

## Preface & Acknowledgments

When a ragged army of leftist guerrillas rode into the streets of Havana in revolutionary triumph in January 1959, U.S. diplomats turned their attention southward. Cuba, after all, was only ninety miles from Florida's coast. The boom in U.S. Latin American studies programs in the 1960s can be traced to the Cold War domino theory that the rest of the continent might follow Cuba into the communist camp. Academics from across the political spectrum pondered why revolution had triumphed and what made Cuba different from the rest of Latin America. Relying predominantly on U.S. diplomatic records, many emphasized the imperialism that began with the U.S. intervention in 1898 separating Cuba from Spain and ended with its so-called puppet dictator Fulgencio Batista in the 1950s. Today, as the U.S. embarks on "freedom and democracy building" projects in the Middle East and the State Department's Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba promises to do the same when the Castro brothers' rule ends, it makes sense to weigh the historical impact of the United States on republican Cuba (1902–59) and to evaluate its relationship to revolution. That is one of this book's goals.

The Spanish colonial system's extensive bureaucracy generated reams of paperwork, which partially explains the depth of historical research on colonial Cuba. In contrast, republican Cuban archival sources are challenging

to access and difficult to use. Cuba's early-twentieth-century archival documents are as mixed up as mid-nineteenth-century documents in other parts of Latin America, because archives reflect the difficult process of building and organizing new states. (Cuba did not become a nation until 1902, in contrast to most other Latin American colonies, which achieved independence in the 1820s.) Only historians have the luxury of time to plow through unsorted documents in series with titles such as "Donated Files" or "Special Files," versus, say, "Department of Finance" or "Department of Labor." This laborious research is the only way to accomplish the second of this book's goals: to identify the nuts and bolts of republican Cuban state formation (where "state" is understood to include political, judicial, and military institutions).

In the late 1960s and the 1970s, J. O'Connor, Eric Wolf, and Jorge Domínguez published less-U.S.-centric analyses of the Cuban Republic that argued that Fidel Castro was able to break the deadlock between the various sectors of society represented in Batista's corporatist state—particularly between landowner associations and labor unions. How this corporatist state came to be remained unclear. What much of the historiography lacked—and what this book contributes—is more serious attention to the mass participation and important political zigzags between left and right that took place between 1898 and 1959, in particular the changes surrounding the 1925 elections, the 1933 Revolution, the Second World War, and the Cold War.

Cuban historians on and off the island—including Luis Aguilar, Olga Cabrera, Alejandro de la Fuente, Alejandro García, Gladys Marel García-Pérez, Jorge Ibarra, Jorge Renato, Lionel Soto, José Tabares del Real, and Oscar Zanetti—have paid closer attention to the changing domestic politics and economics of the republic. Many researchers today are looking at how the Spanish, Caribbean, and Asian immigrant experience changed over the course of the twentieth century. Recent books by historians including Alejandra Bronfman, Lillian Guerra, Aline Helg, Louis Pérez Jr., Rebecca Scott, Lynn Stoner, Jean Stubbs, and Robert Whitney have also placed a refreshing focus on culture, particularly gender, race, and nationalist ideology (*Cubanidad*) in early-twentieth-century Cuba. Their sources include newspapers, writings by Cuban and Afro-Cuban students and intellectuals, and Cuban archival data, which they have used with remarkable success. All of these studies—and others too numerous to mention in this brief

overview—represent a significant step that moves Cuban historiography beyond the obsession with U.S. power, shifting the focus from Washington to residents in Havana, Cienfuegos, and other Cuban locations.

