The Paleocidental Heritage

The stimulating discussion, renewed in recent years, as to the nature of Latin American culture has come to emphasize the authenticity of our indigenous Indo-American or African heritage and to point out our distance from, or, if you will, our sympathies and differences with the Occident, that is, with the developed capitalist countries. This last point is essential: if we are not Europeans, we are, on the other hand, as Alejandro Lipschutz has put it, «Europeans.»

But there is another important heritage of our culture which I would venture to call «intermediate»—not indigenous, not in the strict sense «occidental,» but rather, as I have suggested elsewhere, «paleocidental»: the Iberian heritage. Any attempt, however modest, to specify the roots of our culture cannot gloss over our relations with the Iberian. My intention here is to present some general ideas on these relations, emphasizing the most evident poles: Spain and Spanish America.

To begin with, it is obvious that a considerable part of our culture derives from a Spanish source. Although to speak of a «source» implies speaking metaphorically, and although the weight of the Spanish in the subsequent elaboration of our culture should not be exaggerated, neither should we minimize it, and even less pretend to erase it with the stroke of a pen. We received much more than a language from Spain; however, the peculiar form of our reception of the Spanish is evident in the language itself. Menéndez Pidal, speaking of the unity of the language observed: «Hay, podemos decir, dos tipos de lengua española culta, como hay dos tipos de ingles: uno europeo y otro americano, distintos fundamentalmente por algunas peculiaridades de pronunciación.» This visible (or better, audible) differentiation, which might also be thought of as an enrichment, fortunately does not also entail the risk of linguistic fragmentation, as occurred with Latin after the fall of the Roman Empire and as Andrés Bello and Rufino José Cuervo feared (and fought) a century ago: «Los pueblos en que se fraccionó el imperio español se comunican hoy entre sí mucho más que cuando formaban un solo Estado.»

While permitting variation and enrichment on either side, the unity of our language has properly been preserved, thus guaranteeing a fruitful communication and the maintenance of a homogenous link with the rest of the world.

Beyond language, of course, the situation becomes much more complex. Spanish Americans like to say about Spaniards that we do not descend from those who stayed but from those who came, whose children had already ceased being Spaniards to become first Creoles and then, intermixed with other ethnic groups, Latin Americans. The logic of this distinction is clear: over a century and a half ago Spanish America initiated political separation from the battered and decadent Spanish Empire, which was destined to lose its remaining American possessions, Cuba among them, in 1898. Moreover, the first definition of Spanish America was made in counterpoint with Spain and it necessarily implied emphasizing our differences with the Spanish: an anxious and complex definition, as we understand today, and one in which the urgency of pointing out what distinguished us from the old metropolis contributed to the fact that many succumbed to the lure of new and aggressive metropolis. As if changing masters, as Martí warned, were the same thing as being free.

The attraction of proposals to «westernize» which so fascinated and fascinated Latin American groups intent on modernization was facilitated by the economic ruin of Spain itself and the inequity of the exploitation it imposed on the American territories, soon to become nations. But another factor was that Spain and the Spanish had been branded from the sixteenth century on by a fierce anti-Spanish campaign which has come to be known as the Black Legend. It is worth pausing to consider this legend, whose uncritical acceptance has had generally negative consequences, especially for us.

Rationale of the Black Legend

The Black Legend appears to have its source in a justifiably shared rejection of the monstrous crimes committed in this continent by the Spanish conquerors. But respect for historical accuracy indicates that this is simply false. Yes, the crimes were committed and, yes, they were monstrous. But seen from the perspective of later centuries no more monstrous than those committed by the metropolis which enthusiastically took Spain’s place in the fearsome business of colonial exploitation and sowed death and desolation on all continents. If anything distinguishes the Spanish conquest from the depredations of Holland, France, England, Germany, Belgium or the United States (to mention only a few illustrious «Western» nations), it is not the proportion of crimes—in this they are all worthy rivals—but rather the proportion of scruples. The conquests
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carried out by these countries did not lack their own murders and destruction; what they did lack were figures such as Bartolomé de las Casas and internal debates on the legitimacy of conquest such as those inspired by the Dominicans which shook the Spanish Empire in the sixteenth century. This does not mean, of course, that such figures, always a minority, succeeded in imposing their criteria; but they were able to present them to the highest authorities, and they were listened to and to a certain extent taken seriously. The French scholar Pierre Vilar, who has studied the history of Spain with erudition and from a correct perspective, is able to argue:

Es hermoso para una nación colonial haber tenido un Las Casas, y no haberlo dejado aislado y sin influencias. La Escuela de Salamanca, con Melchor Cano, Domingo de Soto y Francisco de Vitoria, a mediados del siglo (xvi), hizo pasar la discussión del plano humanitario al plano jurídico del «derecho de gentes». Lo esencial, de hecho, es distinguir entre una práctica brutal (pero no más brutal que cualquier otro tipo de colonización) y una doctrina, e incluso una legislación, de intenciones sumamente elevadas (que han faltado frecuentemente a colonizaciones más modernas). 3

It is also useful to note what scholars like Fernando Ortiz, Alejandro Lipschutz and Laurette Sejourné, who have taken a clear stance against colonialism and in defense of the indigenous communities massacred by both the Spanish Empire and those which came later, have to say about the Black Legend. For Fernando Ortiz, «la conquista del Nuevo Mundo fue una realidad ciertamente crudelísima,» but «ni tan leyenda ni tan negra,» given that:

la negrura de su humanísima inhumanidad no fue exclusiva de España, ni más temerosa que la de todos los otros genocidios y sojuzgamientos de unas gentes por otras, realizados a sangre y fuego o con las más refinadas técnicas mortíferas, cuando los infranados aínes de poder y codicia entenebrecen las conciencias, aunque se encuben con alardes de fatalismo ideológico, destinos manifiestos, predestinaciones naturales o servicios a Dios. 4

