

Liberal Pacts and Hierarchies of Rule: Approaching the Imperial Transition in Cuba and Puerto Rico

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One hundred years ago, as the Spanish-Cuban-Filipino-American War dealt a quick and decisive blow to an aging Spanish empire, few observers could anticipate the imperial transition soon to unfold. For most people directly touched by the fighting in the Pacific and the Caribbean, the occasion was much too joyous to entertain such consequences. Among the former colonials as well as the American victors, large majorities experienced the end of Spanish rule with a sense of relief, exhilaration, or both. After straying off course for several decades—since the age of Bolívar and Monroe—History finally seemed to be righting itself. Although a recent flurry of empire building by the major European powers in Africa and Asia could make the retreat of another empire look like an oddity, the long-awaited end of Spanish rule over Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines appeared almost natural and preordained—a denouement tailor-made for the positivist age.

Signs of an impending climax, in the air for decades, had become unmistakable in the years since the eruption of the Second War of Cuban Independence in 1895. A weakened Spain, unable to adequately provide a market for the colonies' chief exports (sugar especially), incapable of fully democratizing the political process, and too weak to stem the Cuban insurrection, had been losing control of its priceless plantation colony. Even before the breakout of the Cuban war, Spain's grip over all its colonies had evidently been loosening. Although the metropole maintained a stubborn opposition to any grant of autonomy, little by little, over the span of a couple of decades, it had handed over greater powers to local bodies and granted broader individual rights to its colonial citizens. Meanwhile, ethnic nationalism had been on the rise in the islands. For some time now, a strong sense of cultural difference and a desire for republican life had reinforced many creoles' belief that they were being

economically and politically sidelined in their own countries. Moreover, in the months leading up to the United States declaration of war against Spain in April 1898, Cuban rebels appeared to have finally gained the upper hand, on the field and in diplomatic circles, after years of a frustrating standoff. And even if all those signs had proven inconclusive, an ominously loud anti-Spanish rhetoric had been on the increase in the United States, where many citizens were eager for their country to step in and replace Spain as the islands' economic metropole and its mentor in the arts of democratic governance. In the Spanish Caribbean, then, an era of hope and renewal seemed poised to begin on the heels of the departure of the United States Army or, perhaps, in the wake of its permanent stationing as part of a project to fully annex the islands to the winning nation, a scenario favored by some in the separatist camp.

Consensus and Challenge

We know now that amid the euphoria of 1898, many people misjudged the essential motives, actors, and forces at play in the imperial transition. Some simply underestimated the extent of disagreement on both islands among those who called themselves nationalists, or the divisions generated by race and class among Cuban combatants. Many more failed to perceive the direction that events would take after the landing of United States troops, events that were propelled more by the internal politics of war and expansion in the newly minted imperial nation than by insular needs and desires. Thus, the nature of United States designs for the "liberated" islands, the distance between the rhetoric of democracy and the reality of cultural jingoism, and even the very character and legitimacy of the collapsed Spanish empire were all consistently misconstrued by majorities in the colonies and in the United States. Some people, especially in the more radical wing of the independence camp, were rightfully weary of American intentions and clamored in exasperation, after the armistice of August 1898, for a quick implementation of United States obligations, both declared and implicit.¹ But the memories of Spanish cruelties in the

1. In the wake of the United States invasion of Puerto Rico, the target Washington strategists dubbed "number two," the aged nationalist leader Ramón Emeterio Betances, exiled in Paris, exclaimed with stunning foresight: "What are the Puerto Ricans doing, why aren't they revolting? Why don't they take advantage of the blockade to rise up in arms? . . . May the Americans cooperate with our liberty, for it is fitting; but dare not our country help in its own annexation. If Puerto Rico does not act rapidly, it will be an American colony for life." Betances to Julio Henna, ca. Aug. 1898, in Ramón Emeterio Betances, *Las Antillas para los antillanos*, ed. Carlos M. Rama (San Juan: Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, 1975), 242–43.

Cuban war were still fresh, and it was easy, even for the most alert nationalists, to subscribe to a narrative of redemption and hope as they saw the Spanish flags lowered one last time at the Morro castles of Havana and San Juan.

If most contemporary *antillanos* believed in this narrative, historians since have validated and embellished much of it. The historiographic consensus on the imperial transition in the Caribbean spans a variety of tenets, among them that the relationship with Spain shackled the islands' economies and prevented them from advancing according to their potential; that the Spanish/Cuban and Spanish/Puerto Rican ethnic counterpoints constituted the main frontier of social conflict and discourse before 1898; that Cuban and Puerto Rican national identities had been firmly created during the nineteenth century, and stood in clear opposition to an equally well established Spanish identity; that most people miscalculated the United States government's intent with regard to the islands' future, believing, at least in the beginning, in the redemptive possibilities of American democracy and in America's lack of interest in a colonial empire; that most *antillanos* were, consequently, disgusted with the actual turn of events, believing that they had been defrauded; and many others. These assumptions derive, for the most part, from nationalist sensibilities that have colored much of Cuban and Puerto Rican historical scholarship in the twentieth century, even at times when those ideologies did not wield a corresponding influence in these countries' political life.²

