

Patriotic commemorations in Santiago's public elementary schools: a look between 1899 and 1920

Daineris Mancebo Céspedes^{1*} <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9669-0660>

Israel Escalona Chádez¹ <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9653-3877>

¹Universidad de Oriente. Cuba

*Author for the correspondence: daineris@uo.edu.cu

ABSTRACT

Stimulating studies related to historical processes within the so-called history of education has been approached in recent times by national and regional historiography. The article presented here is the result of a historical pedagogical research process in which methods and techniques of these sciences were used. Its objective is to show how the process of school commemorations behaved in the public elementary school of the city of Santiago de Cuba in the historical context between 1899 and 1920 and to favor historiographic studies on the history of education in the locality.

Keywords: Patriotic commemorations; Public elementary school; Santiago de Cuba; Historical pedagogical context.

Introduction

The history of education in Cuba has not been unaffected by the influences of various historiographical trends since the early twentieth century. Nor has it been alien to the debate to define it as a discipline within the Educational Sciences, or as Zambrano (2006, p.594) points out, it constitutes a historiographic current aimed at the study of a branch of knowledge and culture in its interaction with the social fabric from various perspectives and confluences. This discipline makes it possible to understand the evolution, the processes of change, the stages, the past, the educational movements, and to make a more real and complete assessment of the situation and state of education, as defined by Hernández Castillo (1999, p.51).

Even though progress has been made in recent years in studies on the history of education in Cuba, in a general way, generalizing aspects are treated and above all, from a perspective that does not cover the phenomenon in the context of the Cuban bourgeois Republic. And within these, little has been approached about the behavior of patriotic commemorations in the public elementary school.

An essential aspect for the future national state that could strengthen from the public school the methods and ways for the formation of a citizen with a full identification with the interests of the official power, marked also, in the ideological order by a deep-rooted nationalism; whose fundamental base is sustained in the independence legacy, with its main representatives and epics. The names of Martí, Maceo, Céspedes would be recurrent in the daily life of the student, from a teacher's effort to exalt patriotic values and civic commitment to contribute with good practices to the improvement and development of the sovereign and independent nation. Precisely in this work, we intend to make a historiographic assessment of the treatment of civic-patriotic education in elementary public schools in the city of Santiago de Cuba.

Some researchers have referred to the subject under study, such as Cordoví (2012), who analyzes the phenomenon from a western point of view, as well as Medina (2008). Quintana (2005) is one of the first approaches to the treatment of public teaching in the city of Santiago de Cuba in relation to patriotic commemorations.

However, even with the contributions made, it is still possible to continue deepening in this subject from the Santiago's vision. The article that is presented unveils essential aspects of the historical treatment of the process of the commemorations in the city of Santiago de Cuba 1899-1920.

Development

During the republican period, a key factor in the teaching-learning process in elementary public elementary schools was the curricular design based on the implementation of the subjects included in the curricular. Although the conception of the classroom was a fundamental aspect in the formation of the new generations, another of the actions that served as a complement in the educational process was the development of extracurricular activities.

If this last concept is assumed from the theoretical assumptions of contemporaneity, it is related to the qualifiers of extracurricular and after school activities¹. Categories that, in the stage under study,

¹Cfr: The extra-teaching and extracurricular work at place Web: [Http://www.pedagogiaruth.wordpress.com](http://www.pedagogiaruth.wordpress.com). En extra-teacher's concepts assume this work themselves and extracurricular as from the importance that they have for the school's educational work. They contribute to the enlargement and deepening of knowledge and they develop creative capabilities. The extra-teaching work extends throughout the activities that the school with the pupils realizes, and

were not used by those who had the responsibility of writing the courses of studies and methodological indications that would govern public elementary education. The research carried out for the present investigation has led us to assume that at the time, the definition of extracurricular activities was "school commemorations".

From the point of view of the pedagogical regulations in the study plans, from the first one, the *Manual for Teachers* (1899), in the initial pages, everything related to the structuring and functioning of elementary public primary education was included, and although these categories were not contemplated, they were made explicit through one of the subjects taught at this educational level, History of Cuba. It was conceived: "*the teaching of history should be carried out through excursions, visits to historical places and the celebration of patriotic dates*", these actions, which, due to their own pedagogical characteristics and assuming the current definition, are, carried out outside the school environment.

In the sections dedicated to Public Instruction in the periodicals, in this case those of Santiago de Cuba, it is referred that the pertinent to the "commemorations" were imposed by the educational authorities in the calls that were carried out to honor the ephemeris as "school parties".