This book takes a different approach from much of Cuban historiography primarily because I am what David Collier and Ruth Berins Collier call a “lumper” rather than a “splitter.” I recognize national and regional differences, but I try to see patterns within the Western Hemisphere. My first exposure to Latin American history came by way of John Tutino, James Brennan, and Peter Klarén, historians of Mexico and South America. Bill Beezley’s monthlong seminar where I met my husband James Cypher was only one among many forums on Mexican history that I have attended since 1998, thanks to Tutino’s and Beezley’s influence. I have become rather obsessed with Latin American populism—with the anti-imperialist coloring it adds to the typical populist mix of idealizing “the common people” over the elites and the “producers” of wealth over the capitalists—thanks to Brennan and Klarén. For several years now, I have been reading U.S. and Latin American history more broadly to teach surveys on Latin America and the Americas. In consequence, this book’s third goal is to ask not what was exceptional about Cuba, but what it shared with the Americas surrounding it.

Teaching has given me an overwhelming desire to try to write a book that can bring something new to the study of Cuba while at the same time synthesizing other research in a way that is accessible to newcomers. Mexican history inspired me to approach Cuba through regional case studies and led me to see that Cuban revolutionary *caudillos* (military strongmen and political bosses) claimed national power through regional networks built during the war of 1895–98, just as northern Mexican *caudillos* took control through Mexico’s 1910 Revolution. Comparative readings on the impact of the Great Depression and the smaller agricultural depressions that preceded it led me to see that Cuba was one among many nations in which nationalism and populism emerged tentatively in the 1920s and more pervasively in the 1930s in response to the dominant gospel of modernity, progress, and free trade that reigned across the Americas from the 1880s to the 1920s. A Latin American Studies Association panel organized by Barry Carr, César Ayala, and Aldo Lauria-Santiago reinforced my conviction that we need to pay attention to what middle sectors did in the stereotypical “banana (or coffee, or sugar) republics” falsely assumed to have only rich landowners

and poor, landless workers. The medium-size coffee or cane farmers were often the ones to push through nationalist and popular reforms during the economic swings of the 1920s and 1930s. Their associational and political movements were more subtle than the worker strikes and revolutions that followed in the 1930s, but they are at least as important to understanding social and nationalist reforms.

This book argues that revolutionary caudillo networks formed in Cuba in 1895–98 and middling farmer and working classes formed in the 1920s and 1930s, respectively, influenced both local day-to-day Cuban politics and national state building. Cuba experienced revolutionary caudillo and populist rule as well its better-known dictatorships and revolutions. It analyzes why shifts from caudillos to populists to dictators and revolution occurred. At the broadest level, it explores what we can learn about the meaning of “democracy” by looking at worker and farmer mobilization under caudillos, populists, and dictators.

Some of these themes have been addressed in other studies, but they have tended to emphasize Cuban difference and to carve up the colonial and republican periods into pieces (usually 1868–98, 1898–1933, and 1933–59). This initial periodization was necessary to get at Cuba’s incredible complexities of region, class, and race. *Blazing Cane* builds on these important studies to provide a narrative that covers the whole of the revolutionary and republican periods (1868–1959). Highlighting the interaction between local and national history makes it clear that Cuban cane farmers and sugar workers, together with other activists, pushed the Cuban government to move from exclusive to inclusive politics and back again. Over the course of the twentieth century, Cuba began with a shallow democracy best defined as *caudillismo* and then shifted back and forth between more inclusive populism, exclusive dictatorship, and full-scale revolution in 1933 and 1959. Individuals went from looking “up” to their bosses who connected them to the government, to looking “beside” to their fellow workers, fellow farmers, or fellow mill owners, organizing horizontally into more powerful classes that could then make demands on the government.