The war's centennial provides a singular opportunity to revisit these common understandings of the 1898 transition, to reexamine old problems in a new light, and to raise new questions. This special issue of the *Hispanic American Historical Review* is devoted to just such a reappraisal from the vantage point of the former Spanish Caribbean colonies of Cuba and Puerto Rico. Presented here are six essays on various aspects of these islands' history in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They range from an exploration of the colonies' role in mid-nineteenth-century Spanish political economy to an attempt to rescue from near oblivion a stream of American and European emigration to Cuba, which resulted in the founding of several dozen foreign colonies there by the end of the second decade of the twentieth century. The

2. For historiographical guidance on the events of 1898, see Louis A. Pérez Jr., *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1998); Carmelo Rosario Natal, *El 1898 puertorriqueño en la historiografía: ensayo y bibliografía crítica* (San Juan: Academia Puertorriqueña de la Historia, 1997); and Centro de Información y Documentación Científica, *En torno al 98: Cuba, Puerto Rico y Filipinas, 1880–1910* (Madrid: Centro de Información y Documentación Científica, 1995).

essays represent a variety of approaches and disciplinary perspectives, from the broad-ranging reflection by literary historian Arcadio Díaz-Quiñones that serves as an introductory essay to a case study of a single rebel leader and his travails with revolutionary justice.

In the introductory essay, Arcadio Díaz-Quiñones reflects on the limits of current interpretations of 1898. Calling for a reevaluation of the processes of imperial transfer that overcomes limitations imposed by single-nation perspectives, he advocates a history of the imperial experience that accounts for interrelations across colonial and metropolitan spaces. His invitation is very much in line with recent attempts to revisit European imperialism in Africa and Asia, in order to show what Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper call “the contingency of metropolitan-colonial connections and its consequences for patterns of imperial rule.”³ Following just that kind of approach in the second essay Christopher Schmidt-Nowara discusses the constitution of an imperial power bloc in mid-nineteenth-century Spain and its ideological evolution, from anti-abolitionism to counterinsurgency. In considering how colonial affairs were central to Spanish political economy, and in treating the empire as a unit that is best understood when observing how the component pieces fit together inside Spanish capitalism, Schmidt-Nowara fulfills, at least in part, Díaz-Quiñones’s demands for a more holistic colonial history.

The focal theme of this special issue, which the next three articles address is the political culture of the islands at the time of imperial transfer and its implications for the construction of a new politics after the Spaniards’ ouster. The essays by Astrid Cubano-Iguina, Ada Ferrer, and Rebecca J. Scott all wrestle with the general problem of how the politics of opposition to Spanish rule intersected with the—admittedly more complicated—politics of race and class in two sharply hierarchical societies. Cubano’s piece, for instance, carefully traces the development of electoral politics in Puerto Rico over the last three decades of Spanish rule. She underscores the *autonomistas*’ creation of a “democratic political culture” based on a campaign for universal male suffrage, the achievement of which, in 1897, was followed by the stunning disappointment of a sharply more limited franchise during the early years of American rule. For her part, Ferrer uses the trial of a black general in the Liberation

3. Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda,” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, eds. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1997), 1.

Army, Quintín Bandera, to examine “longstanding and evolving conflicts over the limits of racial inclusion in the nationalist project.” She uses this case to identify how racial exclusions actually occurred inside the rebel camp, and how racially charged and gendered tensions over honor and respectability anticipated rifts that would occur in the nationalist movement once the combatants put their arms down and began the process of national construction. In the third of these essays on the politics of race and class at the intersection of nationalist struggle, Scott seeks to illuminate a related problem: how the long and costly struggle for independence may have transformed Cuban political culture at the base, despite efforts by dominant groups to limit subaltern participation. There were limits to what racist exclusion could accomplish, she suggests, since the praxis of insurgency prompted Afro-Cubans to develop a real stake in citizenship and gave them the means and strategies to carry them out through democratic procedures. In Scott’s view of postinsurgency Cienfuegos, the actions and expressions of Afro-Cubans support the claim that prior struggle had nourished a democratic political culture from below.

A special issue on the imperial relay race of 1898 in the Caribbean would not be complete, of course, without a look at the aftermath of war, invasion, and the inauguration of a new colonialism. The sixth and final essay, by economist Carmen Diana Deere, opens new vistas on a little studied aspect of the United States presence in Cuba in the early twentieth century: the rise and decline of foreign settlements, many of them geared to the production and export of tropical fruit and intent on establishing Protestant churches, while Americanizing Cuba in anticipation of an eventual annexation to the “colossus of the North.” Such colonies constitute a significant if forgotten chapter in the American “conquest of the tropics.” As Gordon K. Lewis noted on the occasion of the Jonestown, Guyana, massacre of nearly one thousand faithful in 1978, settler movements have been an integral part of United States–Caribbean relations at least since the early nineteenth century. To try to understand these migrations is perforce to place the missionizing thrust of American church groups in the Caribbean in the larger context of European and North American views of the region as a place where it is possible to escape into a promised land, far from a modernity seen as evil and corrupting.⁴ The Cuban *colonias* studied by Deere exemplify how in pursuit of these goals many colonists com-