Some exponents of the Cuban teaching profession dealt with the importance of historical commemorations in civic-patriotic education as an alternative in school education, closely linked to the subject of history.

Cortada (1917, p.585) stated "School celebrations. How they should be organized " in which he explained their significance: "they are used as a means to externalize before the public the efficacy of the educational work carried out in public schools".

His assessment was based on his experience after years of observing the development of these activities. He went so far as to propose the following reflections for a better use of these activities. For the recitations, teachers should be guided by the method of the teacher Manuel Fernández Valdés in his book *Selected Poetry*, a text used in public schools. Especially by the recommendations proposed by its author. Moreover, they should use means (songs, poems, speeches) that really fit the allusive date.

In the city of Santiago de Cuba, the first representative of the public teaching profession who referred to the importance and relevance of school commemorations in elementary education was Miguel Angel Cano in his initial work *La enseñanza de la historia en la escuela primaria* (The teaching of history in elementary school) of 1918. Interestingly, the pedagogue, in the chapter he

enables the achievement of the educational objectives and instruction manuals within the school space. And give them they develop extracurricular character out of the surroundings of the school like support to the teaching educational work and with the institutions' support.

dedicated to "methods", referred to the commemorative method, the importance of which he said: "consists of teaching on the anniversaries of notable historical dates, the events they recall. It constitutes an effective complementary procedure in the teaching of this subject", Cano (1918, p.23). Finally, he stated that its realization at this educational level fosters and strengthens the national spirit.

As early as the American intervention, anniversaries such as October 10 and February 24 were unofficially designated as national days as the basis for the creation of a nationalist patriotic calendar, as referred to by historian Iglesias (2003, p.75), who makes a detailed study of the behavior of this phenomenon at the national level, in which these dates shaped the process of symbolic construction of national identity.

In Cuba, in the years of the first U.S. intervention, the consecration of a patriotic calendar had a double significance: to break with a Hispanic colonial past and to challenge the new imperial authorities, an attitude that would be represented as an initiative of the popular elements combined with the controversial position of a nationalist elite.

The author gives some examples that in the Island demonstrated the beginnings of the development of those celebrations. In the case of the city of Santiago de Cuba, she refers that in October 1898, when the square was militarily occupied by the North American army, an attempt was made to organize the commemoration of the uprising of La Demajagua, a project that although it had the refusal of the military authorities, it was materialized on the 10th, when thousands of people of Santiago attended despite the official refusal, in a pilgrimage to the tomb of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes in the Santa Ifigenia cemetery, in what probably was the first massive public tribute to a pro-independence martyr.

Another first manifestation of commemoration was on October 10, 1901, when several patriotic events were held in the city, one of them being a meeting that took place at the Oriente Theater, which was attended by many people, among them valuable elements of politics and the intelligentsia of Santiago, as evidenced by Duharte and Recio (2005, p.26).

The elementary public elementary schools would also be inserted in honoring the dates of the patriotic calendar derived from the independence imaginary of the 19th century. The fact is that materializing the past in the minds of children was key to incite love for the homeland and to fulfill the civic duty of working for the future of the nation, a mission of the Cuban public school whose commitment was assumed by a large part of the educators. Among the educational purposes of the teacher was not only the referent of the class, but also the development of the commemorations that were part of a broader concept defined as "extracurricular environment".

To go to the celebration of the revolutionary calendar was, as early as the American occupation, a way of rooting and transmitting patriotic values in children, since the acts of remembrance and homage to relevant figures of Cuban history and the most important historical events in which they participated, was a sign of opposition to the interference of the United States, and in turn, a form of defense of the Cuban nationality, of the national feeling.

It was recurrent that most of the events and celebrations that the schools held were held on school days, which ensured the attendance of children to these events, and therefore the schools were able to exercise a more direct and intense action, both from the educational point of view and in the civic education of the schoolchildren. Cuza (1955, p.19).

The scenarios par excellence that were the center of the tributes of the dates and of remembrance of notable personalities of the emancipating gesture were squares, parks, streets, even the cemetery, this last one became a recurrent place for the schools of Santiago de Cuba, where boys and girls took wreaths and bouquets of flowers to place them in the graves of the heroes. The births and deaths of martyrs were a reason for remembrance, for example, the figure of José Martí was one of the most venerated. As well as the notable events of the emancipation gesture, October 10, February 24, May 19, January 28, November 27, December 7, May 20.

The tributes that took place in the general cemetery, assumed a special nuance for its citizens, because in the cemetery rested the remains of some of the most notable heroes of the independence deeds, which presumably provided a more emotional connotation to these activities.

