



A Black Soldier's Story: The Narrative of Ricardo Batrell and the Cuban War of Independence

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In 1896, an illiterate, fifteen-year-old Afro-Cuban field hand joined the rebel army fighting for Cuba's independence. Though poor and uneducated, Ricardo Batrell believed in the promise of Cuba Libre, the vision of a democratic and egalitarian nation that inspired the Cuban War of Independence. After the war ended in 1898, Batrell taught himself to read and write and published a memoir of his wartime experiences, *Para la Historia*. Originally published in 1912—the same year in which the Cuban government massacred more than 5,000 Afro-Cubans—this work of both protest and patriotism is the only autobiographical account of the war written by an Afro-Cuban soldier.

After the war, Batrell became dismayed by the Cuban Republic's rapid retreat from the revolution's democratic ideals. Government corruption, racial discrimination, and the systematic exclusion of black veterans from public service had helped to reassert the racial hierarchy of colonial Cuba. With his memoir, Batrell hoped to remind Cubans about the participation of Afro-Cubans in the war (as much as 80 percent of the Cuban Liberation Army may have been Afro-Cuban) and to protest their subjugation in its aftermath.

Now available for the first time in English, Batrell's powerful memoir provides profound insights into the role of race in the nation's history. Deftly rendering Batrell's forceful and energetic prose into English, Mark A. Sanders also puts forth a critical introduction that contextualizes Batrell's perspective within Cuba's colonial history and its racial politics.

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