

“DON’T DIE HERE:” THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF PROTESTANTS IN THE HISPANIC CARIBBEAN, 1840-1885*

As early as the first decades of the sixteenth century, when English and Dutch corsairs and privateers began to challenge Spain’s exclusivist claims to the New World, the struggle for control over the Americas began to be couched in terms of a holy war. The Caribbean, in particular, became the arena in which the commercial, ideological and military forces of Protestant Northern Europe and Catholic Southern Europe clashed. Spanish officials commonly referred to the English and Dutch intruders as “heretics” and “Lutheran corsairs,” while Francis Drake and his fellow Elizabethan sea dogs believed that their penetration of the New World was a crusade against Popery, Catholic fanaticism and idolatry. These rivalries continued for centuries as new actors, the United States in particular, inherited some of the old roles.

During the nineteenth century, Spain’s last Caribbean colonies, Cuba and Puerto Rico, found themselves caught in a trap of simultaneous colonialism and neo-colonialism. On the one hand, Spanish colonial control and repression increased while, on the other, Cuba and Puerto Rico became more and more dependent upon and integrated into the economies of the Northern Atlantic. With the expansion of the region’s plantation economies, the ties between the Hispanic Caribbean and the Northern Atlantic economies be-

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came stronger as the islands increased their staple exports and their imports of foreign capital, technology, foodstuffs, manufactured goods, and labor. One of the greatest ironies of this process was that even as Spain struggled to maintain colonial domination over Cuba and Puerto Rico on the basis of monarchical absolutism and Catholic unity, it was also being forced to open the production and markets of its colonies to the United States, Great Britain, and other naval powers of Northern Europe. These growing ties brought a greater degree of cultural influence, most notably, an ideological package consisting of free-tradism, abolitionism, representative democracy, and Protestantism.

By the middle decades of the nineteenth century, and as a result of the deeper links between the Spanish island colonies and the commercial powers of the North Atlantic, a noticeable British, North American, German and West Indian Protestant population had found its way into Cuba and Puerto Rico. Moreover, each year thousands of transients from predominantly Protestant countries visited the Spanish Caribbean for business, recreational and curative purposes. The fact that most of these foreign residents and transients were Protestant proved a continuous source of tension between them and their Spanish Catholic hosts.

This article examines the vicissitudes and struggles of the Protestant population in Cuba and Puerto Rico as they sought, particularly at the time of death, to adhere to their faith. Issues related to the proper medical and spiritual care of the dying and decent burial ceremonies and sites for the deceased were among the primary concerns of Protestants in Cuba and Puerto Rico. Tensions and conflicts regarding these matters intensified during the 1860s and 1870s when both Protestant presence and Catholic intransigence peaked. At this juncture, the colonial state was forced to play the role of arbiter. It attempted to find a middle ground acceptable to both the Spanish clergy and the Protestant community and the myriad sectors taking sides on this critical issue.

This article also traces the practice of Protestant funerals and burials before and after the decrees of religious toleration of the late 1860s and early 1870s. It argues that the fate of dying Protestants worsened during this period when it became more difficult to secure consecrated burial grounds for the remains of deceased Protestants.

IMMIGRATION, PROTESTANTISM AND MORTALITY

Dating back to the sixteenth century, with a few exceptions, immigration into the Spanish colonies of the Caribbean was restricted to Spanish sub-

jects, all of whom were presumed to be Catholic, and African slaves, always considered religionless and, therefore, convertible to Catholicism. Jews, Muslims, Protestants and new converts were barred from the Spanish domains when *limpieza de sangre* became a requisite for immigration. The labor and capital demands of the burgeoning plantation economies of Cuba and Puerto Rico, however, forced the Spanish crown to relax immigration standards in the early part of the nineteenth century. In fact, royal decrees, such as the 1815 Cédula de Gracias granted to Puerto Rico and a similar decree for Cuba two years later, not only opened the region to non-Spanish immigration but encouraged and subsidized it with tax exemptions and other benefits. Two basic restrictions still remained, however. First, immigrants had to be subjects of nations friendly to Spain. Second, and equally important, they had to be Catholic.¹

These restrictions against non-Catholic immigration, and the required oath were finally abolished in the late 1860s and early 1870s. This came about in Spain with the rise to power of an anticlerical revolutionary government.² The new constitution and the new decrees of religious toleration, however, did not dramatically change realities in the Caribbean colonies. Protestants had found their way into the region before this period and would face discrimination and intolerance for many years to come.

