

Migration and Culture: A Case Study of Cuba, 1750-1900

Franklin W. Knight

The Johns Hopkins University

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Summary: Migration and Culture: A Case Study of Cuba, 1750-1900

With very few exceptions most of the world's nation states result from the incessant migration of various groups of people. This is especially so in the Americas. The case of Cuba provides an opportunity to chart the unpredictable relations between migration and culture through several centuries. The paper focuses on the period between 1750 and the end of Spanish colonialism in Cuba when large immigrants groups transformed the society and culture of the island. It will focus on the immigration of Africans via the transatlantic slave trade, of Asians who arrived as coerced contract laborers, and as well as the basic group of free white immigrants principally from Spain. Immigration transformed the demographic composition and material culture of Cuba even as it reciprocally revolutionized the agriculture and commerce of the island. As such migration and culture made Cuba more like the other Caribbean territories but identical to none.

Migration and Culture Change.

The intimate connection between migration and culture which are enormously dynamic phenomena are best examined across the Americas in general and the Caribbean in particular. Yet the task is far from easy. All human societies continuously undergo change and those changes tend to accelerate, sometimes with profound transformational consequences, once populations relocate en masse or experience significantly rapid inflows or outflows of new members. The construction of modern American societies illustrates a clear example of the transportation, transformation and transmutation of both society and cultures largely because of the decimation of the original inhabitants by the early intruders. The indigenous American societies were profoundly affected by the traumatic consequences of the environmental and ecological reconstruction of the hemisphere and their environment after the advent of Christopher

Columbus.¹ Rapidly changing morbidity and mortality rates unquestionably reduced the capacity of the indigenous peoples to repel successfully or absorb effectively the intrusion of the Europeans in their hemisphere. In the Caribbean the phenomenal decimation of the indigenous population did not prevent a significant native impact on the newly-created local culture of the intrusive foreign populations and all subsequent colonial American cultures would reflect this. All American populations therefore reflect in language and in daily habits much that has been borrowed from the indigenous inhabitants of this hemisphere.²

Modern American societies have been significantly transformed by migration. Post-1492 migration flows for the Americas may be reconstructed with relative ease although the precise figures remain a matter of continuing dispute.³ By the later eighteenth century the Spanish were beginning to construct reliable and sometimes sophisticated censuses –usually in the form of *padrones*

¹ . The impact on indigenous societies of the European penetration of the Americas has a large and growing bibliography. A good start is Alfred W. Crosby, Jr. The Columbian Exchange. Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492 (Westport: Greenwood Publishing, 1972); Alfred W. Crosby, Ecological Imperialism. The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Philip D. Curtin, Death by Migration. Europe's Encounter with the Tropical World in the Nineteenth Century (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Philip D. Curtin, The World and the West. The European Challenge and the Overseas Response in the Age of Empire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); J. H. Elliott, The Old World and the New, 1492-1650 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); and William M. Denevan, editor, The Native Population of the Americas in 1492 (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1976).

² . For an estimate of the indigenous population of the Americas and their ecological impact see William M. Denevan, "The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492" in Annals of the Association of American Geographers, Volume 82 Number 3 (September 1992), pp. 369-385.

³ . Peter Boyd-Bowan, Índice geobiográfico de cincuenta mil pobladores de la América hispánica (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1985); Lucio Mijares, "La población, la sociedad" in Historia General de España y América (Madrid: Ediciones Rialp, S.A. 1985), pp. 139- 221. Ida Altman, "Emigrants and Society: An approach to the Background of Colonial Spanish America" in Comparative Studies in Society and History, Volume 30, Number 1 (January, 1988), pp. 170-190; Ida Altman, Emigrants and Society. Extremadura and America in the Sixteenth Century (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Ida Altman and James Horn, editors, "To Make America" European Emigration in the Early Modern Period (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Ida Altman, Transatlantic Ties in the Spanish Empire. Brihuega, Spain & Puebla, Mexico, 1560-1620 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000). Nicolás Sánchez Albornoz, The Population of Latin America: A History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

(registrations) – of their American-based populations that indicated remarkable concreteness and specificity. The quality and frequency of census collection would improve tremendously during the nineteenth century as the Spanish became increasingly preoccupied with matters of revenue and territorial defense.⁴

Cultural change, by contrast, is a lot more elusive and less commonly understood.⁵ The definition of culture has not produced general scholarly consensus, especially since it may be employed in quite different ways. Three tangentially connected definitions of culture currently exist. One pertains to the natural sciences. Some researchers associate culture with the preparation of cells or bacteria developed for medical or other scientific purposes. This connotation, although not entirely irrelevant, is not applicable in the present circumstances.

The two most useful definitions of culture have to do with agriculture and social custom. Agriculturalists and social scientists tend to hew closer to the etymological origins of the word with connotations that either deal with cultivation of plants and animals or with patterns of social conduct. Both connotations have direct relationship to the history of Cuba between 1750 and 1900. In the realm of agriculture this era represents the Cuban participation in the sugar revolutions.⁶

⁴ . They may be seen, for example, in Kenneth Kiple, Blacks in Colonial Cuba, 1774-1899 (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1976).

⁵ . Still some very good studies have been produced. See, Eric Wolf, Sons of the Shaking Earth. The People of Mexico and Guatemala – their Land, History, and Culture (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959); George Foster, Culture and Conquest; America's Spanish Conquest (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Samuel M. Wilson, editor, The Indigenous People of the Caribbean (Gainesville: The University of Florida Press, 1997)

⁶ Franklin W. Knight, The Caribbean. The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism 2nd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp.120-158.

Many new plants were also migrating from one place to another along with people, including coffee and other food and ornamental crops.⁷ This was also the period in which Cubans society underwent some marked transformations described so very well by Allan Kuethe in Cuba, 1753-1815 and Sherry Johnson, in The Social Transformation of Eighteenth Century Cuba.⁸ The Caribbean sugar revolutions were, of course, fundamental transformations in every aspect of society and culture. As Higman describes it, “The six central elements of the sugar revolution are commonly regarded as a swift shift from diversified agriculture to sugar monoculture, from production on small farms to large plantations, from free to slave labor, from sparse to dense settlement, from white to black populations, and from low to high value per caput output.”⁹

The characteristics that Higman describes were most applicable to the early sugar plantation systems of the Caribbean as they developed in Barbados, St. Kitts, Nevis, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Jamaica and Saint-Domingue.¹⁰ Because of its belated participation in the Caribbean sugar revolutions, the Cuban example – as did other local late participants such as Puerto Rico, the

⁷ . Miguel Ángel Puig-Samper and Mercedes Valero, Historia del Jardín Botánico de la Habana (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1999(?))