4. Gordon K. Lewis, “Gather with the Saints at the River”: *The Jonestown, Guyana Holocaust of 1978: A Descriptive and Interpretive Essay on Its Ultimate Meaning from a Caribbean Viewpoint* (Río Piedras: Univ. of Puerto Rico, Institute of Caribbean Studies, 1979), 32–33.

properly weigh the significance of the power divides structured by boundaries other than the national. Such renovated political history has also built on both the achievements and the limitations of a historiography that, in the wake of the Cuban Revolution of 1959, revamped our understanding of social and economic history, paying particular attention to the themes of slave society, plantation economy, and class structure and dynamics.⁷ For all its achievements, this scholarship notoriously bypassed questions of race and gender, even though some of the themes it covered, like slavery, constituted ideal prisms through which one might examine these questions.

Drawing on the six substantive contributions, in this introduction I outline some analytic points for (re)interpreting the local dynamics of the imperial transition. I am principally interested in events and processes leading up to the United States intervention, for I propose that the study of United States hegemony must begin with a more realistic assessment of Spanish Cuba and Puerto Rico than has heretofore been possible. A new understanding of these two countries at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth must be based on an appraisal of the principles of social and political organization that guided the Spanish imperial project during its final phases in the Caribbean. In order to properly gauge that imperial project, moreover, it is necessary to look at how it intersected with forces arising from global capitalism. The islands' peculiar insertion in the world system left an indelible imprint on forms of sociability and political organization prevalent in Cuban and Puerto Rican societies at the time of the United States intervention. Local

7. In this category the classic study is Manuel Moreno Fraginals, *El ingenio: complejo económico social cubano del azúcar*, 3 vols. (Havana: Ed. de Ciencias Sociales, 1978), inspired in part by Raúl Cepero Bonilla, *Azúcar y abolición: apuntes para una historia crítica del abolicionismo* (Havana: Ed. Cenit, 1948). Other important contributions regarding Cuba include Herbert S. Klein, *Slavery in the Americas: A Comparative Study of Virginia and Cuba* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1967); Franklin W. Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba during the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1970); Laird W. Bergad, *Cuban Rural Society in the Nineteenth Century: The Social and Economic History of Monoculture in Matanzas* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990); and, more recently, Pablo Tornero Tinajero, *Crecimiento económico y transformaciones sociales: esclavos, hacendados y comerciantes en la Cuba colonial (1760–1840)* (Madrid: Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social, 1996). The relevant literature for Puerto Rico includes Francisco A. Scarano, *Sugar and Slavery in Puerto Rico: The Plantation Economy of Ponce, 1800–1850* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1984); Andrés A. Ramos Mattei, *La hacienda azucarera: su crecimiento y crisis en Puerto Rico (siglo XIX)* (San Juan: Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Puerto Riqueña, 1981); and Laird W. Bergad, *Coffee and the Growth of Agrarian Capitalism in Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1983).

responses to the United States imperial advance were evidently shaped by such patterns of sociability and organization. Racial divisions, for instance, made it difficult for *antillanos* to collaborate along strictly national or ethnic lines at a time when, despite all their internal disagreements, the foreign intervenors enjoyed a working consensus around an imperial project.

In readily apparent ways, the essays in this issue are part of a current of historical writing that questions some of the assumptions of nationalist historiography—the dominant current of Cuban and Puerto Rican scholarship in this century—by foregrounding other ways of understanding sociocultural and political processes. Without ignoring the nation-building struggles upon which so many previous narratives centered, these new works make us keenly aware that besides the stories of Cuban and Puerto Rican national deliverance or disgrace to which we have become accustomed, there were other, equally significant yet mostly forgotten threads from which both the fabric of the new American empire and its forces of opposition were jointly knit.

Liberal Pact, Unliberal Acts

Any attempt to revisit the imperial transition of 1898 must begin with an assessment of Spain and its imperial project. On the surface, this should be a relatively simple undertaking: once a world power, Spain was in frank decline at the time of its war with the United States. Economically and militarily the semimillennarian metropole had declined markedly from the glory days of its early American conquests. In 1898 the capitalist modernity that surrounded but barely touched Spain in Europe, while bearing down on its Caribbean colonies from their northern neighbor, made that decline all the more noticeable. Formerly, even in times of disarray, other nations had been forced to reckon with Spain's power and influence. Now, in its hour of deepest crisis, all that the troubled monarchy could do was to save face—and survive the force that wished to topple it—by engaging in a war that all along it knew it could not win. Having endured several decades of political turmoil, an irrepressible Cuban rebellion, and a humiliating chorus of speculation by United States statesmen of when the moment would be “just right” to pluck the remaining colonies from the mother country's weakening grip, the monarchy could not just back away from this, its last colonial war.⁸ It dutifully entered the fray and lost in the brief span of eighteen weeks—all justified, in the eyes of many contemporaries, by History's “onward march.”