Alejandro Lipschutz, for his part, maintains that «tal leyenda negra es ingenua; y peor que eso, es maliciosa propaganda. Es ingenua, porque los conquistadores y primeros pobladores no son exponentes de la cultura moral del pueblo español; y es maliciosa propaganda, porque en forma igualmente tremenda se han realizado, y todavía están realizándose, todas las conquistas de tipo señorial.» 5 Moreover:

con igual razón se debiera confecionar una leyenda negra antiportuguesa, antibrítánica, antifrancesa, antialemana, antirusa, antianca. En los tremendos sucesos que se resumen con las palabras de Las Casas «La destrucción de las Indias» no hay nada que fluyera simplemente del hecho de haber sido españoles los conquistadores de América y sus primeros pobladores, o si se quiere, de haber sido ellos de «raza» española. Todo fluye del hecho de ser ellos los instrumentos ciegos o videntes del régimen señorial, avasallador, trasladado a un marco tribal ajeno, por medio de la conquista... En el pogrom de la conquista de América se exterioriza el carácter inmanente del régimen señorial. Si se quiere: no hay lugar para una leyenda negra antiespañola, antiportuguesa, antibrítánica, etc.; hay sólo lugar para una leyenda negra anti-colonial. Y aún más vale otro hecho de orden histórico: en verdad «no se trata de una leyenda antiespañola sino de la auténtica realidad señorial milenaria.» 6

Finally, Laurette Sejourné confesses:

nos hemos dado cuenta también de que la acusación sistemática a los españoles desempeña un papel pernicioso en este vasto drama, porque sustraen la ocupación de América a la perspectiva universal a la cual pertenece, puesto que la colonización constituye el pecado mortal de toda Europa... Ninguna nación ha hubiera hecho mejor... Por el contrario, España se singulariza por un rasgo de importancia capital: hasta nuestros días ha sido el único país de cuyo seno se hayan elevado poderosas voces contra la guerra de conquista. 7

Such observations help us understand the real reasons for the rise and spread of the anti-Spanish Black Legend; to paraphrase Sejourné, its intention is to separate the conquest of America from the universal (i.e. European) context to which it belongs. It is essential, therefore, to reject this separation and to consider the Spanish experience in America in the light of this «universal context.» When we do this, it becomes immediately evident that, as Julio Le Riverend has put it, «en definitiva, la conquista y la colonización de América en el siglo xvi forman parte del fenómeno de aparición y consolidación del capitalismo.» 8 The crimes of colonization are attributable, then, not to one nation or another but rather to the general process of what Marx called «the primitive accumulation of capitals»; and they reveal:

the deep hypocrisy and barbarism characteristic of bourgeois civilization as such, presented naked to our eyes when, instead of contemplating it in its home, where it adopts good manners, we contemplate it in the Colonies, where it removes its mask. 9

The Black Legend was created and disseminated precisely to mystify this truth, to exonerate «capital, which comes into the world oozing blood and mud from every pore,» 10 and to throw the blame on one nation, Spain, the most powerful of all in the sixteenth century and therefore the one whose hegemony others desired and plotted to gain. 11 It was the nascent bourgeoisie of these other metropoli who created the Black Legend, naturally not for the benefit of those peoples martyred by the Spanish conquest but rather to cover up their own rapacity. 12 The Black Legend was thus a handy ideological weapon in the intermetropoli struggle which accompanied the rise of capitalism and lasted for several centuries (although by the end of the seventeenth century it had been for all practical purposes decided in favor of new metropoli like...
Holland, France, and England—the major proponents of the Legend). In this struggle there were (and are), as is natural, contradictions and mutual recriminations between the bourgeoisie of the different powers, but over a base of common interests which are evident today in the operations of the multinationals. This allowed them to praise themselves, not as the bandits they were and are, but as the shining representatives of Civilization vs. Barbarism. For example, the inter-imperialist contradictions which led to World War I at the beginning of this century were accompanied by the emergence of new «Black Legends,» just as mendacious as the original and, sadly, reflecting crimes just as real. They were elaborated by the warring contingents to the detriment of their occasional enemies in the division of the world; they were products not only of the respective bourgeoisie but also, shamefully, of the traitors of the Second International, the pseudo-socialists who have left such a lamentable heritage to the present. But such legends did not continue to prosper after the war ended (nor, even in spite of the horrors of Nazism, did the anti-German Black Legend prosper after the Second World War), except an attenuated and haphazard form typical of the ridiculous extremes of bourgeois national chauvinism. They did not prosper because it could not be otherwise among accomplices in the same crimes, especially after the appearance and development, more powerful every day, of the socialist world made possible the ongoing process of decolonization and forced the «civilized» barbarians to hurriedly remake their common cause. To give a name to this common cause—the cause of world exploitation, genocide, pillage and horror—they dusted off the terms «Western» and «Western Culture,» according to them the very essence of human splendour. This Black Legend, that of the «civilized» West, is the reverse of the original, and it has no purpose or value other than that. When it is not used as a weapon of murder, it is simply idle chatter.

THE TWO SPAINS

The way in which Spanish reactionaries have tried to combat the Black Legend directed against Spain has been, as we should expect, absolutely ineffective. Consulting their arid and arduous texts, one feels at times tempted to subscribe to the Legend—something that would be a serious error. Incapacitated by the narrow perspective of their class interests, they are content (besides criticizing other countries) to simply make lists of useless and sterile «glories» and moments of national «greatness,» while denigrating really admirable figures and achievements in Spanish history and culture. A characteristic example of this is the unanimous and bitter hatred expressed by Spanish reaction for the extraordinary Bartolomé de las Casas, to whom we shall have occasion to return to presently.

