

## Sugar and Slavery

Notwithstanding all we hear and know of the enervating influence of the climate, the white man, if not laborious himself, is the cause that labor is in others. With all its social and political discouragements . . . this island is still very productive and very rich.

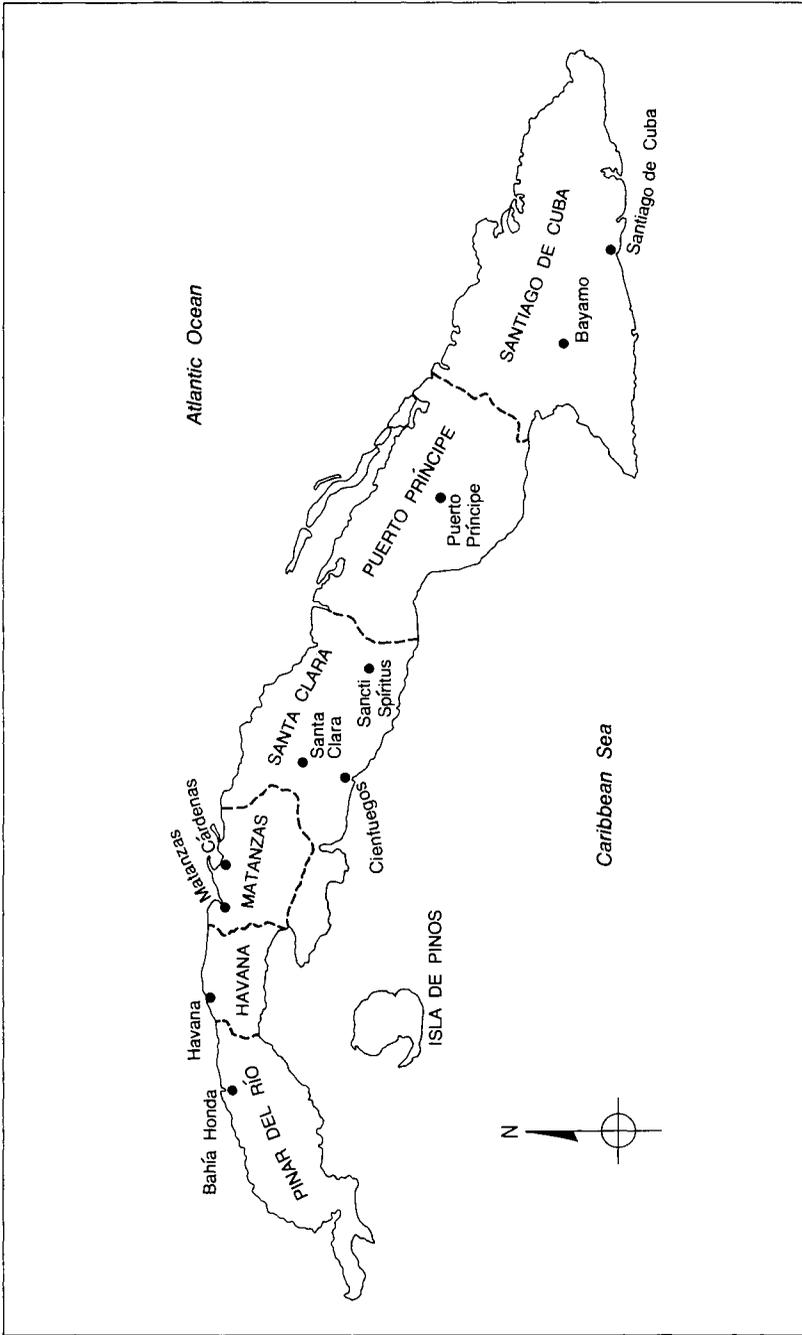
—Richard Henry Dana, 1859<sup>1</sup>

Chattel slavery, the holding of property in men and women, formed the basis of a sophisticated and productive sugar industry in Cuba well into the final third of the nineteenth century. In 1868 the island produced 720,250 metric tons of sugar, more than 40 percent of the cane sugar reaching the world market in that year. But just as Cuba reached this level of production, the abolition of slavery began. Slavery had been maintained in Cuba while it was being abolished elsewhere, and emancipation, when it came, required almost two decades to complete. Like Brazil, Cuba was a holdout, finally terminating slavery only in the 1880s. Subsequently, Cuban sugar production grew still further, reaching the one-million-ton mark just six years after final abolition.<sup>2</sup> This congruence of events raises questions about the relationship between slavery and the development of sugar production in Cuba, and about why emancipation came when and as it did.

There are several approaches to the problem of explaining the ending of slavery in Cuba. One is to analyze abolition as a political process, largely carried out by Spain in response to the domestic and international pressures that arose from slavery's persistence in Cuba

<sup>1</sup> Richard Henry Dana, Jr., *To Cuba and Back: A Vacation Voyage* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1859; reprint ed., Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> Manuel Moreno Fraginals, *El ingenio: Complejo económico social cubano del azúcar*, 3 vols. (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1978) 3: 37, 38, provides production figures.



Cuba, showing provincial divisions of 1878

long after its extinction in most of the New World.<sup>3</sup> Another approach is to view the ending of slavery primarily as an attempt to resolve difficulties within the sugar economy, including, some scholars have argued, a growing internal contradiction between the rigidity of slave labor and the need for technological advancement.<sup>4</sup> A complementary interpretation sees the shift to free labor as largely an economic question, and portrays enlightened planters as either taking the initiative or posing little objection.<sup>5</sup> One might also combine these approaches, portraying a politically expedient colonial policy as serving the higher interests of the local elite, though this would raise the further question of why abolition in fact took so very long to accomplish.

