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The Hispanic American Historical Review, Volume 58, Issue 4 (Nov., 1978), 649-675.

Stable URL:
http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0018-2168%28197811%2958%3A4%3C649%3ACAGVTU%3E2.0.CO%3B2-S

Hispanic American Historical Review
58(4), 1978, 649–675

Caudillos and *Gavilleros* versus the United States Marines: Guerrilla Insurgency during the Dominican Intervention, 1916–1924

BRUCE J. CALDER*

FROM 1917 to 1922, the peasants of the eastern region of the Dominican Republic successfully waged a guerrilla war against the forces of the U.S. military government. This conflict stands, along with the campaign against Augusto César Sandino in Nicaragua in the later 1920s, as the major military involvement of the United States in Latin America in the twentieth century. And it deserves a significant place in the series of guerrilla wars which the United States has fought, from the Philippines at the turn of the century to Vietnam. Yet the record of the Dominican conflict has largely been buried or lost. No one has yet made a comprehensive study of the 1916–1924 seizure of the Dominican Republic by the United States despite its importance as a lengthy episode in Dominican history and as a major example of the implementation of Wilsonian diplomacy in Latin America. The program of the military government, the impact of the occupation on Dominican life, and the nature of the Dominican reaction, including the guerrilla war, remain largely undocumented.[1]

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1. The most balanced account of the 1916–1924 period is the work of Luis F. Mejía, *De Lilís a Trujillo: Historia contemporánea de la República Dominicana* (Caracas, 1944), chs. 6–8. Also valuable are Sumner Welles, *Naboth's Vineyard: The Dominican Republic, 1844–1924*, 2 vols. (New York, 1928), chs. 8–15, reflecting the views of an enlightened State Department official; and Melvin M. Knight, *The Americans in Santo Domingo* (New York, 1928), a somewhat disorganized radical critique of the occupation and the events leading up to it. Stephen M. Fuller and Graham A. Cosmas have written a brief Marine history, *Marines in the Dominican Republic, 1916–1924* (Washington, D.C., 1974). Other books treat individual aspects of the intervention or present documents from the period. Only recently have several authors begun to portray the guerrilla war, namely Gregorio Urbano Gilbert, in his autobiographical *Mi lucha contra el invasor yanqui de 1916* (Santo Domingo, 1975) and Felix Servio Ducoudray, *Los "gavilleros" del este: Una epopeya calumniada* (Santo Domingo, 1976).

This essay, based primarily on the records of the U.S. military government,[2] explores several basic questions: Who were the guerrillas? And what motivated them to fight? The answers are revealed by the examination of two factors: first, the nature of eastern Dominican society, particularly the traditional political system and the new economic influences at work in the region which undermined long established patterns of life; and, second, the U.S. marines' conduct of the anti-guerrilla war and their treatment of Dominicans.

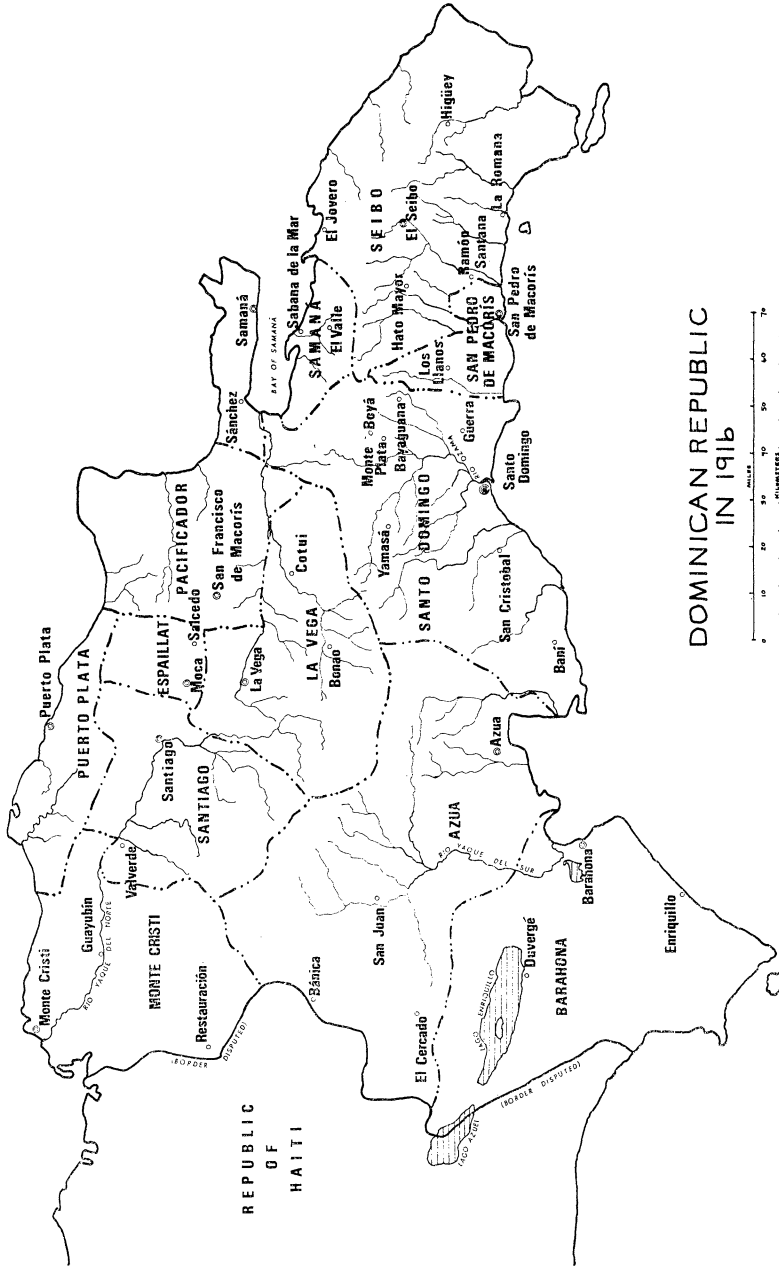
Response to Intervention: The Case of the East

Early in 1916 U.S. armed forces entered the Dominican Republic in response to the latest in a series of revolutionary episodes which had begun in 1911. Although neither U.S. nor Dominican officials envisioned a lengthy occupation at that time, it was mid-1924 before the last of the occupying forces embarked from the island nation. During the eight intervening years, a military government of occupation attempted to bring about a number of fundamental changes in the hope that these reforms by fiat would create a stable and friendly neighbor, and a reliable customer, to the south of the United States.

The Dominican response to the intervention and occupation ranged from enthusiastic cooperation to determined resistance. The latter included a political–intellectual protest, supported mainly by the educated elite in the larger towns and cities, and a guerrilla resistance, sustained by peasants in a rural zone in the eastern part of the republic.

The guerrilla struggle was significant. For six years the Marines failed to control most of the eastern half of the republic. Ranged against them at various times were eight to twelve guerrilla leaders who could enlist up to 600 regular fighters and who could count on the sup-

2. The bulk of the papers of the military government of Santo Domingo are in the U.S. National Archives, particularly in Record Groups 38, 45 and 80. Subsequent references to these papers will denote the record group, the series, and the box number of the document, e.g. NA, RG38, E6, B3. Other papers of the military government are located in the Archivo General de la Nación in Santo Domingo, D.R. These documents are the correspondence of the several executive departments, such as Police and Interior, Agriculture, etc., and cover a wide range of subjects. Lack of organization, however, renders them very difficult to use. Subsequent references to these records will appear as: AGN, *Mil. Govt. Papers*. Since the U.S. Department of State maintained a diplomatic mission in Santo Domingo during the entire occupation period, numerous relevant documents are also located in File 839, *Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of the Dominican Republic, 1910–1929*, which is also available on microfilm as United States National Archives Publication, Microcopy No. 626 (hereafter cited as *Records, D.R., 1910–1929*).


DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
IN 1916
Map I
REPUBLIC OF HAITI
PUERTO PLATA
ESPAILLAT
PACIFICADOR
SANTIAGO
MONTE CRISTI
LA VEGA
SANTO DOMINGO
AZUA
BARAHONA
SAMANA
SEIBO
SAN PEDRO DE MACORIS
Puerto Plata
Guayubin
Monte Cristi
Valverde
Santiago
Moca
Salcedo
La Vega
San Francisco de Macoris
Cotui
Restauración
Bánica
Sánchez
Samaná
Sabana de la Mar
El Jovero
El Valle
Higüey
El Seibo
La Romana
Hato Mayor
Los Llanos
Ramón Santana
San Pedro de Macoris
Monte Plata
Bayaguana
Yamasá
Guerra
Santo Domingo
San Cristobal
Bonao
Azua
Baní
San Juan
El Cercado
Duvergé
Barahona
Enriquillo
BAY OF SAMANA
LAKE ENRIQUILLO
BORDER
DISPUTED BOUNDARY

port of numerous part-time guerrillas, as well as on the aid and sympathy of the general population. The guerrillas, using their environment and experience to advantage, fought against a Marine force which possessed superior arms, equipment, and training. The outcome of the six-year-long irregular war was a stalemate and finally a negotiated conditional surrender by the guerrillas in 1922, a capitulation at least partially predicated on the then impending withdrawal of all U.S. forces from the republic.

The guerrilla war was born early in 1917 when the military government sent Marines into the east and encountered a still-thriving vestige of nineteenth-century politics, the caudillo system. This irregular type of rule, which bestowed power and authority upon men who could combine military skills, economic resources, personal strength, charisma, friendship, family ties, and the ability to manipulate followers, had deep roots in Dominican history. Particularly during the nineteenth century, while the republic's political institutions were developing, Dominicans were often at war, fighting the Spanish, French, Haitians, or among themselves. The result was a society heavily influenced by caudillos, who soon came to dominate the nation's political life. Despite later reform efforts, the caudillo system persisted into the twentieth century, with a few regional caudillos such as the northwesterner Desiderio Arias assuming great national political importance at the time of the intervention.[3]

The east had not boasted a regional leader of Arias' stature since the days of President Pedro Santana in the nineteenth century, but caudillo politics nevertheless continued to play a prominent part in eastern life in 1916. In fact, the east offered a particularly secure environment for this tradition because meager improvements in transportation and communication had hardly challenged the historic isolation and near-independence of most of the region. A kind of dual government existed. Alongside of the highly centralized de jure structure of provinces, communes, and sections, with a civil governor and other

3. For an analysis of the Dominican caudillo system by a man who despised its effects, see Francisco Henríquez y Carvajal, "Memorandum" to Stabler, Chief of the Div. of Latin American Affairs, State Dept., in *U.S. Dept. of State, Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1919* (Washington, D.C., 1934), pp. 111–113 (hereafter cited as *FR*, with appropriate year). See the U.S. Commission of Inquiry to Santo Domingo, *Report of the Commission of Santo Domingo* (Washington, D.C., 1871), pp. 8–9 for a description of the caudillo system by North American investigators in 1870. Miguel A. Monclus, *El caudillismo en la República Dominicana*, 2d ed. (Ciudad Trujillo, 1948), is heavy on biographical facts but light on analysis.

officials appointed by the national government, there was a de facto power structure dominated by popular local leaders, the caudillos. A relationship between the two structures existed because national political factions bid for the support of local and regional leaders and because, once a faction gained control of the central government in Santo Domingo, it could exercise its power in the east only when these local popular leaders, under specified conditions, agreed to cooperate with its officials.[4] As a consequence, national administrations actively sought the allegiance of local and regional caudillos, often with simple cash payoffs, government concessions or franchises, or appointments to public positions, such as the military command of a province or the garrison of a town, or simply a minor position with the rural police.[5] If a government could not obtain the support of an important regional figure, it then had to concede him virtual autonomy in his own territory, or back a rival caudillo with arms and money in an attempt to defeat him.

The central government could not rely on its own military forces to back its authority against the caudillos. The Dominican army was small and so poorly trained, commanded, equipped, and paid that it provided no threat to anyone except the law-abiding and defenseless members of the lower class who fell afoul of its petty extortions and graft. In any case, the caudillos often controlled the army. As Sumner Welles noted, "the military branch of the Dominican Government was inevitably the means through which, by corruption or promise of corruption, revolutions were engineered."[6] Not being able to count on this "meager Dominican soldiery," Military Governor Harry Lee later wrote, the central government had shown a "chronic attitude of passivity and tolerance" toward the caudillos.[7]

Local military chieftains, employed with the government or not, might rebel at any time. In mid-1915, a fairly serious uprising occurred in the east as part of the general restiveness against the administration of President Juan I. Jiménez. Though some casualties had resulted, the national government allegedly pacified the rebels and their followers by promising road construction contracts and appointments to the rural police, as well as by providing safe conducts to Puerto Rico for the

4. Henríquez y Carvajal, "Memorandum," in *FR*, 1919, p. 112.

5. Payoffs to caudillos are cited in Welles, *Naboth's Vineyard*, p. 589; and in Dana Gardner Munro, *Intervention and Dollar Diplomacy in the Caribbean, 1900–1921* (Princeton, N.J., 1964), pp. 82, 274–277, and 311–312.

6. Welles, *Naboth's Vineyard*, p. 908.

7. Lee to Sec. of the Navy, May 19, 1924, NA, RG38, E6, B74.


SAN FRANCISCO DE MACORÍS
Matanzas
PACIFICADOR
Sánchez
SAMANÁ
Pimentel
Castillo
Villa Riva
Río Camú
SAMANÁ BAY
Cotuí
Cevicos
SAMANÁ
Sabana de la Mar
Las Cañitas
Rincón Fogon
El Valle
El Jovero
Boyá
Monte Plata
Yamasá
SANTO DOMINGO
Bayaguana
Pedro Garcia
Sabana Grande
Manchado
Yerbabuena
Dos Ríos
Hato Mayor
El Salto
Las Pajas
Juana Lorenza
Los Ybarbos
Mata Palma
Los Llanos
Vicentillo
San Francisco
El Cercado
Magarín
La Candelaria
EL SEIBO
El Cuey
El Pintado
El Higo
Cibahueta
El Cerrito
Mata Palacio
Mata de Palma
Las Calles
El Macao
El Cerro
El Bejucal
La Campiña
El Caimoni
Guaymate
Chavón Abajo
Jobo Dulce
Higüey
El Naranjo
Feliz
Guerrero
Higüeral Nuevo
La Noria
Higüeral
El Gato
La Romana
Boca de Chavón
San Rafael del Yuma
Central Romana
La Caleta
Naranjo de China
Cumayasa
SAN PEDRO DE MACORÍS
Boca del Soco
Jaguál
Santa Fe
Porvenir
Puerto Rico
Boca Chica
Guayacanes
Consuelo
Angelina
Ramón Santana
El Regajo
Los Chicharrones
Diego
Quisqueya
La Yaguada
La Mula
SAN PEDRO DE MACORÍS
Cristóbal Colón
La Victoria
Villa Mella
San Luis
San Isidro
Guerra
Villa Duarte
SANTO DOMINGO
La Caleta
San Cristobal
ISLA SAONA
THE EASTERN REGION OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
SCALE
KILOMETERS
PROVINCIAL CAPITALS
COMUNAL CENTERS
VILLAGES

Map II

leaders.[8] Authorities continued their policy of accommodation when, a few months later, they brought another eastern caudillo to the capital and "in order to quiet him . . . assigned to him a salary of 150 dollars a month for doing nothing."[9]

The east's population accommodated itself to the caudillo system. Although the influence of these traditional leaders was ultimately felt in every sector of society because of their military strength, it fell most heavily on rural areas and very small towns. In that milieu no cohesive class or caste barriers frustrated the acceptance of the caudillo, who was most often a poor countryman by birth and upbringing. The tradition-oriented inhabitants admired, feared, and respected him as an authority, and from among these country dwellers he recruited his followers. The only potential countervailing force in the countryside was that based on wealth. But the few leading landowning families and the sugar corporations were no more able to control the caudillos than the central government. Instead, they manipulated the caudillo system to protect their own interests, paying one of the stronger local leaders to guard their crops and property.[10]

In the east's larger towns, all closely related to the extensive rural areas which surrounded them, the personal influence of the caudillo was quite strong, at least among the poorer citizens. Even the elite of such towns as Seibo, Hato Mayor, and Higüey, composed of landowners, a few professionals, and the more prosperous merchants was likely forced by political realities to deal with the caudillos, although it set itself apart socially and in other ways. The elite's financial interests were somewhat adversely affected by the caudillo system, for the warfare with which it was often associated caused economic declines which cut business and professional incomes. Elite political interests were in even sharper conflict with the system.[11] Inasmuch as the members of the upper stratum furnished personnel for the higher offices of the de jure governmental structure, they were tied to the

8. Chargé Johnson, Santo Domingo, to Sec. of State, Sept. 15, 1915; and Minister William Russell to Sec. of State, Nov. 30, 1915, in *FR*, 1915, pp. 294, 297.

