

The Africanization of Cuba Scare, 1853-1855

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ONE OF THE most fascinating of the many attempts by the United States, or its citizens, to detach Cuba from Spain prior to the Civil War occurred in 1854-55. Many factors in the international situation at that time combined to give unquestioned importance to the political destiny of Cuba. England and France prodded Spain to abolish slavery and substitute a free labor system in the island with the result that unusual political and social tensions were generated there. Characteristically, the United States was particularly sensitive to the internal unrest in Cuba. This condition was reflected in the cabinet of the pro-expansionist Franklin Pierce administration which decided to press Spain to sell Cuba to the United States notwithstanding deteriorating relations with that European power. The administration was further embarrassed by the fact that exiled Cubans in the United States cooperated with the efforts of John A. Quitman, Governor of Mississippi in 1850-51, to organize a filibustering expedition with the intent of preventing the emancipation of slaves in the island. Spanish authorities were familiar with the development of the enterprise, and the information they conveyed to the Pierce administration made it impossible for the latter to ignore the filibusters. In the background was the ever-increasing sectional furor over the Kansas-Nebraska affair which was to intensify northern opposition to the expansion of slavery.

The threat of Africanization gave the crisis its peculiar character and intensity, both in Cuba and on the mainland of North America. Conservative planters understood Africanization to mean the adoption of any system of labor which had for its ultimate aim the extinction of slavery, and they so interpreted the labor decrees in the island in 1854. Predictable consequences, they declared, would be a marked decline of productivity, bitter racial warfare, and the extermination

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of the whites. With them would perish civilization and Christianity. Such an inferno close to southern shores would menace the social order. That this sentiment was taken seriously by persons of wealth and prestige in the Southwest is suggested by the fact that in 1854 the Louisiana legislature condemned the Africanization of Cuba and appealed to the Federal government to prevent it at all costs.¹ As for the creoles in Cuba, they regarded the Africanization scare of 1853-1855 in a different light for they had long feared that the numerical predominance of Africans in Cuba² would lead to uprisings of slaves, such as occurred in the neighborhood of Matanzas in 1843.³ The creoles acted as if the socio-economic structure of Cuba were in imminent jeopardy during the crisis of the 'fifties, feeling powerless against the collective will of London, Paris, and Madrid.

One may wonder to what extent southerners were genuinely fearful of Africanization, and how far the new labor system merely supplied a rationale for an old desire to acquire new slave states, but the present study is intended to discover, so far as is possible, the facts concerning the controversial labor policy, and to describe the reactions of the four groups that felt themselves adversely affected, i.e., the exiled creoles, the Quitman expeditionaries, the Pierce administration, and propertied classes in the island.

Several forces in the European scene combined to generate the Africanization scare. One was English humanitarianism on an international scale, dating back to the abolition of the slave trade throughout the British Empire in 1807, which led to attempts to suppress the "abominable traffic" on the high seas. In the latter struggle, the humanitarians found their onetime foes, British plantation owners, anxious to co-operate in order to terminate the economic advantage of a continuous source of labor supply from Africa possessed by rival nations in the new world.⁴ In 1833 William Wilberforce died with

¹ Cf. *House Miscellaneous Documents*, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., No. 79 (Washington, 1854), unnumbered page.

² Despite the fears voiced in 1795 by the committee report of the Sociedad Económica, concerning the rapid increase of blacks in the Cuban population, this was counter-balanced by the desire of the planters for profits to be made from the slave traffic. Duvon C. Corbitt, "Immigration in Cuba," *HAHR*, XXII (1942), 283-284.

³ "So thoroughly was the fear of the whites aroused that petitions from a number of planters demanded the enforcement of treaties abolishing the slave trade—treaties which they had been breaking deliberately for years. One petition, signed by ninety-three planters, called attention to the fact that 498,000 of Cuba's 660,000 inhabitants were slaves—shades of Hayti's martyrdom!" *Ibid.*, pp. 299-300.

⁴ James F. King, "The Latin-American Republics and the Suppression of the Slave Trade," *HAHR*, XXIV (1944), 387.

the comforting realization that his crusade had achieved a great success, i.e., the decision of the British Parliament in that year to emancipate all slaves throughout the colonial possessions.⁵ Immediately following the Revolution of 1848, French radicals at Paris did likewise.⁶ Thus both England and France had a vested interest in the free labor system in the tropical Caribbean economy. If Spain could be induced to liberate the slaves in Cuba, this would not only remove the chief economic differential among competing island economies, but would provide a common bond of resistance to the aggressive designs of the United States. The institution of free labor in Cuba would quickly cool the ardor of annexationists in the South who were furnishing most of the leadership to acquire the island. This vital interest of England and France in the political and social status of Cuba was observed and reported to his superiors by James Buchanan, newly installed Minister to the Court of St. James.⁷

Heavy diplomatic pressure by England on Spain to inaugurate radical changes in the Cuban labor structure apparently began in 1851. Prior to that time England's chief concern was to suppress the slave trade in Cuba, and it had secured such commitments from Spain in 1817 and again in 1835.⁸ However, after the Spanish had crushed the Narciso López filibustering venture of 1851, Viscount Palmerston, foreign secretary, directed the British ambassador at Madrid to inform Spain that any steps taken toward the emancipation of slaves

⁵ About 668,000 slaves in the British West Indies were freed at sundown on July 31, 1834. Planters in this area received over £16,500,000 as compensation of the £20,000,000 voted by Parliament. Sir Alan Burns, *History of the British West Indies* (London, 1954), pp. 627-629. See also Lowell J. Ragatz, *The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean, 1763-1833, a Study in Social and Economic History* (New York, 1928), pp. 454-455.