Rather than choose among, or attempt to synthesize, these approaches, I shall embark on a somewhat different tack. In addition to evaluating the pressures exerted on the Spanish government, I shall examine the behavior of a wider range of actors—including slaves, freedmen, and insurgents. While exploring the problems that planters perceived and the ways they sought to resolve them, I shall question the accuracy of the historical claim that they faced “internal contradictions” that could be resolved only through abolition.

<sup>3</sup> The analysis by Arthur F. Corwin best exemplifies this approach: *Spain and the Abolition of Slavery in Cuba, 1817-1886* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967).

<sup>4</sup> The thesis of the incompatibility of slave labor and technology is argued in Moreno's *El ingenio* 1: 220-21 and expressed succinctly in several articles by the same author, including “El esclavo y la mecanización de los ingenios,” *Bohemia*, June 13, 1969, pp. 98-99, and “Desgarramiento azucarero e integración nacional,” *Casa de las Américas* 11 (September-October 1970): 6-22. More recently Moreno has cited the importance of a variety of factors in determining the course of abolition, but he continues to emphasize the key role of a structural “crisis” “provoked by the steadily decreasing profitability of slave-based labor and by the difficulties resulting from the adoption of new technologies.” See his essay “Plantaciones en el Caribe: El caso Cuba—Puerto Rico—Santo Domingo (1860-1940),” in his *La historia como arma y otros estudios sobre esclavos, ingenios y plantaciones* (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 1983), p. 75. Franklin W. Knight argues that “slave labor was woefully incompetent to deal with the scientific advances of the industry,” and refers to slavery in Cuba as “partly the victim of the steam engine,” though he does not see mechanization itself as inclining planters toward abolitionism. See Franklin W. Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba during the Nineteenth Century* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), pp. 182, 178.

<sup>5</sup> Eugene D. Genovese ascribes a leading role in Cuban abolition to “some of the island's wealthiest planters” who, along with other reformists of the 1860s, are said to have “understood the importance of general economic renovation and the extent to which slavery inhibited it.” He argues that in Cuba “the sugar planters had a purely economic stake in slavery and . . . when that stake waned, they could move into a wage-labor system.” *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (New York: Random House, Pantheon Books, 1969), pp. 69-70.

## INTRODUCTION

My emphasis throughout will be on the *links* among the different kinds of pressures—social, economic, political, military—and on the interactions among masters, slaves, rebels, and administrators. The goal, then, is not simply to discover a series of factors that brought about abolition, but rather to understand the dynamics of the process of emancipation and the transition to free labor.

This analysis must begin with Cuban society itself. The composition of the population shaped both social relations and the labor market. Regional differences in the island's economic and social development helped to determine the geographical pattern of the transition to free labor. Specific characteristics of plantation slavery in Cuba—such as provision-ground cultivation and seasonal work patterns in sugar—influenced the evolution of labor relations. Finally, slaveholders' perceptions of their relationship to their workers and to the Spanish government conditioned their responses to the prospect of abolition.

Cuba stood out among the Caribbean sugar islands for its large and growing white population. When the government carried out a census of the island's inhabitants in 1861-1862, it became clear that the balance of the population had shifted markedly since 1846, the date of the previous census. Whites, who had been a minority, were now a majority, their numbers having multiplied through immigration and natural growth from about 426,000 to about 730,000. Within the population of color, slaves still predominated, outnumbering the free persons of color by a ratio of about 1.7 to 1, though this represented a decline from the ratio of about 2 to 1 that had prevailed in 1846. The number of free persons of color had grown rapidly, but they had merely maintained their share of the total population (16 percent) in the face of the even more rapid increase in the white population. The 34,000 Asians (Chinese indentured laborers) and 740 Yucatecans (brought under contract from Mexico) represented a tiny fraction of the total (see Table 1).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The 1846 census data are from Cuba, Comisión de Estadística, *Cuadro estadístico de la siempre fiel Isla de Cuba, correspondiente al año de 1846* (Havana: Imprenta del Gobierno y Capitanía General, 1847). Censuses were taken in Cuba in 1841 and 1846. Both were controversial, and there have been suspicions that the second undercounted slaves. It nonetheless seems appropriate to use that of 1846, both because it was more recent and because it probably reflected a real decrease in the slave population as a result of the high mortality and decline in importation in the mid-1840s. The census that I refer to as that of 1862 was taken between June 1861 and June 1862, and its tables vary both in the dates to which the counts are attributed

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TABLE 1  
Population of Cuba, 1846 and 1862

	1846		1862		Increase
White	425,767	(47.4%)	729,957	(53.7%)	71.4%
Free colored	149,226	(16.6%)	221,417	(16.3%)	48.4%
<i>Emancipado</i> <sup>a</sup>			4,521	(.3%)	
Slave	323,759	(36.0%)	368,550	(27.1%)	13.8%
Asian			34,050	(2.5%)	
Yucatecan			743	(.1%)	
<b>Total</b>	<b>898,752</b>	<b>(100.0%)</b>	<b>1,359,238</b>	<b>(100.0%)</b>	<b>51.2%</b>

SOURCE: 1846 figures are from Cuba, *Cuadro estadístico de la siempre fiel Isla de Cuba, correspondiente al año de 1846* (Havana: Imprenta del Gobierno, 1847); and 1862 figures are from Cuba, Centro de Estadística, *Noticias estadísticas de la Isla de Cuba en 1862* (Havana: Imprenta del Gobierno, 1864), "Censo de población de la Isla de Cuba en el año que terminó en 1º de Junio de 1862."