This dichotomy shows that these reactionary apologists, although clearly products of a process of anti-dialectical mummification, do not completely ignore the existence of a duality in the heart of every national culture—a fact that Lenin constantly insisted on. Only they, claiming for themselves the totality of the Spanish heritage and blinkered by an ultra-conservation view of that heritage, pretend to expel from it much of what we would consider vital and alive in Spain, blindly defending on the other hand all that seems dead, ossified and negative.

To make our own criticism of the Legend, we have to begin by openly challenging this false totality which would oblige us to totally accept or totally reject «Spanish-ness»—a foolish option. We have to insist on the existence of not one but two cultures in Spain or any similar national reality: the seigneurial culture as Lipschutz has it, and the popular; the culture of the oppressors and the culture of the oppressed. The latter is for us the living and authentic culture, and we defend its works. But on this basis we can also proceed to consider the former without excluding it out of hand (and paying attention to Lenin's praxis as well as theory), assimilating critically what there is in it of general value to humanity.

Few countries, in fact, have expressed the consciousness of this duality as vividly as Spain. Due to its advanced position in the process of the initial «take-off» of capitalism and European expansion and its subsequent decline and eventual marginalization from the development of that capitalist system which it was in some measure responsible for engendering, the theme of an external (Europe/Spain) as well as an internal («las dos Españas») duality becomes a constant of Spanish thought and writers almost from the beginning of the Decadence in the early seventeenth century. It is sufficient to recall Larra's striking epitaph in «Día de difuntos de 1836»: «Aquí yace media España: murió de la otra media,» or the worthy Antonio Machado's distinction in texts like «El mañana efímero» of 1913 (the same year in which Lenin wrote of the existence of two cultures in a nation) between:

La España de charanga y pandero,
cerrado y sacrístia,
devoa de Frascuelo y de María,
deso espíritu burlón y de alma quieta,
española inferior que ora y bosteza,
vieja y taur, zaragatera y triste;
española inferior que ora y embiste

cuando se digna usar de la cabeza.

and:

La España del cincel y de la maza,
con esa eterna juventud que se hace
del pasado macizo de la raza.
Una Española implacable y redentora,
España que aborea
con una hacha en la mano vengadora,
España de la rabia y de la idea.
Without denying the evident existence of one history of Spain, which in turn forms a part of world history, any consideration of Spain that does not take into account the existence of these two internal cultures and insists, either to denigrate or to defend, of speaking of Spain in the singular can only be legendary.

SPAIN AND THE WEST

It is not surprising, given its origin, that the Black Legend should find a place among the various and permanently unacceptable forms of racism. We need only mention the well-known fact that in the United States the ordinary words «hispánico» or «latín» as applied to Latin Americans—and to Chicanos and Puerto Ricans in particular—carry a strong connotation of that disdain with which the apparently transparent citizens of that unhappy country habitually deal with persons «of color.» It may be useful also to recall a phrase attributed (in its classic form) to Alexandre Dumas: «Africa begins at the Pyrenees.» The saccroblas West thus shows its repugnance for the other which is not itself, and this other finds its embodiment par excellence in Africa, whose tortured history was caused by Western imperialism which exploited and underdeveloped it in order to make its own growth possible.13

In expressing its disavowal with this phrase, Spanish reactionary thought again makes a muddle of things. What it demonstrates is that it is as racist as those who would subscribe to such a notion: for in effect Spain's capital sin was the doctrine of «purity of the race» (puridad de sangre). Reality is always much more lively and instructive than those who are quick to suspect and lash out against what they consider an offense to their honor normally tend to suspect. The real history of Spain, not the one composed of the lies in pompous and costumed (engolados y engolillados) official histories, shows us the total unreality of what the West thinks about itself: I refer to that singular myth according to which Reason was revealed to Greece, became an Empire in Rome, assimilated a religion which was destined, after spending several centuries in hibernation, to reappear like an armed prophet in the works of the ost-barbarian Westerners, who were to spend the next several centuries stirring the ominous mission of the light of Civilization to the rest of the planet. If any country permits us to remove the mask and see the genial fraud implicit in this «history» appropriated by the developed bourgeoisie of the West, that country is Spain—a fact which doubt has contributed not a little to the hostility she has experienced Western eyes. I do not pretend to be an expert on the matter, but that common knowledge is enough to begin to rectify this mendacious cultural autobiography.

Over and against the stupid simplification according to which Spain was occupied for several centuries by Arab infidels whom she eventually succeeded in expelling from the Peninsular, preserving thus the purity of the Christian faith and preventing the contagion of Mohammedan barbarism from entering Europe, a much richer and more complex truth is superimposed: Christians, Moors and Jews, all equally «Spanish,» co-existed for more than seven centuries in Spain, mutually and fruitfully influencing each other, as Américo Castro has explained in his controversial book. In that process, «no cabia... ni decir que lo español era lo europeo ni que era lo oriental.» Moreover, Castro continues:

Apretujada entre la embestida islámica y la ambiciosa presión de Francia, Castilla desarrolló una existencia de energía y hábil esgrimidor, duro en ataques y en paradas. El menester de vivir bajo la amenaza de la más alta civilización existente en el mundo entre los siglos ix y xii, llevó a Castilla a delegar a los moros y judíos que soñaba el trato de ees cosas, la técnica y lo que requeriera detenerse a pensar.14

Almost at the same time as the appearance of Castro's book, Menéndez Pidal wrote:

La España del sur, el Andalús, aunque desarrolla un islamismo muy hispanizado en costumbres, en arte, en ideología, queda segregado de Europa y unida al orbe cultural afroasiático. La España del Norte, la europea, aunque bien firme en su cristianidad, se ve sin embargo muy sometida a influyos del Sur, en el tiempo en que la cultura árabe era muy superior a la latina, y cumple entonces el alto destino histórico de servir como eslabón entre los dos orbes, oriental y occidental.15

Spain, in other words, was the conduit through which the influence of Arab civilization—the highest existing in the world between the ninth and thirteenth centuries—, and Arab culture—«superior to the Latin»—, passed into Europe and revived the moribund European cultural world. This influence made itself felt in philosophy, literature, science, technology, social customs, in Aquinas and in Dante. (As the Spanish priest Miguel Asín Palacios pointed out, «nuestra patria tendría derecho a reivindicar para algunos de sus pensadores musulmanes una parte no exigida de los tiempos de gloria con que la crítica universal ha decorado la obra inmortal de Dante Alighieri.»)