¹ See 1815 Cédula de Gracias in Cayetano Coll y Toste, ed., *Boletín Histórico de Puerto Rico* (San Juan: Tipografía Cantero Fernández y Cía., 1914-1927), I, 297-304. New immigration laws also established different categories of foreign residents: *transeúntes* were temporary visitors with permits for up to five years; *domiciliados* were permanent residents; and *naturalizados* enjoyed all the rights of Spaniards. See also Royal Order of Oct. 21, 1817, quoted in Kenneth W. Bunce, "American Interests in the Caribbean Islands, 1783-1850" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1939), 191; and D. C. Corbitt, "Immigration in Cuba," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 22:2 (May 1942), 280-308. There is a body of historiography dealing with immigrants in Puerto Rico. See, for example, Francisco A. Scarano, ed., *Inmigración y clases sociales en el Puerto Rico del siglo XIX* (Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1981); Estela Cifre de Loubriel, *Catálogo de extranjeros residentes en Puerto Rico en el siglo XIX* (Río Piedras: Editorial Universitaria, 1962), is a useful, albeit incomplete source, on the immigrant population of Puerto Rico.

² Raymond Carr, *España, 1808-1975* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1985), 276, 304, 333-334. There is plenty of evidence that non-Catholics hoaxed the Catholicity oath. According to one British official stationed in Havana, this requirement was "very easily evaded." It was "a simple declaration, as to which no questions were asked." Another British official later wrote that many Protestants quibbled their way through the oath, satisfying their consciences by omitting the word "Roman." Writing in the 1850s, another observer asserted that although the oath was required of those seeking domiciliation, he knew of only a few that had taken it. About the entire process, another contemporary observer wrote contemptuously that one was "immediately galvanized, electroplated and made a Roman Catholic." See David Turnbull, *Travels in the West; Cuba with Notices of Porto Rico* (London: 1840; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1968), 67; John G. Taylor, *The United States and Cuba* (London: Richard Bentley, 1851), 297; and Peter Minville to Consul Conroy, March 22, 1872, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as NAWDC), Records of Foreign Service Posts, San Juan, Record Group 84 (hereafter cited as RFSPSJ-RG84), vol. 7117.

The opening of the Hispanic Caribbean to immigrants and long term visitors from non-Spanish origins, resulted in the arrival of non-Catholic foreigners and, consequently, caused the collapse of the empire’s so-called religious unity. For decades, before the tolerance decrees of the late 1860s and early 1870s, thousands of Protestants from Europe, North America and the Caribbean found their way into Cuba and Puerto Rico. They circumvented, in one way or another, the requirement of a Catholic oath, and maintained a very low religious profile. By one estimate there were 9,000 Protestants, most of them foreign, in Cuba in 1878.³ The number in Puerto Rico was considerably smaller, but still significant. Once religious toleration was established, a few hundred Protestants residing in Ponce openly declared their religious affiliation.

Unacclimated immigrants and transients from higher latitudes, many of them Protestants, were particularly vulnerable to the onslaught of tropical diseases so prevalent in the Spanish Caribbean. Doctors advised migrants to become acclimated first in the Canary Islands, and upon their arrival at Havana to abstain from “excesses in drinking, romantic pleasures, insomnia, violent or depressing passions, exposures to the cold, and eating. . . .” In Havana mortality rates among recently-arrived foreigners reached appalling levels of between 260 and 400 per thousand.⁴ One United States consul referred to mid-nineteenth century Havana as one of the “foulest” ports in the world. Another observer dubbed it a “hot bed of pestilence.” Yet another nineteenth-century visitor blamed Havana’s unhealthiness on the fact that the city’s fortifications obstructed the free circulation of air currents, creating “a stagnant atmosphere of fetid vapors emanating from a crowded population in the swampy shores of the port. . . .”⁵ Cuba’s capital was, according to contemporary statistics, one of the island’s most insalubrious districts, with a mortality rate of 36 per thousand, almost 40 per cent higher than the rate in other districts of the Diocese of Havana.⁶ Puerto

³ Edward Kenney, *Report of Our Mission in Cuba: October 1874-October 1877* (Detroit: Diocesan Printing Office, 1878), 15.