<sup>a</sup> *Emancipados* were Africans found on captured slave ships, legally freed, and contracted out under government authority.

The white population was overwhelmingly Creole (that is, born in the New World), though with a substantial and disproportionately powerful minority of Spaniards (that is, those born in Spain), many of them merchants, shopkeepers, or government employees. There was frequent tension between Spaniards and Creoles over issues of politics and commerce, and occasionally open separatism on the part of Cubans. The Creole elite had developed in large measure during the course of the sugar revolution of the nineteenth century, leaving many eighteenth-century patriarchal traditions behind. Spanish merchants had also profited from the island's economic growth, both in their role as providers of slaves and credit and in their role as sellers in the protected Cuban market. Though planters were frequently indebted to, and resentful of, Spanish merchants, the two groups generally closed ranks on the issue of the maintenance of slavery. The sugar elite, both Spanish and Creole, also cultivated and benefited from a close relationship with a long series of colonial administrators, helping to block the implementation of unfavorable metropolitan rulings.<sup>7</sup>

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and in the total population enumerated. For Table 1 I have used the figures listed in the census as "Censo de población de la Isla de Cuba en el año que terminó en 1.º de Junio de 1862," in which the Chinese and Yucatecans are counted separately. Elsewhere in this work I use the figures from later tables in the census that group Chinese, Yucatecans, and whites together and divide the population into finer categories of residence. See Cuba, Centro de Estadística, *Noticias estadísticas de la Isla de Cuba en 1862* (Havana: Imprenta del Gobierno, 1864).

<sup>7</sup> On the composition of the white population, see Fe Iglesias, "Características de

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Sugar planters, however, constituted only a tiny minority within white society, and a substantial part of the population was not directly part of the sugar economy. Almost 236,000 whites lived on *sitios de labor* and *estancias*, small farms predominantly devoted to the raising of food crops, with another 75,000 on tobacco farms and 52,000 on *potreros*, stock-raising farms. Some 311,000 whites lived in the cities and towns of the island, and fewer than 42,000 on the sugar estates.<sup>8</sup> While sugar planters' adherence to Spain had helped maintain the island's loyalty in the decades since Spain's mainland colonies had broken free, they alone could not indefinitely insure the security of the Cuban countryside, given the large number of small farmers, tenants, and laborers.

The island's free population of color included descendants of slaves liberated generations earlier as well as those recently manumitted. The large proportion of women among those who obtained freedom contributed to the group's relatively high rate of growth. Most free persons of color lived in towns and cities, where they usually worked as day laborers, artisans, and domestics, though some attained professional and semiprofessional positions. The rural free population of color was concentrated in the eastern part of the island. Some 23,700 of the 84,500 free persons of color in the eastern districts lived on *estancias*, while another 15,500 lived on tobacco farms and 7,400 on ranches and stock-raising farms. The eastern department's free population of color thus had a distinctly rural character, while that of the western department was 65 percent urban.<sup>9</sup>

Though legally allowed to own property (even slaves), free blacks and mulattos suffered from widespread social discrimination, including limited access to public gatherings and prohibitions on in-

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la población cubana en 1862," *Revista de la Biblioteca Nacional José Martí*, 3rd series, 22 (September-December 1980): 93. For a picture of Havana and its Spanish merchants at mid-century, see Antonio de las Barras y Prado, *La Habana a mediados del siglo xix* (Madrid: Imprenta de la Ciudad Lineal, 1925). On the development and composition of the planter class; see Knight, *Slave Society*, pp. 21-22 and chap. 5, and Moreno, *El ingenio*, vol. 1. For a discussion of the influence of the sugar elite on the formulation of government policy concerning the slave trade, see David R. Murray, *Odious Commerce: Britain, Spain and the Abolition of the Cuban Slave Trade* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

<sup>8</sup> Cuba, Centro de Estadística, *Noticias estadísticas*, "Distribución de la población en los pueblos y fincas de la isla." In this context, the category "whites" includes Chinese contract laborers.

<sup>9</sup> On occupations, see Pedro Deschamps Chapeaux, *El negro en la economía habanera del siglo xix* (Havana: Unión de Escritores y Artistas de Cuba, 1971). For statistics, see Cuba, Centro de Estadística, *Noticias estadísticas*, "Distribución."

terracial marriage. Despite a generally more flexible system of ethnic classification than that prevailing in the U.S. South, the concept of an African "stain" continued to stigmatize the Cuban descendants of slaves.<sup>10</sup> One Spanish resident of Havana in the 1860s explained candidly that all blacks were obliged to show respect to whites in order for whites to maintain the "moral force" necessary to keep the "black race" in submission, since it would be difficult to do so on the basis of material force alone.<sup>11</sup>