But Spain was not only the «eslabón entre la cristianidad y el Islam,» as Menéndez Pidal put it; due to the extension of Islam, her function as link or conduit was also to introduce to Europe the contributions of Greece, Persia and India which the Arabs had assimilated. Think of the short story or of mathematics; of wax, an Indian invention which entered Europe through Arab Spain; of the arithmetic book written in the ninth century by the Persian Al-Khwarizmi who gave his name to our numbers (algarismo in old Spanish, modern guarrismo). José Luciano Franco notes, in addition:
Against the Black Legend

If it is somewhat understandable that the Legend continues to live on in the reactionary sectors of the West, those for whom racism, mystification, resentment and irrationality are essential, it may seem less understandable that the Legend still has currency in sectors considered part of the Western Left where one would expect a more reasoned judgement of history. That this is so, nevertheless, exemplifies the sort of paternalistic European leftist who, as Jacques Arnault remarks, «de-nuncia el colonialismo, pero se le eriza la piel cuando descubre esa denuncia en la pluma de un colonizado.»

As a case in point, consider a classic representative of the Western Left, Jean-Paul Sartre, expounding on Spanish culture in a manner that Alexandre Dumas might have recognized as his own. To a (loaded) question put him by the journal Libre, Sartre replies: «Cuando fui por primera vez a Cuba, recuerdo que una de las principales preocupaciones de los cubanos era la de resucitar su antigua cultura, que infelizmente es española, para oponerla a la absorbente influencia de los Estados Unidos.» One might think that Sartre is referring to the present situation of Spanish culture, which is indeed lamentable; but no, he speaks explicitly of «its old culture, which is unfortunately Spanish.» Why insist on the obvious oversights? The old culture could be the indigenous or the African or the Creole, but for Sartre it is the old Spanish culture which is unfortunate. Since in every country that has risen out of colonialism the old culture can only be if we omit as Sartre does the extra-European component, the culture of the respective colonizing metropolis, then why should we admit that «unfortunately» our old culture is Spanish? Would we be more fortunate if our old culture were Dutch, as in the case of Surinam, or English, as in Jamaica, or French, as in Haiti? How have these countries been favored over us by their relation to a non-Spanish metropolitan culture? Although he may not be aware of this, Sartre is doing nothing more than subscribing to the Legend in such remarks. The most important and definitive thing is that those countries born of colonialism, Cuba among them, have not only our respective old cultures but also a new and revolutionary culture which we are creating together.

Jean-Jacques Fol offers us another example (though a minor one) of this same phenomenon in his evaluation of Las Casas. «Sin duda,» he writes, «Bolívar llamó a Las Casas el Apóstol de América,» and Martí hizo su elogio. ¿Pero eso es verdaderamente suficiente? ¿No es menester ver más lejos? No seeing further than Bolívar and Martí is a prodigious task. Here is the mountain of Monsieur Fol’s «long view»: «Pues la defensa de América por el padre Las Casas se hizo en detrimento de Africa, y la salvación de los indios tuvo lugar en la época por la llegada de esclavos transportados de Africa.»

If Pol’s ignorance were no; as great as his telescopic fatuity, he would have only needed to look at some maps of America (those that Manuel Galich offers in his essay «El indio y el negro,» for example) to learn that where the «salvation of the Indians» occurred (the Meso-
American plateau, the Andean sierra, etc.) are precisely the regions into which African slaves were not introduced; rather, they were brought to work on the plantations of the coastal lowlands where the Indians had already been exterminated. But above all he should have known that such a calumny against Las Casas, one of the noblest figures in human history, represents a base and reactionary imputation. Fernando Ortiz had already written in 1938:

Contra Las Casas hubo un doble deseo, el de borrar el recuerdo de su nombre por ser evocador de la barbarie de la conquista y destrucción de las Indias Occidentales, y, a la vez, el de denigrarlo, cuando era inevitable sacarlo a la luz, atribuyéndole la iniciativa de la traición negra... Imputación afrentosa que le arrojaron los defensores del esclavismo y del colonialismo español. 28

It goes without saying that this challenge has not been met by the enemies of Las Casas, a fact which has not impaired their propagation of the sort of nonsense echoed by Monsieur Fol which coincides with conservative bullheadedness and contributes to keeping alive the Black Legend against Frey Bartolomé. 29

THE SPANISH DECADENCE

One matter which we neither can nor want to gloss over is the magnitude of the Spanish decadence. The Decadence is an incontrovertible fact; but it has nothing to do with supposed defects inherent in "the quality of being Spanish." The twilight of Empire, which Spain was the first modern nation to know, would be relived by Portugal, Holland, France and even England itself, the "Queen of the Seas" in our childhood, today a provincial lady more closely resembling Agatha Christie's Miss Marple. In each case, the new imperial power, the Yankee Empire, scurried to inherit by ruse or by force the former colonies. From Spain it wrested Puerto Rico and the Philippines; from France and Portugal it attempted to take over Indochina and Angola... As we see today, however, the peoples of these former colonies have had different ends in mind.