⁶ While preliminary steps toward emancipation had been taken in 1845, the law of March, 1848, abolished slavery in the West Indies without restrictions. Indemnity was fixed at the sum of 430 francs per head although the market value of the blacks varied from 1,500 to 1,800 francs. As a concession to sugar planters, however, emancipation was to be postponed until July, but, liberated in principle, the blacks precipitated an economic and social crisis by refusing to work for nothing. W. Adolphe Roberts, *Les Français aux Indes Occidentales* (Montreal, Canada, 1945), pp. 273-274.

⁷ Buchanan, La Rochelle, to Jefferson Davis, August 1, 1854, Jefferson Davis Papers (Library of Congress).

⁸ In return the Spanish monarchy was compensated to the extent of 400,000 pounds sterling. The original treaty was to take effect in 1820. Hubert H. S. Aimes, *A History of Slavery in Cuba, 1511-1868* (New York and London, 1907), pp. 82-83. This treaty proved unsatisfactory to the English because of a proviso to the effect that a slave-carrying vessel could not be condemned unless captured while Africans were aboard. The revised treaty allowed confiscation of any vessel if the nature of its equipment indicated its use as a slave runner. *Ibid.*, pp. 126-127.

would be in accordance with England's idea for the peaceful and happy rule of Spain in Cuba. The institution of a free Negro population "would create a most powerful element of resistance to any scheme for annexing Cuba to the United States, where slavery exists."⁹ In 1853, Lord Russell requested Lord Howden at Madrid to point out to the Spanish government that, although England naturally preferred to see Spain continue as mistress of Cuba, British subjects would derive great satisfaction from seeing the new sovereign, presumably the United States, abolish the slave trade.¹⁰ This constituted a warning not to expect any assistance from England if the island were wrested from her prior to the abolition of the slave trade. Meanwhile, England exerted great and sustained efforts to induce Spain to liberate the *emancipados*, and was finally rewarded by the promise of the Spanish government to do so in March, 1853.¹¹

In the interim the United States was in ignorance concerning British intent, but, when James Buchanan outlined to Lord Clarendon, successor of Lord Russell, the dangers to the United States of a Cuba without slavery, he received evasive answers. Clarendon remained discreetly silent concerning the direct proposal England had made that Spain institute total abolition, and spoke instead of the suppression of the slave trade and of securing justice for the *emancipados*.¹²

A most significant fact is that in October, 1853, England presented a series of demands upon Spain which anticipated the reform program of Captain General Juan M. de la Pezuela. The latter precipitated the Africanization of Cuba scare on an international scale. The English Foreign Office justified these proposals on the ground that without them Spain could never honor its treaty obligations to suppress the slave trade. They contained two features of the subsequent

⁹ No. 575. Viscount Palmerston to Lord Howden, October 20, 1851, *British and Foreign State Papers* (London, 1864), XLI, 525-526.

¹⁰ No. 271. Lord John Russell to Lord Howden, January 31, 1853, *ibid.*, XLII, 335.

¹¹ No. 283. Lord Howden, Madrid, to the Earl of Clarendon, March 16, 1853, *ibid.*, XLII, 345-346; No. 642. Consul-General Crawford, Havana, to the Earl of Clarendon, January 2, 1854, *ibid.*, XLIV, 1383. *Emancipados* were those Africans captured aboard slave ships after 1820. By terms of the Anglo-Spanish treaty of 1835, they were given to the custody of the nation whose vessel made the capture, and their freedom legally assured. Aimes, *Slavery in Cuba*, p. 127. However, in Spanish Cuba it became the custom for the captain general to sell the labor of the *emancipados* to the local planters for a period of seven years. Unfortunately, few *emancipados* survived their seven year indenture. Amos A. Ettinger, *The Mission to Spain of Pierre Soulé, 1853-55, a Study in the Cuban Diplomacy of the United States* (New Haven, 1932), p. 12.

¹² Portell-Vilà, *Historia de Cuba en sus Relaciones con los Estados Unidos y España* (4 vols., Havana, Cuba, 1938-1941), II, 33-34.

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Pezuela program, which most alarmed the wealthy classes in Cuba: the abolition of immunity of rural estates from search and seizure by the authorities of illegal slave entries, and the registration of all slaves held on the island.¹³ The institution of these same measures a few months later by Pezuela shortly after assuming office can scarcely be regarded as coincidental.

There were, of course, valid reasons why Spain should court England's favor by yielding or appearing to do so. One compelling argument was the English navy which, if properly employed in the Caribbean, would guarantee Spain continued possession of the Pearl of the Antilles. Besides, English citizens held a large portion of Spanish bonds, the interest payments of which were lagging. In typical Palmerstonian fashion, England could easily embarrass Spain by diplomatic pressure for payment.¹⁴

Although the Madrid *Heraldo* had proclaimed since 1851 that Cuba would be either Spanish or African,¹⁵ the beginning of prolonged internal agitation in the island over Spain's labor policy virtually coincided with the inauguration of Captain General Pezuela in December, 1853.¹⁶ Pezuela had served in the same capacity in Puerto Rico, and was well known for his strict enforcement of treaties. Abolitionist by sentiment, and opposed to the slave traffic because of his belief in human dignity, Pezuela was familiar with the labor problem in Cuba. Prior to taking over the post "he was in close communication with the [Spanish] ministry, by which an exact policy was determined upon."¹⁷ One present-day Cuban historian observes

¹³ No. 462. Earl of Clarendon to Mr. Otway, October 15, 1853, inclosing draft of a letter to be sent Señor Calderon de la Barca, *British and Foreign State Papers*, XLIV, 1365-1368.