An assessment of the behavior of the commemorations in Santiago de Cuba revealed that there were regularities in the way they were carried out during the stage under study. In the first place, their development had two aspects:

- Its conformation was based on a program established by the municipality's Board of Education a few days before the commemoration ceremony, which had to be carried out by all public elementary schools. It was published in the educational sections of the main local publications of the time.
- The initiatives adopted by teachers and school principals to commemorate the anniversaries.

The review of newspaper sources has allowed us to validate that the vast majority of elementary public schools attended the celebration of these patriotic events, however there are almost always in these processes those who stand out within the totality, for example there were schools that became the vanguard in this type of celebrations due to the presence of teachers and principals more committed to the educational work of promoting national values from the early ages of the

individual. In this case, we find the school directed by Caridad Lacoste Arnau, María Caro y Más, Leocadia Araujo, José Ramón Valadon, Mercedes Álvarez de Rodón.

It is interesting that between 1899 and 1920, a historical period marked by two military occupations and the presence of governments in office, the elementary public schools of the city of Santiago carried out their school commemorations without any variation according to the provisions of the authorities of the branch. From what was researched, these events were held uninterruptedly by the educational institutions, whose significance took on a greater force when celebrating a closed anniversary. Therefore, the examples discussed below are part of a representation of the development stage of the process.

One of the first manifestations of commemoration was the fall in combat of José Martí, on May 19. As early as 1899, there were expressions of homage to him in the city. In this sense, the women of Santiago assumed an essential role that was maintained throughout the context of the bourgeois Republic, which was to perpetuate the legacy of one of the most transcendent men in the history of the country.

In February 1899, the Society of Martí's Admirers was founded, "whose mission was to keep a rose and a flag at the tomb of the Apostle. It also instituted a school from which the first female teachers from Santiago emerged". Sónora (2003, p.204) This corporation also played a significant role in the patriotic acts in the city during the first decade, especially those of May 19th from where they departed from the Crombet Square with political and civilian elements of the territory, and a representation of the schools to the Cemetery to pay tribute to the patriot. It represented a first declaration of patriotism in a historical context of occupation by U.S. troops, summoning the legacy of the Apostle was a sign of preservation of Cuban sovereignty.

It should be noted that although all the members of the aforementioned society did not belong to the teaching profession, there were signs of its representation, which is why the continuity of the same is assumed by the teachers of Spencer School, who maintained the tradition with the creation of the Pro Martí Commission, and contributed to instilling in their students through the care of the funeral site where the remains of the Apostle rested and the commemoration of the birth and death of the Master as a sign of patriotism.

As it has been previously expressed, the patriotic feeling that had the realization of these celebrations had for Santiago de Cuba a particular role, not only for the patrimonial vestiges present in its soil, but for having happened significant facts of the emancipating gesture in the then province of Oriente, which influenced in a deep vocation of Cuban citizenship of many of its children.

In this regard, the Santiago journalist Enrique Hernández Miyares, who lived in Havana until his death in 1914, said in a visit he made to his homeland in 1904,

Nowhere in the island, the lively revolutionary enthusiasm is maintained as in Santiago de Cuba. The burial of a hero accumulates in the streets such a crowd that it is impossible to walk. The enormous line advances imposing and respectful and does not stop until the cemetery, and does not leave the sacred site without visiting the tombs of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes and Martí, and the Monument of the Martyrs of Independence. Duharte and Recio (2005, p.46).

In the assessment of the intellectual was reflected perhaps a criterion that many other citizens of the time could have had, and that perhaps could also have influenced the position of many teachers from Santiago who worked in the public elementary school that contributed from the realization of these acts to promote patriotism to their pupils.

One of the dates of remembrance was December 7, an event where tribute was paid to all those who fell during the emancipation struggle. The one that corresponded to the year 1911 was remembered by the public schools in the Cemetery of the city Ram de O (1911, p.11), to which children and teachers attended, and as samples of tribute allegorical hymns were sung, poems were recited, and later a representation of the centers went to the Delegation of Veterans to offer their tribute to the members of this association.

The December 7 commemoration was not only linked to the death of the Bronze Titan, but was also marked by the Congress to commemorate the fall of all those who fell defending independence.

It should be noted that on some occasions some private schools joined the call for these historical events, accompanying the public schools. This can be noticed in the celebration of February 24th, 1912, the Commission of celebrations of the Veterans' Center expressed with great joy that, in honor to the glorious anniversary, the public schools and the private school Juan Bautista Sagarra would deploy in a single act the realization of the anniversary. The children of the latter escorted the students of the public schools in a clear demonstration of patriotic and school solidarity. Poveda (2015, p.22).