9. Russell to Sec. of State, Mar. 14, 1916, in *FR*, 1916, p. 221.

10. Military Gov. Harry S. Knapp to Maj. Gen. Cmdt., U.S. Marine Corps (hereafter cited as USMC), Oct. 27, 1918, NA, RG45, WA7, B647. The analysis in this and the two following paragraphs is in part speculative, based on the author's study of contemporary commentaries by Dominican civilians and many military government documents which infer the existence of the social situation described.

11. Officials of the military government argued, with statistics, that a close relationship existed between political strife and economic decline. See, for instance, U.S. Military Government of Santo Domingo, *Santo Domingo: Its Past and its Present Condition* (Santo Domingo, 1920), p. 13.

national political system rather than to the regionalism of the caudillo. But their political survival was ultimately related to the goodwill of the traditional rural leader.[12]

Only in the city of San Pedro de Macorís, the third largest in the republic by 1916, did these traditional rural leaders have minimal influence. The city's obvious sources of independent strength lay in its size and wealth and in the international ties which resulted from its being headquarters for the republic's sugar production and export. Perhaps even more important was the process of urbanization, which weakened ties with the rural area surrounding the city (except for the neighboring sugar estates) and resulted in a separate social structure in which the rural chieftains had no place and thus no power. San Pedro de Macorís' leading citizens, though they might ally themselves with the caudillos for their own political ends, could bargain from a somewhat more equal position than other citizens of the east.

Thus, local and regional caudillos effectively held power and maintained or broke the peace in most of the eastern region. The U.S. military government confronted this situation in late 1916 and either failed to understand it or completely misjudged the strength of the caudillo system. Military officials had learned during 1916 that some people in Macorís, as well as the sugar companies, strongly opposed the dispatch of Marines to the east. But the military authorities decided to ignore this opposition after they discovered that "the sugar estates were practically paying blackmail to bad characters to keep them from looting and burning, a part of the understanding being apparently that they themselves would keep other bad characters off."[13]

Though military officials might well have viewed the sugar companies' payments as a kind of tax collected by what was the effective police power of the region, they instead saw the situation as anarchic and criminal. When they sent in troops to enforce the authority of the central government, the local and regional caudillo leaders, whose prestige and power derived from the threatened system, went to war. As they had done many times before, the regional power holders determined to force the central government to deal with them.[14]

12. A typical incident in Seibo in 1916, when the *comandante de armas* rebelled against his civilian superior, the governor, is a graphic example. See Bernardo Pichardo, *Resumen de historia patria*, 3d ed. (Buenos Aires 1947), p. 297.

13. Knapp to Maj. Gen. Cmdt., USMC, Oct. 27, 1918, NA, RG45, WA7, B647.

14. One regional leader, Vicente Evangelista, made this point explicitly in the surrender terms he proposed to the military government. Knapp to Sec. of the Navy, July 14, 1917, NA, RG45, WA7, B647. It is important to note that the notorious pre-1917 caudillos were killed or captured during the first year of fighting. Thereafter, with the war underway, new leaders appeared.

In the caudillo system then, are found the roots of the guerrilla war which desolated the east for six years. But an important question remains. If the caudillo system existed in other parts of the republic, as it did, why should guerrilla war develop only in the east? The answer seems to be that there was such a possibility in other areas of the country, but various factors thwarted or redirected the energies which might have sustained revolt.[15] The east, more than other isolated areas of the country, had wealth and population in conjunction with a favorable topography. Thus, food, money, and supplies were readily available to the insurgents. And the sizeable, though by no means dense, population of the east provided the guerrillas with recruits, shelter, refuge, and most important, an extensive system of intelligence.

The rapidly changing social and economic structure, however, more than any other factor, distinguished the east from other regions. The expansion of the predominantly foreign owned sugar latifundia beginning in the late nineteenth century, which in a few years converted large portions of the east's fertile lands from subsistence minifundias into large capital intensive agricultural estates, had a severe impact on a significant portion of the eastern population. Independent peasants who for generations had lived in the area, holding and farming small *conucos* (garden plots) without interference, suddenly found themselves pushed from the land. By a combination of outright purchase, cajolery, tricks, threats, violence, and legal maneuvers, the sugar companies easily wrested homesites, farms, and grazing lands from their former holders or owners, leaving them landless and destitute.[16]

Large numbers of peasants either left the area or became part of a growing rural proletariat, laborers completely dependent on the sugar industry for money wages. Unfortunately for the laborers, the sugar estates needed a large work force only during the harvest, which lasted for less than six months of the year. The jobs, mostly for cane-

15. Several tense situations developed in the west. In Barahona province there was some unrest over land and water rights and in neighboring Azua province there existed a messianic movement led by Dios Olivorio Mateo, whom the Marines hunted over a period of years and killed in 1922.

16. Beginning from almost nothing in 1870, the sugar estates had grown very rapidly. By the early twentieth century, sugar had become the nation's most important crop, with the bulk of the production on the plains of the east, centered around San Pedro de Macorís. Knight, *The Americans*, pp. 139–140, notes that by 1925 between 350,000 and 400,000 acres of the east's best land was in sugar. Knight, who devotes a chapter to the growth of the sugar industry is one of the best sources of information on this aspect of Dominican life. Juan J. Sánchez, *La caña en Santo Domingo* (Santo Domingo, 1972), is a short, excellent book on the industry in the late nineteenth century.

cutters, were laborious and low paid. Work was not even assured during the harvest season, because of the sugar companies' practice of importing laborers from Haiti and neighboring West Indian islands; for the remainder of the year unemployment was inevitable for all but a few fortunate employees.

Thus, the east counted a substantial number of displaced and bitter peasants and many others who, similarly threatened, sympathized with them. And they had cause to direct their bitterness toward North Americans, whose corporations were among the chief beneficiaries of the land acquisitions. Many of the men who fought with the caudillo-led bands were from the sugar *bateys*, the company-owned villages in which the workers lived. As James McLean, a Marine officer who commanded the Guardia Nacional in the east, noted unsympathetically in 1919, the guerrilla ranks included "a number of voluntary recruits from the riff-raff among the unemployed who were hanging around the sugar estates."[17] Fighting alongside the guerrillas at least provided a livelihood for the landless and unemployed worker, if not for his family, and it was a convenient way to even a score with oppressors who were protected by the law. After the mass surrender of guerrillas in 1922, military officials found a significant percentage to be men who had recently lost their land.[18] Realizing the relationship of landlessness and unemployment to the guerrilla war, the military government implored the sugar companies to increase "steady employment" during 1922, and to open up as much land for new *conucos* as possible, so that the sugar work force could maintain itself during the months after the *zafra* or harvest. "Any lack of employment," stated the military governor, "will have the most disastrous results in the increase in banditry"[19] (as military officials preferred to call the guerrilla insurgency).

Marine documents indicate that the insurgents generally fought close to home. The greatest number came from the sugar growing heartland of the east, an expanse centering on Hato Mayor and Seibo and running south to the coast. Others came from adjacent areas; from the north coast near Sabana de la Mar, from the east in the vicinity of Higüey, and from the west around Monte Plata and Bayaguana. Most of the peasant partisans, both leaders and followers, were Dominicans, despite the presence in the eastern cane fields and the company-

17. James T. McLean, Director, Southern District, to Cmdt., Guardia Nacional Dominicana (hereafter cited as GND), NA, RG38, E6, BU (BU indicates box number unknown).