The reasons for the decline of Spain are well known, although some of them are still objects of debate. A series of disasters, like the expulsion of the Jews and Moriscos and the crushing of the rebellion of the comuneros in Villalar by Charles V, stifled the growth of a bourgeois and led to the recrudescence of a feudalism that Ferdinand and Isabella had endeavored to check. Without protobourgeois nuclei in Spain capable of capitalizing it, the arrival of the riches of America consolidated this regression. Pierre Vilar explains:

El triunfo del "cristiano viejo" significa cierto desprecio del espíritu de lucro, del propio espíritu de producción, y una tendencia al espíritu de

casta. A mediados del siglo XVIII, los premios empezan a exigir que sus miembros prueben la "limpieza de sangre": mala preparación para una entrada en la era capitalista... Para unos, el oro de las Indias ha servido por sí mismo para asegurar la hegemonía española. Para otros, es ese mismo oro la causa de la decadencia... Los beneficios no fueron "invertidos" en el sentido capitalista del término. Los emigrantes favorecidos por la fortuna se habían con compras de terreno, construcción de castillos, con tesoros. El teatro y Don Quijote reflejan esta actitud, tanto del campesino como del hidalgo... Doctrinas modernas hay que han considerado como un signo de gloria esta inadaptación de España al capitalismo. Pero fue ella quien condenó al país a la ineficacia. Por otra parte, no hay que considerar en esta psicología un rasgo determinante. Si la inflación de medios monetarios no hubiera anquilosado a la empresa castellana y hubiera a la banca sevillana, destruyendo los gérmenes de la burguesía, hubiera podido transformarse. La España del siglo XVII, por posición y por coyuntura, tuvo que dejar a las naciones del norte de Europa la tarea de desarrollar las consecuencias de la "revolución hecha posible gracias a los "Descubrimientos." 30

This defeat of the bourgeoisie, this persistence of feudal structures, marks the future of Spain with the survivals of an archaic ideology embodied in an obscurantist Catholicism which set the power of the Counter Reformation against the process of bourgeois modernization, causing thus in Spain the retardation or regression of scientific development, essential for a bourgeois but not for a feudal society. 31 Despite efforts at renovation in the eighteenth century, Spain still presents a desolate panorama at the beginning of the nineteenth, a fact that Spanish Americans could not but resent bitterly. In the course of his trip to Spain in 1846, Sarmiento writes with his customary rudeness: "Ustedes (españoles) no tienen autores, ni escritores, ni sabios, ni economistas, ni políticos, ni historiadores, ni cosa que valga." In 1890, writing about the poet Sellés, Martí would note: "Los pueblos de habla española nada, que no se manjar revohido, reciben de España." This is simply truth to (a sad) fact, not a concession to the Black Legend. The most lucid Spaniards of the nineteenth century, from Larra to Costa, were saying essentially the same thing. The Spain from which Spanish America separated at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was in the words of the modern historian Tuñón de Lara:

... un país que vivía dentro de los moldes de lo que se ha llamado "viejo régimen", o sea: un país eminentemente agrario, dominado por la gran propiedad rústica y los señores, en que la nobleza y la Iglesia detenían la mayoría de las fuentes de riqueza... Los vestigios feudales eran tan acusados, que en multitud de casos la propiedad de la tierra llevaba aparejada la potestad sobre los habitantes de pueblos y tierras. 32

According to Roberto Mesa, "La España del siglo XIX es una gran potencia de museo, albañaza testamentario del Imperio." Even more, the Spain of Franco, given the annulment of the relative renewal experienced between 1898 and the Civil War, "por encima de acronías, tecnocracias
a la moda y masas de consumidores, es un inmenso serpiente que camina desde los aguafuertes de Goya hasta los militares valleincandescentes de charretera y cuarteazo.  

This concrete historical situation—the structural backwardness of a European country which did not go through a bourgeois revolution and remained overwhelmed by feudal remnants—explains the frequently low level of theoretical discussion in Spain (a fact Cajal insisted on). Many of Spain’s best thinkers, those who admitted the reality of her decadence, embarked on an interminable discussion of the need to «Europeanize»: something which meant, inevitably, different things to different people and which was a confused and confusing slogan, even in a figure as energetic and lucid as Costa. Consider, for example, the paradoxical Unamuno, who subscribed to Costa’s thesis in «En torno al casticismo» (1895) only to pass—seeing some things clearly but mystifying still more—to the other extreme; or the Westernized Ortega, a classic case of what Machado called «la trágica frivolidad de nuestros reaccionarios»; or those today who think Spain’s linkage with the multinationals is going to guarantee modernization. This is not to deny that Spain is in urgent need of a genuine modernization, but this cannot be a «Europeanization» or «Westernization.» The latter, as has been demonstrated in Spanish America, can only lead to neocolonialism. Genuine modernization requires a drastic change in structures: the revolution Costa had desparately called for. But no longer the same revolution—the democratic bourgeois revolution—he championed; rather an advancement towards the socialist revolution prefigured in the 1936–39 Republic triumvirs, towards the sort of revolution which will make of Spain not a Western but a post-Western nation, as occurred with Russia in 1917 and Cuba in 1959. There is no «Western» (i.e. developed capitalist) future for Spain. It is today what I have called a paleooccidental country, tomorrow (and hopefully tomorrow will come soon) it will be a post-occidental one.

NUESTRA ESPAÑA

This economically underdeveloped and (until recently) politically shackled Spain is a country which we Spanish Americans can only consider fracternally: it is a country like ours. Its tormented past is also, to some extent, our own; its sad recent present under the heel of Franquism resembles that of many of our countries (especially now that Fascism is beginning to spread on our continent); its future is not at all foreign to us. With great pain, we watch the descendants of harmonious Indo-American or African societies doing the toughest jobs in the present-day capitalist world. The destiny of the poor descendants of Spain’s rundown greatness is hardly different: where they are not exploited in their own land, they are servants in France, miners in Belgium, unskilled workers in West Germany. This also gives us pain.