¹⁴ John H. Latané, *The Diplomacy of the United States in Regard to Cuba*, in the *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1897* (Washington, 1898), p. 246. Since 1830, Palmerston had distinguished himself in the Foreign Office through his forceful campaign against the slave trade. King, "The Latin-American Republics and the Suppression of the Slave Trade," pp. 393-394.

¹⁵ *Llamamiento de la Isla de Cuba a la Nación Española, Dirigido al. Excmo. É Ilmo. Señor Don Baldomero Espartero, Duque de la Victoria, Presidente del Consejo de Ministros por un Hacendado, en Diciembre de 1854* (New York, 1854-1855), p. 56. (Pamphlet, University of Chicago Library.)

¹⁶ *The Island of Cuba*, by Alexander Humboldt. Translated from the Spanish with Notes and a Preliminary Essay. By J. S. Thrasher (New York, 1856), pp. 66-67; Ramiro Guerra y Sánchez, *Manual de historia de Cuba (Económica, Social y Política)* (Havana, 1938), pp. 502-503. Earlier in the same year, Captain General Cañedo made the planters apprehensive concerning Spain's emancipation designs, but protests by the conservative creoles to Madrid resulted in his hasty recall. Aimes, *Slavery in Cuba*, p. 177; Basil Rauch, *American Interest in Cuba, 1848-1855* (New York, 1948), p. 276.

¹⁷ Aimes, *Slavery in Cuba*, p. 177. See also P. Carlos de Sedano, *Cuba; Estudios políticos* (Madrid, 1872), pp. 77-78.

that this policy appeared to have involved nothing more than instructions and powers to carry through great reforms, extirpate the slave traffic, and establish a base for important changes in the system of slavery with a possible view to gradual emancipation.¹⁸ Other scholars, while not questioning Pezuela's integrity, admit that his precipitate action caused genuine alarm in influential Cuban circles over the implied threat to abolish slavery.¹⁹

Shortly after Pezuela undertook his new duties, there appeared in the government's special organ at Havana, the *Diario de la Marina*, a series of articles carrying grave implications for the future of slavery. The first article condemned the previous administration for winking at the illicit traffic, and promised that treaty obligations would be strictly enforced. A progressive change in the labor policy was imperative. A few days later another article appeared which argued the superiority of free to slave labor.²⁰ The tension was heightened by rumors that Spain had signed a secret treaty with Britain which provided for the complete emancipation of slaves and that, as soon as the Russo-Turkish controversy was settled, the English navy would seal off the island while the dreaded project was consummated.²¹ Such was the local atmosphere when the new labor decrees were promulgated.

While the initial reforms were moderate, they lent an air of truth to rumors of emancipation. The first proclamation declared that all Negroes known as emancipados were to be freed. A circular to subaltern authorities ordered them to resist the smuggling of African slaves along the coast. The only limitation placed upon their ability to pursue illicit slave gangs was conformity to Article IX of the law of 1845 which provided immunity from search and seizure for rural estates.²² Further unrest was created by the government's announcement that it had in view the "transition from labor that is entirely compulsory, to the organization of labor under a state of complete freedom." In mid-January, 1854, the new regime further imple-

¹⁸ Portell-Vilá, *Cuba*, II, 75.

¹⁹ de Sedano, *Cuba*, pp. 77-78; Guerra y Sánchez, *Cuba*, pp. 502-506; Justo Zaragoza, *Las insurrecciones en Cuba. Apuntes para la historia política de esta isla en el presente siglo* (2 vols., Madrid, 1872), I, 656. "...the Spanish government, impressed by the imminent danger to Cuba from the new administration in Washington, decided to demonstrate its determination to Africanize the island as a last measure of defense." Rauch, *American Interest in Cuba*, p. 277.

²⁰ Thrasher's introduction to *Humboldt's Cuba*, pp. 67-68; New Orleans *Daily Delta*, January 15, 1854.

²¹ Guerra y Sánchez, *Cuba*, pp. 502-503.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 504-505. The New Orleans *Daily Delta*, January 15, 1854, reported that only those emancipados were declared free who had been captured on the high seas in slave ships prior to 1835.

mented its scheme of free labor by its decision to permit the introduction of large numbers of free Negro apprentices from Africa.²³

More startling changes soon followed. Since the immunity from search on rural plantations had hampered efforts to stamp out the smuggling of slaves, Pezuela had appealed to Spain and in March, 1854, Madrid granted his request for the abolition of the law. This meant that the authorities could enter a suspected property at any time to examine anything they desired relating to the labor force. In May a crisis stage was reached. All slave holders were ordered to appear before the local authorities and make a full declaration concerning their slave property. This would include the name, age, and sex of each slave, the lawful title to the person of each, and full data concerning the white from whom the slave had been purchased. Any improperly registered slaves were to be freed.²⁴ The reason is clear. Since 1820 Spain had been committed by treaty to suppress the slave trade. Thus all slaves imported since that time were illegal entries. A full investigation of slave property would make it easy for the authorities to declare the emancipation of illegally held blacks on the ground that the government was conforming to treaty obligations.²⁵

Fears of the slave interests were aggravated by the edict which permitted the slave to hire himself out to others than his master, provided he returned eight dollars monthly to his owner. All compensation above that sum received by the slave might be retained by him and applied to a fund with which he could ultimately purchase his freedom. Although an old principle, the new law allegedly deprived the owner of over half his revenue at a single stroke because his previous monthly compensation had been eighteen dollars. Since Spanish laws had always been lenient concerning emancipation, the result would be to lend additional domestic pressure for the abolition of slavery to those already existent in the international sphere.²⁶

White supremacy was threatened when it was announced in May that the government was arming free mulattoes and blacks to help protect Cuba. Their enlistment was for a period of two years during which they enjoyed the same status as regular Spanish soldiers.²⁷

²³ Thrasher's introduction to *Humboldt's Cuba*, p. 69.