8. Carlos Serrano, *Final del imperio: España, 1895–1898* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno, 1984).

If it was only a matter of time before Spain experienced its final colonial crisis, it was not equally certain that the colonies snatched away in 1898 represented an archaic carryover, a relic of an era long gone, as so many believed them to be. It is true that the metropole was, by European standards, undeveloped and poor, and that throughout the century its colonial administration had ranged from unenlightened to ruthlessly despotic. But these facts alone did not justify a complete dismissal of the empire as an anachronism. In Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines, the nineteenth century had seen dramatic shifts in how Spanish colonialism was structured, practiced, legitimized, and challenged. These changes had, for the most part, followed the dictates of a global capitalist system based in Europe and of an international order attuned and responsive to that system. In peculiar ways, therefore, they had “modernized” the colonies and fashioned them closer, in economic terms at least, to the liberal ideal. This was perhaps nowhere more evident than in the Caribbean, where Cuba and Puerto Rico, with their economies firmly entrenched in circuits of capitalist production and trade, straddled the Dominican Republic, an underpopulated independent nation only weakly plugged into these circuits and burdened by economic and social structures inherited from the early colonial past.⁹

When it came to organizing the relationship between the colonies, the metropole, and the rest of the world, as it neared its end in the summer of 1898 the Spanish empire was indeed quite different from its early modern predecessor. In the colonies remaining at the end of the wars of Latin American independence, the old patrimonial pact of the Habsburg era had long been replaced by a more calculating agreement—a liberal pact of sorts—between dominant classes on both sides of the Atlantic, the crown, and imperial bureaucrats.¹⁰

9. For an interesting juxtaposition of the nineteenth-century economic history of Cuba and the Dominican Republic, see Roberto Marte, *Cuba y la República Dominicana: transición económica en el Caribe del siglo XIX* (Santo Domingo: Universidad APEC, [1998]). Some scholars have contrasted Cuba's shift to a plantation economy with Puerto Rico's slower economic development, but others recognize more parallels than differences. For the former viewpoint, see Laird W. Bergad, “¿Dos alas del mismo pájaro? Notas sobre la historia socioeconómica comparativa de Cuba y Puerto Rico,” *Historia y Sociedad* 1 (1988); and, for a somewhat different view, Scarano, *Sugar and Slavery*, 19–22.

10. Following Max Weber, Richard M. Morse has described the “structure and logic” of the Spanish empire in America as “patrimonial.” See his “Claims of Political Tradition,” in *New World Soundings: Culture and Ideology in the Americas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1989). In discussing the insular colonies that remained after continental independence, Juan Pan-Montojo refers to “the empire constructed by Spanish liberalism”;

This “liberal pact” not only temporarily stabilized the colonial relationship, it also considerably renovated the empire’s connection to the rest of the world system. As its part of the bargain, Spain had promised such benefits as freer trade with the leading economic powers and the maintenance of social order in the face of mounting challenges from below. In exchange, colonial elites had agreed to allow Spain to rule—for a time at least—while those born on the peninsula dominated internal commerce and the import trades and the Spanish exchequer siphoned off formidable sums from the islands’ treasuries. Conceived in this way, the pact had not only satisfied the most deeply concerned elites (Spaniards and colonials), it had also received the stamp of approval of other powers, especially the United States, the foreign nation that in the 1820s and for some time thereafter had the most to gain from a stable, slaveholding Spanish Caribbean.¹¹

Within this framework, Cuba and Puerto Rico had evolved into major producers of export agricultural commodities. As their populations multiplied at a rapid pace over the course of the century, their economies prospered beyond the highest expectations of the reformist creoles who in the late 1700s and early 1800s had pressed the monarchy for a loosening of restrictions on trade and immigration—a key bargaining point on the road to the liberal pact. By 1840, barely a quarter-century after the crown had acceded to these demands in a comprehensive way, Cuba had become the world’s largest exporter of sugar. Its second export staple, tobacco, had already established itself as the

“Introducción: ¿98 o fin de siglo?” in *Más se perdió en Cuba. España, 1898 y la crisis de fin de siglo*, coord. Juan Pan-Montojo (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1998), 9. See also Roberto Mesa, *El colonialismo en la crisis del XIX español: esclavitud y trabajo libre en Cuba*, 2d ed. (Madrid: Instituto de Cooperación Iberoamericana; Ediciones de Cultura Hispánica, 1990).

11. Lester D. Langley, *Struggle for the American Mediterranean: United States-European Rivalry in the Gulf-Caribbean, 1776–1904* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1976), 42–50. See also Arthur P. Whitaker, *The United States and the Independence of Latin America, 1800–1830* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1941).