⁴ D. Ramón Hernández Poggio, *Aclimatación é higiene de los europeos en Cuba* (Cádiz: Imprenta de la Revista Médica, 1874), 67-70; Roberto Marte, *Cuba y la República Dominicana: Transición económica en el Caribe del siglo xix* (Santo Domingo: Editorial CENAPEC, n.d.), 191.

⁵ Robertson to William Marcy, July 27, 1854, NAWDC, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Havana, Record Group 59 (hereafter cited as DUSCH-RG59); Maturin M. Ballou, *Due South: Or Cuba Past and Present* (Cambridge, MA: 1891; reprint, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 141; Levi Marrero, *Cuba: Economía y sociedad* (Madrid: Editorial Playor, 1988), XIV, 67.

⁶ Rate based on data for the 1858-1867 decade in Jorge Le-Roy y Cassá, *Estudios sobre la mortalidad de la Habana durante el siglo xix y comienzos del actual* (Havana: Lloredo y Cía., 1913), 6. See also Angel José Cowley, *Ensayo estadístico-médico de la mortalidad de la diócesis de la Habana durante el año de 1843* (Havana: Imprenta del Gobierno, 1845), 1-41. Later estimates put it at a much higher rate of 46 per thousand and above. See Marte, *Cuba y la República Dominicana*, 123.

TABLE 1.

MAJOR CAUSES OF DEATH AMONG ADULTS, HAVANA AND ITS OUTSKIRTS, 1843 (PERCENTAGES)

Cause	Whites		Blacks	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Consumption	20.5	34.4	24.4	42.2
Hepatitis	4.0	7.0	7.4	5.9
Diarrhea	6.9	3.7	4.9	2.8
Vascular Apoplexy	3.1	4.4	3.8	4.0
Yellow Fever	31.3	2.0	0	0

Source: Angel José Cowley, *Ensayo estadístico-médico de la mortalidad de la diócesis de la Habana durante el año de 1843* (Havana: Imprenta del Gobierno, 1845), 1-2.

Rico's principal ports were somewhat healthier, but were still a concern among foreigners, many of whom faced the prospects of a premature death. On one occasion Consul Charles De Ronceray said of San Juan: "[it is a place with] unhealthy climate, where a man's life is in danger. . . ."⁷

Some of the best sources describing the insalubrity of the region and its impact on the health of foreigners are found in the dispatches of consular representatives stationed in the Hispanic Caribbean. In 1860, the United States consuls or consular agents at Havana, San Juan, Ponce, and Mayagüez all requested leaves of absence claiming health reasons. A fifth consular representative from Arecibo resigned that year from his post "for the benefit of his health."⁸ Two years later, the consular agent at Santo Domingo reported the death of the vice-agent's wife and took the opportunity to request a leave "because of health and doctor's advice." In 1864 his own wife died.⁹ Between 1865 and 1867 the United States vice-consuls at St. Mark, Haiti, and Ponce passed away; their counterparts in Havana and Mayagüez and the general consul at San Juan requested medical leaves; and the consul at Port-au-Prince resigned "due to ill health."¹⁰

⁷ Charles De Ronceray to William Cass, Dec. 3, 1860, Department of State, San Juan Consulate, *Despachos de los cónsules norteamericanos en Puerto Rico* (Río Piedras: Editorial Universitaria, 1982), 308.

⁸ James Gallagher to Cass, March 20 and July 17, 1860, NAWDC, Despatches from U.S. Consular Representatives in Puerto Rico, Record Group 59 (hereafter cited as DUSCPR-RG59); De Ronceray to Cass, Aug. 17, 1860, NAWDC, RFSPSJ-RG84, vol. 7228.

⁹ William Jaeger to Seward, July 15, 1862 and Nov. 20, 1864, NAWDC, Despatches from U.S. Consuls in Santo Domingo, Record Group 59 (hereafter cited as DUSCSD-RG59).

