

The Mentoring Corner (April, 2021)

Hello, Brethren:

Some brothers may have noticed that some Masonic issues I raise are not typical. This observation is well taken. I come from the Spanish Caribbean Masonic tradition, which in some ways differs from the American one (our Freemasonry developed an important social and educational function). I will illustrate such experience through an article I wrote some years ago: *Freemasonry in the Spanish Antilles during the Second Half of the XIX Century*, published in 2018, in Vol. 131 of the Masonic research journal *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*.

I will reproduce several key paragraphs and statements therein, that speak for themselves:

“Spain invested in its rich Mexican and South American colonies spending very little time or capital in the Spanish Antilles ones. It was only after Spain lost all of its continental colonies that it started dedicating attention to its two remaining Caribbean colonies: Cuba and Puerto Rico.

Responsibility for Spain losing its Empire was not due to disloyal Cuban and Puertorrican Creoles, to Freemasonry, or to American Imperialism, as some have claimed. It was due to the disastrous Spanish colonial policy, implemented throughout the XIX Century by its government.

Autochthonous Freemasonry (composed of Creole membership) *provided the vehicle* that allowed Cuban and Puerto Rican intellectuals and politicians to gather, interact, develop their skills and ideas, and bring to fruition their efforts to improve the governments of their islands.

In 1859, Grand Lodge of South Carolina, through Bros. Pike’s and Mackay’s intercession, provided charters enabling Cuban *Bro. Andres Cassard* to create the *Grand Lodge of Colon*. *Bro. Cassard* also created the *Supreme Council of Colon*, for Cuba and the Spanish Antilles.

In 1878, Cuba’s first War of Independence ended with a Peace Treaty. In 1880, all Cuban Grand Lodges merged under Grand Master Antonio Govín, who was the President of the Liberal Autonomic Party. His key philosophy was that *Freemasonry would strive to obtain, by evolution, what had not been achieved by war*. Autonomist Party leadership included prominent members of Masonic Lodges. *Many of the best known intellectuals of that time were Masons*. The *Grand Lodge*, as an institution, affirmed its *non-political* character; but *its members, their commitment as masons and citizens*. *Grand Master Govín said it would be a major misfortune if there were separation between Freemasonry and Citizens*, because the work of Freemasonry would be lost.

Until late 1800s, neither Cuba nor Puerto Rico had political parties, clubs, unions, or civic organizations. For, most of these institutions were forbidden by the colonial authorities, or had not yet been created. There were few schools, especially mid-level education, and one university in Havana. *Freemasons grew intellectually* by participating *in the Lodges* and literary societies. *Freemasonry became, for most masons, their school*, as well as *the vehicle* through which *they prepared themselves to become future leaders*, able to undertake their patriotic endeavors.

The fundamental contribution of Freemasonry to nation-building, in Cuba and Puerto Rico was through three key functions: the connective, the disseminating and the incubating functions.

Autochthonous Freemasonry functioned as a true school of political and socio-economic leaders, especially for those Brethren lacking economic opportunity to obtain a formal higher education. This was the greatest contribution of Freemasonry in the Spanish Antilles.”

This information may help explain the variations that some may have observed in my work. The entire paper is in: <https://web.cortland.edu/romeu/AQC131.11%20FinalRomeu2018.pdf>

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