⁸ . Allan Kuethe, Cuba, 1753-1815. Crown, Military, and Society (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986); Sherry Johnson, The Social Transformation of Eighteenth Century Cuba (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2001). See also, Franklin W. Knight, Slave Society in Cuba during the Nineteenth Century (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), pp.3-46; Manuel Moreno Fraginals, El ingenio: complejo económico social cubano del azúcar 3 volumes. (Havana : Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1978); and María del Carmen Barcia, Gloria García and Eduardo Torres-Cuevas, editors, Historia de Cuba vol i. La colonia evolución socioeconómico y formación nacional de los orígenes hasta 1867 (Havana: Editora Política, 1994).

⁹ . B. W. Higman, “The sugar revolution” in Economic History Review, LVIII, 2 (2000) pp. 213-236. The quotation is from page 213.

¹⁰ . The migration of sugar production may be followed in Stuart B. Schwartz, editor, Tropical Baylons. Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450-1680 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

Dominican Republic, Trinidad and British Guiana -- represented a variation in the classical development of the Caribbean sugar plantation complex.

The Cuban Case:

Until 1750 Cuba was still in many ways, typical of the Spanish Caribbean frontier society. As John McNeill describes it, "Cuban society reflected Spanish society a good deal more than did most parts of Spanish America... Titled landowners were very rare in the eighteenth century... a landed aristocracy of sorts decorated Cuban society, ranch owners and sugar mill owners for the most part; but few of these owned large tracts, and few lived handsomely off their holdings... the mass of white rural population worked as landless laborers or was self-employed."¹¹ In the 1750s Cuba, then, was closer to a slaveholding society than the mature slave societies that existed elsewhere in the Caribbean and found its highest development in Barbados, Jamaica or Saint-Domingue. The population of the entire island of Cuba approximated 160,000, of which the slave population might have represented only about 25 percent. Apart from Havana and its surroundings, the interior of the island was sparsely settled. It would have resembled the sort of society described by Richard Turits and Teresita Martínez Vergne for the Dominican Republic in the later nineteenth century.¹² Sugar production absorbed a relatively large number of slaves but the ingenios (sugar mills) in the neighborhood of Havana remained comparatively small with an

¹¹ . John Robert McNeill, Atlantic Empires of France and Spain. Louisbourg and Havana, 1700-1763 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), p. 42.

¹² . Richard Lee Turits, Foundations of Despotism. Peasants, the Trujillo Regime, and Modernity in Dominican History (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Teresita Martínez Vergne, Nation and Citizen in the Dominican Republic, 1880-1916 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005)

average of only about 45 slaves per unit. That would have been normal for a small water-powered mill in Hispaniola in the early sixteenth century.¹³ Other Cuban slaves worked at constructing the military fortifications around Havana, as well as in the copper mines of El Cobre near Santiago de Cuba. As nominal royal slaves those living in El Cobre would enjoy some unusual privileges.¹⁴ But all that would change dramatically after the middle of the eighteenth century. This paper focuses on the massive waves of migrants who catalyzed Cuban society after 1750 with an emphasis on the political culture that developed from that experience.

European migration.

Large-scale civilian migration from Europe did not play an important role in the social and cultural development of Cuba between 1511 and 1750. This is not to suggest the lack of migrants but rather to indicate their relative paucity as well as their similarity to the host group. Immigration did not fundamentally affect the social basis of the political and economic culture. Nevertheless, Cuba was less lethargic than outlined in McNeill's careful, interesting and insightful study. Havana was not only one of the largest cities in the western hemisphere but as the important strategic nodal point for Spain and its American empire after 1580 it had acquired characteristics befitting its status as a significant fortified colonial port city. One of the consequences of this importance would be the semi-permanent deployment of thousands of soldiers and sailors in the military

¹³ . Troy Floyd, *The Columbus Dynasty in the Caribbean, 1492-1526* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973), pp. 224-225; Genaro Rodríguez Morel, "The Sugar Economy of Española in the Sixteenth Century" in Schwartz, *Tropical Baylons*, pp. 85-114.

¹⁴ . María Elena Díaz, *The Virgin, the King, and the Royal Slaves of El Cobre. Negotiating Freedom in Colonial Cuba, 1670-1780*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

establishments constructed in Havana to safeguard the bullion of the empire temporarily lodged before its ongoing transit to Spain. The vicissitudes of war in the Atlantic theater would impact the local population in a number of ways. The regular rotation of the overwhelmingly single males in the military continued, augmented throughout the nineteenth century by the expanding revolutionary wars on the mainland and later in Cuba between 1868 and 1898.¹⁵ Beginning with the administration of the Conde de O'Reilly in the mid 1760s many retired soldiers were allowed to remain in Cuba and an increasing proportion of them opted to do so until the end of Spanish colonialism in 1898¹⁶. Imperial re-adjustments after the Seven Years War (1756-63) also accelerated the civilian population increase of Cuba as the entire population of Spanish Florida was evacuated to Havana and its environs. Paralleling these regional transfers was a steady stream of normal immigrants from Spain and the Canary Islands, an exodus from the peninsular that has been meticulously examined by Rosario Márquez Macías.¹⁷ These immigrants helped stimulate the social transformation not only of the city of Havana but also the entire island of Cuba. By the 1790s the Cuban population exceeded 272,000 and the pattern of society and culture would

¹⁵. For military activities during the nineteenth century see, Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, Empire and Antislavery. Spain, Cuba and Puerto Rico, 1833-1878. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999); Luis Martínez-Fernández, Torn Between Empires. Economy, Society, and Patterns of Political thought in the Hispanic Caribbean, 1840-1878 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1994); Louis A. Pérez, Jr. Cuba Between Empires, 1878-1902 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983); and John Lawrence Tone, War and Genocide in Cuba, 1895-1898 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

¹⁶. Alejandro O'Reilly was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1722 and along with many other Irish Catholics went to Spain to defend the Church and Spain. He was a distinguished military officer who saw service in Louisiana, Cuba and Puerto Rico. Married to the sister of Luis de Las Casas who became governor of Cuba in the 1790s, O'Reilly served as Captain-General of Cuba but died in Cadiz in 1794.

¹⁷. Rosario Márquez Macías, La emigración Española a América (1765-1824) (Oviedo: Universidad de Oviedo, n. d).

expand geometrically during the course of the nineteenth century. Cuba had suddenly gained attention as a locale for economic opportunity and many Spanish and non-Spanish emigrants went there to seek their fortunes.