²⁴ Guerra y Sánchez, *Cuba*, pp. 505-507.

²⁵ de Sedano, *Cuba*, pp. 77-78. Judah P. Benjamin of Louisiana declared in the United States Senate on May 24, 1854, that the rigid application of such a law would free virtually one-fourth of the slaves in Cuba. *Congressional Globe*, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., vol. 28, Part II, 1299.

²⁶ John Slidell, May 1, 1854, *ibid.*, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., vol. 28, Part II, 1023.

²⁷ Guerra y Sánchez, *Cuba*, p. 508. This desperate measure may have been necessitated by the refusal of Spanish troops to serve in Cuba. J. L. O'Sullivan, Lisbon, to Quitman, July 10, 1854, Quitman Papers (Houghton Library, Harvard).

The American consul at Havana reported that the organization and drilling of some four thousand blacks, principally emancipados, had been in effect for a month prior to the edict. Although the total number under arms was uncertain,²⁸ it was believed that the official plan called for one armed Negro for every two armed whites.²⁹ Meanwhile, not only did the project for the importation of Negroes from Africa as quasi-free laborers, or apprentices, threaten to aggravate the imminent danger of black numerical predominance and racial warfare,³⁰ but the whites feared that free schools were about to be provided for them, and racial intermarriage permitted.³¹

This is apparently about as close to the facts concerning the new labor decrees as one armed with present evidence may get, but there remains the analysis of the reactions of those groups that felt themselves menaced by them.

In the fall of 1853, members of the Cuban junta in New York and New Orleans voiced concern over rumors that Spain intended to introduce free Negro apprentices from Africa. They interpreted this action to mean that Spain expected to improve its chance of making good its boast that Cuba would either be Spanish or African and believed that the ultimate result would be the social ruination of the island and the destruction of its white population.³² According to the junta, slavery in Cuba was doomed in August, 1854, when Spain yielded to English demands for abolition; as soon as the Near Eastern difficulties were resolved, the scheme would be consummated under the protection of the English navy. Cuba's only hope lay in the United States where influential elements desired both to conserve slavery and to resist further encroachments of European power in the

²⁸ W. H. Robertson, Havana, to William L. Marey, Washington, April 26, June 11, 1854, Consular Correspondence, Dispatches Havana, vol. 27 (National Archives, Washington, D. C.).

²⁹ Guerra y Sánchez, *Cuba*, p. 508.

³⁰ "The Cuban Debate," *Democratic Review*, XXXI (1852), pp. 440-445; New Orleans *Daily Delta*, January 26, 1853.

³¹ Maturin M. Ballou, *History of Cuba; or, Notes of a Traveller in the Tropics. Being a Political, Historical, and Statistical Account of the Island, from Its First Discovery to the Present Time* (Boston, 1854), p. 57; Thrasher's introduction to *Humboldt's Cuba*, p. 71; Rauch, *American Interest in Cuba*, p. 278. However, one authority states that all such absurd stories concerning Captain General Pezuela's intent to equalize social conditions for the slaves "were fabrications employed for political ends." Aimes, *Slavery in Cuba*, p. 184.

³² Francisco Agüero, "Habitantes de Cuba," *La Verdad*, September 20, 1853, p. 269; Major Louis Schlesinger, New Orleans, to Quitman, November 7, 1853, John A. Quitman Papers (Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson. Hereinafter cited as M.A.H.); "A Los Patriotas Cubanos," New Orleans, May 9, 1854, *ibid.*

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 western hemisphere.³³ However, private efforts to flibustering attempts against Cuba were to be preferred over public intervention. Spain would almost certainly counter a declaration of war by the United States with a proclamation providing for gradual or immediate freedom for the slaves. Even the conquest of the island could not undo such an evil. On the other hand, in the event of an invasion by filibusters, Spain would maintain Cuba's existing institutions on the specious theory that it could repel the invader.³⁴

Since one of the junta's main concerns was to prevent Africanization, it is not surprising that its members joined forces in 1853 with John A. Quitman, Governor of Mississippi in 1850-51, who, along with many other southerners, shared that same determination. In April, 1854, final arrangements were made at New Orleans in the name of the junta by Gaspar Betancourt Cisneros, Porfirio Valiente, and Elías José Hernández. Quitman was placed in full charge of the enterprise.³⁵

Accepting the premise of the inevitability of emancipation of slaves in Spanish Cuba, Quitman argued that southern progress and expansion would be precluded by the erection of a "strong negro or mongrel empire."³⁶ His first course of action was to warn President Franklin Pierce that, unless positive measures were taken soon, he would be held responsible for social disaster both in Cuba and the South.³⁷ Since, from Quitman's point of view, the cabinet had remained inactive for a year, despite his warning of the Africanization menace,³⁸ he confessed no confidence in the proposed plan to purchase the island.³⁹ Only the rugged individualism of resolute private citizens could save Cuba from the emancipation of the blacks and racial warfare.⁴⁰ Since Quitman both publicly and privately took

³³ "Los Patriotas," Havana, October 3, 1853; "Manifiesto al Pueblo de Cuba," in *La Verdad*, November 10, 1853, pp. 329-330.

³⁴ Cuba (Private and Confidential), No. 173, Fayssoux-Walker Papers (Tulane University).

³⁵ Confidential circular, unsigned, Mobile, June 10, 1854, Quitman Papers (M.A.H.).

³⁶ Quitman, Monmouth, to Thomas Reed, August 24, 1854, in J. F. H. Claiborne, *Life and Correspondence of John A. Quitman*, 2 vols. (New York, 1860), II, 207.

