In the 19th century, the Latin American world was in a constant state of turbulence. The majority of Spanish American countries won their independence during this time. This century of violence, passion, and liberty was reflected in the artistic output of the time. Many authors, like Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and Juan Díaz Covarrubias used their works as a way to offer political commentaries for the incipient nation. Their novels include both explicit and implicit political opinions. *Sab*, by Gómez de Avellaneda, and *La Clase Media*, by Díaz Covarrubias, can be read as allegories for the political situations in Cuba and Mexico, respectively. The two authors wrote about international relations, using their characters as allegoric representations. Gómez de Avellaneda, deliberately obscuring her message through her writing style, criticized the imperialism that dominated the 19th century. Meanwhile, Díaz Covarrubias wrote an allegory for the Mexican-American War. This promotion of an ideal nation is a common theme in romantic era Latin American literature. The two works also contain direct messages about slavery, sexism, classism and racism. Both authors used their novels as allegories, for their countries as they were at the time, and for the ideal nation. They treated their characters as representations of their ideas. This work proposes that in *Sab*, Gómez de Avellaneda promoted a new nation independent of foreign influence. Meanwhile, in *La Clase Media*, Díaz Covarrubias shared his vision of a nation governed by an educated middle class and free of the corrupt aristocracy. I intend to compare and contrast the two novels and their individual methods of sharing their messages.
Race takes center stage as one of the most important themes in *Sab*. The titular protagonist is an African slave, and because of this, race relations end up being a vital theme to the story. Enrique Otway, one of the novel's primary antagonists, is a white Englishman. He is a representation not only of the white race in Cuba, but of foreign culture. The author presents a clear contrast in Carlota, the main love interest of both Sab and Enrique. The primary difference between Enrique and Carlota, also white but portrayed much more positively, is that Enrique is a foreigner. He stands in for the influence of the Anglophonic world, particularly Britain and the United States. Enrique holds a pronounced disdain for Cuban heritage and spends his time imposing his own values on the Cuban characters. Although he at first appears to be opposed to slavery, he wastes no time taking advantage of slaves, representing the hypocrisy Gómez de Avellaneda saw in British mercantilism.

Sab, by contrast, represents Afro-Cuban heritage. He's mixed race, born of a white father and black mother. Following the allegory, it can be said that Gómez de Avellaneda promotes the idea of a Cuba returning to its roots. Though the United States and Britain are "suitors" of Cuba, their promises are vacant. Cuba can only have a truly happy future without foreign influence. The novel's tragic ending exemplifies this further, as Carlota's decision to embrace her foreign suitor is ultimately portrayed as what led to her downfall.

There is also a theme exploring Cuba's indigenous heritage. One of the characters, Martina, is an indigenous woman who represents Cuba's native heritage. Martina is portrayed entirely positively, and her relationship with Sab forms a critical part of the novel. However, the main focus of the novel is undoubtedly on Sab, and by extension, Afro-Cuban heritage. Although this could be seen as a slight towards native heritage, it seems doubtful that Gómez de Avellaneda intended it as such. The inclusion of an indigenous character and criticism of the
Spanish conquest shows that she considered native heritage important. Martina's relationship with Sab is portrayed as a maternal one, and as a result, Sab ends up as a mix of three cultures, Europe, Africa, and Cuba. This mix creates the perfect protagonist for Gómez de Avellaneda's message, one who represents the ideal Cuba. According to Nuria Filba, the author intentionally avoids categorizing Sab, instead promoting his mixed heritage as an asset in itself. "Ante la imposible categorización, la voz narrativa recurre al recurso de la amalgama para referir la chocante perfección de Sab"¹ (Filba 127). In a way, Martina's existence promotes the idea of an immortal Cuban heritage. Though Sab lacks indigenous blood, the influences of the new world will live forever in him as a person.

Sab's portrayal as an educated, intelligent, and pained soul is an enormous part of the most prominent message in the novel: that of antislavery. As Williams explains "Shunning the classic image of physical brutality visited upon the ostracized black slave, the novelist turns to the less visible but equally painful injury of the co-opted mulatto slave" (161). The portrayal of Sab focuses on his emotional pain, not physical. This difference promotes the idea of slaves as human beings, equal to whites, and by extension, the vision of an ideal nation without slavery, and with true equality.