12. Cuba’s population of 1.6 million in 1899 was about four-and-a-half times that of one hundred years earlier. Puerto Rico’s population of slightly less than 1 million in 1899 was about 6 times as large as its 1800 population. On the making of the liberal pact, see Moreno Friginals, *El ingenio*, 1:129–30. On Cuban politics under the new pact, see Jesús Raúl Navarro García, *Entre esclavos y constituciones: el colonialismo liberal de 1837 en Cuba* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos de Sevilla, 1991). On negotiations concerning Puerto Rico, see Isabel Gutiérrez del Arroyo, *El reformismo ilustrado en Puerto Rico* (Mexico City: Asomante; El Colegio de México, 1953); and Arturo Morales Carrión, *Puerto Rico and the Non-Hispanic Caribbean: A Study in the Decline of Spanish Exclusivism* (Río Piedras: Univ. of Puerto Rico Press, 1952).

most prized product of its kind in the world. A burgeoning system of railroads, launched even before any lines had been laid in the mother country, already crisscrossed the western part of the island and was vital to the spread of the sugarcane frontier. For its part, a slower-developing Puerto Rico had overtaken Jamaica around midcentury as the second most important sugar producer in the Caribbean. Later in the century, as its sugar industry stagnated, Puerto Rico grew into the Caribbean's second—and the New World's fifth—coffee exporter. Together, the Spanish Caribbean colonies supplied a large portion of the U.S. import market for sugar throughout the mid–nineteenth century, even as their economies diversified and other crops rose in commercial importance.¹³ The two islands also constituted very profitable markets for foreign flour, machinery, and other manufactures, predominantly sold there by Spain and the United States.

Colonial demographic and economic growth—far more impressive than in the metropole—reveals only part of the story of Spanish imperial readjustment, however. To fully grasp the significance of the liberal pact and its attendant socioeconomic changes, we must set them against the backdrop of an even greater transformation taking place in the Atlantic world between the mid–eighteenth and mid–nineteenth centuries. During this time the mercantilist order that had characterized imperial relations before the Age of Revolution was replaced by a capitalist order that, at this early stage, combined elements of the old and the new. Complex international networks of trade and investment arose in place of the old *exclusifs*, and armed with political independence (as in most Latin American countries) or with greater bargaining power vis-à-vis the metropolises (as in the Spanish Caribbean), many former colonies revamped their ties to the leading economic powers, consolidating relations of (inter)dependence with them. But in those portions of the New World that Charles Wagley aptly termed “Plantation America,” key aspects of the old system not only survived, they prospered.¹⁴ The most important of these were institutions and practices that secured a constant and inexpensive supply of workers: African chattel slavery and other forms of coerced labor. Even as wage labor increasingly became the norm in an industrializing Europe, an insatiable demand for tropical produce translated into further enslavement of

13. The best analysis of the United States–Cuban sugar trade in the nineteenth century is still Moreno Fraginals, *El ingenio*, vol. 2.

14. Charles Wagley, “Plantation America: A Culture Sphere,” in *Caribbean Studies: A Symposium*, ed. Vera Rubin (Jamaica: Univ. College of the West Indies, Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1957).

those traditionally deemed “enslavable.” As a result, the slave populations of Brazil, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the southern United States all grew by leaps and bounds in the first half of the nineteenth century.¹⁵ Except in the United States, where slave populations experienced vegetative growth, many of the additional slaves in plantation areas of the nineteenth century were imported, brought over between 1791 and 1850 during some of the most intense slave trading ever registered in the history of the transatlantic traffic. In fact, one authority on the nineteenth-century slave trade has concluded that fully 40 percent of all slaves ever transported across the Atlantic were on board ships that sailed between 1777 and 1867.¹⁶ In these same societies over the same period, many people who were nominally “free” were subjected for the first time to compulsory labor systems that one would be hard pressed to functionally distinguish from slavery.

Slavery: Intimacy and Distance

The long-term implications for the Spanish Caribbean of the modernized capital-intensive colonialism ushered in by the liberal pact cannot be overemphasized. As highly productive colonies, commercially intimate with the industrializing core but rather distant from it in the way their societies were structured, Cuba and Puerto Rico occupied a special “in-between” zone of the nineteenth-century capitalist system. Like the United States South and Brazil they had intense economic interactions—and hence, political and cultural intimacy—with the leading European powers and with the industrialized north of the United States. Yet, this intimacy was predicated on maintaining great distance from those core areas of the world system, a distance marked predominantly by slavery and race, but also by the way in which other social hierarchies buttressed the primary goals of surplus extraction and social discipline.

The key to this contradiction of intimacy with distance was slavery itself. An institution that eased the colonies’ insertion into international circuits of trade, ushered in state-of-the-art infrastructure, and lined the pockets of planters, merchants, and industrialists on both sides of the Atlantic, slavery was doubtless an agent of capitalist modernity.¹⁷ But it was also the crucial dif-

15. For an in-depth analysis of the role of British trade in this transformation, see David Eltis, *Economic Growth and the Ending of the Transatlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987).

16. *Ibid.*, 14.

17. A considerable controversy ensued around an argument parallel to this one in the wake of the publication of Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross:*

ferentiating ingredient between the colonies and those societies that consumed their sugar, coffee, and tobacco, and to whose “civilized gifts” many in the colonies—even those who profited from slavery—aspired. Acute observers of Cuban reality, such as Alexander von Humboldt, had noted slavery’s deep roots in Cuban soil as well as its intractable character, and hence the difficulty that even the most enlightened of Cubans or Spaniards—those who “[cried] before the barbaric institutions that such a sad legacy has bequeathed to them,” in the noted scientist’s words—would face in eradicating this evil.¹⁸ Others, like José Antonio Saco, the exiled nationalist historian, knew that it was the primary reason why Cuba had not achieved its independence in the 1810s and 1820s, while sinking deeper into the colonial morass as more and more slave ships arrived on island shores.¹⁹ As long as the plantocracy and its allies kept slavery alive, the Spanish colonies would be irremediably remote—in social, cultural, and political terms—from the nations whose modernity colonial elites wished to emulate.