³⁷ Draft of a letter in Quitman's hand to President Franklin B. Pierce, undated, Quitman Papers (M.A.H.); memo of answer to B. F. Dill on Cuban Affairs, June 18, 1854, initialed by Quitman, Quitman Papers (Harvard).

³⁸ Quitman to B. F. Dill, February 9, 1854, Quitman Papers (M.A.H.).

³⁹ Note in Quitman's hand appended to a letter from Dr. F. R. Witter, Napoleon, Mississippi, to Quitman, March 17, 1854, *ibid.* The General believed that the helplessness of the administration was due to its knowledge that the majority of Congress opposed slavery. Memo of answer to B. F. Dill on Cuban Affairs, June 18, 1854, Quitman Papers (Harvard).

⁴⁰ Confidential circular, unsigned, Mobile, June 10, 1854, Quitman Papers (M.A.H.).

this position, receiving many letters from those anxious to volunteer for strictly sectional reasons,⁴¹ we may infer that one of the chief motives of the expedition was to prevent the Africanization of Cuba.

Conservative creoles in Cuba meanwhile were quick to take alarm at Pezuela's attempt to introduce a new labor system, and began to plot revolution and subsequent annexation to the United States.⁴² Although there had always been local dissatisfaction at the lack of political liberty, and a realization that American sovereignty would bring economic blessings, these motives had never been sufficient to induce the wealthy classes to revolt. Now, confronted with sudden ruin, the instinct of self-preservation enabled them to mobilize their energy and resources for annexation. The solution was fundamentally conservative for it was designed to preserve slavery and white supremacy within the framework of the Federal Union.⁴³ Even previously loyal peninsulars joined the bitter opposition to Pezuela for they shared the apprehension of bankruptcy, as well as the grimmer prospect of racial warfare.⁴⁴ So serious did the resistance of men of property become that, in 1854, Ramón Pintó, former director of the Havana *Diario de la Marina*, became convinced that Spain would lose the island before the year was out.⁴⁵

While an analysis of the available correspondence from Cuba during this period indicates genuine apprehension of Africanization by propertied groups, it is likewise true that they appeared anxious for the United States to solve their problem. Even before Pezuela assumed command, conservative Creoles had warned the Pierce administration that, in the event of invasion, Spain was prepared to march all slaves into the interior, presumably with the intent to liberate and arm them.⁴⁶ The first hint by Pezuela of the new labor

⁴¹ Although more articulate than most correspondents, Colonel John S. Ford, formerly of the Texas Rangers, and editor of the Austin *Star Times*, struck a popular note when he declared that Quitman's expedition was "the paramount enterprise of the age—the grand work to secure the South against malign influences from any quarter and the consummation of it will place an immovable keystone in the arch of the Union." Ford, Austin, to J. S. Thrasher, August 12, 1854, *ibid.* Another writer declared: "The acquisition of Cuba I regard as the only hope of the South. Whether it comes into the Union or not, will matter little, so far as the South is concerned. With the aid of Cuba, she can make her own terms either in or out of the Union." William S. Langley, Jackson, to Quitman, January 13, 1855, Quitman Papers (Harvard.)

⁴² José A. Saco, *L'Esclavage à Cuba et la Révolution d'Espagne*. Preface by Leon Pierre Adrien de Montluc (Paris, 1869), Preface, p. 7.

⁴³ Guerra y Sánchez, *Cuba*, pp. 510-511; Portell-Vilà, *Cuba*, I, 351-352.

⁴⁴ Robertson, Havana, to Marcy, Washington, June 27, 1854, Consular Correspondence, Dispatches Havana, vol. 27.

⁴⁵ Guerra y Sánchez, *Cuba*, p. 511.

⁴⁶ Cristóbal Madan, Havana, to President Pierce, Washington, October 4, 1853, Consular Correspondence, Dispatches Havana, vol. 27.

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law led to quick predictions of economic and social chaos.⁴⁷ The months of April and May in 1854 brought affairs to a crisis stage. Since it was believed at Havana that the administration controlled Quitman, and had not let him get under way,⁴⁸ the Creoles appealed to Washington. In April several influential creoles approached Consul W. H. Robertson with suggestions concerning the strategy of the American Army when it invaded Cuba. Robertson forwarded them with favorable comment because he thought the scheme would attract sympathy for the annexationist cause.⁴⁹ When the Pierce administration declined to accept this advice, inevitable disappointment resulted. Nevertheless, in mid-May Robertson sensed that the time for action had arrived. If the United States were ready to intervene, he concluded, the creoles would retire to a certain point, issue a revolutionary proclamation, and form a temporary government to annul any acts of the captain general which jeopardized the institution of slavery. But the creoles' sense of desperation was so great, Robertson believed, that they would, if necessary, initiate the revolution.⁵⁰ Shortly thereafter, Ramón Pintó informed the Pierce administration that, if the United States was not going to aid the creoles, it should immediately say so, and thus allow them to risk all in a revolution rather than to wait death at the hands of the enraged Negroes.⁵¹ But nothing came of these bold words during the summer of 1854.

While it is obvious that the Pierce administration was under heavy pressure from many quarters to terminate the threat to slavery in Cuba and the South, its own course of action was for some time uncertain. The cabinet felt a genuine concern over the social implication of the new labor laws.⁵² It also seems clear that President Pierce and his principal subordinates knew about the early history of the Quitman venture, giving it their tacit consent, if nothing more.⁵³ The month of May, 1854, proved crucial in forcing the hand of the administration. It opened with the sensational speech of Senator

⁴⁷ Madan, Havana, to Robertson, December 25, 1853, *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Juan Martínez, Havana, to "My dear Sir," May 14, 1854, *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Robertson, Havana, to Marcy, Washington, April 26, 1854, *ibid.*

⁵⁰ Robertson, Havana, to Marcy, Washington, May 16, 1854, *ibid.*

⁵¹ Juan Martínez, Havana, to Charles Davis, Washington, May 29, 1854, *ibid.* Juan Martínez was the pseudonym of Ramón Pintó. Portell-Vilà, *Cuba*, II, 90.