18. Military Gov. Samuel S. Robison to sugar companies, mailing list attached, June 13, 1922, NA, RG38, E6, B36.

19. Ibid.

owned *bateys* of many imported laborers from Haiti and the British Caribbean.[20]

Political Motivations of the Guerrillas

Two of the most important questions about the guerrilla war concern the political nature of the movement.[21] Were the insurgents politically conscious? If so, at what level? Many bits of evidence indicate that all the guerrillas had at least inchoate political motives: they resented the changes in their lives which resulted from the loss of their land to the large corporations; they resented being unemployed and poor; and they resented the fear and insecurity brought into their daily existence by the aggressive and arbitrary acts of the occupying Marines. Some guerrillas, moreover, were conscious that these issues were important to their struggle. They would, for instance, recruit followers by informing peasant smallholders that the American corporations were planning to take over their land.[22] Going one step beyond this, various guerrilla leaders and groups openly identified themselves as political revolutionaries and claimed regional or national goals. They also conducted themselves, on some occasions, as an irregular government, exacted taxes, enforced popular law, and dispensed justice. For example, at the beginning of the struggle in 1917, the guerrilla leader Vicente Evangelista let it be known that he was fighting a "revolution" against the military government and, according to a Marine report, his stand received considerable support from the country people.[23]

However, the statement that the guerrillas had political motivations must be qualified. As in most movements of this kind, both leaders and

20. Of more than 100 men who were imprisoned on charges of banditry in the spring of 1922 in San Pedro de Macoris jail, only 14 had French names and were scheduled for deportation, probably to Haiti. Provost Marshal, to Commanding Gen., Aug. 14, 1922, NA, RG38, E6, B50. Of the more than 140 guerrillas who surrendered in April and May 1922, only 4 had names which could possibly be Haitian-French. Commanding Gen. Lee to Military Gov., May 22, 1923, NA, RG38, E6, B64.

21. The military government consistently referred to the insurgents as "bandits," although military documents frequently belied this thesis. Most Dominican writers, until the recent works of Felix Servio Ducoudray and Gregorio Urbano Gilbert, have for various reasons left the "bandit" thesis unchallenged. The cover-up of the guerrilla war is discussed at length in my dissertation. See Calder, "Some Aspects of the United States Occupation of the Dominican Republic" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Texas, 1974).

22. Col. C. Gamborg-Andresen, CO, 3d Provisional Regiment, to Brigade Commander, Feb. 27, 1919, NA, RG45, WA7, B645.

23. D. B. Roben, CO, 44th Co., to Regimental Commander, July 30, 1917, NA, RG45, WA7, B646.

followers were sometimes motivated by personal rather than political considerations. Intergroup rivalries at times led guerrilla bands to fight one another.[24] Such rivalries were the product of the caudillos' preintervention competition for personal power and influence, and they persisted after 1916. Vicente Evangelista, for example, once tried to negotiate an agreement with the Marines which would have delivered a rival leader into his hands.[25] In addition, small groups of actual bandits took advantage of the social turmoil brought on by the guerrilla war, and even the organized guerrillas sometimes committed criminal acts against fellow Dominicans.

Considerable positive evidence demonstrates the political consciousness of the insurgents. In 1918, for instance, a group of Marines was scouting near Las Pajas, guided by a local official, the second alcalde of the section. An unidentified group of insurgents surrounded the Marines and a battle began. At one point, the alcalde called out, taunting the guerrillas for being *gavilleros*, the Dominican word for rural bandits. Back came numerous cries to the effect that: "We are not *gavilleros*; we are revolutionists!"[26]

During and after 1919, one of the most prominent groups operating in San Pedro de Macorís and eastern Santo Domingo provinces was that led by Eustacio "Bullito" Reyes. These guerrillas called their troop La Revolución, and when seizing money, arms, or supplies from their victims, they identified themselves as such.[27] And in 1920, on the eastern edge of the zone of hostilities, between La Romana and Higüey, an unidentified guerrilla unit accosted a mail carrier and sent him and his mail unmolested back to Higüey with a letter carefully explaining that the guerrillas were revolutionaries, not killers. A Marine report noted that this and similar incidents indicated that the "bandits" were "trying to pose as revolutionists" in order to "gain assistance and recruit[s]. . . ."[28]

24. Julio Peynado, a Dominican observer, makes this observation in a letter to Horace G. Knowles, Apr. 22, 1922, Peynado Family Papers (hereafter cited as PFP). Knowles was a former diplomat, an active lawyer and writer, and one of the organizers in the U.S. of the campaign against the Dominican and Haitian occupations.

25. Knapp to Sec. of the Navy, July 14, 1917, NA, RG45, WA7, B646.

26. Capt. T. P. Cheatham, 114th Co., to Battalion Commander, Nov. 22, 1918, NA, RG45, WA7, B646.

27. Record of the Proceedings of a Superior Provost Court, Santo Domingo, convened Feb. 16, 1920, Trial of Olivorio Carela, NA, RG38, E6, B36.

28. Capt. Robert Yowell, Seibo Barracks, to Battalion Commander, Sept. 14, 1920, NA, RG38, E6, B22.

By far the most important partisan leader was "General" Ramón Nateras, who campaigned with large groups between 1918 and 1922. In 1921, Nateras devised an obviously nationalistic operation which forced the military government to recognize the political motivations of the guerrillas. In the fall of that year Nateras and his men abducted the British manager of the Angelina sugar estate. They released him unharmed after two days, when he agreed to Nateras' demand that he and the other estate managers make known to the U.S. government the political and patriotic goal of the guerrillas, which was that the United States should terminate its occupation of the Dominican Republic.[29]

Corroborating the guerrillas' direct statements is evidence which shows that they saw themselves as a kind of government. In January 1922, for example, Marines discovered the burial site of four men. The epitaph on a board above the grave read: "Emilio Gil, Miguel de León, Reimundo Ramos, Juan Moraldo: fusilados por haber descalado la bodega Margarita [shot for having robbed the store 'Margarita'], diciembre 22 de 1921, Ramón Nateras;" and in three places the board had the inscription "General Ramón Nateras," imprinted with the rubber stamp which Nateras used in his correspondence. The Marine report on this finding noted "that Ramón Nateras purports to be a ruler in the section of the woods north of La Campina and that he undertakes to punish raids made upon the cane field bodegas when the raids are not made under his direction and control."[30] This system of justice applied equally within insurgent ranks. During a raid on a sugar estate bodega in early 1921, the guerrillas executed one of their troop on the spot for a violation of discipline.[31] Departure from the guerrillas' code of ethics compromised their all important relationship with other Dominicans.

Evidence indicates that the guerrillas regarded their seizures of money and property as a kind of taxation or as material requisitioned for a political movement. They "look upon themselves as heroes, and the food and clothing which they steal as prerogatives of their position," wrote an incredulous Marine lieutenant.[32] In a similar vein, a Marine

29. Sugar estate managers to Military Gov. Robison, Oct. 4, 1921, NA, RG38, E6, B24.

30. William C. Harlee, Commander, 15th Regiment, to Commanding Gen., Jan. 25, 1922, NA, RG38, E6, B48.

31. R. Sánchez González, Gov., San Pedro de Macorís province, to Col. P. M. Rixey, Jr., Sec. of State for Interior and Police, Mar. 8, 1921, NA, RG38, E6, BU.

32. William O. Rogers, 15th Regiment, to District Commander, Apr. 25, 1919, NA, RG45, WA7, B645.

officer reported in late 1920 that a wealthy farmer living near Higüey had been "fined" one hundred dollars by the guerrillas.[33]

Occasionally, Marine reports suggest that the guerrillas had some connection with the national political structure and with the bourgeois party system. But no national politician was ever directly implicated in the guerrilla activity despite numerous investigations by the military government.[34]

Personal Response to Marine Conduct

There can be little doubt that personal motivations had more significance for the ordinary guerrilla than political or patriotic considerations. Unemployment certainly played an important part in swelling guerrilla ranks. Yet men had other reasons for fighting; included among the partisans and their supporters were many who still had small farms and other means of employment. Some of these men may have fought for adventure's sake, others to vent economic fears or frustrations. But overshadowing all other factors was that of personal hatred and fear of the Marines and the Marine created and controlled Guardia Nacional Dominicana (National Guard). The Marines, as they fought to exert U.S. control over the eastern Dominican Republic, frightened, insulted, abused, oppressed, injured, and even killed hundreds of Dominicans, combatants and noncombatants alike, who lived and worked in the area of hostilities. No more effective agent existed for the guerrilla cause.