Why was slavery so intractable? In order to grasp how profoundly slavery was sculpted onto the colonial polity it would be well to understand it for what it is: a finely tuned system of exploitation that involved much more than inflicting physical violence upon, restraining, and forcing its victims into involuntary labor. Beyond the indispensable application of sheer force, slavery relied on hierarchies of difference based on race, class, gender, and place of birth, some of which, like slavery itself, were written into law while others were not.²⁰ In nineteenth-century Cuba and Puerto Rico, a reinvigorated slave system broad-

The Economics of American Negro Slavery, 2 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974). Fogel and Engerman argued that slavery in the nineteenth-century United States South was a relatively efficient and modern system of production. Numerous scholars objected to this characterization. For some of these opposing views, see Paul A. David et al., *Reckoning with Slavery: A Critical Study in the Quantitative History of American Negro Slavery* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976). Laird W. Bergad’s work on the economic history of sugar in Matanzas raises points similar to those of Fogel and Engerman. See his *Cuban Rural Society* and “The Economic Viability of Sugar Production Based on Slave Labor in Cuba, 1859–1878,” *Latin American Research Review* 24, no. 1 (1989).

18. Alexander von Humboldt, *Ensayo político sobre la isla de Cuba* (Havana: Archivo Nacional de Cuba, 1960), 283–84.

19. José Antonio Saco, *Historia de la esclavitud desde los tiempos más remotos hasta nuestros días*, 6 vols., 2d ed. (Havana: “Alfa” 1936–45), vol. 4, passim.

20. Certain analyses of occupation patterns among slaves over long periods of time have revealed the interlocking nature of these hierarchies. See, for example, Richard S. Dunn, “‘Dreadful Idlers’ in the Cane Fields: The Slave Labor Pattern on a Jamaican Sugar Estate, 1762–1831,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 17 (1987); Hilary McD. Beckles,

ened and deepened the fissures of colonial society across these four domains. Plantation production, with its attendant class hierarchy, could not stand simply on its own; it had to be supported by an intense, all-encompassing racial ideology, sharpened gender divisions, and a stifling regimen of colonial privilege. The four hierarchies of difference were interconnected and mutually supportive. For the control and discipline of their subalterns (not just the slaves, one might add), dominant groups relied on actions that maximized coverage across two or more of these hierarchies. Thus, for instance, the concentration of wealth, which grew increasingly acute over the final decades of Spanish rule, was both cause and consequence of an economic system that relied not only on the differential distribution of productive property but on the exploitation of people deemed inferior because they were black, women, non-Spaniards, or a combination of these. Likewise, exclusions and inequities imposed upon people of African descent were abetted by colonial legislation that conjured distinction based on skin color and by a class system that tried to conceal injustices behind the facade of a presumably neutral system of property rights.²¹

That such practices of control and discipline proved extremely effective in economic terms few can deny. Colonial Cuba and Puerto Rico generated vast wealth, great enough to support not only resident plantocracies and a bloated colonial apparatus that included vastly increased military and police forces, but also to weigh heavily in the metropole's economy. But such wealth exacted a heavy price in social peace and stability. Once transformed into modern slave societies, the Spanish Caribbean colonies, and Cuba especially, were almost never at peace. Historians have documented large numbers of conspiracies, rebellions, and individual acts of resistance in both Cuba and Puerto Rico throughout the nineteenth century. These acts occurred predominantly along two fronts: the antislavery and anticolonial struggles. Slave conspiracies and rebellions took center stage during the first few decades of the nineteenth century, at a time when slave traders were introducing the bulk of several thousand shiploads of African captives—most of them illegal, banned by a succession of treaties with Great Britain that went into effect after 1820—tha

Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1989); and Marietta Morrissey, *Slave Women in the New World: Gender Stratification in the Caribbean* (Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Press, 1989).

21. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies: A Comparison of St. Domingue and Cuba* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1971). See also Jesús Raúl Navarro García, *Control social y actitudes políticas en Puerto Rico, 1823-1837* (Sevilla: Excma. Diputación Provincial de Sevilla, 1991).

allowed both islands to prosper as plantation economies. In the second half of the century, as the slave population became more “creolized” and the struggle against slavery turned somewhat away from direct action and more toward parliamentary maneuver, the source of greatest instability shifted toward the nationalist camp. Over more than half of the final three decades of Spanish rule, Cuba experienced a devastating anticolonial insurgency.