The change in population influenced a change in social culture. By 1790 Cuba already boasted a titled nobility of twenty persons, a fourfold increase over the number in 1760. The titled nobility ranked at the top of the social elites as well as the commercial and administrative elites. They used their wealth and influence to purchase supernumerary captaincies and colonelcies both in the regular army and the colonial militia. Cubans held a majority of positions in the local garrison by 1800 as well as a majority of positions in the municipal government. Gonzalo O'Farrill (1754-1831), born in Havana, rose to be lieutenant-general of the Spanish army and minister of war. Cuban born Joaquín Beltrán de Santa Cruz y Cárdenas, spent seven years at the Spanish court and returned with the title of Conde de Santa Cruz de Mopós, as well as a brigadier in the regular army, and sub-inspector-general for the army in Cuba. Both achievements were singularly distinguished.¹⁸

To a greater extent than elsewhere in the Caribbean, Cuba's diversified white population included peasants and landless laborers; artisans, construction workers, shopkeepers, import and export merchants, prostitutes, butchers, salters, stevedores, ditch diggers, tailors; a bureaucratic class serving the city, colony and empire; a professional class of officers in the army and navy, lawyers,

¹⁸ See Franklin W. Knight, "Spanish American Creole Society in Cuba and the Rise of American Nationalism", *Primer Congreso Internacional de Historia Económica, y Social de la Cuenca del Caribe, 1763-1898* (San Juan Puerto Rico: Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y El Caribe, 1992), pp. 685-708.

doctors, chemists, priests, scribes, ship captains and university professors.¹⁹ The social and occupational complexity in Cuba reflected the fact that it was a longstanding settler society of great strategic importance in the Spanish imperial system. It served as the most important Caribbean fortified harbor, the permanent location of thousands of troops, and, after 1763, the locus for experimental imperial administrative reforms introduced by Charles III.²⁰ Cuba also had a population that, more than elsewhere in the region, exploded between 1774 and 1841. In 1774 the island of Cuba had 171,620 inhabitants of which slaves comprised a modest 22.8 percent. By 1840, however, the population exceeded a million inhabitants and the slave sector had grown to 43.3 percent of the total population.²¹ Equally important, the white population became relatively smaller for a very short period with profound psychological ramifications for the society at large. The introduction of the sugar revolution radically transformed Cuban economy, demography and culture.²²

¹⁹ See, Sherry Johnson, The Social Transformation of Eighteenth Century Cuba (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2001); Allan J. Kuethe, "Havana in the Eighteenth Century" in Franklin W. Knight and Peggy K. Liss, editors, Atlantic Port Cities. Economy, Culture, and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650-1850 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), pp. 13-39; and Franklin W. Knight, The Caribbean. The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism 2nd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 227-233.

²⁰ Allan J. Kuethe, Cuba, 1753-1815. Crown, Military, and Society (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986)

²¹ Franklin W. Knight, Slave Society in Cuba during the Nineteenth Century (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), p. 22.

²² Manuel Moreno Fraginals, El Ingenio. Complejo económico social cubano del azúcar 3 tomos. (La Habana Ciencias Sociales, 1978); 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); Gloria García, "El auge de la sociedad esclavista en Cuba" and Eduardo Torres-Cuevas, "La sociedad esclavista y sus contradicciones" in Historia de Cuba. La colonia. Evolución socioeconómica y formación nacional de los orígenes hasta 1867 (La Habana: Instituto de Historia de Cuba, 1994), pp. 225-313.

This transformation affected both urban and rural areas of the island, but was especially noticeable in and around the port city of Havana.²³

By the end of the eighteenth century the city of Havana grew physically and almost doubled the population it had at mid-century. By 1790 the city and its immediate hinterland had a population approaching 100,000, the third largest urban density in the Americas and far exceeding that of any of its Caribbean rivals. At that time, Kingston counted a mere 23,508 inhabitants; Cap Français around 15,000, Port-au-Prince a little more than 6,200; and Basse-Terre and Point à-Pitre 9,000 and 13,000 respectively.

Havana had a university established in 1728, and by 1840 a rich and varied urban cultural life that was not quite matched by its neighboring Caribbean cities and towns. Anomalies certainly arose among Caribbean urban populations. Although figures are not precise for most towns and the figures fluctuated depending on the time of the year, some observations are in order. Havana probably had a larger number of ecclesiastical and military-cum-naval persons than the other Caribbean towns. It was, as we have indicated, a garrison city as well as a major depository for commodities awaiting the convoys to Spain. Sherry Johnson claims that in the 1770s “between one in two and one in three of the adult males walking Havana’s streets was a peninsular soldier.”²⁴ French and English Caribbean towns did not have the permanent military garrisons that were a prominent feature of Havana, although some, like Bermuda, Kingston, Antigua

²³ . Mercedes Santa Cruz, Condesa de Merlin, *La Habana*. Translated from the original French by Amalia E. Bacardí. (Madrid: Chronocolor, 1981 [1842]); Joseph L. Scarpaci, Roberto Segre, Mario Coyula, *Havana: Two Faces of the Antillean Metropolis*. Revised Edition. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002)

²⁴ Johnson, *The Social Transformation of Cuba*, p. 58.

and St. Lucia did have large naval installations. On the other hand many Caribbean towns had far more non-whites proportionally than did Havana.²⁵ Part of this resulted from the function of the various towns – some like Havana, being the principal bureaucratic center and others not. During the nineteenth century the Cuban population would increase, despite the depredations of incessant warfare, so that by 1899 the island counted more than a million and a half inhabitants. By that time the slave system was abolished. The non-white population would account for about 33 percent of the total population, boosted slightly by the inclusion of the Chinese, a group previously designated as “white” by the Spanish.

The constant influx of white people from the peninsula, from the Canary Islands, from Louisiana and Florida after their cession to France and England respectively, as well as thousands of refugees from Saint-Domingue (after the slave uprising in 1791) and from the Spanish mainland after 1821 meant that Cuba retained the pronounced characteristics and culture of an overseas European settlement colony despite the conversion to a slave society during the nineteenth century. Economic progress, however, depended heavily on the importation of laborers, first from Africa and then from Asia. These immigrants would also affect social mores as well as the economy.

The African migration.

If the white population increase in Cuba was impressive after the 1760s the African and African-Creole sector increased even more dramatically. In

²⁵ Franklin W. Knight and Peggy K. Liss, Editors, Atlantic Port Cities. Economy, Culture, and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650-1850 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

1774 almost one of every two Cubans was non-white; and one of every five was enslaved. By 1841 the population of the island exceeded a million and the slave population increased from about 44,000 to more than 400,000, accounting for slightly more than 43 percent of the total. In two generations the non-white sector – slaves as well as free – of the society had become the majority.²⁶ Significantly almost one in every two Cubans was enslaved in 1841.