Free persons of color constituted an uncertain element in the colonial equation. The Spanish administration had long sought to use them as a counterweight to the slave population, even to the extent of arming battalions of free mulattos and blacks.<sup>12</sup> In the 1840s, however, authorities suspected free persons of color of collaboration in a rumored general slave uprising and arrested, tortured, and executed members of Cuba's precarious free colored middle sector. The colored small-scale farmers, tenants, and squatters in the east, where in most districts they outnumbered slaves, were a similar unknown in the balance of power.<sup>13</sup> As in virtually all slave societies, mulatto free persons had often sought to distance themselves from blacks in an effort both to avoid the "stain" of shared slave ancestry and to assert the importance of differences in social status and gradations of skin color. At the same time, however, slaves and free persons of color had often been joined by ties of kinship and shared membership in the *cabildos de nación*, particularly in the towns. To the extent that there was a continuous process of manumission, absolute caste-like barriers were unlikely to develop.<sup>14</sup>

The island's slaves were both recognized by the white elite as the

<sup>10</sup> See Verena Martínez-Alier, *Marriage, Class and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

<sup>11</sup> Barras y Prado, *La Habana*, pp. 111-12.

<sup>12</sup> Deschamps Chapeaux, *El negro en la economía*, pp. 57-86.

<sup>13</sup> On the 1844 uprising and its repression, see Murray, *Odious Commerce*, chap. 9, and references cited therein; and Robert Louis Paquette, "The Conspiracy of La Escalera: Colonial Society and Politics in Cuba in the Age of Revolution." Ph.D. thesis, University of Rochester, 1982. For population figures by district, see Cuba, Centro de Estadística, *Noticias estadísticas*, "Censo."

<sup>14</sup> See Martínez-Alier, *Marriage*, especially pp. 96-99. On the U.S. South, see Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters* (New York: Random House, 1974). For a discussion of *cabildos*, see Chap. XI, below, and Fernando Ortiz, "Los cabildos afro-cubanos," *Revista Bimestre Cubana* 16 (Jan.-Feb., 1921): 5-39. On the free persons of color, see Deschamps, *El negro*, and Paquette, "Conspiracy."

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TABLE 2  
Slaves Imported into Cuba, 1840-1867<sup>a</sup>

Year	Number	Year	Number	Year	Number
1840	14,470	1850	3,100	1860	24,895
1841	9,776	1851	5,000	1861	23,964
1842	3,000	1852	7,924	1862	11,254
1843	8,000	1853	12,500	1863	7,507
1844	10,000	1854	11,400	1864	6,807
1845	1,300	1855	6,408	1865	145
1846	1,500	1856	7,304	1866	1,443
1847	1,000	1857	10,436	1867	—
1848	1,500	1858	16,992		
1849	8,700	1859	30,473	Total	246,798

SOURCE: David R. Murray, *Odious Commerce: Britain, Spain and the Abolition of the Cuban Slave Trade* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 244.

<sup>a</sup> These totals are the estimates published by the British Foreign Office and are based on reports of the British commissioners in Havana. (In 1841 no figure was published, and the figure here is taken from the commissioner's reports.)

basis of Cuba's prosperity and perceived as a potential threat to its security. The decade of the 1850s saw an upsurge in the contraband transatlantic slave trade, partially offsetting the decline that would otherwise have resulted from deaths and manumissions in a population that did not have a positive natural rate of increase (see Table 2). By the end of the decade, however, the absolute number of slaves appears to have begun to decline. Slave registration figures, though distinctly unreliable, showed a total of around 373,000 in 1855-1857.<sup>15</sup> By 1861-1862 the census counted just 368,550, and the 1867 slave registration showed 363,288.<sup>16</sup>

The experience of slavery itself varied widely within Cuba, from the cities and towns, where slaves filled a broad range of occupations, to the rural settings, each with different characteristics and work rhythms. Though slaves in towns were highly visible to travelers—and are in some ways more visible to historians—most Cuban slaves in the 1860s lived in the countryside, and the largest group (47 percent) lived on sugar estates. Indeed the proportion of the slave labor force employed in sugar was even greater than 47 percent

<sup>15</sup> Knight cites the figures from the 1855, 1856, and 1857 "capitations" in *Slave Society*, p. 63.

<sup>16</sup> Cuba, Centro de Estadística, *Noticias estadísticas*, "Censo," and AHN, Ultramar, leg. 4884, tomo 8, exp. 160.

because of the relatively small numbers of slave children on sugar plantations, compared to the cities.<sup>17</sup>

Rural slaves who were not employed in sugar labored on various kinds of plantations, farms, and ranches (see Table 3). The slaves on *sitios de labor* and *estancias*, both small food-producing farms, numbered almost 32,000 and of necessity had closer relations with their owners and performed a wider range of tasks than most plantation slaves. Over 31,000 slaves lived on intensive stock-raising farms, *potreros*, that were sometimes independent and sometimes tied to *ingenios*, on occasion sharing their work force with a nearby estate. About 26,000 slaves lived on the island's coffee plantations, where conditions were traditionally viewed as less oppressive than those on *ingenios*.<sup>18</sup> Cattle ranchers owned few slaves each, most of them men. With greater open space, the ranches may have offered relatively independent working conditions, but the sex ratio must have made family life very difficult. Tobacco farms also held few slaves per farm, with *vegas* in the district of Pinar del Río averaging four or five slaves each, and those in the Eastern Department averaging less than one slave each. In the western Pinar del Río and San Cristóbal districts, most of the residents of tobacco farms were whites, while in the eastern Santiago de Cuba district, most were free persons of color.<sup>19</sup>