While each of these struggles had distinct leaders and followers, the fact that they converged at critical moments shows that racial politics, class politics, and nationalist politics could not be discrete; indeed, many people “on the ground” felt them to be part of the same injustice. In Cuba, for example, the Escalera Conspiracy of 1843–44, which resulted in the widespread persecution of people of color and in the bloody massacre of several hundred presumed conspirators, dramatized the extent to which several causes—among others, the struggles against the power of the plantocracy, for democratic rights, against race barriers, for independence—could be, and were, subsumed under the banner of antislavery.²² Equally so, the 1868 Puerto Rican Grito de Lares, an abortive revolt for independence that flared up in the western coffee highlands as part of a wider conspiracy, saw a motley array of peasants, slaves, coffee farmers, and small merchants take up arms to liberate the Fatherland *in order* to free most of its citizens from serfdom of one kind or another, including that of the infamous forced-labor regimen of *la libreta*.²³ In entering such cross-racial alliances in pursuit of emancipation from slavery and colonialism—and in making common cause against the liberal pact—insurgent Cubans and Puerto Ricans gave witness to the transformation that had occurred in Spanish colonialism since the days of Latin American independence.

The Torment of Frayed Alliances

If labor systems in export agriculture opened up a great distance vis-à-vis a democratizing Europe, close market interactions and immigration conferred

22. The best study of La Escalera is Robert L. Paquette, *Sugar is Made with Blood: The Conspiracy of La Escalera and the Conflict between Empires over Slavery in Cuba* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan Univ. Press, 1988). See also Louis A. Pérez Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988), 99–100. On Puerto Rico, see Guillermo A. Baralt, *Esclavos rebeldes: conspiraciones y sublevaciones de esclavos en Puerto Rico (1795–1873)* (Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1981).

23. Olga Jiménez de Wagenheim, *Puerto Rico's Revolt for Independence: El Grito de Lares* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1985); and Laird W. Bergad, “Towards Puerto Rico's Grito de Lares: Coffee, Social Stratification, and Class Conflicts, 1828–1868,” *HAHR* 60 (1980).

an intimacy in cultural, political, and intellectual terms that only fanned the fires of frustration and resistance against colonial injustices. Intimacy bred a desire to imitate, to be like the more democratic states and assume their modernity. In doing so, it induced a longing for a different origin, for an ancestry rid of the pathos of slavery, forced labor, and the indignities of arbitrary rule. This yearning clearly had a class basis. It set its deepest roots in the minds of people who, by virtue of their intermediate class position, were often suspended above the most explosive confrontation of colonial society: that between the owners of large landed property and those who were coerced to work for them. As the plantation system prospered, elites with weak or no ties to the export economy emerged in the liberal professions, in the craft trades, in retail commerce, and in service occupations. In Cuba, especially in Oriente, they also emerged from the ranks of smaller sugar planters, while in Puerto Rico they were associated with the midsize and small-scale coffee growers who were dominant in this sector during the early stages of the coffee boom. Although these intermediate elites often socialized with the large planters, merchants, and bureaucrats, they saw themselves as different from the patrician groups, and often abhorred the institutions and practices that gave such groups their power and prestige. Having received, in many cases, a university education in the colonial capital (in the Cuban case), Europe, or the United States, these intermediate elites imbibed a liberalism whose individual freedoms were directly counter to the key principles of the liberal pact.

Writers and politicians who hailed from these groups were almost to a person tormented by the contradictions of colonial life. Many of them traveled to Europe or the United States, where they became intimately acquainted with the canons and models of progress, only to return to colonial situations that, for all their apparent modernity in material terms, seemed the very antithesis of those aims. The dream of a liberal society, although seemingly close and attainable, remained bitterly elusive. Alejandro Tapia y Rivera, the Puerto Rican playwright and novelist, captured the psychological effect of this contradiction on people like him when, in his memoirs, he drew a parallel between his love of *la patria* and Quasimodo's pathetic fascination with the cathedral bell in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*:

As to the physical environment, I would have preferred another climate, less variable, hot and humid; as to the human element, another people. And yet, I find a singular attractiveness in one and the other. I was born full of life and activity; my country is all ice and negligence. I adore light; it seems to be content in its darkness. I aspire to the flight of lightning; it

trods along at a turtle's pace. And yet, I have not been able to live without it. I flee and the nostalgia haunts me. I do not want to think about it, but it leaves me restless. If I try not to grieve over its misfortune, I cannot avoid an ever more painful torment: I wish not to love it, but it takes over my soul. What fatal bond is this from which I cannot escape?

Oh, yes, Quasimodo, cling to your bell, let yourself be numbed by the hoarse rumble of its bronzes . . . !²⁴

One senses here the psychological turmoil that Albert Memmi would describe more than a half-century later in his well-known portrait of the colonized: "Being a creature of oppression," the Tunisian author wrote of the tortured colonial subject, "he is bound to be a creature of want."²⁵

In many liberally educated *antillanos* like Tapia, this tension sparked a reformist political impulse, based on the untested assumption that a more democratic Spain would right the wrongs of colonial rule and, in the process, curtail or moderate the "uncivilized" urges of the lower classes. But in others it ushered in a significantly more radical version of the liberal program, one that directly addressed the disempowerment of popular majorities and the issues of racism, landlessness, the extension of voting rights, the inequities of the tariff and monetary policies, and other issues that disproportionately affected the poor. In Cuba, thanks in part to the radicalizing thrust of the armed struggle itself—the very conduct of the Ten Years' War of 1868–78 drove reluctant small and medium-sized planters in Oriente toward the abolitionist camp—this radical version of liberal politics mediated and cemented a special collaboration between members of the popular classes, most notably people of African descent, and a nationalist leadership drawn, for the most part, from the intermediate elites.