African immigrants, introduced as slaves, comprised the largest components of the steady population increase in Cuba until the 1860s.²⁷ Cuba imported more than 49,000 slaves during a period of free trade, between 1763 and 1788. Between 1789 and 1804 more than 101,000 Africans arrived in Cuba at a rate exceeding 6,700 slaves per year. Between 1805 and 1820 another 185,807 Africans arrived in Cuba, equivalent to 12,387 slaves per year despite the legal abolition of the British transatlantic slave trade in 1807. In 1820 Spain accepted £20,000,000 and agreed with Great Britain to terminate the slave trade to Cuba. After that date the slave trade was technically illegal. Nevertheless, by 1833 another 126,000 Africans were brought to the island. Altogether, more than 600,000 Africans arrived in Cuba during the nineteenth century, accentuating the consciousness of Africa and raising the fearsome specter of another Haiti.²⁸

Africans not only revitalized Cuban culture but were instrumental in transforming its agriculture. Africans were essential for the expansion of the

²⁶ . Franklin W. Knight, Slave Society in Cuba during the Nineteenth Century (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970), p. 22.

²⁷ . Gloria García, “El auge de la sociedad esclavista en Cuba” in Historia de Cuba, la Colonia, pp. 225-264, and Eduardo Torres-Cuevas, “La sociedad esclavista y sus contradicciones”, in Historia de Cuba, la Colonia, pp. 265-313.

²⁸ . The specter of the Haitian revolution would haunt the Americas after 1804. See David P. Geggus, ed. The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic world (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2001).

sugar production complex across the island. Slaves formed a viable sub-sector of the population with marked differentiation of occupational function, and regional division but with significant communication across legal and color lines. Despite the legally rigid segmentation based on race and occupation, Caribbean societies could not afford the luxury of an operationally rigid or inflexible caste structure. Social necessities excluded that. No Caribbean society was completely self-sufficient. In no society were the whites sufficient to provide all required services. In the Caribbean Cuba came closest to the conventional European settler model of society, nevertheless it failed to provide the sort of occupational differentiation that completely satisfied the growing needs of a dynamic community.

Occupations and skills were of necessity randomly distributed. No group was sufficient unto itself. Mutual needs forced a sort of crude integration in the cities that extended from patterns of living to the effective distribution of services. The pattern of occupational diversity that Anne Pérotin-Dumon described for Guadeloupe around the end of the eighteenth century was probably fairly characteristic of much of the rest of the population across the region.²⁹ In Guadeloupe she found a black privateer ship captain, many black sailors, black ship carpenters, hairdressers, dressmakers, schoolteachers and small shopkeepers but no non-whites among the goldsmiths, apothecaries, and large

²⁹ Anne Pérotin-Dumon, "Cabotage, Contraband, and Corsairs: The Port Cities of Guadeloupe and their Inhabitants, 1650-1800" in Knight and Liss, eds. *Atlantic Port Cities*, pp. 58-86. See also, Anne Pérotin-Dumon, *La ville aux îles La ville dans l'île. Basse-Terre et Point-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe, 1650-1820* (Paris: Karthala, 2000).

shopkeepers. Spanish law excluded non-whites from the professions or service in the upper layers of the imperial bureaucracy.³⁰

Between 1791 and 1841 the free non-white population in Cuba had increased nearly threefold, paralleling the overall population increase of more than three percent per year. As the slave trade diminished after 1850 the proportion of mulatto among the African-based population would increase; and by 1860 the Spanish authorities were replacing the previous distinction between *pardo* (Mulatto) and *moreno* (black) with the undifferentiated classification of *gente de color* (colored person).

According to the statistical compilation of Jacobo de la Pezuela in the 1840s, non-whites showed an amazing versatility and industry over a wide range of occupations.³¹ They featured prominently in the lower skilled and non-skilled occupations as might be expected of people who were required to do manual and menial labor – bakers, barbers, bricklayers, carpenters, daily laborers in industry and agriculture, hatters, house painters, masons, muleteers, musicians, potters, saddle makers, sawyers, shoemakers, silversmiths, tailors, water carriers, and night watchmen. Women dominated dressmaking, clothes washing and the domestic services. Very few non-whites were listed among merchants, skilled technicians in the sugar industry or with the railroads, or as teachers, fishermen, *mayorales*, or supervisors of slaves (which was illegal), or as cattle

³⁰. Franklin W. Knight, "Cuba" in David Cohen and Jack P. Greene, Neither Slave Nor Free. The Freedmen of African descent in the Slave Societies of the New World (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1972), pp. 278-308.

³¹. Jacobo de la Pezuela, Diccionario geográfico, estadístico, histórico de la isla de Cuba, 4 vols. (Madrid: Mellado, 1863-66),

dealers. By law non-whites were forbidden in the priesthood, the military, the police, or to serve as bookkeeper on estates.

Non-whites comprised an integral, absolutely indispensable sector of the Cuban population and although the increasing sensibility about what constituted *lo cubano* during the nineteenth century indicated a growing hostility to blacks, the society could no longer define itself as Hispanic in the way the Dominican Republic tried during the Trujillo regime of the twentieth century. Instead, Cubans would retreat from the extreme forms of discrimination and segregation that afflicted the neighboring United States of America.

The Asian immigrants

Chinese migration to Cuba falls within a long tradition of emigration across Asia and eventually to the Americas.³² The initial impetus for Chinese migrants derived from the desperate quest of Cuban sugar producers to find an adequate source of manual laborers for the sugar estates during the difficult transition from slavery to wage labor in the nineteenth century. Between 1847 and 1874 some 125,000 Chinese laborers entered the island under written contracts that guaranteed their repatriation at the end of the stipulated period of engagement.³³ As with subsequent Chinese immigrants, the great majority came from Canton in China and as imported manual laborers they suffered from the attitudes that had previously been part of the experience with African slavery on the island. In 1874

³² , Lawrence W, Crissman, "The Segmentary structure of urban overseas Chinese Communities" in *MAN*, New Series Vol 2 Number 2 (June 1967): 185-204. I am grateful to Professor William Rowe for bringing this article to my attention.

³³ . See Lisa Yun and Ricardo René Laremont, "Chinese Coolies and African Slaves in Cuba, 1847-74" in *Journal of Asian American Studies*, Vol. 4:2 (June 2001), pp. 99-122. See also the excellent study by Lisa Yun, *The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers and African Slaves in Cuba* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008)

the Chinese government interrupted the migration of contract laborers. After a hiatus, a second phase of Chinese immigration coincided with the history of the Republic, between 1902 and 1959. Finally the history of the Cuban Chinese Diaspora under the Cuban Revolution severely challenged, but signally failed to eradicate the notions of race, ethnicity and identity that had constituted such a fundamental part of the ongoing Chinese experience in Cuba.