⁵² Marcy, Washington, to Pierre Soulé, Madrid, April 3, 1854, William L. Marcy Papers (Library of Congress); Edward Everett, Washington, to Sir Henry Holland, April 25, 1854, Everett Papers (Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston).

⁵³ W. S. Haynes, New Orleans, to Quitman, February 7, 1853, Quitman Papers (Library of Congress); Virginia Quitman McNealus, Dallas, Texas, to S. E. Morison, Cambridge, Massachusetts, January 21, 1932, Quitman Papers (Harvard).

John Slidell of Louisiana who proposed to repeal the neutrality laws. Although the manoeuvre was unsuccessful, it caused Senator Edward Everett of Massachusetts to fear that the administration was determined to provoke a quarrel with Spain and thus justify turning loose 100,000 filibusters.⁵⁴ In the middle of May, Secretary of State William L. Marcy sent Charles W. Davis to Cuba as his secret agent to report on the dangers of Africanization.⁵⁵ Consul Robertson apparently directed Davis to Ramón Pintó who spoke with considerable candor.⁵⁶ Upon his return to Washington later that same month, Davis confirmed creole fears of imminent Africanization.⁵⁷ Just before the month of May elapsed, the cabinet reached its first major decision by the resolution to forestall social disaster by the purchase of the island.⁵⁸

There appears little doubt that the decision to purchase Cuba was inspired by the moderates in the Pierce cabinet. Although the prospect of the legal acquisition of Cuba was viewed with misgivings in the North,⁵⁹ it was calculated to provoke less opposition than the filibustering design. This was an important consideration to an administration which had already incurred bitter sectional animosity with its sponsorship of the Kansas-Nebraska bill.⁶⁰ Another important consideration was the information that the Spanish would abandon the radical plan of arming the blacks if they were assured that the filibusters would not sail.⁶¹ Meanwhile, the Spanish embassy was able to give the administration full details concerning the progress of the Quitman expedition because its spies had wormed their way into the confidences of some of the leaders of the junta.⁶² Thus the cabinet

⁵⁴ Everett, Boston, to His Excellency James Buchanan, May 8, 1854, Everett Papers. See also Everett to Mrs. Charles Eames, May 16, 18, 1854, *ibid.*

⁵⁵ Portell-Vilá, *Cuba*, II, 93.

⁵⁶ L. Case, Newark, Ohio, to D. A. Wilson, Jr., New Orleans, May 24, 1856, Quitman Papers (Harvard).

⁵⁷ Rauch, *American Interest in Cuba*, p. 285.

⁵⁸ Portell-Vilá, *Cuba*, II, 88. See also Marcy, Washington, to Buchanan, June 27, 1854, Marcy Papers.

⁵⁹ "The annexation of a territory which would imply the admission of two or more slaveholding States into the Union would put its power of cohesion to a fearful test." Abstract of a letter from Everett to Lord John Russell, June 8, 1854, Everett Papers.

⁶⁰ Everett to Mrs. Charles Eames, November 13, 1854, *ibid.* Mr. Abbot Lawrence of Massachusetts was of the firm opinion that the Kansas-Nebraska bill would lead to the admission of both territories as slave states. Everett, *Diary*, March 22, 1854, *ibid.*

⁶¹ Robertson, Havana, to Marcy, Washington, May 23, 1854, Consular Correspondence, Dispatches Havana, vol. 27.

⁶² A. M. Segovia, New Orleans, to Pezuela, May 25, June 25, 1854, Num. 3, 2d época, Legajo 34 (Archivo Nacional, Habana, Cuba).

was forced to make a choice between allowing the filibusters to depart amid a storm of domestic protest, or going ahead with its purchase plans. It chose the latter, pushing them with almost incredible optimism,⁶³ after administering an abrupt check to the Quitman expedition by the legal prosecution of its leadership at New Orleans.⁶⁴

That this path would ultimately lead to the fiasco of the Ostend Manifesto,⁶⁵ with its declaration that the United States should consider taking Cuba by force if Spain refused to sell it, and full diplomatic retreat from it could not be foreseen. But the important thing is that it allowed Spain to seize the initiative. Both the creoles in Cuba and the Quitman expeditionaries were forced to wait upon the Pierce cabinet, and that body directed anxious eyes upon Pierre Soulé, its minister at Madrid, who was frustrated at every turn.

It was the return to Cuba of Captain General José de la Concha in September, 1854, which inaugurated an abrupt transition in political sentiment. He had been given his opportunity following the sudden removal of Pezuela which, ironically, occurred as the result of Soulé's demands in the *Black Warrior* controversy.⁶⁶ Thus it would appear as if the pacification of the island were more of a personal triumph for Concha than the result of a strategic decision at Madrid. At any rate, his return was marked with great festivities by privileged groups, especially Catalan slave traders, landed proprietors, and merchants who feared for the loss of their fortunes because of Pezuela's dangerous tampering with the institution of slavery.⁶⁷

Immediately evident was the much more conservative approach of the new regime. Concha felt that slavery must be preserved in

⁶³ Officials at the Paris embassy were so confident that they advised Washington to suppress the Quitman expedition lest it alone prevent the consummation of purchase plans. A. Dudley Mann, Paris, to Marcy, August 31, October 2, 1854, Marcy Papers. See also Samuel R. Walker, New York, to Quitman, July 31, 1854, Quitman Papers (Harvard).