The diversity of situations in which Cuban slaves lived and the range of their activities suggest that one should exercise considerable caution in attributing a general "character" to Cuban slavery. While some earlier scholars saw Cuba as an instance of a mild New World slavery, strongly influenced by the Catholic Church, recent research has shown that the Church could not determine practices within the plantation once large-scale capitalistic agriculture had developed. Thus the image of a paternalistic slavery characterized by concern for the soul of the slave is out of keeping with the regime

<sup>17</sup> Cuba, Centro de Estadística, *Noticias estadísticas*, "Distribución." It is thus somewhat misleading to emphasize the urban experience, as Herbert S. Klein does, and portray Cuba just prior to emancipation as a "rich world of economic opportunity" for the slave, one that had provided him with a "rich industrial heritage." See *Slavery in the Americas* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 162-63.

<sup>18</sup> On the reputation of the coffee estates, see Knight, *Slave Society*, pp. 65-67.

<sup>19</sup> All of the figures in this discussion are from Cuba, Centro de Estadística, *Noticias estadísticas*, "Distribución," and "Registro general de fincas rústicas."

TABLE 3  
Distribution of Slave Population by Place of Residence, 1862

Residence (Census category)	Males	Females	Total	Percentage of Slaves in Island	Slaves as Percentage of Residents	Male Slaves per 100 Female Slaves
<i>Ingenios</i> (Sugar plantations)	109,709	62,962	172,671	47%	79%	174
<i>Poblados</i> (Towns)	37,014	38,963	75,977	21%	15%	95
<i>Potreros</i> (Stock-raising farms)	20,414	11,100	31,514	9%	35%	184
<i>Cafetales</i> (Coffee plantations)	14,344	11,598	25,942	7%	77%	124
<i>Sitios de labor</i> (Small farms)	14,253	10,597	24,850	7%	11%	135
<i>Vegas</i> (Tobacco farms)	11,622	6,053	17,675	5%	15%	192
<i>Estancias</i> (Small farms)	4,220	2,698	6,918	2%	8%	156
<i>Haciendas</i> (Ranches)	4,311	1,909	6,220	2%	18%	226
Other establishments	2,675	1,500	4,175	1%	19%	178
Other farms	1,655	769	2,424	1%	20%	215
Total (calculated from table) <sup>a</sup>	220,217	148,149	368,366			149

SOURCE: Cuba, Centro de Estadística, *Noticias estadísticas*, "Distribución de la Población en los Pueblos y Fincas de la Isla."

<sup>a</sup> Because of apparent omissions in the original, these totals do not equal those cited elsewhere in the census.

of the developed *ingenio*.<sup>20</sup> Verena Martínez-Alier, studying the position of the Church on the delicate issue of intermarriage, has also shown the reluctance of many Church leaders and parish priests to press for the recognition of the spiritual equality of all men. As Martínez-Alier has argued, the authorities were well aware of the precepts of Catholic morality, but did not feel bound by them: "On the contrary, they manipulate these values in accordance with the circumstances and as a rule subordinate them to the interests of the State."<sup>21</sup>

One institution often cited as distinguishing the status of the Cuban slave from that of slaves elsewhere was *coartación*, or gradual self-purchase. Under Spanish law, a slave who made a substantial down payment on his or her purchase price—thus becoming *coartado*—gained certain privileges. He or she could not be sold for a price greater than the appraised value at the time of the *coartación* and was entitled to a portion of the rental if hired out. In theory, *coartación* provided an avenue for self-emancipation and created an intermediate status between slave and free.<sup>22</sup> As slave prices rose, however, the possibility that a slave would be able to accumulate the purchase price receded. Herbert Klein cites the example of *coartación* through a down payment of 50 pesos, one-quarter of a purchase price of 200 pesos.<sup>23</sup> But by the 1860s slave prices were from three to six times that much, putting self-purchase far beyond the reach of almost all slaves.<sup>24</sup> The total number of freedom papers

<sup>20</sup> The earlier thesis was associated particularly with Frank Tannenbaum and Herbert Klein. See Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas* (New York: Random House, 1946), and Klein, *Slavery*. Major challenges to it are contained in Knight, *Slave Society*, and Moreno, *El ingenio*. Cuba, particularly in the eighteenth century, showed a greater diversity of economic activity, a smaller proportion of slaves in the population, and a larger free population of color than many other Caribbean sugar islands. These features did help to give Cuban slavery a special character and created a heritage that would influence society in the nineteenth century. But it does not follow that all aspects of this character persisted until abolition, for the intervening decades saw a dramatic concentration of resources in sugar production, massive importations of slaves, and a weakening of countervailing forces that might offset the hegemony of the planter class.

<sup>21</sup> Martínez-Alier, *Marriage*, p. 47.

<sup>22</sup> Klein, *Slavery*, pp. 196-99. See also Hubert H. S. Aimes, "Coartación: A Spanish Institution for the Advancement of Slaves into Freedmen," *The Yale Review* 17 (Feb. 1909): 412-31.

<sup>23</sup> Klein, *Slavery*, p. 197.