That the radical impulse also originated and resonated deeper in the islands' social structures goes without saying. Through the politics of protest and resistance, and especially through the abolitionist struggles of the 1840s to the 1880s—including many acts of individual resistance by slaves themselves—Cubans and Puerto Ricans of popular origin, many of them blacks and mulattos, had been imagining the nation in ways that were profoundly different from those fancied by elites, even those who advocated social regenera-

24. Alejandro Tapia y Rivera, *Mis memorias, o, Puerto Rico como lo encontré y como lo dejo* (1928; reprint, Barcelona: Ediciones Rumbos, 1968), 14 (my translation).

25. Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (New York: Orion Press, 1965), 119.

tion and social justice, such as José Martí and Eugenio María de Hostos. In the aftermath of emancipation and the partial liberalization of political life starting around 1880, working-class Cubans and Puerto Ricans who advocated alternate forms of sociability and a more participatory polity used as their main vehicle of struggle the platforms of organized social movements, including mutual-aid societies and other protolabor groups, as well as organizations that sought the “improvement” of people of color by opening up civil and political opportunities that they could turn to their own advantage. In the long run, it would be especially significant that, in Cuba, people of African descent demanded change assertively, in quite an organized fashion and from the earliest possible time.²⁶ For people of African descent, the proposed Cuban republic held, from the moment they began to fight and die on its behalf, the promise of a future with full citizenship rights and devoid of the most grievous forms of racial exclusion. In some of his more famous writings, of course, Martí had validated those promises.

Understandably, it was in Cuba, and specifically in the context of its protracted wars of independence, where the *entendre* between elite and popular radicalisms reached its most developed—and problematic—expression. During both wars, the rebel forces of both genders constituted delicate coalitions whose members came from diverse class and racial backgrounds. The Second War, in particular, saw this cross-class and cross-racial alliance at its most mature, when not only the *mambises* came predominantly from the ranks of poor and black Cubans, but many officers as well. The cry of “¡Cuba Libre!” resonated with this motley array of nationalists for a variety of reasons, and as historian Louis Pérez Jr. has argued, “[beyond] a commonly shared notion that independence involved at the very least separation from Spain, the final structure of *Cuba Libre* remained vaguely if not often incompatibly defined by the various sectors of the separatist movement.”²⁷

In the heat of two long and difficult military campaigns, the coalition of popular and elite rebels built a working relationship and achieved a certain unity of purpose. On both occasions a common objective—defeating the Spaniards—sustained their collaboration, both in military and political affairs, and tem-

26. This is one of the points raised by Aline Helg in her stimulating account of race relations and the problem of the nation in early-twentieth-century Cuba, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886–1912* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1995).

27. Louis A. Pérez Jr., “Intervention and Negotiation: The Politics of Cuban Independence, 1898–1899,” in *Essays on Cuban History: Historiography and Research* (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 1995), 3.

porarily helped bury any potential disagreements about a future free Cuba. The Spaniards' often brutal tactics of counterinsurgency, from their efforts to suffocate the rebellion by limiting the fighting to Oriente during the Ten Years' War to the deadly reconcentration of the rural population during the Second War, inflamed the patriotic passions of the parties in revolt and helped to further cement the working relationship between the coalition's members.

Despite their overall agreement on key points of the nationalist program, each group brought a discrete agenda to the coalition, a particular vision of the nation to be constructed and of what it would specifically afford them. The collaboration could not indefinitely mask two interrelated sources of tension: profound disagreement over programs of social reform that some rebels advocated while others disavowed, and different views of what Cubans—and Puerto Ricans, since the same issue applied there even without an active insurgency—would do with their independence: establish a distinct republic, possibly confederated with others in the Caribbean, or join the United States as a state. Though it worked to the tactical advantage of the rebel movement, the partnership between separatists of various ideological persuasions and socioracial backgrounds would disintegrate under the weight of these disagreements. As Pérez has shown, once authority in Cuba passed from Spain to the United States and accommodationist insurgents (under more bourgeois, white, and thus more “acceptable” leaders like Tomás Estrada Palma) took the initiative in representing the Cuban side before the occupation authorities, the more radical elements lost whatever political space they had managed to pry open for themselves during the war.²⁸

Thus, in addition to the institutional and political changes it introduced, one of the most enduring legacies of the American occupation of Cuba from 1898 to 1902 would be precisely the political and military dismemberment of the rebel coalition. As a result, the programs that most appealed to the destitute masses—a key to the rebels' successes on the battlefield, as we have seen—were all but proscribed. By the time Cubans inaugurated their neocolonial republic in 1902, the richness and breadth of the social ideas that once inspired the *mambises'* legendary bravery were no longer politically viable in what turned out to be a rather conservative republican polity. To the extent that a new imperial consensus had been crafted this early, both in Cuba and in Puerto Rico, it had clearly been made possible by the intense social conflicts that all but ripped apart the two countries on account of their nineteenth-century journey through the slaveholding periphery of the capitalist system.

28. *Ibid.*, 9–22.