The relationship between popular mobilization and state formation that creates zigzags from exclusive to inclusive political systems is recognized for other Latin American nations in studies by the likes of Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugent on Mexico; Daniel James on Argentina; and John French, Barbara Weinstein, and Joel Wolfe on Brazil but generally denied to the

stereotypical “dictatorship” states of Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba. A Nicaraguan exception to this rule that inspired my own methods and approach is Jeffrey Gould’s *To Lead as Equals*. Richard Lee Turits and Lauren Derby are also re-conceptualizing the Dominican Republic’s Trujillo regime. State formation theory emphasizes that Latin American states express the relationships between local, regional, and national agents as they interact with international political and economic realities. Large political and economic events like wars, booms, or busts can change these relationships abruptly. National politics can only be understood by looking both outside the nation to the influence of foreign politicians and capitalists and inside the nation to the actions of municipal, provincial, and national leaders, as well as to the lower and middle sectors of society who seek to support, challenge, or overthrow them. Following E. P. Thompson’s work on Britain, Lizabeth Cohen’s on the United States, Thomas Klubock’s on Chile, and Greg Grandin’s on Guatemala, I trace how lower and middle sectors of society overlooked their differences to join together and define themselves as a “class” (in this case, “sugar workers” and “cane farmers”).

This book builds a narrative of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Cuba by contrasting the development of two sugar communities from the 1860s through the 1950s. Most studies written on Cuba’s republican era are national, not local; they have outlined important social, political, and economic changes, but the local processes and outcomes of these changes remain little analyzed, especially for areas outside Havana, Santiago de Cuba, and Cienfuegos. We can only build “the national” by layering “the local,” as the historian Rebecca Scott has emphasized: the close study of individuals and social networks at the local level allows us to better understand larger mechanisms and interactions. This book joins the very few other analyses that focus on single Cuban communities, but it offers a broader time frame and scope by contrasting the development of two communities from colonialism through the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. Case studies of sugarmills make important building blocks for colonial and republican Cuban politics because sugarmills transformed the island’s countryside and served as a base for political networking, class formation, and revolutionary mobilization.<sup>1</sup> By examining closely the radical changes in the relationships and responsibilities linking workers, cane farmers, and sugarmill owners with the state, I offer a new picture of how Cubans lived and worked and of how the colonial, and then Cuban, state operated from 1868 to 1959.

Previous historians have developed useful conceptual shorthand that divides Cuba into two regions. The West was the center of national power, closely tied to Spain, sugar, and slavery in the colonial era and negotiations with U.S. power in the twentieth century. The mountainous East was home to runaway slaves, bandits, subsistence peasants, and rebellion in the colonial era, and it became the site of U.S. imperialism and rebellions against U.S. power in the twentieth century. My research has led me to adjust the model, emphasizing that there were subregions within each region that resembled the other and giving more space to the central province that straddled the two regions (called “Las Villas” in the colonial era and then “Santa Clara” in the republican years).

The triumph or failure of revolutionary struggles depended largely on the capture of the central region of Las Villas / Santa Clara. That center served as the base from which to conquer Havana. By 1920, sugar had spread almost entirely across the island, making Cuba an extreme case of the single-crop export economy,<sup>2</sup> but sugar communities had sprung up across the colony in an uneven pattern beginning in the western provinces of Havana and Matanzas and only gradually spreading to the East and Center.<sup>3</sup> Until the mid-eighteenth century, the western provinces of Havana and Matanzas produced about 85 percent of the sugar on the island, while central Las Villas produced most of the rest. Through the 1850s and 1860s, Las Villas’s share increased to 30 percent. The two regions’ sugar production leveled off at about 40 percent each from 1900 through 1908, at which point the eastern provinces of Oriente and Camagüey started to claim a larger share of production.

Eastern production rose as a select group of mills built in the region during and after the U.S. occupation of 1899–1902 began to hit their stride. Chaparra, the grandest sugarmill in the world in the early twentieth century, was the first of a new type of plantation in Cuba. Established in Puerto Padre, Oriente, the mill was characterized by large-scale U.S. investment, ultramodern machinery, massive landholdings, and an integrated system of production that included ports, railroads, and easy access to food, work animals, and sugarcane. Sugar baron Manuel Rionda’s Francisco sugarmill began to produce shortly after Chaparra, alongside the United Fruit Company’s Boston and Preston mills, among others (see map 1, above).