Farmhands for sugar planters, 1847-1874. The origins of Chinese immigration to Cuba fall squarely within the wider context of Cuban, Caribbean and world history of the nineteenth century. For Cuba and the wider Caribbean the problem resided with the maintenance or expansion of the regional sugar industry in the light of the English abolition of their component of the transatlantic slave trade in 1807 and then the abolition of their slave systems in 1838.³⁴ In short it had its origin in the regional quest of new farmhands for sugar plantation owners to replace the previous African slaves. Chinese immigrants facilitated the transition from slave to wage labor across the Caribbean, paralleling the arrival of Indians in some neighboring Caribbean territories. Not only did the English abolish their system of slavery worldwide, they also mounted an energetic campaign to replace slave labor by waged labor throughout the tropical Atlantic world. Cuba then faced a huge labor deficit at precisely the moment when it was undertaking

³⁴ For Cuba see Manuel Moreno Fraginals, El Ingenio complejo económico social cubano del azúcar 3 volumes. (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1978.); Franklin W. Knight, Slave Society in Cuba during the nineteenth century (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970); Instituto de Historia de Cuba, Historia de Cuba. La Colonia evolución socioeconómico y formación nacional de los orígenes hasta 1867 (Havana: Editora Política, 1994); Instituto de Historia, Historia de Cuba. Las Luchas por la independencia nacional y las transformaciones estructurales 1868-1898 (Havana: Editora Política, 1996); Laird W. Bergad, Cuban Rural Society in the Nineteenth Century. The Social and Economic History of Monoculture in Matanzas (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Rebecca J. Scott, Slave Emancipation in Cuba. The Transition to Free Labor, 1860-1899 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985);

its greatest agricultural expansion. Fortunately, that coincided with conditions abroad that created surplus populations in many areas. The nineteenth century represented the period of great international migrations.³⁵ Millions of Europeans crossed the Atlantic and peopled vast sections of the Americas. At the same time, as Walton Look Lai and others have demonstrated, Chinese and Indian emigrants were pouring out of their respective countries in vast numbers.³⁶ The Chinese went principally to Southeast Asia (as they had been doing for a very long time), but also to Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii, Tahiti, Western Samoa, Mauritius, as well as to the Americas.³⁷ Chinese immigrants dispersed themselves widely across the Americas. Apart from the United States and Canada, they went to Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Peru, Brazil, and several French, Dutch, and British Caribbean colonies.

As Cuba underwent its second series of sugar revolutions after the introduction of the railroads in 1837, the Cuban need for field labor was then considered acute. This need coincided with strongly centrifugal demographic forces in China at the time. But the complementarity of demand and supply had to contend with complex issues of international politics as well as the inescapable

³⁵ Thomas Sowell, Migrations and Cultures. A World View (New York: Basic Books, 1996); D. Eltis, "Free and Coerced trans-Atlantic Migration: Some Comparisons" in American Historical Review 88:1 (1983); 251-280; William H. McNeill and Ruth Adams, Eds. Human Migration: Patterns and Policies (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978); Roger Daniels, American Immigration. A Student Companion (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

³⁶ Walton Look Lai, Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar. Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies, 1838-1918 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); K. O. Laurence, A Question of Labour. Indentured Immigration into Trinidad and British Guiana, 1875-1917 (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1994); Nicolás Sánchez-Albornoz, The Population of Latin America. A History

³⁷ . Lawrence Crissman, "The segmentary structure of urban overseas Chinese communities." See also Yun, Coolie Speaks, pp. 14-35; and Evelyn Hu-Dehart, "The Chinese Diaspora" in The Asian Pacific American Heritage edited by George Leonard (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998),

“tyranny of distance”³⁸. Driven by the imperatives of the world sugar market Cuba urgently needed to increase its overall population during the nineteenth century. The preference in Cuba at that time was for white immigrants largely as a result of the pressures to end the transatlantic slave trade in Africans and of what Anthony Maingot has called the “terrified consciousness” of whites in the aftermath of the Haitian revolution.³⁹ Schemes to attract “white” Europeans proved unsatisfactory and so the Cubans had few options besides seeking farther afield for free laborers.⁴⁰ Once the Chinese were classified as “white” therefore fulfilling the legal requirements for acceptable immigrants, a number of schemes were put in motion to recruit Chinese males between the ages of sixteen and forty exclusively to work on Cuban sugar plantations for periods ranging from four to ten years.⁴¹

In approving the Cuba plan promoted by Pedro Zulueta, a former African slave trader, and his agent in Havana, Joaquín Arrieta, the Royal Order of July 3, 1847 noted that based on the experience with Chinese labor in the Philippines, “those Asiatics were docile, industrious, frugal, temperate, hardened to rural labor, especially in the cane fields, and accustomed to the rigorous climate of the country.” Moreover, it noted, “their labor at the moderate wage specified would

³⁸ The phrase, “tyranny of distance” is borrowed from the title of Geoffrey Blainey, The Tyranny of Distance. How Distance shaped Australia’s History (Melbourne: Sun Books, 196).

³⁹ Anthony Maingot, “Haiti and the terrified consciousness of the Caribbean” in Gert Oostindie, ed. Ethnicity in the Caribbean. Essays in Honor of Harry Hoetink (London: Macmillan Educational Ltd., 1996), pp. 53-80.

⁴⁰ See William Woodruff, Impact of Western Man: A Study of Europe’s Role in the World Economy, 1750-1960 (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1967), pp. 61-100. For evidence on the political discussion over Cuban immigration in the 1830s and 1840 see Archivo Histórico de la Nación, (Madrid) Sección de Ultramar, Subsección de Fomento, Legajos 94-102.