Fortunately, our hope of eventually seeing a revolutionary and newly triumphant Spain is not based merely on sentimental illusions. Marx, over a century ago, had already noted prophetically: «Napoleon, who like all his contemporaries, considered Spain a lifeless corpse, received a fatal shock on discovering that, although the Spanish state was dead, Spanish society was everywhere full of life and bursting with the force of resistance.»  

Forty years ago this fact was proven again: the brilliance of that example, which illuminated my childhood, has not yet been extinguished. Savagely attacked by the Fascist blitzkrieg which was later to penetrate the countries of Europe like a hot knife through butter only to come to ruin against the magnificent Russian people, Spain demonstrated for three unforgettable years to what a degree it was still «everywhere full of life and bursting with the force of resistance.» It is indicative of our solidarity with Spain that the best Spanish American poets went to the Peninsula in those years and wrote in homage to the resistance of the Spanish people some of their finest poems: «Niños del mundo: está la madre España con su vientre a cuestas,» wrote impassioned César Vallejo. And there also, made a symbol of the fraternal identity of our destinies, remained the generous Pablo de la Torriente Brau, as his close companion Miguel Hernández was to say, «con el sol español puesto en la cara / y el de Cuba en sus haces.»

Is it really necessary to insist on the intimacy we feel and will always feel for this other Spain, the Spain where Las Casas and the great Dominicans of the sixteenth century—«el momento más brillante del pensamiento anticolonialista hispánico—« defending with nobility the first Americans; the Spain of Vives and the Erasmists, of Servet, Huarte, Suárez, Sánchez, Feijoo, Cadalso, Jove blancos, Blanco-White (many of them obliged to write and think outside of Spain itself); the post-independence Spain of Larra, Pi y Margall, Giner and the Krausistas, of Costa, Iglesias, Cajal, some of the figures of the Generation of ’98, and above all of Antonio Machado; the Spain whose peoples, in a dramatic process, engendered the rebellious descendants of our America; the Spain of the comuneros, of the guerrillas against Napoleon, of the Cortes de Cádiz, of Riego and the Institución Libre de Enseñanza; the Spain that worked and thought; the Spain that fought magnificently for all of humanity from 1936 to 1939 and lost? With the eyes of this Spain we can look upon the members of an impressive and varied family: Hispano-Arabic art, the Poema del Cid, Don Juan Manuel, the Arcipreste, La Celestina, the romanciero and the picaresque novel, García, fray Luis, Erriqu, Santa Teresa, San Juan de la Cruz, Góngora, Cervantes, Balbuna, Quevedo, Lope, Tirso, Ruiz de Alarcón, Calderón, Saavedra Fajardo, Gracián, El Greco, Velázquez, Moratín, Goya, Quintana, Espronceda, Bésquer, Rosalía de Castro, Valera, Galdo, Clarín, Unamuno, Baroja, Valle-Inclán, Azorín, Antonio Machado, Juan Ramón, Miró, Picasso, Gómez de la Serna, Falla, León Felipe, Moreno Villa, Lorca, Alberti, Buñuel, Miguel Hernández...
Against the Black Legend

Is there any reason on earth why those infected with the Black Legend should presume to tell us that the errors and horrors of Spanish reaction oblige us to forget what is also our heritage, or make us ashamed of it? What sense does it make to declare the whole of a country’s culture worthless because of the atrocities that the ruling classes of that country may have committed at a given moment? Do we not admire the work of Shakespeare, Shaw or Virginia Woolf in spite of the British Empire? That of Whitman, Twain or Hemingway in spite of Yankee imperialism? That of Rabelais, Rimbaud or Malraux in spite of French colonialism? That of Pushkin, Tolstoy or Dostoevsky in spite of Czarism? That of Dante, Leopardi or Pavese in spite of Fascism? That of Goethe, Heine or Brecht in spite of Nazism? That of Kipling, Claudel or Pound in spite of Kipling, Claudel or Pound? The truth is that we are proud that what is Spanish is also ours. To leave it out would not enrich us; it would make us immeasurably poorer.

The exceptional case of José Martí suffices to demonstrate how the best of Spain’s cultural heritage, mixed with others, was transfigured in an American work. It is evident today that no other person of our America was able to elaborate such a vast and coherent work, respecting and loving of our aboriginal roots and at the same time reaching a level of universal excellence. No one was less blinded than Martí by the false and bloody light of the empire whose last chains he contributed decisively to remove from America. And yet, what reader of his familiar with several literatures fails to recognize that his work—modern, nourished by the most advanced fashions of his time, original and prophetic—has its stylistic equivalent only in the greatest writers of the Spanish Golden Age, writers he knew and admired especially intimately. Juan Marinello, in La edad de oro, referred to Quevedo, noted: “Ahondó tanto en lo que venía, que los que hoy vivimos, con su lengua hablamos.”

The man who in his La edad de oro taught the children of his America to love and respect Las Casas, who was Spanish (“y su padre, y su madre”), to not confuse him with “aquellos conquistadores asesi- nos (que) debían venir del infierno”, who in his later years confessed:

Para Aragón, en España,
Tengo yo en mi corazón
Un lugar todo Aragón:
Franco, fiero, fiel, sin saña

.................................

Estimo a quien de un roce
Echa por tierra a un tirano:
Lo estimo si es un cubano;
Lo estimo si aragones...;

who, in the midst of preparing Cuba’s way of independence was able to distinguish between “el español que tiene en el Sardiner o en la Rambla su caudal, que es su única patria” and “el español llano, que ama la libertad como la amamos nosotros, y busca con nosotros una patria en la justicia”; who spoke also of “el español liberal y bueno, ... mi padre valenciano, ... mi fiador montañés,” and exclaimed of them: “A estos españoles los atacarán otros: yo los ampararé toda mi vida! ”: such a man gives us a lasting lesson on the nature of the relation between Spain and our America.