Ramiro Guerra’s *Sugar and Society in the Caribbean*, first published in 1927, argued that these super-plantations of the East threatened social and

political stability on the island. He advocated that the more stable “Cuban” system of the West should be applied to the more “American” East. Guerra’s regional contrast influenced policymakers at the time, and many analysts have built upon it since (most recently Oscar Zanetti, Alan Dye, and César Ayala). Fascinated by Guerra’s argument, I initially chose Chaparra and Tuinucú in order to establish a contrast between North American and Cuban systems of production. According to the construct, Chaparra, being in the East, would be the largest and most “American” mill in early-twentieth-century Cuba, while Tuinucú, being closer to the West, would be decidedly “Cuban.” (I was unable to find a mill in the West proper that had not changed owners, thereby dispersing source material, during the 1868–1959 period.) On closer examination, I had to put Guerra’s construct aside because at least during the first twenty years of the century, both mills appeared to be quintessentially “Cuban American” in that they combined attributes from both worlds. Moreover, closer study revealed that workers and cane farmers in the foreign enclaves of the East ended up organizing and winning more demands than those of the West precisely because of the rising nationalist context in which Ramiro Guerra wrote *Sugar and Society*.

Although a number of studies focusing on U.S. imperialism in Cuba have sought to identify the number of “American” versus “Cuban” mills on the island (beginning with Leland Jenks’s 1928 *Our Cuban Colony* and continuing through Jorge Ibarra’s and Oscar Pino Santos’s studies), I believe that this quest blinds us to the complex realities of corporations. It is extremely difficult to unravel a sugarmill’s “nationality.” For example, Tuinucú was owned predominantly by Spaniards, but it was incorporated in the United States. Manuel Rionda, a Spanish subject, studied in the United States from a young age and lived in New York, while much of his family was based in Matanzas, Cuba. He made some decisions regarding Tuinucú from his New York office, but other Rionda family members lived in Cuba and administered the mill directly on a day-to-day basis from the 1880s through the 1940s. Manuel himself would claim to be Cuban in one context, Spanish in the next, and American in a third. After so many years of residence, at what point does one cease to be “Spanish” and become “American” or “Cuban”? If part of the capital is North American but the corporation has offices in both Havana and New York, should we consider the mill “American,” “Spanish,” or “Cuban”?



Equally complex, Chaparra was set up and administered by a Cuban, General Mario García Menocal, but Texas Congressman Robert Hawley and Hawley's group of New York-based sugar capitalists funded and incorporated the company in the United States. Menocal's identity is similar to that of Manuel Rionda (minus the Spanish nationality) in that he spent much of his life studying in the United States and embraced many things American. He graduated from Cornell University with an engineering degree shortly before the 1895 insurgency began. Although he ran Chaparra in close conjunction with the American directors, as general manager of the Chaparra mill Menocal doled out cane farms to Cuban generals, officers, and family members.

When my research did not fit Guerra's model, I shifted my objective to using the Tuinucú mill in the relatively old central region and the Chaparra mill in the eastern "frontier" to gain a broad understanding of island-wide change from the colonial through the republican eras and to study the impact that sugar communities had on the state. (The eastern "frontier" region hosted little large-scale industry but was home to many squatters and small to medium-size farms producing tobacco, cattle, cane, and other products.) Since the Tuinucú estate began producing sugar early in the colonial era, and Chaparra did not enter the scene until 1895, my initial focus is mostly on Tuinucú in the central province of Las Villas. Chaparra enters the study later but becomes the central focus for the discussion of the republican era because it was significantly larger and its inhabitants achieved more political power than Tuinucú's. Chaparra's first administrator, Mario García Menocal, became Cuba's president from 1913 to 1921, and Puerto Padre's significant cane farmer and worker associations of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s were among the vanguard pushing through laws to protect cane farmers and workers in those same decades.