⁴¹ Juan Pérez de la Riva, “Documentos para la historia de las gentes sin historia. El tráfico de culies chinos” Revista de la Biblioteca Nacional José Martí, 6 (1965), 77-90.

repay the greater part of transporting them from such remote points.”⁴² In theory the Chinese entered their work contracts as fully free individuals and indeed considerable thought was given to their conditions of work. The contracts, however, bound the workers to seek paid employment in rural area. They were expected to repay the cost of their passage from China from their modest monthly wage, but they were entitled to free clothing, food, medical treatment and housing within barracks on the compound of their principal employment. In some case promises were made to supply a priest and a school. As the imports were all adult males, the plantations dispensed with the requirement for schooling and on most plantations the regular clergy, if any, attended to the spiritual needs of the Chinese along with all the other members of the plantation community.⁴³

Nevertheless, on their arrival in Cuba the immigrants found themselves virtually tied to the sugar estates under conditions that scarcely separated them from their fellow workers who were slaves. In the Cuban context of the nineteenth century the Chinese became subject to almost identical police measures used to manage and coerce slaves on the plantations. Asians who thought they were free wage laborers and that the terms of their contract allowed them to behave as such were rudely surprised on their arrival in Cuba.⁴⁴ Not only were they prohibited from changing masters or estates easily but they also found that their employers assumed that their position was identical to purchased

⁴² Duvon CloughCorbitt, *A Study of the Chinese in Cuba, 1847-1947* (Wilmore, Kentucky: Ashbury College, 1971), pp. 4-5

⁴³ Knight, *Slave Society in Cuba*, pp. 116-118.

⁴⁴ . See the depositions in Yun, *The Coolie Speaks* pp. 143-182.

slaves and hardly bothered to make any distinctions. Antonio Gallenga noted during his travel through Cuba in the early 1870s that no Cuban spoke of “hiring” a Chinese worker. Instead they bluntly admitted that they were going to “buy a chino.”⁴⁵ The promised minimal wage was further reduced by a number of stratagems such as compulsory savings that eventually disappeared, deductions for extended illness, or for refusing to work at nights.⁴⁶

The first contingent of Chinese contract laborers arrived in Havana on two vessels on June 3 and 12, 1847. Despite the long discussions over the need to have women and children, the first arrivals were exclusively males.⁴⁷ That pattern would characterize all Chinese immigration to Cuba before 1900. The first immigrant vessel, the Oquendo, carried 206 workers, having buried six at sea, and made the transit in 131 days after leaving the port of Amoy (currently Xiamen in Fujian Province). Many of the newly arrived were not in good physical condition. One died immediately on landing and a further six died shortly thereafter. The second vessel, The Duke of Argyle, made the crossing in 123 days and had an even worse experience. The ship started out with 400 Chinese, lost 35 at sea and on arrival found that 200 of the passengers were considered too feeble to be accepted and were quarantined for 8 days. After a week some 125 were still considered “too sick, too thin, or over age.”⁴⁸ The Junta de Fomento [Development Board], the official sponsoring arm of the government

⁴⁵ Anthony C. N. Gallenga, The Pearl of the Antilles (London: Chapman and Sons, 1873), p. 88

⁴⁶ AHN *Ultramar*, *Fomento*, leg. 94-102 especially Leg 102 (1876) folio 31: *Cónsul de España en Saigon al M. de Estado, 4 de septiembre de 1876*.

⁴⁷ Part of the reason for the predominance of males derived from the cultural practice of Chinese to leave their wives and children at home when they went abroad to work. As a result, more than ninety five percent of the Chinese arriving in Cuba before 1874 would be males.

⁴⁸ Corbitt, The Chinese, p. 6; José Baltar Rodríguez, Los Chinos de Cuba. Apuntes etnográficos, (Havana: Fundación Ortiz, 1997) pp. 13-14.

that paid 170 pesos each for the initial contingent, distributed the allocation in lots of ten to planters who promised to pay the workers between 2 and 4 pesos per month in wages while supplying the stipulated lodging, meals and clothes as they had previously done for their African slaves. Some important officials, including Captain General Leopoldo O'Donnell "bought" lesser numbers than the designated lots.

From the planter perspective, the work experience of the first immigrants was mixed. Some planters such as Urbano Feijóo de Sotomayor and Francisco Diago reported that the overall performance of the Chinese workers was satisfactory. Pedro Diago thought they possessed "all the strength, intelligence and good will that could be desired." Many others reported that the Chinese failed to live up to their expectations.⁴⁹ One Fernando y Pozo wrote that he and his colleagues found in his Chinese "very little disposition and no will to work in spite of the fact they have been given the best of treatment and punctual payment of wages." The firm of Moliner y Echarte reported that one of their Chinese workers killed another "and the rest were rancorous, poor workers, immoral, and too weak for the rigors of plantation labor. Francisco Pedroso lamented that:

I have used them at the easiest work on the farm and have observed that during the first months they were not very docile under the moderate discipline to which they were subjected. They were lax in their work, although their tasks were reasonable and they were well fed and religiously paid....they do not stand up under, nor are they fitted for, the

⁴⁹ Corbitt, The Chinese, pp.11.

difficult work of the farm. But this improvement that has been observed in their conduct is not sufficient to prove that their continued immigration would be useful, because the desired results are not obtained, and because their strength and constancy are inferior to that of the Africans.⁵⁰

Regardless of reservations of some planters and the noted deficiencies of the workers the need for manpower in Cuba was so great that thousands of Chinese were brought in the following years, reaching a total of 124,835 before the temporary termination of the traffic in 1874 during the Ten Years War in Cuba.⁵¹

By 1873 more than 338 ships from nineteen countries had participated in the transportation of Chinese workers to Cuba.⁵² Most of the later arrivals were loaded at Macao, and originated in Canton (now Guangzhou) in Guandong Province. In Havana and in other cities of Cuba, sales of “coolies” were conducted as though the slave trade had never been abolished – and indeed, many of the participants in the transport of Chinese had previously been slave traders.⁵³ While technically only the contracts were on sale, no one seemed especially concerned about that legal technicality. Chinese contract workers became an important segment of the labor force in the prime sugar producing areas of western Cuba.⁵⁴

Regardless of the close comparisons with the institution of slavery, however, Chinese workers were not legal slaves. They enjoyed legal recourses,

⁵⁰ Corbitt, *The Chinese*, p.9

⁵¹ Roland T. Ely, *Cuando reinaba su majestad el azúcar* 2nd edition. (Havana: Editorial Imagen Contemporánea, 2001), p. 608;.