It was usual for teachers and school authorities to offer their evaluations in the press on the development of these activities. The educator Manuel Portuondo Silveira, referring to the February 24th celebration, described it as a day of joy and enthusiasm, since the public teachers, together with their students, organized a celebration that was a faithful exponent of patriotic sentiment because it sustained in the children the respect for the heroes of the past. In his final words, the

pedagogue emphasized that when they reached their majority, they should not forget that it was their teachers who instilled in them the love for the country (1912, p.2).

One of the most popular dates in the city's schools was May 19 and January 28, linked to the personality of José Martí. Its importance was not only derived from the historical significance of the figure but the connotation that had for Santiago de Cuba, that the funeral remains rested in the sacred site of Santa Ifigenia. Precisely one of the elementary schools that undertook the patriotic task of caring for and beautifying the sacred place was the Spencer School for girls, whose teachers took on the task on their own initiative. To undertake the project they created the Pro Martí Commission that since 1912 not only materialized that purpose, but was one of the standard-bearer centers in the commemorations of the dates linked to the Apostle.

The commemoration of May 19th, 1914 took place in spite of the inclement weather due to the rainy day. Nevertheless, as was customary, the tribute to the Apostle took place. The tribute always began with the singing of the National Anthem. A moment of great patriotic feeling was constituted by the performance of poetic compositions allusive to the act, by several students of the Spencer School. This event usually culminated with the intonation of the notes of the Hymn "To Martí", which was composed to distinguish not only the anniversary, but also the work of the Commission.

From that moment on, the teachers of the Spencer public school commemorated the death of the Apostle year after year. And although the programs included the intervention of intellectual or political personalities, school authorities, the leading role was always assumed by the students of that school. Under the guidance of their teachers, they knew how to stamp a seal of love to the homeland, and especially to the figure of José Martí, every time they recited or sang the allegorical hymn to the celebration, as well as when at the end they covered the tomb with flowers, whose care and embellishment was a constant practice of their work.

In the group of anniversaries and personalities that paid tribute to him, not only the ideological projection but also their significance in the republican historical context was a nuance. The most important ones, such as October 10, November 27, February 24, May 19, January 28, December 7, May 20², etc., are those of greater connotation.

In the case of the last one, its celebration was not the result of the emancipation process, but it is implemented as an expression of a trend that at the end of the American occupation was stipulated as a national holiday, equating in significance with dates such as October 10 and February 24. Its

² During the first fifty years of the century XX, the May 20 one considered as a token of the Republic. The date personified the Heaven and the hope of the republican dream. With the triumph of the Revolution Cuban January 1959's 1ro his connotation had a slope because it was assumed along with the preceding Government's evils, consequently the allegory would to date have another assessment as from the new studies on the history of Cuba.

election constituted an effort to create a new foundational, thus imposing an equally unknown and virgin anniversary in the social imaginary.

As studied by historian Ana Cairo Ballester in her work *May 20th .glorious date?* It was aspired that the national holiday of May 20th would create in the Cuban mentality a tradition similar to the design of July 4th in the United States, a purpose to encourage the search for a new imaginary of rupture with the colonial past and to incorporate a date that reflected the heritage of the U.S. model. Cairo (2019, p.58).

It was in this conception that the nation's elementary public schools would be inserted in relation to the celebration of the date. An important aspect was that since its consummation it was closely linked to the figure of Estrada Palma, first president of the Republic. After his exit from the government in 1906, Estrada Palma had a group of followers with an important bastion in the eastern capital; several local politicians had links with the first president of the republic, among them the journalist Mariano Corona, Federico Perez Carbo and Antonio Bravo Correoso. The nucleus of Santiago people welcomed and supported the stay of the master of Central Valley in the city, as well as the initiatives to perpetuate his memory after his death. Morales (2008, p.50).

The preceding studies on the celebration of the date allowed us to arrive at the assessment that there is no approach that questions or minimizes the commemoration of May 20th, based on the appreciation of intellectuals, school authorities and prominent representatives of the Santiago teaching profession. The veneration of the event and its relationship with the first ruler remained in the city's imagination and in the memory of children.

An example that illustrates the initiative developed by the Board of Education of the city was the one corresponding to 1912. It was agreed that the schools of the district would carry out from the classrooms of History and Moral and Civic Instruction in which the importance of the date of May 20 would be present. Secondly, extracurricular activities would be carried out, such as the performance by the children of poetic compositions related to the date, whose purpose would be to encourage patriotism in the citizens of tomorrow.