In the footsteps of Martí’s example, and giving others of their own, are Nicolás Guillén, author of the extraordinary “El apellido,” who was able to evoke his “dos abuelos” (one Spanish, the other African) in an exemplary poem; and Mirta Aguirre in her excellent Marxist study of Cervantes, which has shown a new generation of revolutionary scholars and critics what a correct approach to the enor- mous cultural heritage of Spain should be.

And should we not also recall that when that legendary but completely real hero of our America left Cuba over ten years ago to fight in other lands, he wrote that the felt Rocinante’s ribs—“el castillero de Rocinante”—under his heels? Frankly and finally, I think Federico de Onís was right when he wrote:

Podemos suponer que llegue a desaparecer todo lo que España esté estableciendo en América, como desapareció la estructura política de su organización colonial y otras cosas del pasado –ni más ni menos que han desaparecido en España misma—; pero aquello que plantaron en América los españoles que tuvieron la voluntad de ser americanos —aquello que sin duda era lo más íntimo y popular de España, lo que tenía más fuerza de unidad, universalidad y libertad, lo que era más apto para transformarse y fundirse con los demás elementos que ofrecía la nueva realidad— perdería a través de todas las transformaciones que sufra este continente, cuyo destino, como ellos quisieron, es el de ir siempre en busca de un más allá. 41

Havana, June 9, 1976

(English translation by John Beverley and Roberto Fernández Retamar)

FOOTNOTES

2 Ramón Menéndez Pidal, op. cit., p. 192. On this question of the language, which has provoked so much nonsense on both sides of the Atlantic, see, in addition, Amado Alonso, El problema de la lengua en América (Madrid, 1935), and Castellano, español, idioma nacional: Historia espiritual de tres nombres (Buenos Aires, 1943); and Angel Rosenblat, El castellano de España y el castellano de América: Unidad y diferenciación (Caracas, 1962). Rosenblat notes in his enjoyable essay: “Frente a la diversidad inevitable del habla popular y familiar, el habla culta de Hispanoamérica presenta una asombrosa unidad con la de España, una unidad que me parece mayor que la del inglés de los Estados Unidos o el portugués del Brasil con respecto a la antigua metrópoli” (p. 46).
Roberto Fernández Retamar

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9 Karl Marx, *The Future of British Domination in India*. (Italics mine).


11 Quevedo, who was born in 1580, eight years before the defeat of the Invincible Armada, sensed the beginning of this process and predicted it in his enormous, but still genial work. In one of his best-known scenes, he wrote: *Y es más fácil, oh Espectáculo, en muchos modos, / que lo que a todos le quitaste sola / te puedan a todos lo quitar todos.*

12 In general, the concealed slavery of wage workers in Europe required, as a prop, slavery *sans phrase* in the New World. Marx, *Capital, Vol. 1, Part. VIIl.

13 Ciudad anaya negra, Estudios acerca del concepto de España en el extranjero (1914), by Julián Juderia; and *Historia de la leyenda negra hispanoamericana*, by the Argentine Rómulo D. Carbia (Madrid, 1944). It is not accidental that the extreme right of Spain and many foreign reactionary parties have yielded to this *defensa* of Spain with the same zeal they usually employ to justify more modern depredations.

14 Lenin wrote in his *Notes on the National Question* (1913): *Although they may not have developed, elements of democratic and socialist society exist in every national culture. In every nation there is an exploited and working mass whose living conditions inevitably engender a democratic and socialist ideology. But a bourgeois culture also exists in each nation (and in most cases is also universal and clerical), not only in the form of 'elements', but as the dominant culture. Therefore, the 'national culture' is generally the culture of the landowners, priests and bourgeois.*

15 During the early years of the October Revolution and against the Proletkult’s intention to pass over or reject pre-revolutionary culture in toto and create a new *proletarian* culture, Lenin reiterated that this proletarian culture can only be created knowing precisely the culture created by the whole of humanity during the course of its development and transforming ... Proletarian culture has to be the logical development of the storehouse of knowledge conquered by humanity under the yoke of capitalist society, of landowning society, and of bureaucratic society. All of these roads and paths have led and continue to lead to the proletarian culture. *Tasks of the Communist Youth Leagues* (1920). These ideas are repeated and extended in, for example, the essay *On Proletarian Culture* of the same year, and in general guided on questions of culture the gigantic Leninist task of founding the first socialist state.

16 From the viewpoint of a Liberal, Fidelino de Figueiredo has dedicated himself to this theme of the *two Spains*—one of the Right, the other of the Left—in his book *Las dos España*, first published in 1932.


19 Ramón Menéndez Pidal, *España, eslabón entre la cristianidad y el Islam* (Madrid, 1936), passim.


21 Bolivia was conscious of this fact: *España misma deja de ser europea, por su sangre africana, por sus instituciones y por su carácter*, he told the Congress of August 1819. Far from offending, such a fact contributed to the American originality he was to proudly proclaim four years later: *Nosotros somos un securities movement.* On the other hand, it is known how the *Arabic* in Spanish culture attracted Martí. The otherness or heterodoxy of Spain has always interested the great creators of our America.

*The history of primitive Christianity has notable points of similarity with the modern working-class movement,* noted Engels. To Anton Menger’s question of why socialism did not follow the fall of the Roman Empire in the West, he replied that *socialism in fact existed wherever possible at that time, and even reached a dominant position... in Christianity. However, Christianity of necessity, given the historical conditions, did not wish to complete the social transformations in this world, but rather beyond it in the eternal life after death, in the imminent *millennium*.* Friedrich Engels, *On the History of Primitive Christianity.* See also his preface to Marx’s *Class Struggles in France*.