⁵² Baltar Rodríguez, *Los Chinos*, pp. 18-19

⁵³ . Yun, *The Coolie Speaks*, p. 18

⁵⁴ Denise Helly, *Idéologie et ethnicité: Les Chinois Macao á Cuba, 1847-1886* (Montreal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montreal, 1979), pp. 142-143. Helly refers to these workers as “Chinese slaves.”

wages, and however deviously manipulated, a legally contracted period of servitude after which they were free either to return to their homeland or to settle down in Cuba. But the pejorative attitudes that formerly pertained to African workers at the lowest rung of the social hierarchy gradually reverted to the new Chinese contractees. Julia Louisa Woodruff visited Cuba in 1871 and compared her favorable reception from the African slaves on Santa Sofia plantation with that of the Chinese:

I do not remember that I ever elicited the slightest mark of interest or attention from the Chinese. These men appeared to be in a state of chronic sullenness; they persistently avoided meeting my eye, and emulated the hardness, inflexibility, and soullessness of the implements with which they labored. As they feel the weight and shame of bondage more than the Negroes, it is a comfort to think that they can look forward to a day of emancipation; for the coolies are bound for a term of eight years only during which time their servitude is severe enough, but at the end of which they are their own masters. It is also a comfort to know that their propensity for suicide operates as some check upon the worst forms of cruelty – one so often has to be glad, in this world, of things which, in happier circumstances, were fitter subjects for tears.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ W. M. L. Jay, *My Winter in Cuba* (New York: Dutton and Company, 1871) pp. 221-222 cited in Louis A. Pérez, Jr. Ed. *Slaves, Sugar, & Colonial Society. Travel Accounts of Cuba, 1801-1899* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1992), pp. 69-70.

The plantation slave system produced, as David Trotman has pointed out in his study of Trinidad during the nineteenth century, a criminogenic society.⁵⁶ The planter elites and the colonial administrators tended to criminalize any action that they deemed subversive of public order or productive efficiency on the plantation. It should not be surprising, therefore, that the Chinese population in Cuba quickly established a reputation for criminality. One official estimated in 1855 that the Chinese were more than twice as prone to crime as either the white or the black groups of the society.⁵⁷ Yet it should be pointed out that the reporting universe of the Chinese was considerably smaller than that of the other social segments and that 60 of the 90 reported “crimes” for which the Chinese were accused were for attempted suicide. Indeed, the Chinese committed suicide at alarmingly high rates. In the 1850s one of every 162 Chinese worker committed suicide, and in the 1860s one of every 225 did so. During those years at any given time approximately 19 percent of Chinese workers ran away from the plantations.⁵⁸

Despite the difficulties of accumulating money from wage labor, a surprisingly large number of the original Chinese fulfilled their contracts and returned to their homeland or left Cuba for other destinations [See Table 3]. By the early 1870s a steady stream of Chinese who had terminated their contracts filtered to the cities and began to establish commercial niches for themselves. Some found plots of land on the outskirts of Havana and started small truck gardens. Others entered itinerant vending. In 1870 the law recognized the

⁵⁶ David Trotman, *Crime in Trinidad. Conflict and Control in a Plantation Society, 1838-1900* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986).

⁵⁷ Corbitt, *The Chinese*, p. 79.

⁵⁸ Baltar Rodríguez, *Los Chinos*, pp.28-29.

prevailing reality and a Royal Order legally permitted Chinese who had completed their contracts to remain in the island.⁵⁹ The Chinese had by then become an important presence in Havana, although not a flattering presence sometimes. John Mark remarked in his diary in 1884 “the most miserable objects of human beings I have ever seen are the Chinese cripples and beggars in Cuba. Many of the wretched creatures look like mere skeletons covered with parchment.”⁶⁰

The foundations for the barrio that presently constitutes China Town in Havana were laid as early as 1858 when two individuals, Lan Si Yee and Chung Leng, opened a fruit and vegetable stand along with a bodega on Zanja Street at the corner of Rayon.⁶¹ Gradually other Chinese came to the area, and soon a veritable village was created that expanded for several blocks offering all sorts of services not only to a Chinese clientele but also to the wider urban community. In a similar way, before the termination of the first phase of immigration in the mid 1870s Chinese began to enter commerce in several towns across the westernmost provinces of Cuba.⁶²

A few individuals arrived in Cuba during the 1880s and 1890s after the formal termination of the labor contract system, and in 1899 the Chinese population amounted to around 15,000. The census taken by the United States after its appropriation of the island indicated how the Chinese role had evolved

⁵⁹ *Departamento de Guerra, Informe sobre El Censo de Cuba, 1899*. Translated from the English by F. L. Joannini. (Washington: Government Printer, 1900), p. 76.

⁶⁰ John Mark, *Diary of a Trip to America and Havana, in October and November 1884* (Manchester: A. Ireland and Company, 1885), cited in Pérez, Jr. *Slaves, Sugar and Colonial Society*, p. 35.

⁶¹ Baltar Rodríguez, *Los Chinos*, pp. 32-33.

⁶² . Yun, *The Coolie Speaks*, pp. 66-68.

since 1847. Chinese were engaged in 69 different types of occupations.⁶³ No longer were the majority of Chinese employed on sugar plantations, although manual labor remained their principal activity. Not only had they become largely urbanized, but they had also diversified considerably in their occupational activity. The Americans listed 14,380 individuals who claimed to have a profession in 1899. Of that number only 20 were women who worked outside the home. More than half of the listed worked as day laborers, a total of 8,033 (55.8 percent.) The next largest occupation was that of merchant, accounting for 1,923 individuals (13.4 percent.) Street peddlers and second hand dealers accounted for 775 individuals (7.0 percent of the total.) But Chinese had penetrated all levels of economic activity in Cuba, They were artists, agents, actors, bakers, barbers, barkeepers, blacksmiths, box makers, braziers, bricklayers, brick masons, builders, butchers, carpenters, cattlemen, charcoal vendors, cigar makers, clerks, coachmen, confectioners, coopers, day laborers, dressmakers, engineers, engravers, fishermen, gardeners, government employees, housekeepers, innkeepers, jewelers, laborers, laundresses, machinists, mechanics. Milkmen, musicians, office boys, organ makers, painters, peddlers, physician (1), plantation owners (42), policemen, porters, potters, railroad workers, restaurateurs, sailors, scholars (2), servants, shirt makers, shoemakers, silversmiths, soldiers, stable grooms, stable owners, stone cutters, sugar mill evaporators, tailors, tinsmiths, and woodcutters.

Under the occupation of the United States army between 1898 and 1902 Chinese immigration to Cuba was prohibited in accordance with the exclusionary

⁶³ Departamento de Guerra, *Informe sobre El Censo de Cuba, 1899*.

immigration laws of the invading country.⁶⁴ The North Americans reclassified the Chinese as “colored” and subjected them to the overt discrimination that was the pattern then on the mainland. Nevertheless, Chinese migration would continue, albeit on an exotically small scale until the revolution of 1959.

Migration and Culture in Cuba: some observations.