These abuses ranged from major atrocities to minor, if infuriating, Marine rudeness. If cases such as that of a Marine captain who allegedly machine-gunned to death as "bandits" some thirty peasants working a sugar *cañaveral* (cane field) were exceptional,[35] other incidents such as that involving a group of armed and uninvited Marines who invaded a party at a social club in Seibo and drank up much of the champagne[36] are so common that many probably went unrecorded. Also very common and often recorded, but only occasionally punished,

33. Maj. Watson, 9th Co., GND, to Cmdt., Nov. 23, 1920, NA, RG38, E6, BU.

34. In 1918 a regional leader of the Horacista party, Basilio Camilo, was accused of connivance with guerrillas. One of his lawyers, Luis F. Mejía, wrote later that Camilo was sentenced to prison "despite the lack of proof against him," but was pardoned soon afterwards. Mejía, *De Lilís a Trujillo*, p. 164.

35. Horacio Blanco Fombona, *Crímenes del imperialismo norte-americano* (México, 1927), p. 122.

36. President and members, Club Faro de Hicayagua, to Military Gov. Thomas Snowden, May 25, 1920, NA, RG38, E6, B24.

were serious crimes such as the well documented case of Altagracia de la Rosa. As this teenage peasant woman prepared dinner one evening in December 1920, four armed Marines entered her house in Ramón Santana, raped her, and then took her and her mother prisoner and held them for ten days. No charges were brought against the Marines involved.[37]

What factors underlay the friction between the Marines and the inhabitants in the east? In the first place, the Dominican peasants feared the Marines because they were outsiders. In peasant eyes, the invaders had an unfamiliar physical appearance; they dressed queerly, they spoke an unintelligible language, and they practiced unfamiliar customs. Besides, the Marines were armed and many of them were brusque, discourteous by Dominican standards, and not a few abusive.[38]

The Marines and other American officials arrived in the Dominican Republic completely unprepared for the experience. Most enlisted men had little education; neither officers nor enlisted men knew anything about Dominican culture; and few could speak Spanish.[39] The jingoistic nationalism prevalent in the early twentieth-century United States affected the Marines as much or more than others. Many North Americans possessed a patronizing sense of superiority, the belief that they had taken up what Military Governor Thomas Snowden referred to as "the white man's burden; the duty of the big brother."[40] Such attitudes flourished in the impoverished, exploited, and underdeveloped Dominican Republic.

37. Dispatch, Marine Corps to Flag Santo Domingo, Mar. 17, 1922, NA, RG80, CNO Planning File 159-9; and Knowles to U.S. Senator Medill McCormick, Mar. 17, 1922, PFP.

38. Col. George C. Thorpe, a Marine commander in the east, notes that Dominican peasants feared the Marines' very appearance. Thorpe, "American Achievements in Santo Domingo, Haiti and the Virgin Islands," *Journal of International Relations*, 11 (July 1920), 63–64.

39. Military Gov. to Bureau of Navigation, Sept. 9, 1920, NA, RG38, E6, B32, contains the estimate that "the majority" of naval enlisted personnel in Santo Domingo had not completed grade school and only "a few" had begun high school; the figure is probably no higher for the Marines. Harry Alverson Franck, *Roaming through the West Indies* (New York, 1920), pp. 245–246, and Otto Schoenrich, "The Present American Intervention in Santo Domingo and Haiti," in George H. Blakeslee, ed., *Mexico and the Caribbean* (New York, 1920), p. 211, both note the Marines' lack of ability to use Spanish. Military Gov. Knapp admitted that in late 1916 he could not read a simple pamphlet in Spanish. Knapp to Sec. of the Navy, Dec. 17, 1916, NA, RG45, WA7, B643. Kenneth W. Condit and Edwin T. Turnbladh, *Hold High the Torch: A History of the 4th Marines* (Washington, D.C., 1960), p. 76, notes the Marines' general unpreparedness for their occupation duties.

40. Snowden to Josephus Daniels, Sec. of the Navy, June 2, 1920, NA, RG38, E6, B31.

More important than ignorance or chauvinistic nationalism was the deeply ingrained, antiblack racism of many Marine officers and men. North American racism found a fertile field in the Dominican Republic, "a country whose people," Military Governor Harry Knapp noted, "are almost all touched with the tarbrush."[41] The Marines' prejudice caused them to look down upon Dominicans generally, but the problem became even worse among the peasants of the east, poor and darker-skinned than many other citizens of the republic. Furthermore, the Marines' racist culture had accustomed them to patterns of white superiority and black subservience in both the northern and southern United States, a fact which in the Dominican Republic led to Marine abuse and Dominican bitterness.[42]

Race was a potential irritant in any encounter between Dominicans and Marines. A North American woman resident in Santo Domingo reported that Marines commonly referred to Dominicans as "spigs" and "niggers," a habit also noted by several visitors.[43] When a writer accused Marine officers and men of using the terms "spig" and "spik," Military Governor Knapp came to their defense, questioned whether officers would do so, and denied that the enlisted men's use of this "slang" caused bad feelings among Dominicans.[44]

A typical incident occurred on the streets of San Pedro de Macorís. An offended black artisan reported, probably in cleaned-up language, that when he and a Marine corporal accidentally brushed each other in passing on the sidewalk, the corporal whirled around and yelled, "Look here, you damned negro! Don't you know that no damned negroes are supposed to let their body touch the body of any Marine?! And that they are always to give them way in the street!" The Marine then assaulted the man. The victim, an English-speaking immigrant, fully understood and reported the encounter.[45] The provost marshal of

41. Knapp to Arthur T. Hadley, President of Yale University, Sept. 20, 1917, NA, RG38, E6, BU.

42. A Dominican, Mejía, *De Lilís a Trujillo*, p. 157, noted U.S. racial prejudices. For a fuller description, see Franck, *West Indies*, pp. 239–240. Rubin Francis Weston, *Racism in U.S. Imperialism: The Influence of Racial Assumptions on American Foreign Policy, 1893–1946* (Columbia, S.C., 1972), thoroughly documents the racist views of U.S. citizens regarding the Dominican Republic and other nations. See especially pp. 209–256.

43. Mrs. Helen Leschorn to U.S. Senator Atlee Pomerence, Jan. 24, 1922, enclosed in letter of W. C. MacCrone, Regimental Intelligence Officer to Brigade Intelligence Officer, Mar. 25, 1922, NA, RG38, E6, B48; and Franck, *West Indies*, p. 239.

