than those of noted beauties and other celebrities," *Collier's Weekly*, March 12, 1898, 4. On visual coverage of the *Maine* episode see Miller, "The Spectacle of War: A Study of Spanish-American War Visual and Popular Culture."

9. Thomas A. Edison Inc., *Wreck of the Battleship Maine* (1898). The film can be consulted on the Library of Congress website, "Spanish-American War in Motion Pictures," <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/sawhtml/sawsp2.html>. The sinking of the *Maine* was also filmed by the pioneering Cuban cinematographer José G. González; while in

France Georges Méliès filmed a shortened version of the episode. See Chanan, *Cuban Cinema*, 41.

10. Only two days after the *Maine* explosion, the *Atlanta Constitution* published moving descriptions of the catastrophe on its front page. In the same edition but in the advertising section, a reproduction of the ship illustrated an ad by the R. S. Crutcher Furniture Company of Atlanta with the text, “The terrible explosion of the U.S. Man of War *Maine* . . . is causing a great deal of excitement among the American people, but for the next 30 days we are going to have an ‘explosion of prices’ on Furniture, Carpets and Baby Carriages that will startle the entire population of Georgia.” *Atlanta Constitution*, February 18, 1898, 6.

11. For the relationship between consumption and nationalism, see Fox and Miller-Idriss, “Everyday Nationhood,” 549. A theorization of consumption as a cultural practice can be found in Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* and *A Theory of Shopping*.

12. *Diario de la Marina*, February 18, 1898. For a detailed description of the ceremony, see also Sigsbee, *The “Maine”: An Account of Her Destruction in Havana Harbor*, 110.

13. *New York Times*, March 5, 1898.

14. *New York Evening Journal*, February 19, 1898.

15. “Central Union Patriotic: Resolutions Favoring a Monument to the *Maine* Victims Passed by a Large Majority,” *New York Times*, February 28, 1898.

16. *Diario de la Marina*, February 17, 1898; “Naval Divers,” *Frank Leslie’s Popular Monthly* 47, no. 2 (December 1898): 170.

17. “*Maine* Wreck Abandoned,” *New York Times*, April 3, 1898.

18. “The *Maine* Inquiry Report,” *New York Times*, March 29, 1898.

19. “Will Be No Delay,” *Washington Post*, April 14, 1898.

20. “*Maine* Day in Havana,” *New York Times*, January 24, 1899, and “*Maine* Monument in Havana,” *New York Times*, February 4, 1899.

21. “Dos pueblos y dos banderas unidos para honrar gloriosos hechos: Las fiestas de la loma de San Juan,” *La Discusión*, February 15, 1906, 1, 10; and *Society of the Army of Santiago de Cuba: Dedication of the Battle Monument at El Caney* (Baltimore Press of John S. Bridge & Co., 1906), 11; cited in Klein, *Spaniards and the Politics of Memory in Cuba*, 311–12. Note that Young’s opinion had changed considerably: on August 7, 1898, he had declared to the *New York Times* that the Cubans “are no more capable of self-government than the savages of Africa.”

22. Magoon, *Reports on the Law of Civil Government in Territory Subject to Military Occupation by the Military Forces of the United States*. See also “Civil Government by the Military,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, July 14, 1902, and Gonzalez, “The Cause of Civilization,” 206–54.

23. “Magoon Says Raise Wreck of *Maine*,” *New York Times*, January 25, 1909, and *Wreck of battle ship Maine. Letter from the Secretary of War, transmitting a letter from the Chief of Engineers relative to the rising or removal of the wreck of the battle ship Maine*

from Havana harbor, May 17, 1910, 61st Cong., 2d sess., House of Representatives, doc. 919, Washington, D.C., 1910, 2.

24. "Would Make an Isle of the Sunken *Maine*," *New York Times*, January 31, 1909.

25. "Would Lift the *Maine*," *Washington Post*, January 8, 1900.

26. "New Plan to Raise *Maine* Would Reveal Famous Secret," *Washington Post*, August 7, 1910; and also "Engineer at *Maine* Wreck," *Beaumont Enterprise and Journal*, December 9, 1910.

27. "Contest in House," *Washington Post*, February 27, 1909.

28. "Maine to Be Raised" *Washington Post*, May 5, 1910; "Removal of Wreck of U.S.S. *Maine* in Havana Harbor, Cuba, March 15, 1910," 61st Cong., 2d sess., House of Representatives, report no. 754, Washington, D.C., 1910.

29. Letter of José Miguel Gómez to W. H. Taft, Havana, December 6, 1910, 61st Cong. 2d sess., House of Representatives, Washington, D.C., 1910.

30. "No Relics from the *Maine*," *St. Albans Messenger*, December 24, 1909.

31. "Services for *Maine*'s Dead," *Washington Post*, February 16, 1911.

32. "To Inspect *Maine* Wreck," *Washington Post*, November 11, 1911; "Board Is Kept at Havana," *Washington Post*, December 2, 1911; "Examine the *Maine* Wreck," *New York Times*, November 23, 1911; "Report on the Wreck of the Battleship *Maine*. Message from the President of the United States Transmitting a Report of Board Convened at Havana Cuba, by Order of the Secretary of the Navy, to Inspect and Report on the Wreck of the *Maine*" (old), December 14, 1911, 62d Congress, 2d sess., House of Representatives, doc. 310, Washington, D.C., 1912.

33. "Raising the *Maine* in Moving Pictures," *New York Times*, November 19, 1911.

34. "Clash over Plan to Sell the *Maine*," *New York Times*, December 17, 1911; "Bill to Sell *Maine* Wreck," *Washington Post*, December 20, 1911; "No Gifts of *Maine* Guns," *New York Tribune*, December 21, 1911.