⁶⁴ Memo on "Substance of My ——— Before Grand Jury 1854," unsigned manuscript in Quitman's hand, Quitman Papers (M.A.H.).

⁶⁵ This was a common declaration by the United States ministers to Spain, England, and France, meeting at Ostend, Belgium, in the fall of 1854, which justified the seizure of Cuba, provided Spain would not sell, and its refusal interpreted as inimical to the national interests of the United States. *House Executive Documents*, No. 93, 33 Cong., 2 Sess., 127-132.

⁶⁶ Portell-Vilà, *Cuba*, II, 95. The controversy originated when the *Black Warrior*, an American steamer, was arbitrarily seized by the Spanish authorities at Havana for a customary but technical violation of port rules in regard to listing the ship's manifest. Rauch, *American Interest in Cuba*, p. 279.

⁶⁷ Zaragoza, *Insurrecciones en Cuba*, II, 28-29. When captain general of Cuba in 1851, Concha had been accused by the British of winking at the slave traffic and resenting the presentation to him of the facts in the case by their officials at Havana. Viscount Palmerston to Lord Howden, July 10, 1851, *British and Foreign State Papers*, XLI, 493.

agricultural pursuits, and that stringent efforts to curtail it would produce serious disturbances. From a pragmatic point of view, his shrewdest move was the compromise effected with regard to the illicit slave traffic. He was convinced that the hostility of planters to arbitrary visits to their estates was founded on a fear of a relaxation of discipline over the slaves which might lead to revolution. He announced that, although the illicit traffic would be halted, there would be no registration of slaves. Whenever circumstances compelled the search of a rural estate, precautions must be taken to maintain the prestige of the master. Local authorities were merely to count the slaves and prevent escapes. Arbitrary seizures of slaves were forbidden.⁶⁸

As a result of this conciliatory attitude toward those having a vested interest in slavery, revolutionary zeal declined. Wealthy persons, creole as well as peninsulars, perceived that the threat to slavery had abated and, allowing their conservative instincts to dominate, withdrew from the revolutionary movement.⁶⁹ Instead they devoted their talents to augmenting their fortunes, an affair they understood better than the art of promoting revolutions. Such was the new confidence of capital that within a year the new regime witnessed the founding of 136 banks and anonymous societies with a capital of 375 million pesos.⁷⁰

Under the velvet glove was the mailed fist, as a few Cuban irreconcilables were to discover. When rumors reached Havana in January, 1855, that the Quitman expeditionaries were about to sail, despite the previous legal action against them by the government, Concha placed Havana under martial law.⁷¹ The conspiracy of Ramón Pintó was discovered and crushed.⁷² The Pierce cabinet was informed that as a last resort Concha would arm the blacks. In these critical days English naval vessels at Havana co-operated with the Spanish

⁶⁸ Concha, *Memoria sobre Cuba*, 258 ff., as quoted in Aimes, *Slavery in Cuba*, pp. 174-175; Zaragoza, *Insurrecciones en Cuba*, II, 31.

⁶⁹ Guerra y Sánchez, *Cuba*, p. 523.

⁷⁰ That a great majority of these institutions eventually went bankrupt because of Concha's excessive taxation does not diminish the social significance of their establishment almost immediately after Pezuela's withdrawal. Portell-Vilà, *Cuba*, II, 130.

⁷¹ Gobierno Capitania General y Superintendencia General Delegada de Hacienda de la Isla de Cuba Secretaría Militar, Havana, January 12, 1855, José de la Concha, Signatura 18, Legajo 49 (Archivo Nacional, Habana).

⁷² Guerra y Sánchez, *Cuba*, pp. 522-523. Pintó attributed the discovery of his plot to the indiscretion or treachery of the Pierce administration through the agency of Charles W. Davis. Case, Newark, Ohio, to Wilson, New Orleans, May 24, 1856, Quitman Papers (Harvard).

authorities.⁷³ When these drastic measures brought peace to the island, the captain general cleverly made no attempt to press charges against those who had contributed money to the revolutionary cause.⁷⁴ He had gained his objective and was content.

In retrospect it seems clear that the stunning reverses suffered by the "Young America" faction and the triumph of the Know-Nothings and Whigs in the elections of 1854 were very important factors in causing the administration to execute a reversal of its Cuban policy. The results at the polls may have prevented a declaration of war over Soulé's diplomatic wrangles on the continent of Europe.⁷⁵ By January, 1855, it was obvious to Edward Everett, who had resigned as senator at the height of the Kansas-Nebraska agitation, that filibusterism was at its lowest point in Washington.⁷⁶ It was no doubt because of this conviction that he urged his son and nephew to vacation at Havana for the next several weeks.⁷⁷ Had the plans of Quitman fully matured, he would have landed in Cuba to interrupt the vacation of the two lads who presumably had no intention of being involved even as spectators.⁷⁸ But Everett's diagnosis was correct, for on March 9 Quitman was in Washington calling on President Pierce.⁷⁹ Although we do not know what transpired when the president saw him, it appears fair to conclude that Quitman was convinced his enterprise must be abandoned.⁸⁰ Following the publicized failure of the government's

⁷³ Portell-Vilá, *Cuba*, II, 98-99.

⁷⁴ Robertson, Havana, to Marcy, Washington, December 20, 1855, Consular Correspondence, Dispatches Havana, vol. 30.

⁷⁵ Everett to Mrs. Charles Eames, November 16, 1854, Everett Papers; Everett, Boston, to Sir Henry Holland, January 11, 1855, *ibid.* "In 1852 Pierce had carried every northern state except Vermont and Massachusetts; in 1854 his party lost every northern state except New Hampshire and California." Roy F. Nichols, *Franklin Pierce. Young Hickory of the Granite Hills* (Philadelphia, 1931), p. 365.