44. Knapp to Russell, Nov. 2, 1918, NA, RG45, WA7, B644.

45. J. I. Bowman to Military Gov., Dec. 21, 1921, NA, RG38, E6, B37.

San Pedro de Macorís essentially refused to investigate the matter and it was dropped.[46]

In another instance of abuse, one which involved the killing of several men, all testimony against the Marine defendant was discounted by the Marine officer in charge of the investigation because of "the unreliability of the Dominican as a witness under oath . . . and . . . the hopelessness of finding any Dominican who can differentiate between what he has seen and he has heard." The charges in the case, the investigator argued, coming from "an individual of different race . . . who has no conception of honor as we understand it," would best be dropped. Because "of the wide gulf separating the white from the negro race," because of the basic "difference in psychology," the officer added, the Dominican "race has a totally different conception of right and wrong from that held by the white race." Finally, the Marine officer in charge of handling the case suggested prosecuting the complainant, "for the maintenance of the prestige of the white race."[47]

The conduct of the guerrilla war itself greatly frustrated the Marines. Their frustration at times led to abuse of Dominicans, irrespective of whether they were guerrillas or *pacíficos*, as the noncombatants were called. The Marines were not prepared to fight a guerrilla war. They found themselves in often futile pursuit of an elusive enemy, repeatedly fell into ambushes and other tactical situations of the guerrillas' choosing, and were unable to establish permanent control over any area. Even if they had understood the guerrillas' style of warfare, the Marines would still have suffered difficulties. They were strangers in an environment in which the guerrillas had lived all their lives. Unlike the Marines, the guerrillas blended into that environment perfectly; as a result, it was usually impossible for the North Americans to distinguish guerrillas from *pacíficos*.[48]

As the war progressed, the Marines began to discover that frequently there *was* no difference between the two groups. A peasant tilling a field might be behind a rifle thirty minutes later, ambushing a Marine patrol. A woman innocently washing clothes, or a child at play,

46. Provost Marshal G. M. Kincade to Military Gov., Jan. 11, 1922, NA, RG38, E6, B37.

47. Finding of Facts, Opinion, and Recommendations of Court of Inquiry convened at Marine Barracks, San Francisco de Macorís, Feb. 24, 1920, NA, RG38, E6, B38.

48. News Release, Oct. 29, 1921, issued by Eastern District Headquarters, San Pedro de Macorís, cites the problem of guerrillas "appearing like any other citizen." Located in NA, RG38, E6, B37. Franck, *West Indies*, p. 236, also notes this problem.

might, as soon as the Marines moved out of sight, convey news of their direction and numbers to a guerrilla agent. As the Marines began to grasp the situation, they came to treat everyone as the enemy. In the process, they created more guerrillas and guerrilla supporters from among the previously uninvolved.

As Marine harshness touched the lives of an increasing number of people, both individuals and families began to flee their homes, seeking greater security by establishing new homes and *conucos* in more isolated areas of the forests and in the mountains to the north. It was simply not safe to be in areas where the Marines were actively pursuing guerrillas. Numerous incidents occurred in which people who could not or would not reveal information concerning the guerrillas were beaten, tortured, and killed, or, if they were more fortunate, imprisoned. A peasant might also be the object of gratuitous violence by the Marines, such as rape or the destruction of a home or other property. Ever present was the danger of being attacked as a suspected guerrilla.[49] On the other hand, the danger existed of being robbed by individuals or groups who used the guerrilla war as a cover for their ordinary criminal behavior. As a result of all these circumstances, the whole central area of the east became, in the words of a Marine commander, "a scene of desolation and long abandoned homes . . . a sad and pitiful spectacle."[50]

Flight did not necessarily help. Marine patrols began to run across hidden homesteads or even small villages with permanent houses and surrounding *conucos*, and populations of men, women and children. The Marines assumed, generally without evidence, that the inhabitants were guerrillas. It became common to burn their homes and possessions, although the Marine command attempted to stop this practice, hoping that such homes would serve as gathering places where patrols

49. U.S. Senate, Inquiry in Occupation and Administration of Haiti and Santo Domingo, *Hearings before a Select Committee of Haiti and Santo Domingo*, 2 vols., 67th Cong., 1st and 2d sess., 1922 (hereafter cited as U.S. Senate, *Hearings*), I, 1106–1155, documents a large number of incidents of Marine violence against captured guerrillas, suspected guerrillas, and *pacíficos*. Franck, a journalist who spent some time with the Marines in the Dominican Republic circa 1920, gives a sketch of Marine abuses and suggests some possible motivations for them in *West Indies*, pp. 234–235. Military courts tried eighty-five persons during the first three years of the occupation for allegedly having concealed information regarding guerrillas or arms. See Summary of Exceptional Military Courts in the Dominican Republic from November 29, 1916, to December 29, 1919, Covering Cases of Dominicans and Sojourners in the Dominican Republic, Tried by Provost Courts, Superior Provost Courts and Military Commissions, NA, RG38, E6, B13.

50. Harlee, Eastern District Commander, to Commanding Gen., Jan. 25, 1922, NA, RG38, E6, B48.

might easily locate insurgents in the future.[51] If the inhabitants fled, as fear often impelled them to do, the Marines fired at them, even though they were usually unarmed. "People who are not bandits do not flee at the approach of Marines," noted one Marine officer.[52]

In a typical incident in 1918, a Marine detachment located two peasant homes north of Hato Mayor, at the foot of the Manchado hills. "There were two bandit houses," wrote Sergeant Morris Stout, Jr., "and I would say, four men, four women and some children occupied same. They did not have any property of importance." When the inhabitants fled the approaching intruders by climbing a steep hill next to the houses, the Marines "formed a skirmish line and opened fire, but all got away except one woman and child and one horse and saddle."[53] This particular incident brought an admonition from Marine headquarters in Santo Domingo to "exercise extreme caution in firing on fleeing parties which contain women and children."[54] But a 1919 communication, not five months later, revealed that a Marine raid had severely wounded three of the four children of one "bandit."[55]

Olivorio Carela, a follower of the guerrilla leader "Bullito" Reyes, provides evidence of the results of Marine policies. Carela had joined the guerrillas, he testified, when "American forces had fired at his house and he had run away to take refuge."[56] Another guerrilla, Ramón Batía, said in an interview that after a Marine captain had threatened his life, he believed "that his only remaining option was to flee into the hills." There he joined the guerrilla leader Vicente Evangelista and later formed his own group.[57]

As the guerrilla war progressed, the insurgents became more and more indistinguishable from the rest of the populace. A number of Marine reports in 1918 show that women had begun accompanying guerrilla bands, a fact which is corroborated by the few guerrilla docu-

51. Thorpe, Chief of Staff, to Brigade Commander, May 29, 1917, NA, RG45, WA7, B645. Thorpe's order was not necessarily obeyed. In October 1918, he angrily denounced two recent home burnings. Thorpe to 2d Lt. William A. Buckley, Oct. 7, 1918, NA, RG45, WA7, B646.

52. Harlee, Eastern District Commander, to Commanding Gen., Jan. 25, 1922, NA, RG38, E6, B48.

53. Sgt. Stout, Detachment of 113th Co., to Senior Officer, Oct. 16, 1918, NA, RG45, WA7, B646.

54. Brigade Commander B. H. Fuller to Col. Thorpe, Oct. 31, 1918, NA, RG45, WA7, B646.

55. Company report[?], unsigned, 1919, contained in Marine Operations, 1919–1924 file, NA, RG45, WA7, B646.

56. Record of the Proceedings of a Superior Provost Court, Santo Domingo, convened Feb. 16, 1920, Trial of Olivorio Carela, NA, RG38, E6, B36.

57. "Ramón Batía dice . . .," *Listín Diario*, May 18, 1922.

ments which exist.[58] The incorporation of women and sometimes whole families into guerrilla life, and the establishment of permanent villages, made it all the more difficult to distinguish guerrillas from refugees and other ordinary inhabitants of the rural areas.

In time, nearly the entire population of some areas of the east became involved in the guerrilla war. The Marines faced not only full time guerrillas and former *pacíficos* who had fled their homes, but also those who had stayed behind in villages and small towns. These rural centers became hotbeds of guerrilla activity, serving as centers for intelligence, for the gathering of money and supplies, and for recruitment. Several incidents occurred which revealed that a town's male population had turned out almost en masse to ambush a Marine patrol shortly after its departure from the town.[59] Marine reports frequently noted that many of the "so called bandits or gavilleros have relatives in all the outlying towns and it is understood that they are frequently visited by the gavilleros."[60] Similarly large numbers came from the *bateys* located on the sugar estates to the south. In periods of guerrilla inactivity, a Marine lieutenant surmised, many of them "can be found in the southern district near the *colonias* [sugar workers' villages] and living in the houses of the sugar cane workers. Some of them may even be working the sugar mills." In any case, he continued, "it is a certainty that they are being supplied with rum, clothes and all sorts of supplies by their friends around the mills."[61]

Of course, *pacíficos* were not the only victims of Marine abuse. The guerrillas themselves sometimes suffered brutal treatment, torture, and even death while captives of the Marines. In one 1918 incident, a Marine lieutenant murdered eleven jailed followers of Ramón Nateras. His explanation was that he became angry after having heard that a friend of his, a Marine captain, had been killed in an encounter with guerrillas.[62] One of the more common methods of eliminating guerrilla prisoners was to shoot and kill them while they "attempted to escape." In 1919, after two and a half years of such incidents, Marine authorities in Santo Domingo cautioned Marines in the field to secure prisoners more carefully, since "there is always suspicion produced by reports of

58. Ibid.

59. Col. Thorpe to Regimental Commander, Sept. 8, 1918, NA, RG38, E6, B6.

60. CO, 2d Battalion, 15th Provincial Regiment, to District Commander, Sept. 28, 1921, NA, RG38, E6, B36.

61. 1st Lt. Allan S. Heaton, 2d Battalion, 15th Provisional Regiment to Brigadier Commander, June 11, 1919, NA, RG45, WA7, B645.