<sup>24</sup> For estimates of slave prices in the 1860s see Hubert H. S. Aimes, *A History of Slavery in Cuba, 1511 to 1868* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1907; reprint ed., New York: Octagon Books, 1967), pp. 267-68. For the valuations of slaves on specific estates, see Manuel Moreno Fraginals, Herbert S. Klein, and Stanley L. Engerman,

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issued between 1858 and 1862 averaged about 1,900 per year, and this figure included manumissions as well as self-purchase by *coartados*.<sup>25</sup> While in any given year there could be more slaves becoming *coartados* than achieving full freedom, other evidence suggests that the number actually in the status of *coartado* at any one time was small. When the slave population was counted in 1871, it included only 890 male *coartados* and 1,247 female *coartadas*, less than one percent of the total. Over 40 percent of the *coartados* lived in the urban *jurisdicción* of Havana, while the sugar areas had very few.<sup>26</sup>

The significance of these figures goes beyond their relevance to the debate on the relative "severity" of Cuban slavery—a discussion grown somewhat barren. More important, in conjunction with other findings, they cast doubt on the notion that the nature of the integration of former slaves into Cuban society after abolition was determined by extensive prior social mobility and by Church-inspired "mores and attitudes that permitted the Negro to be treated as a coequal human being."<sup>27</sup> *Coartación*, combined with a generally more positive attitude toward manumission than was found, for example, in the United States, was clearly important in developing Cuba's large free population of color. But on the eve of final emancipation *coartación* affected only a tiny fraction of Cuba's slaves. Understanding the integration of the majority of freed men and women into Cuban society requires both a closer examination of Cuban sugar plantations and a direct look at the process of emancipation itself and its aftermath.

It is clear that the exigencies of technology and profitability tended to turn the semimechanized, capitalistic, export-oriented sugar plantation of the mid-nineteenth century into a prison, the slaves into mere factors of production.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, to focus solely on

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"The Level and Structure of Slave Prices on Cuban Plantations in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: Some Comparative Perspectives," *American Historical Review* 88 (Dec. 1983): 1201-18. See also note 83, below.

<sup>25</sup> Cuba, Centro de Estadística, *Noticias estadísticas*, "Cartas de libertad expedidas a esclavos en la isla en el quinquenio de 1858 a 1862." The estimate of 6.2% of slaves being freed through *coartación* each year, cited by Klein, is based on a miscalculation by Aimes. Klein, *Slavery*, p. 199.

<sup>26</sup> Resumen general de los esclavos existentes en esta Provincia formado por Jurisdicciones con arreglo al censo de Enero de 1871, Havana, November 15, 1872, AHN, Ultramar, leg. 4882, tomo 3, exp. 39.

<sup>27</sup> Klein, *Slavery*, p. 105. See also Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen*, p. 100.

<sup>28</sup> The most emphatic and well-documented statement of this view is in Moreno, *El ingenio*.

these characteristics may lead to new errors—to characterizations that too rigidly reflect an ideal type. By concentrating on the logic of the enterprise, one may overlook aspects of its reality.

Manuel Moreno Fraginals, for example, has written that plantation slaves “did not know economic, personal, or family responsibility because they lacked an economy of their own.”<sup>29</sup> Because of radical “deculturation” under slavery, he argues, abolition was “traumatic” for many of them.<sup>30</sup> “Deculturation” and the denial of a personal economy to the slaves may indeed have been the aims of planters, and may have conformed to the logic of capitalistic slave plantations. But this does not mean that they were everywhere actually achieved. That the experiences of enslavement, transportation to the New World, and forced labor were devastating, no one can doubt. But that they left most slaves incapable of recreating a cultural life is unlikely.<sup>31</sup> In the Cuban case, patterns of provision ground cultivation, lodging, and family life created experiences and expectations that would later help to provide the basis for an active involvement by many slaves in the process of emancipation.

Though slaveholders in Cuba and elsewhere in the Caribbean had traditionally granted provision grounds or *conucos* to their slaves, on which the slaves were to grow their own food, the economics of the sugar boom made it profitable for masters to put land into cane and to import food to feed the slaves.<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, *conucos* were apparently revived and encouraged even on large estates in the mid-nineteenth century by advocates of “better treatment” as a means of tying slaves to the plantation, improving their health and longevity, and discouraging sabotage by fire.<sup>33</sup> The key to such changes was not simply whether religion or custom granted a limited right of private property to the slave, or even whether imported food was cheaper than home-produced, but whether, all things considered, it was convenient for the plantation to have a portion of its food produced relatively independently by slaves. “All things considered”

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 45.

<sup>30</sup> Manuel Moreno Fraginals, “Aportes culturales y deculturación,” in Manuel Moreno Fraginals, ed. *África en América Latina* (Paris: UNESCO, and Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1977), p. 22.

<sup>31</sup> See Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976).

<sup>32</sup> Knight, *Slave Society*, p. 68.

<sup>33</sup> Moreno, *El ingenio* 2: 89.

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would include the reactions of planters to the behavior of slaves—their skills, their work habits under different situations, their resistance—as well as slaves' responses to planters' behavior. The analysis thus shifts away from the "rights" granted under Catholic slavery and toward the circumstances under which, despite a rigorous plantation regime, slaves did obtain access to land and were able to produce crops.

Records of purchases of animals and produce from slaves are common in surviving plantation account books of the second half of the nineteenth century. Goods sold included maize, yucca, *malanga*, *boniato*, plantains, and pigs.<sup>34</sup> Contemporary observers also suggested that the cultivation of provision grounds was a very general phenomenon.<sup>35</sup> To be sure, the slaves' actual experience of selling goods to the plantation was often a travesty of the free market for the bargaining power of the two sides was hardly equal. James O'Kelly witnessed one such sale in the 1870s and noted that "the use of the word 'buy' in the transaction should be seen as a euphemism."