Díaz Covarrubias, by contrast, simply doesn't mention the races of his characters. We can assume that the aristocracy in La Clase Media is white or criolla, as that was the reality of the time, but the novel simply does not say. There is a far greater focus on the topic of race in Sab than La Clase Media. This should be principally attributed to the different cultures of Cuba and Mexico, as well as Díaz Covarrubias's own political opinions. Gómez de Avellaneda emphasizes

¹ "Faced with an impossible categorization, the narrative voice resorts to the appeal of the amalgamation to refer to the shocking perfection of Sab" (Filba 127, my translation)
race problems and slavery far more than Díaz Covarrubias. It should be noted that slavery was illegal in Mexico when the novels were published, but legal in Cuba, likely contributing to this difference.\textsuperscript{2} In fact, Díaz Covarrubias had been born after the abolition of slavery in his native Mexico.

There are crucial themes about international relations in both novels. Until almost the end of the 19th century, Cuba remained one of Spain's final colonies in the Americas. Gómez de Avellaneda used her novel to argue for a free Cuba, not only from Spain, but from any foreign power. This desire can be seen in the character of the English Enrique Otway. He is entirely preoccupied with money, and uses Carlota as a means to an end. This represents the economic exploitation, spearheaded by Britain and the United States, that plagued 19th century Latin America. Carlota, for her part, represents the exploited Cuba as the prize for which both men fight.

Though Enrique is English by birth, he studied in the United States, combining both major Anglophonic powers. Although the English were the primary group exploiting Cuba during the time, there was also a fear of the United States, particularly of their expansionist policies. This fear was hardly unfounded, as the United States went to war with Spain near the end of the century and annexed Cuba.\textsuperscript{3} Colleen O'Brien confirms this idea. "The anxiety about amalgamation, in this case, does not convey any dread about a possible coupling between Sab and Carlota; instead, it denotes a fear of U.S. encroachment on Cuba..." (O'Brien 61). In other words, Enrique represents this foreign, Anglophonic influence, from both Britain and the United States.

\textsuperscript{2} Slavery was legal in Cuba until 1886, while \textit{Sab} was written in 1841. In Mexico, slavery was abolished in 1829. \textit{La Clase Media} was written almost thirty years later.

\textsuperscript{3} The war between the United States and Spain occurred in 1898. It resulted in a U.S. victory, and the consequent annexation of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines.
*La Clase Media* was written in Mexico after the war against the United States. Naturally, its message differs greatly from that found in *Sab*. Like Gómez de Avellaneda, Díaz Covarrubias used his novel as an allegory for the political situation in his home country, and for his ideal nation. However, Díaz Covarrubias has a more positive outlook on the United States than Gómez de Avellaneda. We see this in Amparo's mother. She is from Florida, and is one of the more positively portrayed characters in the novel. Instead of representing a country, the villain in *La Clase Media* represents the aristocracy. Amparo's stepmother, standing in for the upper class, sells Amparo to Isidoro. This act functions as an allegory for the Mexican aristocracy, and how they, according to Díaz Covarrubias, sold Mexico to the aristocracy of the United States. Juan Díaz Covarrubias portrayied the aristocracy of both countries exclusively negatively, and, as the title indicates, promoted a professional middle class as the rightful leaders of the world.

Neither novel shows the aristocracy positively. In *Sab*, the aristocracy is depicted as irresponsible and lazy at best. Meanwhile, the novel's heroes are a slave and a poor orphan. Although Enrique and Jorge Otway are decidedly not members of the aristocracy, they are rich, and their portrayal is none the better for it. They are painted as corrupt, greedy individuals. We see in this Gómez de Avellaneda's opinion of the "new rich" and the aristocracy in general.