Between 1750 and 1900 three major immigrant groups entered the island of Cuba from Europe, from Africa and from Asia. The conventional prevailing custom described those from Europe and from Asia as white and those who came from Africa black. But until 1886 Cuba was a slave society segmented by race, color, class and condition that did not fall conveniently into the dual color categories of white and black. As a complex host society therefore, the sort of reception offered to the immigrants would vary enormously and inconsistently. This is not surprising since all sorts of contradictions and irony permeated every slave society.⁶⁵ Divided into castes as well as classes, neither caste nor class manifested coherence and consistency. To complicate matters, Cuba entered the group of Caribbean slave societies when the system had already begun to disintegrate which created beneficial opportunities as well as significant problems. The age of revolutions was both a period of political change as well as of increasing social consciousness. The Haitian revolution resulted in an

⁶⁴ Daniels, *American Immigration*, pp. 68-71. Between 1850 and 1882 more than 250,000 Chinese entered the United States, most attracted by the California gold rush of 1849. Most worked on the construction of the transcontinental railroad. After 1875 American law forbade the entry of Chinese women. Most states legally prevented Chinese from owning property, from certain types of jobs such as mining, or from testifying in Court. Chinese migrants could not become citizens of the United States and between 1882 and 1943 federal law prohibited Chinese immigration. The Act was repealed in the latter year as a concession to a war ally.

⁶⁵ . See Franklin W. Knight, “Slavery in the Americas” in *A Companion of Latin American History*, edited by Thomas H. Holloway, (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2008): 146-161.

increased fear of Africans, enslaved or free, throughout the Americas. But without slaves there could be no expansion of the plantation complex that had, by the middle of the eighteenth century replaced bullion as the chief engine of individual and national wealth.

The relatively large proportion of whites in Cuba before 1750 when it started to become inundated by the sugar revolutions of the nineteenth century established a sort of resilient social template that could be bent but not broken during the challenging period of massive labor immigration. Arriving Europeans, Africans and Asians blended in with the prevailing host society, altering it in some respects but never so much as to eliminate the basic Spanish colonial mores and customs that had acquired acceptable permanence over the centuries. More important – although not unique to Cuba – the inadequacy of each intrusive group to establish an organic and entirely isolated whole resulted in a society of cross-cutting social cleavages with a certain degree of tolerance for the unfamiliar and unknown.

The inhabitants of the island enjoyed some unusual circumstances. Owing to its large protected harbor and excellent strategic geographical location, Havana emerged at the end of the sixteenth century as one of the optimal locations to concentrate the treasure fleets bearing the gold and silver produced in New Spain and Peru for the transatlantic convoys. As a result a large, complex city developed around the port. By the eighteenth century Havana ranked as the third largest city in the Americas with an economic hinterland extending from central Mexico along the gulf to New Orleans and along the Atlantic seaboard to

Charleston, Philadelphia, New York and Boston.⁶⁶ At any given time between 10,000 and 20,000 troops – overwhelmingly single males – were stationed in the fortresses around the city. As we have indicated before, a number of these young men chose to remain in Cuba after their period of military service. In addition a constant stream of civilian immigrants arrived thereby boosting the local white population.

This white population was not homogenous by any measure. In addition to divisions of wealth and social prestige, the whites were sharply divided between those born in Spain, called *Peninsulares*, and those born overseas, referred to initially and pejoratively as *Criollos*. Peninsular Spaniards tended to exalt their native geographical region over the national state – although challenges like the Ten Years War and the war of 1895-98 would elicit devotion to the national, that is to the Spanish cause among some of the regionalists.

Whites had lived alongside non-whites in Cuba since 1511. Havana was a quite diverse city with a large population of non-whites represented in a wide variety of occupations. Both groups existed in unavoidable symbiosis and a part of the nonwhite groups resulted from the procreation of white persons, mostly white males, with free and enslaved nonwhites. Before 1860 the nonwhites were officially listed in two sub-categories reflecting color – mulattoes and blacks. The group was also divided between those who were enslaved and those who were free for several generations. The free could have been manumitted for any

⁶⁶ . See the essays by Allan J. Kuethe and Linda K. Salvucci in *Atlantic Port Cities. Economy, Culture and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650-1850* edited by Franklin W. Knight and Peggy K. Liss (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), pp. 13-57. See also, Carlos Martínez Shaw and José María Oliva Melgar, eds. *El sistema atlántico español (siglos XVII-XIX)* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, S.A., 2005)

number of reasons but there was also a proportion whose liberty was as ancient as any white person on the island. There was a degree of restricted social mobility between free coloreds – the term used when the census of 1860 collapsed the non-white groups – and whites. More mobility existed between free blacks and free mulattoes, and an even greater mobility between enslaved blacks and free blacks. In short, caste lines as well as class lines remained permeable in Cuba. The situation, however, could not be described as fluid.

Before 1899 Chinese immigrants were classified as white although denied the full privileges of other whites. That a group described as white would be contracted in large numbers to do the manual and menial labor once considered to be the preserve of Africans helped to undermine the notion that color provided an irrefutable definition of superior social status. The prolonged independence wars of the nineteenth century also produced outstanding national military heroes among non-whites such as Antonio Maceo, Juan Gualberto Gómez Morúa Delgado, and Quentin Banderas. Non-white regiments, however, had been a feature of the Spanish colonial military for centuries.

The Cuban reality from the beginning of the society was not conducive to the development of a culture of exclusion but rather to one of inclusion. Whites and non-whites borrowed freely (though not necessarily equally) from one another across lines of caste, color and condition. The reality of the plural society manifested itself in language in music, in cuisine, in the arts, and even – thanks to the long wars of independence – in everyday social conduct. As a result, Cubans might have articulated a political discourse of the homogenous society

reflected in the rhetoric of the nineteenth century but for most Cubans their experience would daily contradict that notion. Some members of the elites might have feared non-whites but many white Cubans worked with them, fought with them, and depended on them for their economic well-being. In the 1880s and 1890s José Martí could advocate a Cuban nationalism that transcended race and color and the novel idea would find receptivity and moral traction on the island.⁶⁷ That did not eliminate race, color and condition but merely subordinate them temporarily to the greater good of political independence. The appeal was successful enough for Cubans to reject the North American introduced notion of restricted civil rights after 1898. The Cuban republic would therefore, unlike its imperial benefactor, be based on universal manhood suffrage. That did not go as far as the Haitian republic of 1804 to uphold human rights.⁶⁸ But in 1804 Haiti was free and independent. Cuba in 1900 was merely nominally free. But its political and social culture would reflect the indelible influences of continual migration in its history.

⁶⁷ . Alejandro de la Fuente, A Nation for All. Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001.)

⁶⁸ . Franklin W. Knight, "The Haitian Revolution and the Notion of Human Rights" The Journal of the Historical Society, 5:3 (Fall, 2005): 391-416.