23 Pierre Vilar, op. cit., p. 60.


25 *Entrevista con Jean-Paul Sartre*, in *Libre, Number 4* (1974), p. 10. Note that this publication, whose subtitle was *Revista crítica trimestral del mundo de habla española*, passed over this remark without the slightest criticism or comment.


28 Antonio Saco, *Historia de la esclavitud de la raza africana en el Nuevo Mundo y en especial en los paises americano-hispánicos* (Havana, 1938), I, p. LIX.

29 Silvio Zavala, *Las Casas, esclavista?*, in *Cuadernos Americanos* (March, April, 1944). Juan Comínás, *Fray Bartolomé, la esclavitud y el racismo*, *Cuadernos Americanos* (March-April, 1976). *Cita* in n. 4, pp. 183-84. Unfortunatly, Menéndez Pidal has also repeatedly contributed to this unjust *Las Casas* legend in the following: *¿Qué dicen los incas?*, *¿Las dos banderas?* (1940), in *La lengua de Cristóbal Colon: El estilo de Santa Teresa y otros estudios del siglo XVI* (Buenos Aires, 1942); *Vitoria y Las Casas* (1956), and *Una norma yanoamérica de Padre Las Casas*, in *El Padre Las Casas y la leyenda negra* (Madrid, 1958); and *El padre Las Casas: su doble personalidad* (Madrid, 1963). Menéndez Pidal compares Las Casas negatively to Bernal Díaz and Vitoria, accuses him of being a slanderer who intensified, fixed and perpetuated the black legend against Spain, an anti-black slave and, lastly paranoid (to which Lipschutz would reply in *La paranoia y el historiador de los profetas,* in Marx and Lenin in the América Latina, *cit.* in n. 6). On this and other historical points, the eminent philologist, who is taken for the most objective and serene soul, proves to be the heir of another great Spanish energumen, the cipher expert Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo, whose sadly reactionary criteria do not, however, invalidate his enormous work. I would like to add that his author’s ideology it would be absurd to leave in the hands of Spanish reaction. It is still an arsenal of the most varied thoughts.

An attempt to elucidate the living and the dead in that great work (a very insufficient attempt, given the usual superficiality of the person who undertook it) was realized by Guillermo de Torre in *Menéndez Pelayo y las dos Españas* (Buenos Aires, 1943). After reading this little book, one is convinced of the importance of doing a more serious job on this matter. For example, in volu-
30 Pierre Vilar, op. cit., pp. 38, 53, 65. In his spiritedly bookish youth, Menéndez Pelayo tried to deny this fact: La ciencia española (1876). But in 1894 he already recognized the decadent state of Spanish science of his time «Esplendor y decadencia de la científica española,» in Antología del pensamiento de lengua española en la Edad Contemporánea, edition, introduction, and notes by José Guas (México, 1945). For his part, Santiago Ramón y Cajal, with the authority given to him by his great scientific work on the international level, affirms that the output of Spanish science, judged globally, «ha sido pobre y discontinuo, mostrando, con relación al resto de Europa, un atraso, y sobre todo una mezquindad teórica desplorable.» «Nuestro atraso cultural y sus causas preñaditas,» in El concepto contemporáneo de España, Antología de ensayos (1895-1931), ed. Ángel del Río and M. J. Bernardete (Buenos Aires, 1946), p. 46.
34 In the Guas Antología mentioned in note 37 there is a good panorama of thought on the Spanish decadence and the independence movement in America.
36 Roberto Mesa, «Prólogo a la edición española,» El anticolonialismo europeo desde Las Casas a Marx, ed. Marcel Mele and Roberto Mesa (Madrid, 1972), p. 8. As high representatives of that «moment» we must also mention the chroniclers of Indian cultures like Sahagún: Cronistas de las culturas precolombinas, anthology, prologue and notes by Luis Nicolau d’Olwer (México, 1963).
38 Juan López Morillas, El krausismo español: Período de una aventura intelectual (México, 1956). Arturo André Roig has provided an example for scholars in other Spanish-American countries with his book, Los krausistas argentinos (Puebla, Méxi-
40 Carlos Blanco Aguinaga has studied in a useful book, Juventud del 98 (Madrid, 1970), how the writers grouped under the label «youth of 98» approached the problem of Spain between 1890 and 1903 from radical socio-political prospects which went from intransigent federalism to Marxism (p. XII) and how in their capacity as petty bourgeois intellectuals «acabaron volviendo, cada uno en su modo, a recogerse en el seno de la sociedad establecida» (p. 32b).
41 We do not mention Portugal here, despite its known contributions to world art and literature, because that country has suffered the lash of the anti-Spanish Black Legend, a legend with a definite anti-Iberian form. Of course, we must not forget that «Portugal no es un problema español, y es tan extraño y tan a la España grande como Polonia a Rusia, Bélgica a Francia… No forma parte de ninguna de las dos Españas», Fidelino de Figueiredo, Las dos Españas, cit. in n. 16, pp. 271, 276. The Black Legend has affected other peoples of the Peninsula, the Basque, Galician, Catalan, even more strongly. They were oppressed by a reactionary Castilian Spain against which they have never tired of fighting in search of a just federal solution.
42 Juan Marinello, «Sobre Martí escritor: La españolidad literaria de José Martí,» in Vida y pensamiento de Martí, Homenaje a la ciudad de La Habana en el cincuenta aniversario de la fundación del Partido Revolucionario Cubano 1892-1942 o I, (Havana, 1942). Guillermo Díaz-Plaja could affirm of Martí: «ese gigantesco fenómeno de la lengua hispánica, raíz segura de la prosa de Rubén, y desde luego, el primer ‘creador’ de prosa que ha tenido el mundo hispánico.» Modernismo