Both novels have a major focus on class differences in Latin America. However, an interesting point is that Díaz Covarrubias writes shockingly little about the lower class. As the title *La Clase Media* (Spanish for "The Middle Class") indicates, the novel focuses on the struggles of the Mexican middle class. The upper classes, meanwhile, serve as the villains. In fact, the only mention of the lower class in the novel is disdainful. "...porque esa clase [la clase

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4 The U.S. invasion of Mexico, which occurred from 1846 to 1848. Mexico lost almost half of its territory to the United States.
media] colocada entre la alta y el pueblo... sufre con los dolores de la segunda sin tener su ignorancia" (Díaz Covarrubias 36). This dismissive attitude demonstrates how Díaz Covarrubias viewed the lower class; as little more than a footnote in Mexican history. He promoted a nation ruled by the middle class, a class he believed to be uniformly hardworking and intelligent. His omission of the lower class sends a message about Díaz Covarrubias' vision of an ideal Mexico, with the middle class serving as his only intended audience. Romantic era authors often wrote about and for people they saw as underrepresented. "Pero en la mayoría de los casos el romanticismo movió a los escritores a crear sus propias culturas nacionales. Eran conscientes de vivir en tierras entre gentes que por el momento aun no tenían literatura" (Franco 96). The decision by Díaz Covarrubias to focus on the middle class, therefore, shows who he saw as the future leaders of Mexico.

There is also a marked difference in the styles of the two novels. Gómez de Avellaneda obscured her message far more with a constant use of allegory. This unique style was born almost entirely out of necessity. Her themes were incredibly controversial for her place in history. It would have been impossible for anyone, especially a woman, to present a directly anti-slavery viewpoint in 19th century Cuba and have it be taken seriously. In fact, Sab was banned for its message, and did not see publication in Cuba until 1914, more than 70 years after it had been written.

Conversely, La Clase Media is uniquely direct. Díaz Covarrubias even takes the opportunity to address his audience directly. "...nearly all of Díaz Covarrubias' verse is characterized by a subjective, egoistic tone. It is his own feeling he is voicing, no matter what his

5 "Because this class [the middle class] set between the upper class and the common people... suffers from the pains of the latter without their ignorance" (Díaz Covarrubias 36, my translation).
6 "But in the majority of cases, romanticism moved writers to create their own national cultures. They were concerned with living among people that at the time had no literature" (Franco 96, my translation).
subject" (Spell 328). This difference can be seen as a consequence of the world the authors shared. The idea of women speaking honestly about social issues, in both Cuba and Mexico, would have been extraordinarily revolutionary. Neither country granted women the right to vote until the 20th century. As a result, Gómez de Avellaneda had nowhere near the same freedom to be honest that Díaz Covarrubias had. In fact, some critics have argued that the antislavery message in Sab served as a method of hiding the novel's true message, one just as controversial as anti-slavery, that of feminism. "Thus, the allusions to black slavery only constitute the author's vehicle for communicating her frustrations as a woman in a society where the female role was unquestionably inferior" (Pastor 188).

The political climate of Cuba also contributed to Gómez de Avellaneda's style. As a result of the recent Haitian revolution, Cuban society had a type of paranoia when it came to slavery. “Ante un conflicto entre criollos y metropolitanos, ondeaba en la memoria colectiva la reciente revolución de Haití, de la que se hizo eco gran parte de la narrativa cubana del XIX, entre ellas la novela Sab” (Gomariz 104). This revolution weighed heavily on the minds of the Cuban people and influenced Sab greatly. The idea of promoting basic human rights for slaves held connotations of the Haitian revolution and terrified the white Cuban public. For this reason, Gómez de Avellaneda wrote using "las tretas del débil," a style of writing in which her actual opinions were obscured in order to avoid "rocking the boat."

Both novels also focus heavily on gender in society. Or, to be more specific, both novels have a theme focusing on the "ideal woman" for each country. Although this theme exists in the

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7 Women in Mexico received the right to vote in 1947. In Cuba, women received the right to vote in 1934.
8 The Haitian Revolution took place from 1791 to 1804. It resulted in former Haitian slaves taking control of the government.
9 "Faced with a conflict between criollos and metropolitanos, the Haitian Revolution lingered in the collective memory, echoing over a large part of the 19th century Cuban narrative, including the novel Sab” (Gomariz 104, my translation).
two works, each author treats women very differently. One of the origins of this distinction is the obvious; *Sab*'s author was a woman, while *La Clase Media* was written by a man. But to attribute all of the differences in the novels to the genders of the authors would oversimplify it.