Though less prominent in the republican era, Tuinucú serves as a useful comparison that sometimes mimics and sometimes diverges from its much larger counterpart to the east. Overall, the comparison and contrast of the two communities make it possible to explore how the local—specific individuals, enterprises, and regions—interacted with power changes at the national and international levels. We see how the communities were affected by global processes such as changes in the international sugar economy, wars, nationalism, and depression, and how they in turn sought to use and shape the national responses to these processes.



Before continuing, I want to alert the reader to a few of the most important people, places, and sources for this story. The sugar baron Manuel Rionda organized a U.S. corporation to purchase the Tuinucú estate in 1893. Tuinucú's U.S. base proved important because it allowed the stockholders to sue the United States for damages perpetrated during Cuba's third war for independence from 1895 to 1898. (On signing the Treaty of Paris at the end of the Spanish–American War, the United States made itself responsible for property claims against the Spanish government.) My analysis of the 1895–98 Revolution in the Sancti Spiritus region builds on evidence from this legal case and Rionda family correspondence contained in the University of Florida's Braga Brothers Collection. Though often contradictory, the testimonies of planters, cane farmers, workers, Cuban insurgents, and Spanish soldiers confirm the importance of central Cuba and provide an exceptionally detailed description of the state of contested power in that region in the 1890s.

Documents from the Braga Brothers Collection in Florida and the Cuban-American Sugar Mills Collection at the provincial archives of Las Tunas provide the scaffolding for chapters 4 to 8 on the Cuban Republic. The former was donated by the Braga–Rionda family and contains correspondence, production data, and maps relating to the Czarnikow–Rionda Company, one of North America's largest importers of sugar and molasses. The records deal with its affiliated companies in Cuba and the United States, including cane farms, storage facilities, a sugar refinery, alcohol distilleries, cattle ranches, and sugarmills, Tuinucú among them. Manuel Rionda was very hands on, demanding detailed contact from each mill manager and company president; the records therefore provide a rich source on Tuinucú and the other Rionda mills.

Especially during the years surrounding the First World War (roughly 1914–20), Rionda played a very important role nationally as organizer of the largest ever sugar conglomerate on the island, the Cuba Cane Sugar Company. Muriel McAvoy, who was extremely helpful throughout my research and writing, documents this side of the Rionda story in *Sugar Baron: Manuel Rionda and the Fortunes of Pre-Castro Cuba*. Rionda's association with this larger conglomerate helps to stretch *Blazing Cane's* coverage beyond two mill case studies. During that same period, Rionda served as a sugar broker and negotiator for President Mario García Menocal, a second central character who helps this book bridge the local–national gap.

Menocal was a revolutionary caudillo, then the general manager of the Chaparra sugarmill, and then the president of Cuba from 1912 to 1921.

Rionda's close friend Robert Bradley Hawley also served as an important negotiator for Menocal during the First World War. He owned the second large conglomerate at the time, the Cuban-American Sugar Company (Cubanaco). At its peak, Cubanaco owned two refineries (one in Matanzas and one in Louisiana) and six sugarmills, including Chaparra and its neighbor Delicias in Puerto Padre. Cubanaco's annual production capacity was over 300,000 tons of raw sugar and 150,000 tons of refined sugar. The corporation also owned mechanical workshops; electricity, power, and ice plants; and large storage, communication, and transportation facilities (over 2,000 miles of telephone lines and railroad tracks for public and private service). When the Cuban revolutionary government nationalized Chaparra and Delicias in July 1960, all company records were to be destroyed to make space and clear the imperial record, so to speak. Thank goodness one worker, José Collazo, decided to preserve as many documents as possible in an abandoned scale house at Chaparra. His family donated the material to the provincial archives of Las Tunas, where Marina Pichs Brito, Antonio Oliva, and other dedicated archivists have created a well-organized and professional place to research, despite the lack of resources.

