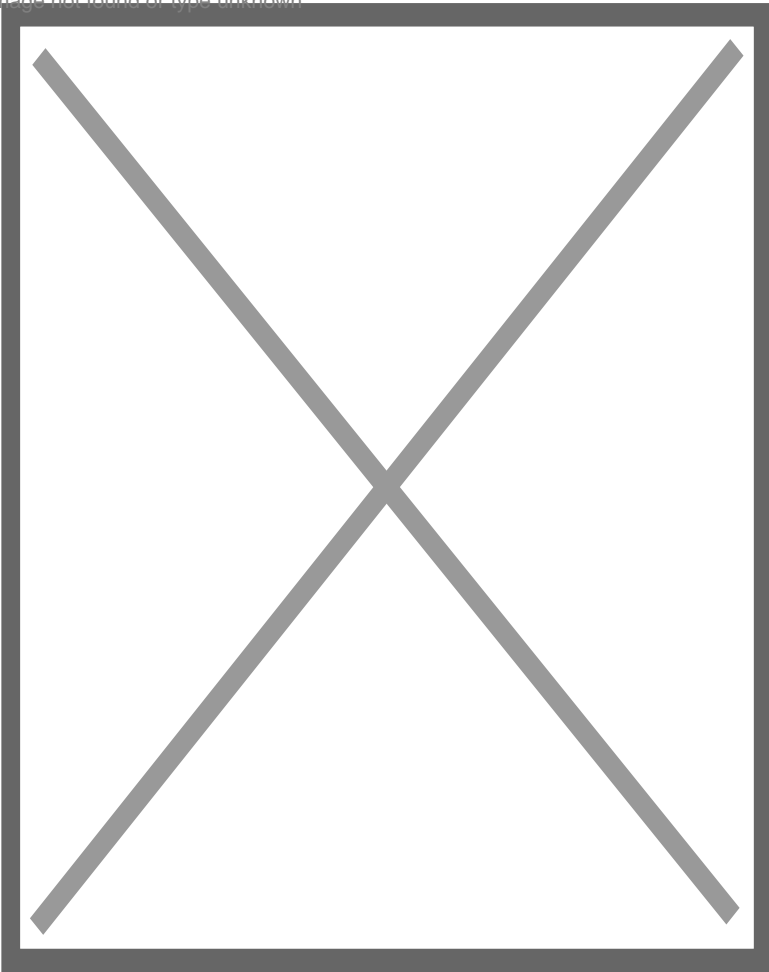


With strength of mind and body

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At only 23 years old, he joined the Cuban independence struggle in 1868, led by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes.

Photo: Archivo/RHC

By Roberto Morejón

"As handsome as Maceo," many Cubans are accustomed to say when they try to illustrate the bravery of a person, because the hero Antonio Maceo (1845-1896) was wounded in a thousand battles and always recovered, until the fatal battle in San Pedro, on the outskirts of Havana, 125 years ago.

At the age of 23 he joined the Cuban independence struggle in 1868, led by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, the Father of the Homeland, against Spanish colonialism.

From his mother Mariana Grajales, emblem of bravery, his father Marcos Maceo and brothers, Antonio received the best teachings.

His father initiated him in the maneuver of the weapons and his mother instilled in him the discipline that he would show in the armies of the Liberator Army.

Nicknamed the Bronze Titan, Antonio Maceo y Grajales gave one of the most eminent demonstrations of revolutionary intransigence when on March 15, 1878 he rejected the peace proposal presented by the Spaniard Arsenio Martínez Campos.

The lieutenant general of the Liberation Army considered inadmissible the circumstances proposed for an alleged end to the ten-year armed controversy, when the proposal was to throw out obvious postulates, among them the absolute independence from Spanish colonialism and the abolition of slavery.

Credited as the Protest of Baraguá, the response extends to the present of the Cubans, when they reiterate to defend sovereignty against a powerful adversary.

But Maceo did NOT limit himself to rejecting the unseemly proposal of the representative of the Iberian country, because years later he led the machete charge from East to West, together with General Máximo Gómez.

Military strategists described the anti-colonial offensive as one of the most audacious events of the time.

Along with the struggle in the mountains, the lieutenant general outlined his political arsenal, because he went so far as to say: "I never expected anything from Spain (...). Freedom is conquered with the edge of the machete, it is not asked for; begging for rights is typical of cowards incapable of exercising them. Nor do I expect anything from the Americans; we must entrust everything to our own efforts".

A wise lesson for the present generations when, in the midst of material deprivation and in the face of an external siege, it is essential to appeal to one's own forces to work for well-being.

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