62. Findings of a Court of Inquiry held at Seibo, Mar. 27, 1918, NA, RG38, E6, B9.

this character that the prisoner was given an opportunity to escape so that he might be killed."[63]

A Dominican who watched the events in the east unfold described the effects of the Marine presence quite clearly: "The gavillerismo [rural unrest] increased with the occupation, or was created by it, . . . because of the increasing danger and difficulty of living in those districts. . . . When someone . . . was killed, his brothers joined the gavilleros, to get revenge on the Marines. . . . Some joined the ranks inspired by patriotism, but most of them joined the ranks inspired by hate, fear or revenge."[64]

Efforts to Eliminate Marine Abuses

Higher officials of the military government soon became aware of the developing pattern of Marine abuse in the east and took some corrective action. But the remedies were often weak and ineffective, either for lack of enforcement or because of the difficulty of controlling the hour-to-hour conduct of units in the field. Furthermore, many officials devised rationalizations which enabled them to ignore much of the evidence which steadily accumulated during the occupation.

Military officials did make efforts to get Dominicans to come forward with their charges,[65] but few chose to complain to the authorities. Many who had experienced or witnessed the Marines' system of justice, based on provost courts, believed that to bring charges was useless and possibly dangerous, since those who did so were sometimes jailed, fined, harassed, or physically harmed. Otto Schoenrich, a North American writer of moderate opinions who was well acquainted with the Dominican Republic and the occupation, wrote that: "the provost courts have gained the reputation of being unjust, oppressive and cruel, and seem to delight in excessive sentences. These provost courts, with their arbitrary and overbearing methods, their refusal to permit accused persons to be defended by counsel, and their foreign judges, foreign language and foreign procedure, are galling to the Dominicans, who regard them with aversion and terror."[66]

Military records indicate that the Marines' investigative officers and courts of justice deserved their poor reputation. Investigating of-

63. Brigadier Gen. Fuller to CO, 15th Regiment, Mar. 1919, NA, RG38, E6, B19.

64. Peynado to Knowles, Apr. 22, 1922, PFP.

65. Lt. Col. Henry C. Davis, District Commander, "Public Notice," May 10, 1921, NA, RG38, E6, B36.

66. Schoenrich, "American Intervention," p. 212.

ficials in general showed themselves unsympathetic to the views of Dominican complainants, often accepting the word of their cohorts over that of a Dominican as a matter of course. And the Marines viewed the court system as a weapon to be used against the guerrillas and their supporters. Like the officers in charge of preliminary investigations, the military tribunals were notoriously biased in favor of Marine defendants. Prosecutions of offending Marines were often halfhearted, and sentences, if any, were light, especially when the defendant was an officer. On the other hand, the court system was often prejudiced and sometimes even vindictive against Dominican plaintiffs. And Dominican defendants could only expect the worst. One Dominican observer of the Marines' judicial efforts commented: "When an American officer has committed a crime, the effort of his superiors is to hide it, to prove the innocence of the criminal, believing that to admit the truth would tarnish the honor of the American forces."[67]

One example of the misuse of the system of military justice is the case of Licenciado Pelegrín Castillo. This man, a lawyer, accused Marine Captain Charles R. Buckalew with killing four guerrilla prisoners in cold blood, and of other atrocities, such as crushing the testicles of a prisoner with a stone. Although evidence pointed unequivocally to the captain's guilt, a preliminary court of inquiry, headed by Marine Lieutenant Colonel C. B. Taylor, found the evidence unreliable and suggested that Buckalew "deserves praise and not censure." Furthermore, the court recommended that Pelegrín Castillo be stripped of his right to practice law.[68] Pelegrín Castillo was then tried by a military court for making false accusations.[69] Much later such massive evidence accumulated against Buckalew that he was made to stand trial before a military court. Despite the defendant's confession, which essentially corroborated Pelegrín Castillo's earlier charges, the court acquitted Buckalew on technical grounds.[70]

Not only was testimony given by Dominicans discounted by the courts, but clear evidence exists of the intimidation of witnesses. Such intimidation prevented some cases from ever reaching the courts, and prevented others from being tried fairly. One instance of the former

67. Blanco Fombona, *Crímenes*, pp. 123–124.

68. Finding of Facts, Opinion and Recommendation of Court of Inquiry convened at Marine Barracks, San Francisco de Macorís, Feb. 24, 1920, NA, RG38, E6, B38.

69. Col. C. M. Perkins, Brigade Law Officer, to Brigade Commander Logan Feland, May 1, 1920, NA, RG38, E6, B38. Luis F. Mejía, one of Pelegrín Castillo's lawyers, describes the case in *De Lilís a Trujillo*, p. 172.

70. Col. Constantine Perkins to Lt. Col. C. B. Taylor, Mar. 4, 1921, NA, RG38, E6, B38.

involved a man who volunteered to turn in some firearms. A Marine, assisted by members of the Guardia whom he commanded, apparently believed that the man had knowledge of the whereabouts of additional arms and so began to torture him, beating him on his testicles with sticks and burning his feet. His daughters were taken naked from their house and forced to watch and then all of them were imprisoned. Complaints concerning the incident subsequently produced an investigation, but it reached no conclusion because witnesses were afraid to talk.[71]

During one of the investigations into the misconduct of Captain Buckalew, all of the prosecution's witnesses suddenly "voluntarily recanted and acknowledged that they falsely testified," thus making it "impossible to establish the truth of the accusations made against Charles R. Buckalew."[72] It is reasonable to conclude, in light of Buckalew's later confession, that the witnesses were under pressure to recant their previous, accurate testimony.

Some of the sentences of the military courts were so blatantly unfair that higher military officials were compelled to protest. Occasionally this caused a retrial or the reopening of an investigation. In one case involving the killing of prisoners, Military Governor Harry Knapp called the acquittal of the obviously guilty Marine defendants a "shocking occurrence, utterly reprehensible."[73] On another occasion, Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels wrote that he viewed with "distinct regret and disapprobation" the "inadequate sentence" given to a Marine private for a serious offense.[74] In 1922, Marine Lieutenant Colonel Henry C. Davis was dismayed to discover that of a number of Dominicans sentenced to five years' imprisonment at hard labor for alleged guerrilla connections, "none of these men were legally tried but were 'railroaded' into jail." Tried by a provost court in San Pedro de Macorís, the prisoners had not been allowed to present witnesses on their behalf, nor did any prosecution witnesses appear against them, a procedure approved by Rear Admiral Thomas Snowden, the military governor at the time. Lieutenant Colonel Davis believed that "other cases of this kind" existed and asked a special investigation.[75]

71. Sworn and notarized statement concerning the case of José Cepeda, signed and witnessed, May 31, 1920, Casa de Don Federico y Biblioteca del Maestro, Santo Domingo, D.R. (hereafter cited as BDM).