35. "Would Sell the *Maine* Wreck," *New York Tribune*, December 20, 1911.

36. "Clash over Plan to Sell the *Maine*" *New York Times*, December 17, 1911.

37. "Rules Prevent Fight," *Washington Post*, December 17, 1911; "House Refuses to Sell *Maine* Wreck," *New York Tribune*, December 17, 1911.

38. "¡El *Maine* flota ya en la bahía!" *La Discusión*, February 14, 1912.

39. *La Discusión*, February 29, 1912.

40. "¿El *Maine* frente a la boca del Morro?" *La Discusión*, March 27, 1912.

41. "Wreck of *Maine* Is Sought as War Relic for Capital," *Washington Post*, March 10, 1912.

42. "Los funerales del *Maine*," *La Discusión*, March 15, 1912, 1; "Últimos tributos a los restos del *Maine*," *La Discusión*, March 17, 1912; "*Maine* to Sink Today to Her Lasting Rest," *New York Tribune*, March 16, 1912.

43. "The *Maine* Sinks to Raise No More," *New York Tribune*, March 17, 1912, 1.

44. "Estreno de la película *El epílogo del Maine*," *La Discusión*, March 19, 1912, 4.

45. "Los funerales de las víctimas del *Maine*," *La Discusión*, March 23, 1912.

46. The ship's main mast is part of the monument to the *Maine*'s victims in Arlington

National Cemetery, while the foremast is preserved in the Annapolis Naval Academy. Different pieces and ornaments that belonged to the ship form part of monuments in Bangor, Maine; Marion, Indiana; South Bend, Indiana; Canton, Ohio; Lewiston, Maine; Pompton Lakes, New Jersey; Woburn, Massachusetts; Key West; Minneapolis; and Pittsburgh. See Mayo, *War Memorials as Political Landscape*, 166.

47. Bogart, "Maine Memorial and Pulitzer Fountain," 50.
48. "Unveil Memorial to Maine Heroes," *New York Times*, May 31, 1913.
49. "Mast of Battleship *Maine* Landed at Navy Yard Here," *Washington Post*, February 10, 1912.
50. "Plan Monument to *Maine*," *Washington Post*, December 17, 1911.
51. "Monumento a las víctimas del *Maine*," *La Discusión*, February 21, 1912.
52. "Want *Maine*'s Relics Back," *New York Times*, September 4, 1915.
53. Santovenia, *Libro conmemorativo de la inauguración de la Plaza del Maine en la Habana*, 121.
54. "Zayas Tells Gratitude of Cuba to Americans," *Washington Post*, February 16, 1924.
55. "Pershing at Unveiling of *Maine* Monument," *New York Times*, March 9, 1925.
56. Klein, *Spaniards and the Politics of Memory in Cuba*, 335.
57. "*Maine* Monument Gone," *New York Times*, October 21, 1926; "Havana *Maine* Memorial Restored," *New York Times*, November 20, 1926.
58. Santovenia, *Libro conmemorativo de la inauguración de la Plaza del Maine en la Habana*, 123.
59. Lejeune, Beusterien, and Menocal, "The City as Landscape," 174–76.
60. "La apertura de la Sexta Conferencia Internacional Americana," *Carteles*, La Habana, 9, no. 4 (January 22, 1928): 23.
61. "New U.S. Embassy in Cuba," *New York Times*, June 9, 1953.
62. "U.S. Statue in Havana Marred," *New York Times*, March 17, 1949.
63. Franqui, *Retrato de familia con Fidel*, 92.
64. "Castro Makes Issue of the *Maine* Loss," *New York Times*, March 6, 1960, and "Palabras pronunciadas por Fidel Castro en las honras fúnebres de las víctimas de la explosión del barco 'La Coubre,' en el cementerio de Colón 5 de marzo de 1960," <http://www.cuba.cu/gobierno/discursos/1960/esp/fo5o36oe.html>; Walterio Carbonel, "Las explosiones misteriosas del *Maine* y *La Coubre*," *Revolución*, March 15, 1960, 2; Pardo Llada, "La voladura del *Maine*," 70.
65. "Cayó el águila del imperialismo," *Revolución*, May 1, 1961, 3. A short take of the toppling of the monument's eagle, filmed at dawn on May 1, 1961, can be seen in the documentary collage that serves as the backdrop to the celebrated film *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (dir. Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, ICAIC, 1968).
66. Franqui, *Retrato de familia con Fidel*, 92. In an interview that Franqui gave to William Luis in 1981, he claims that despite Picasso's willingness to substitute a cubist dove for the *Maine*'s eagle, the project was rejected after "Soviet-style" socialist realism was imposed in Cuba. See Luis, *Lunes de Revolución*, 192–93. See also "Picasso to De-

sign Cuba Dove,” *New York Times*, July 6, 1961, and “Cayó el águila del imperialismo,” *Revolución*, May 1, 1961, 3.

67. “Cuba to Develop along Red Lines,” *New York Times*, May 1, 1961.

68. “Cubans Save the Eagle: Anti-Castro Group Retrieves Part of U.S. Monument,” *New York Times*, May 21, 1961. Curiously, the U.S. representatives in Cuba also keep the original eagle, tumbled by the 1926 infamous hurricane. Since 1954 the restored eagle decorates the gardens of the Interests Section chief’s official residence in Havana.

69. Peter Orsi, “Havana Restores Monument to Victims of USS *Maine*,” Associated Press, February 15, 2013. <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/havana-restores-monument-victims-uss-maine-2>).