In order to discuss the origins of these differences, it is first necessary to discuss what the differences are. The "ideal woman" in *Sab* is represented in the character of Teresa, a very liberal woman who promotes a country of powerful women. In fact, much of the story's conclusion could easily be read as Gómez de Avellaneda's personal essay in which she describes, among other things, the ideal woman. She wanted an equal nation, and the constant comparisons between the problems of women and slaves show the injustices that the author argued against. "As a slave and a person of color in a colonial context, Sab is metonymically associated not only with others who are forced into servitude but also with all who are oppressed even if they are not literal slaves" (Paulk 232). Here, Paulk demonstrates how Sab is used to represent marginalized groups other than his own, including women. The use of slavery as an allegory for the oppression of women is a constant in *Sab*.

The idea of "purity" is also explored in Sab. Gómez de Avellaneda makes a point of the fact that Carlota and Teresa are virgins. However, this is in no way a focus of the novel. It is only mentioned, and hardly affects anything. We can see, then, that Gómez de Avellaneda gave little importance to the idea of virginity. Thanks to social attitudes of the time, it would have been necessary to mention, but this author focuses much more on her characters' personalities and opinions, and in this way avoids reducing her female characters to their reproductive capability.

Díaz Covarrubias paints a much more subordinate portrait of his "ideal woman." She follows the rules of men, and, by extension, the "manual de urbanidad," a set of Latin American
social rules that gives "[...] reglas a que debemos ajustar nuestras acciones para hacer amable nuestro trato en la sociedad" (Pascual de Sanjuán 1).

This is epitomized in the character of Amparo in *La Clase Media*. Amparo is portrayed as a very quiet, inactive character in the story. Instead, the story is driven by the character of Román. In fact, Román is the character who seeks justice and reparation for Amparo's rape, while Amparo does very little. Díaz Covarrubias treats her rape as a conflict between Román and Isidoro. Through this, we can see Díaz Covarrubias's vision of the ideal Mexican woman; one who takes no agency over her own life, but instead both permits and allows the men in her life to control her world.

Though normal for the time, this sexist attitude is incredibly pronounced in how Díaz Covarrubias treats the idea of virginity. In direct contrast with how Gómez de Avellaneda treats it, virginity is one of the most important virtues in Díaz Covarrubias's ideal woman. The main reason Amparo leaves Román at the end is because she is not a virgin. She is ashamed of herself, and says as much in her own words. "Un hombre honrado no debe unirse á la mujer perdida" (Díaz Covarrubias 105). This was a very popular mindset in the 19th century, and Díaz Covarrubias supported it with his treatment and eventual punishment of Amparo. This idea of virginity, and the double standard in which it is applied only to women and not men, promotes the idea of women as property.

In Gómez de Avellaneda's ideal nation, men and women have the same rights and powers. "Los hombres son malos, Carlota, pero no debes aborrecerlos ni desalentarte en tu camino" (Gómez de Avellaneda 262). *Sab* does promote more powers for women, but only

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10 "[...] rules to which we should adjust ourselves in order to make our conduct acceptable in society" (Pascual de Sanjuán 1, my translation).
11 "An honorable man should not stay with a lost woman" (Díaz Covarrubias 105, my translation).
12 "Men are evil, Carlota, but you shouldn't abhor them, nor be discouraged in your own life" (Gómez de Avellaneda 262, my translation)
until the point that both sexes are equal. This is a stark contrast to what *La Clase Media* promotes, a world in which men dominate over women. Both *Sab* and *La Clase Media* criticize the upper classes heavily, yet they disagree on who should replace them as the new leaders of the country. *La Clase Media* ignores the poor and downtrodden members of society while promoting the virtues of the middle class. *Sab*, on the other hand, tries to give a voice to the lower classes and marginalized groups. In this way, Gómez de Avellaneda promotes liberation and power for those who traditionally had none. Finally, both novels treat international relations very differently. *Sab* shows a very realistic fear of imperialism and demands independence for Cuba, while *La Clase Media* instead holds a greater focus on the problems inherent in Mexico itself.
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