72. Commanding Gen. Charles G. Long to Military Gov., Jan. 11, 1921, NA, RG38, E6, B38.

73. Knapp to CO, 2d Provisional Brigade, June 14, 1918, NA, RG38, E6, B6.

74. Daniels to Brigade Commander Pendleton, July 9, 1917, NA, RG38, E6, B4.

75. Davis, Southern District Commander, to Military Gov., May 13, 1922, NA, RG38, E6, B49.

Dominicans ordinarily received harsher treatment in the military courts than did Marines. Though there are not many precisely comparable cases recorded, a revealing exception occurred in early 1922. A group of four Marines, thought by other Marines in the half-light of dusk to be guerrillas because they carried rifles and wore the blue denim typical of the peasant fighters, had been flushed out of the brush by a Marine patrol. An investigation proved that the Marines had set out "on a robbing expedition in the Consuelo [sugar estate] settlements," one of several in which they had participated. For this crime they each received a sentence of thirty days' imprisonment on bread and water.[76] Dominicans tried for similar but less devious acts received sentences from five years to life.

The failure of the system of military justice to deal fairly with Dominicans caused them to distrust and fear it, and thus eliminated legal recourse for those who suffered mistreatment by the Marines or the Guardia. Another obstacle to an effective crackdown on Marine misconduct lay in the fact that military officials often sought to ignore, suppress or make excuses for incidents which did come to their attention.

Among the explanations which the authorities of the military government gave for the misconduct of troops in the field was that the problem originated with Dominicans of the Guardia Nacional fighting under Marine command rather than with the Marines themselves. Since Guardia members lacked adequate training, argued Military Governor Knapp, their breaches of discipline were a natural "reversion to the intolerable conditions which existed in the late preintervention Dominican Army and Guardia Republicana."[77] His view found support in reports from the field, such as one from the brutal Captain Buckalew who complained that, after his men had been through an area, he had "to listen to complaints of stolen horses, poultry and produce . . . as well as iron-handed methods used, which were in vogue in the old Guardia. . . ."[78]

The Guardia *was*, no doubt, a source of problems. But in reality the responsibility for abuse and atrocities lay as much with the Marines. This fact became obvious in the case of Captain Charles Merkle, whose infamous deeds are still remembered in the Dominican Republic in the 1970s. In October 1918, only after the Archbishop of Santo Domingo

76. Harlee, Eastern District Commander, Jan. 25, 1922, NA, RG38, E6, B48.

77. Knapp to Brigade Commander, Confidential, Oct. 17, 1918, NA, RG38, E6, B6.

78. Buckalew, CO, 6th Co., GND, to Cmdt., June 8, 1918, NA, RG38, E6, B6[?].

interceded on behalf of terrified citizens in the east, Marine authorities arrested Merkle, charging him with numerous incidents of torture and murder.[79] When Merkle conveniently committed suicide,[80] the military government dropped its investigation and brushed off his numerous atrocities as unique and isolated incidents, attributable to his Germanic ancestry rather than to Marine attitudes, the problems of fighting a guerrilla war, or the occupation itself. Captain Merkle, wrote Military Governor Snowden, "was a German who used the well-known German methods on the native population."[81]

In the years following Merkle's death, as it became clear that other Marines had been involved in similar atrocities, officials created a new rationalization. Many Marine officers in the east, they explained, were actually corporals and sergeants who, without further training, had been hurriedly promoted to captain because of the World War I officer shortage.[82] "It is hardly equitable," argued Military Governor Knapp, "to expect young and inexperienced officers, some of whom have just been appointed from the ranks, to be thoroughly familiar with all the regulations and rules of warfare governing their conduct, especially as many of these have been rushed into field service as soon as their commissions were received."[83]

Charges made by C. M. Ledger, the British chargé d'affaires in San Pedro de Macorís in late 1921, within six months of the end of the guerrilla insurgency, indicate clearly that both the abuses and the failure to deal adequately with them continued throughout the war. Ledger sought an investigation into events surrounding the killing in cold blood of a British citizen, a black worker from St. Kitts, by Marines. The chargé saw this incident as part of a "reign of terror," and mentioned several *bateys* from which the inhabitants had fled their homes in fear of Marine violence after incidents during which Marines had beaten men and raped women. Though the Marines were theoretically protecting the *bateys* from guerrilla raids, the chargé noted, the guerrillas were "not in the habit of killing their victims nor of interfering with their women folk." He asked a thorough investiga-

79. Merkle's crimes are documented in U.S. Senate, *Hearings*, I, 1117–1147.

80. Thorpe, Battalion Commander, to Regimental Commander, Oct. 9, 1918, NA, RG45, WA7, B646.

81. Snowden to Sec. of the Navy Daniels, June 2, 1920, NA, RG38, E6, B31.

82. They are listed in Ernesto Vega y Pagán, *Historia de las fuerzas armadas*, vols. XVI and XVII of *La era de Trujillo: 25 años de historia dominicana* (Ciudad Trujillo, 1955), XVII, chs. 1–5.

83. Knapp to Brigade Commander, Oct. 21, 1921, NA, RG45, WA7, B646.

tion.[84] Military officials at first ignored the charges, but repeated insistent requests finally brought some action. Indications pointed strongly to a particular Marine officer and his unit, but the investigator seemed unable to produce sufficient concrete evidence for anything more than a minor charge against one enlisted Marine. Eventually the entire matter was quietly shelved and the criminals remained free.[85]

The occupation forces compiled a lengthy record of wrongdoing, even if, as appears likely, not all cases were recorded. The most blatant offenses occasionally resulted in investigations, trials, and convictions. But, in a sense, these judicial processes were irrelevant: the abuses had already occurred, the peasants had learned to hate the Marines, and the guerrilla cause had gained adherents.

Only in 1921 and 1922, during a U.S. Senate investigation of the military occupations of the Dominican Republic and Haiti, did some of the details concerning Marine misbehavior come to light.[86] By then the damage had long since been done. The only beneficiaries were those who somehow could obtain a sense of vindication from the far-off, after-the-fact hearings, which in themselves did not declare anyone innocent or guilty or pass any sentences.

Concluding Summary

In early 1917, representatives of the U.S. military government in the Dominican Republic had disembarked in the east to carry out what appeared to be a relatively simple task: the pacification of a few local troublemakers and the establishment of the authority of the central government. But when the newly arrived and poorly prepared Marine leaders attempted to implement their orders by riding roughshod over the traditional autonomy of the east, they sparked an armed uprising. Thereafter, several factors combined to feed the flames of war. One was the tension and resentment associated with the region's rapidly expanding sugar industry and the resulting social and economic dislocations. Another was the anger which the Marines' own mishandling of the conflict generated.

There can be no doubt that the Marines' opponents were something other than the "bandits" born of military government propaganda and accepted by subsequent writers. They were peasant guerrillas fighting for principles and a way of life. Although the precise nature and the

84. Ledger to Military Gov., Note no. 79, Nov. 4, 1921, NA, RG38, E6, B37.

85. See file of letters and Report of Investigation, all attached to letter of Chargé Ledger, cited above.

86. U.S. Senate, *Hearings*, vols. I and II.

degree of their motivation remains open to exact definition, it is certain in some cases that both the guerrillas and their leaders were conscious of political issues.

The end of the guerrilla conflict came in the spring of 1922, shortly after U.S. and Dominican representatives had signed an agreement for the termination of the occupation. The peasant rebels, faced by combined forces of Marines and Dominican paramilitary auxiliaries, were encountering their first effective opposition in six years. After long negotiations, they laid down their arms in return for a nearly total amnesty.[87]

In their surrender, the guerrilla leaders paid obeisance to a new way of political life. They may have hoped that the new order would last only until the Marines departed, but, if so, they were mistaken. No longer would the central government be forced to negotiate with the eastern caudillos to gain the region's allegiance. Never again would these traditional leaders successfully defy the central government or raise their followers in rebellion.

Despite the Marines' ineffectiveness in combatting the guerrillas, changes had occurred in the east which ensured the demise of the old system. Over the course of the war the military government had greatly improved transportation and communication networks and continued to do so until 1924. By then, for the first time, the east was effectively linked to the rest of the nation. More important, military authorities had created in the Dominican constabulary, the Guardia Nacional Dominicana, a force which would soon hold an effective monopoly of military control, power that would be directed from the national capital, Santo Domingo. The reality of the new situation became clear in 1930 when the head of the Guardia, General Rafael Trujillo, overthrew the constitutional government and began his thirty-one-year dictatorship.

87. The events leading to the surrender are detailed in Calder, "Some Aspects," ch. 6.