On the occasion of the project to erect a statue to Estrada Palma in Santiago, a group of actions were developed in the city to collect money for the fund for that purpose. One of those expressions was the evening that took place in the Heredia Theater on February 23rd, 1914, where some representatives of the local public teaching staff attended with several of their students. One of the most significant moments were the words of the girl Emilia Balcells, a student of the public school directed by one of the most outstanding teachers of those years, Caridad Lacoste. She expressed in her speech:

I believe that childhood has an indisputable privilege to take part in this tribute, inasmuch as it is paid to the memory of that paternal educator, that venerable guide of children and adolescents who, in his retreat in Central Valley, raised and maintained for many years a school to teach the truths of science and the virtues of patriotism and human brotherhood. (...) he was a man of healthy and incorruptible fiber, of patriarchal simplicity and affability, of fervent devotion to his country, to justice and to all the great ideals of humanity. (...) Let us all dedicate ourselves to the martyr and contribute tonight to perpetuate in a great monument the memory of Estrada Palma! Ram de O (1914, p.2).

One of the most significant celebrations related to another of the dates of the patriotic calendar was on October 10th; in this sense was the commemoration of the centenary of the birth of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes. To carry out the homage, the program was approved in the city of Bayamo on April 6th, 1919. The civic patriotic acts were carried out from the 18th to the 19th. The public teaching staff of the city of Santiago de Cuba took an active part in the commemoration. On the first day at 10:00 a.m., the schools together with the authorities of the sector and part of the people, made a pilgrimage to the General Cemetery with the purpose of placing floral offerings at the tomb of the martyr of San Lorenzo. On behalf of the public elementary schools that attended the day, the schools No. 4 and 16 "Saco" and "Padre de la Patria" respectively, sang the notes of the "Hymn to Céspedes" written by Navarro Riera, as well as several speeches were made and several poems were recited in allegory to the date.

Later in the afternoon session, the children, accompanied by their teachers, went to the Statue of Liberty at the Campo de Marte where an allegorical act took place. The closing of the day's activities took place at the Moncada Barracks where a selection of students presented a copy of the national flag to the Cuban Army on behalf of the children. The activities that took place in the city were congratulated by the then Secretary of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, Francisco Domínguez Roldán.

A notable event as part of the program was the excursion made by the public schools of Santiago de Cuba to the cities of Bayamo and Manzanillo, an initiative that arose from the renowned Reporters Association. Poveda (2015, p.140) It was carried out by railroad. A particular feature of this fact was the predominance of female teachers in the activity; in this regard, one of its members, teacher Amelia Casado de Carbonell offered the following impressions about the trip: "My stay in the city of Bayamo was pleasant; they surrounded us with attention and affection. Before our arrival, an entourage was waiting for us and we went to the Central Park from where we would leave for La Demajagua, a place where brilliant celebrations would be held in memory of the illustrious patriot". (1919, p.2).

The centenary of the birth of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes was so important in the country that the highest authority of Public Instruction published a communication in which he stated that he intended to accuse as unpatriotic all teachers who without a justified reason did not attend the festivities that were convened. The then Secretary stated that it was a duty of patriotism to attend these events. In addition, to stimulate the educational sector, he demanded a list of those teachers who gave their participation to be taken into account in their service record.

The above opinion was only a sample of how important it was for the authorities of the guild and for figures of the teaching sector to attend these celebrations as an effective way to inculcate the memory among children of the glorious past. Memorable dates of national history should not go unnoticed by the public teaching profession. Everything that was done to disseminate civic culture and to ingrain patriotic remembrances in the spirit of the new generations should be assumed with responsibility by educators.

Conclusions

The behavior of the commemorations in the public elementary school of the city of Santiago de Cuba had a national regularity. Nevertheless, our locality became a natural museum that stamped a distinctive seal to this type of celebrations during the first two republican decades. In this historical course, some teachers of the local environment stood out who contributed to transmit patriotic values from the evocation of the national calendar anniversaries.

Even though there were several dates designated by school authorities to be celebrated by public elementary schools, not all of them had the same appreciation and prominence by those who had the responsibility of remembering them.

It is considered necessary to continue contributing and deepening in other historical periods of the locality where the patriotic commemorations carried out by the public school had from certain conjunctures, regularities as for their treatment and expressions both for students and teachers. It is recommended a more detailed study of the dates of the Cuban patriotic calendar from its interpretation in the different historical contexts.