One of the superintendents of the estate called out a woman's name. Almost immediately a wretched-looking creature advanced to where the superintendent was standing, and, taking up a position of absolute subservience, with head bowed and eyes cast down, awaited in silence the further wishes of the superior being before whom in spirit she was prostrated. She had not long to wait. A pig was wanted, she had one ready to be killed; it was to be delivered up, and, in return, she would receive two dollars. The poor creature curtsied awkwardly, mumbled an assent, and the "purchase" was completed.<sup>36</sup>

O'Kelly, an abolitionist, minimized the autonomy allowed to the slave. But his moral point about the humiliation of the woman involved does not contradict an economic and social interpretation of the significance of production for sale. Cultivation of provision

<sup>34</sup> See the purchases recorded in the Libro Mayor del ingenio Nueva Teresa (Años 1872-86), ANC, ML, 11245; in the Libro que contiene documentos del estado general de la Finca Mapos y del ingenio de elaborar azúcar, Desde 1881-1884, APSS, Valle-Iznaga, leg. 24; and in the Libro Diario del Ingenio Delicias, 1872-82, ANC, ML, 10802.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Francisco Acosta y Albear, *Memoria sobre el estado actual de Cuba* (Havana: A. Pegó, 1874), p. 14, and Jacobo de la Pezuela, *Diccionario geográfico, estadístico, histórico de la Isla de Cuba* (Madrid: Mellado, 1863) 1: 214.

<sup>36</sup> James O'Kelly, *The Mambi-Land or, Adventures of a Herald Correspondent in Cuba* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1874), p. 59.

grounds represented opportunity for initiative, relatively unsupervised labor, and a source of funds—a limited “personal economy.”<sup>37</sup>

The point is made not to suggest special generosity on the part of the master, but rather to emphasize that such exchanges required masters to deal with slaves in terms of money rather than strictly in terms of forced labor. The slave who grew vegetables for sale, or who was given a piglet to raise on halves with the plantation, learned something of the market economy, however miserably he or she was compensated for the effort. And what slaves thus learned could affect the way they would behave during and after emancipation.

A somewhat similar point could be made about the family. Moreno correctly points out the vulnerability of any marriage among slaves, the sexual imbalance in the slave population, and the prison-like regimen of the plantation. But he goes on to argue that, because of these, “a family unit within the *ingenio* was a foreign body, naturally rejected,” basing his argument on the objective conditions of life for slaves and on his claim that slaves knew no economic, personal, or family responsibility.<sup>38</sup> However, one should not confuse the absence of legal marriage with an absence of perceived family responsibility, nor assume that hostile conditions made the formation of families impossible. Evidence from other societies challenges both of these views.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, there is direct evidence of slave family ties, even on Cuban sugar estates.

A predominant symbol of the Cuban slave plantation at its height was the *barracón*, a prison-like barracks, often described as segregating males and females. Such an institution, quite obviously, would strongly discourage family formation. But *barracones*, large and expensive to construct, were principally confined to the developed mills of Havana and Matanzas. They were rarer in Santa Clara, and absent in Santiago de Cuba and Puerto Príncipe. Even in the advanced zone of Cárdenas in Matanzas, of the 221 *ingenios* existing in 1850, a slight majority retained the old *bohío* or hut system.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> For a more general discussion of the importance of provision grounds, see Sidney W. Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing, 1974), chap. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Moreno, *El ingenio* 2: 45.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976), and B. W. Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807-1834* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

<sup>40</sup> See Juan Pérez de la Riva, *El barracón y otros ensayos* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1975), particularly “El barracón de ingenio en la época esclavista,”

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A slaveholder in 1840 portrayed one such group of *bohíos*. His account was biased by an obvious self-interest in the matter and by his romanticism. The details he invokes in his description of the two-room huts that the slaves built for themselves are nonetheless significant.

Where they live is in the parlor. There the blacks do almost everything, there they have a fire burning constantly, there they cook, there they eat, there they talk. The bedroom serves only to hold the clothes chest, to hang straw baskets with God knows how many things inside, to put away the baskets in which they rock their small children, and for the godchildren and relatives to sleep in, because the masters of the hut stay in the parlor.<sup>41</sup>

In such circumstances, the institution of the family was clearly not a "foreign body naturally rejected." Indeed, this description portrays relations of kinship and godparenthood beyond the units of parents and children. None of these had to be legally sanctioned to be recognized and valued by slaves, through in fact baptismal records of slave children do sometimes list godparents.<sup>42</sup>

Even within *barracones*, slaves found ways to make their cells less prison-like, and the sexes were not invariably separated. They were still frightful places to live—squalid, smoky, confining. But contemporary descriptions of them reflect the existence of both family relations and a private economy. Álvaro Reynoso, in 1861, noted that "in these rooms the blacks establish divisions and subdivisions, they construct lofts or granaries to store their harvests."<sup>43</sup> Another

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pp. 15-74. Pérez de la Riva points out the ambiguities in the usage of the words *barracón* and *bohío*; in this discussion I have restricted the term *barracón* to barracks and *bohío* to huts, and used only evidence in which the reference of the observer is clear. On the geographical distribution of *barracones* see Moreno, *El ingenio* 2: 74-75.