⁷⁶ Everett to Mrs. Charles Eames, January 13, 27, 1855, Everett Papers.

⁷⁷ Everett, Boston, to H. S. Everett, Washington, January 11, 1855, *ibid.*

⁷⁸ Quitman issued his first alert to subordinates in early February, 1855. Manuscript in Quitman's hand, "Organization & Collection of Troops," February 3, 1855, Quitman Papers (M.A.H.). According to Concha's spies, February 15 was the approximate departure date for the Quitman expedition. Portell-Vilá, *Cuba*, II, 98.

⁷⁹ Sidney Webster, Washington, to Quitman, Washington, March 9, 1855, Quitman Papers (M.A.H.).

⁸⁰ Portell-Vilá, *Cuba*, II, 100-101. Members of the junta noticed a sudden change in Quitman's behavior when he returned from Washington, but this was attributed to his realization of the obstacles that still lay ahead of the expedition. Following a mysterious reversal suffered by agents of the junta in the North, Quitman became openly discouraged and resigned as chief of the enterprise. *Manifiesto de la Junta Cubana al Pueblo de Cuba*, La Junta Cubana (New York, August 25, 1855), pp. 10-11. (Pamphlet, Widener Library, Harvard.) A southerner and intimate of Quitman speaks of precipitate measures in New York

purchase plans in January, 1855,⁸¹ the dissolution of the filibustering front in the Southwest terminated the international controversy from 1853-1855 over Cuba.

Four years of peace followed in the island. There were many factors which favored pacification. Spain was showing greater strength and stability, together with a tendency toward liberalism in its colonial policy. The revolutionary disillusionment also contributed to the general desire for peace. Cubans were preoccupied by questions of an economic nature, largely created by the financial crisis of 1857, which only slowly receded. The solution of annexation had lost much prestige as an easy remedy in an emergency. It was now seen as a manifestation of an inferiority complex, and as a conservative scheme for the preservation of slavery. Concha had indeed laid the ghost of the Africanization theme, myth or menace, and, superficially, at any rate, affairs returned to normal.⁸²

What reasonable inferences may the scholar draw from this data? It is clear that England and France would have derived certain political and economic, as well as moral, advantages from the emancipation of slaves in Cuba and, under British influence, Spain was moving fairly rapidly in this direction while Pezuela was captain general. Vested interests in Cuba and the South were naturally alarmed over the adverse consequences which they believed would stem from tampering with the island's labor system. These fears reinforced already existent desires to terminate Spanish sovereignty, and effect annexation to the United States. Mutual apprehensions brought together ardent southerners and exiled Cubans. Both favored filibustering because of the assumption that this method would not disturb the institution of slavery. Meanwhile, the energy of persons of wealth and prominence at Havana was directed toward obtaining the intervention of the United States Army, but they felt that with proper safeguards such action need not jeopardize the institution of slavery. Their willingness to resort to this scheme was probably implemented by the hypothesis that the Pierce administration would not allow the Quitman expedition to sail.

While the Pierce cabinet shared fears of Africanization, it was ultimately committed to the more cautious solution of peaceful purchase and, when the filibusters threatened this, they were temporarily

City, presumably taken by members of the junta, which provoked adverse Federal action. News of this was followed by Quitman's resignation on April 30, 1855. Claiborne, *Quitman*, II, 392.

⁸¹ New Orleans *Bee*, January 17, 1855; New Orleans *Daily Delta*, January 17, 1855.

⁸² Guerra y Sánchez, *Cuba*, pp. 549-550.

suppressed in June, 1854. In a way this was ironic. The administration's scheme, pushed with unfounded optimism, was doomed to failure because of Spanish intransigence and Soulé's petulance. Viewed in another light, however, it was perhaps more realistic than more radical solutions of the problem. The cabinet could not with honor have allowed the expedition to sail in violation of international treaties, nor could it have been oblivious of the storm of protest which would have broken out in the North had treaty obligations been winked at, particularly when such action would have allowed a southern enterprise to be consummated.

By the time that the bellicose Ostend Manifesto forced some kind of decision with regard to the acquisition of Cuba upon the cabinet, it had no other choice than to yield to northern hostility to the further expansion of slavery within the Federal Union. Disastrous Democratic election results in the North in November, 1854, discouraged immediate attempts at annexation. The natural desire to acquire Cuba was sacrificed to expediency because the Kansas-Nebraska controversy dwarfed all other issues. The North would never permit a war to be fought for the purpose of acquiring Cuba, possibly to be divided into several slave states, when it was already deeply agitated over the administration's apparent willingness to allow slavery in the territory of Kansas.

Although the triumph of the anti-annexationists at the polls in 1854 dictated the hasty retreat of the Pierce administration concerning purchase plans, their victory was not complete until the cabinet was forced by the recalcitrant mood of Congress in January, 1855, to lay down an ultimatum to General Quitman. When this occurred in mid-March the crisis terminated.

Meanwhile, these frustrations of the separate groups working in different ways for the liberation of Cuba allowed the initiative to shift to Spain through the person of a new captain general who in September, 1854, quieted much revolutionary fervor by abandoning the movement toward emancipation. This fact tends to validate the hypothesis that it had been a genuine fear of Africanization by persons of social position and property in the island which gave the crisis its peculiar character. Once the social order was deemed secure, much capital was lured from hiding and poured into new enterprises at Havana. The idea of annexation was discredited. New discontents had not as yet had time to develop.

But for the island an old age based upon slavery was dying, despite a temporary respite, and a new one of political and social freedom was yet to be born.