Newspaper and magazine clippings and Eva Canel's and Carlos Marti's travel diaries, along with documents from the national and provincial archives of Cuba, the United States, and Great Britain, helped me sketch out the 1900–20 period that is less well documented in the Braga and Cubanaco collections. Also, in 1959 and shortly thereafter, Cuban sugar workers had the foresight to understand the importance of the historic worker struggles that they had lived through. "Historical Committees" formed at each mill to write short histories of the mills, and I found some of these precious histories in provincial libraries and archives and in the "kitchen archives" of former sugar workers.

Oral history and worker histories highlight the humble counterparts to the patrons, matrons, and middlemen and women in this study. You will see the likes of Agustín Valdivia, Melanio Hernández, Eduardo Bertot, Jesús Menéndez, Rita Díaz, and Ester Villa standing up to Manuel and Isidora Rionda, Oliver and Elena Doty, Mariana Sava and Mario García Menocal, Robert Bradley Hawley, and R. B. Wood. I found their stories through Eladio Santiago, Arquímedes Valdivia, Omar Villafruela, Rita Díaz, Tomás

González, Ester Villa, Victor Marrero, and Jose Abreu, who let me interview them and showed me their own notes from Tuinucú and Chaparra histories. While early-twentieth-century everyday life at the mills is extremely difficult to reconstruct, the Rionda family correspondence and the days and days of interviews with old-timers that Eladio and Victor shared with me made it possible to imagine life during what Eladio calls the “Golden Age” from 1900 to 1920 and during the more turbulent years thereafter. Where relevant, I also cite the testimonials of sugar workers from other mills on the island to fill out the human side of the story. Although they may be tinted with nostalgia in some areas and exaggerated by anti-American bias in others, these reminiscences offer irreplaceable insights into the lives of the workers. Their words can touch us in ways that the contemporary historian cannot.

The Cubans mentioned here are only a few of the many to whom I owe a huge intellectual debt. Between the time I wrote my dissertation proposal (on sugar workers in the 1933 Revolution) and the time I began my research, Robert Whitney published an important book, *State and Revolution in Cuba: Mass Mobilization and Political Change, 1920–1940*. I am extremely grateful to Bob, Barry Carr, Marc McLeod, César Ayala, Muriel McAvoy, Lillian Guerra, and Rebecca Scott, among other Cubanists, for helping me identify sources and potential areas for research when I was casting around for ideas between 1998 and 2000.

James Cypher, whom Eladio Santiago so beautifully named my “fiel compañero,” fed me, copied lists of names and numbers for me, and was my home in Gainesville, Florida; Bloomington, Indiana; Washington, D.C.; and across the island of Cuba. Since then, he has become an incredible father to our four- and six-year-old bundles of joy, Charles and Justine, and has cooked and provided for the family to let me finish this book. I also thank my mother, Helen, for her editing; my father, Donald; my grandmothers, Helen Weider and Sheila McGillivray; and my brothers and in-laws for being so supportive along the way. José Abreu, Domingo Corvea, Fe Iglesias, Jorge Giovannetti, Rafael Soler, Olga Portuondo, Reinaldo Román, Michael Zeuske, and Jorge Renato Ibarra all shared their work with me and pointed me in the right direction. Franklin Knight, Berarda Salabarria, Luis Frades, and Carmen Valdes did the “trámites” to get me permission to do the research at archives and libraries across Cuba; and Oscar Zanetti, Amparo Hernández Denis, Omar Villafruela, Victor Marrero, and Belkys Quesada

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In the end, Bob Whitney's book and Barry Carr's articles on sugar workers in Cuba's 1933 Revolution forced me to become more ambitious in time and scope. Thanks to them, this book aims to describe the process of class organization among sugar workers, cane farmers, and sugarmill owners that dominated the Cuban countryside from Cuba's first war for independence in 1868 all the way through to the 1959 Revolution. It seeks to identify the political openings and blockages related to international events that these groups used to construct and change the Cuban state at the local and national levels. I hope the book demonstrates that we can understand national change only by paying attention to international context and local agency.