<sup>41</sup> "Bohíos" (1840), in BNC, CC, C.M. Suárez R., tomo 6, no. 3.

<sup>42</sup> For instances of the presence of *padrinos* and grandparents at slave baptisms, see Libro 16 de Bautismos de Pardos y Morenos, Archivo Parroquial de la Iglesia Mayor del Espíritu Santo, Sancti Spiritus, Cuba. In many cases the father was listed as "no conocido"; in others he was named and the child was legitimate. For a listing of slaves' children from the *ingenio* Angelita along with their godparents, see Libro Diario del ingenio "Angelita" de la propiedad de Sr. J. A. Argudín, fol. 199, ANC, ML, 11536. Sixteen children baptized on June 13, 1870, are listed. All of the mothers who are identifiable from other records were Creole; all were between ages twenty and forty. Most *padrinos* and *madrinos* were also Creole, but a substantial number (ten out of thirty-two) were African (Lucumí or Gangá). One set of godparents was white, the man listed as French. It is not entirely clear what the status of the mother was in that instance.

<sup>43</sup> These observations by Reynoso are quoted by Francisco Pérez de la Riva in *La habitación rural en Cuba* (Havana: Editorial Lex, 1952), p. 69.

observer in 1875, horrified by the dampness and filth of these barracks, wrote, "In each of these pestiferous dungeons, a whole family lived in a condition more foul and degraded than any beasts of the field."<sup>44</sup>

It should by now be clear that the questions of mistreatment, private economy, and family are in some ways separable. Slaves could be cheated, yet participate in a money economy. They could be ill-housed, yet struggle to maintain families. They could be treated worse than beasts, yet not become like beasts.

These arguments are not meant to substitute a romantic image of cozy families in thatch-roofed huts for the devastating picture of deracinated individuals in squalid barracks. They are instead intended to convey a sense of the range of slave adaptations to even the worst circumstances. While a conscious policy of "good treatment" might ameliorate some of these circumstances, such intentions of planters were by no means a necessary precondition for initiatives by slaves, though some measures, such as balancing the sex ratio on an estate, would make family formation more likely.

By focusing on the dehumanizing conditions in the largest mills, one may capture the essence of capitalist, slave-based sugar production. If one portrays these conditions only in their starkest terms, however, it is not possible to understand fully the initiatives taken by slaves, their collective efforts, their creative use of small concessions. If one insists that family life was impossible within the *ingenio*, it is difficult to make sense of the efforts of slaves to purchase the freedom of their spouses and children. If one insists that plantation slaves lacked all economic responsibility and experience of private economic activity, it is difficult to see how they gathered the funds to make these purchases.

One should not fall into the error of making the exception seem ordinary, or exaggerating the "space," the room for initiative, the autonomy of slaves. The sex ratio was often unbalanced and families were under continual threat of disruption; *conuco* production was limited and vulnerable; acquiring capital was never easy; harsh phys-

<sup>44</sup> Frederick Trench Townshend, *Wild Life in Florida, with a Visit to Cuba* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1875), p. 195. Fredrika Bremer, a Swedish visitor to Cuba in 1851, also referred to the *barracón* of the *ingenio* Ariadna as having "one room for each family." Fredrika Bremer, *Cartas desde Cuba* (Havana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1980), p. 79.

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ical punishment damaged slaves as it damages all human beings. There is no way to know whether a numerical majority of rural slaves had provision grounds, or whether a majority established some kinds of family ties. Even if these were minority patterns, however, they were part of the cultural background that slaves drew upon in gaining freedom and took into freedom. They provided goals to be sought, even if such goals were not always achieved.

Despite the diverse situations in which slaves found themselves, the character of labor in sugar shaped the lives of Cuban slaves more than any other single factor. Even for urban slaves, knowledge of conditions on sugar estates to which they might be sent served as a form of discipline.<sup>45</sup> There was a kind of symmetry to the process whereby such infamous working conditions arose: the particular labor needs of sugar cultivation and processing were thought to require slave labor, and then the presence of slave labor on the estates reinforced the coercion to which all sugar workers were subject.

SUGAR. The process of sugar production varied widely in Cuba, from huge enterprises employing hundreds of slaves and producing thousands of tons of sugar per season to tiny mills with a few slaves each, producing less than one hundred tons. In 1860 Cuban sugar plantations (using the term to apply to the combination of land and mill) included some 1,382 *ingenios* as well as several hundred very small *trapiches*, the latter generally producing for local consumption. Manuel Moreno Fraginals has categorized the *ingenios* of 1860 in three major groups: animal-powered, with an average production capacity of 113 tons of sugar per grinding season, of which there were 359 (excluding the very small ones); semimechanized, using steam engines, with an average production capacity of 411 tons, of which there were 889; and mechanized, using steam power and more advanced processing technology (including vacuum pans), with an average production capacity of 1,176 tons, of which there were 64. Despite their enormous capacity, the mechanized mills were still responsible for only about 15 percent of total production in the island in 1860. The animal-powered mills produced only 8 percent. It was

<sup>45</sup> Juan Francisco Manzano, an urban slave of the early nineteenth century, vividly depicted in his autobiography the practice of punishing urban slaves by sending them to an *ingenio*, and the terror this inspired. See Edward J. Mullen, ed., *The Life and Poems of a Cuban Slave: Juan Francisco Manzano, 1797-1854* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1981), p. 93.