¹⁰ Jourdan to Seward, Jan. 26, 1867, NAWDC, RFSPSJ-RG84, vol. 7228; Seward to Whidden, March 14, 1865, NAWDC, Records of Special Missions, Record Group 59; Coxe to Seward, June 1,

As one could expect, the life insurance rates for foreign diplomats stationed in the Caribbean were virtually prohibitive. In two separate communications dated 1859 and 1860, the United States consul at San Juan complained that his health had been ‘‘impaired in this hot climate,’’ and that his life insurance premiums had doubled from one to two hundred dollars for a \$5,000 policy ‘‘for the privilege of coming to Puerto Rico.’’ Consul Charles De Ronceray added that the new cost had ‘‘obliged [him] to abandon the policy.’’¹¹ Galician contract laborers in Cuba paid even higher premiums for their insurance coverage: one peso per month for a two hundred peso policy.¹²

The most dreaded foe of the unacclimated foreigner was yellow fever, a virus transmitted by mosquitoes that thrive in stagnant water.¹³ Yellow fever or ‘‘v3mito negro’’ – as the local residents referred to it – was responsible for the vast majority of deaths among recent immigrants and was also deadly among the region’s natives. Data collected in the Diocese of Havana in 1843 shows that yellow fever was the second most common cause of death among the population of Havana and its outskirts (8 per cent) behind pulmonary consumption (19 per cent). Similar data for 1871 indicates that more than 10 per cent of deaths in the Cuban capital were results of yellow fever. This contagious disease was particularly deadly among adult white males. Yellow fever caused close to a third of fatalities within this group. More specific data from hospitals serving colonial troops (overwhelmingly foreign-born) and Protestant sailors, point to the fact that between 50 and 70 per cent of those dying in such facilities were victims of yellow fever.¹⁴ These proportions are corroborated by an 1857 register of fatalities in three Havana

1866, NAWDC, DUSCP-RG59; Jasper Smith to F.W. Seward, Dec. 2, 1864, Department of State, *Despachos de los c3nsules*, 662. British officials stationed in Havana endured similar fates. See, for example, Joseph T. Crawford to Lord Russell, Aug. 5, 1861, Great Britain, Foreign Office, Collection 541, Confidential Series, The Slave Trade.

¹¹ De Ronceray to Cass, Dec. 3, 1860, Department of State, *Despachos de los c3nsules*, 486.

¹² Mariano Torrente, *Pol3tica ultramarina que abraza todos los puntos referentes a las relaciones de Espa1a con los Estados Unidos, con Inglaterra y la Antillas* (Madrid: Compa1a General de Impresos y Libros del Reino, 1854), 213.

¹³ The link between yellow fever and mosquitoes was not established until later in the century, when during the early 1880s, Cuba’s Dr. Finlay began to put forth the hypothesis that yellow fever was transmitted through mosquitoes. One North American physician earlier described the disease’s symptoms as follows. First, ‘‘a chilly fit and high fever’’ or ‘‘headache, languor, and sick stomach.’’ Then, ‘‘stupor, delirium, vomiting, a dry skin, cool or cold hands and feet, a feeble slow pulse.’’ The patients’ skin and eyes turning yellow and the ‘‘vomiting of black matter’’ explain the disease’s names. Dr. Benjamin Rush to Mrs. Rush, Aug. 29, 1793, in L.H. Butterfield, ed., *Letters of Benjamin Rush* (Princeton: American Philosophical Society, 1951), II, 644-658. See also, Le-Roy y Cass1, *Estudios sobre la mortalidad*, 28.

¹⁴ Cowley, *Ensayo estad3stico*, 3-6; Hern1ndez Poggio, *Aclimataci3n 3 higiene*, 45

TABLE 2.

DEATHS AND YELLOW FEVER HAVANA AND ITS OUTSKIRTS, 1843

<i>Place or Subgroup</i>	Deaths <i>All Causes</i>	<i>Deaths</i>	
		<i>Yellow Fever</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Belot's Hospital	17	12	71
Military Hospital	314	162	52
Adult White Females*	454	9	2
Adult White Males*	1240	388	31
Adult Black Males*	835	0	0
All Groups	4790	398	8

Source: Cowley, *Ensayo estadístico*, 1-6.

* Includes information only for Feb.-Dec., 1843.

hospitals and on board United States ships calling on the port which included 114 dead, of which all but four died of yellow fever.¹⁵ For their part, the records of Cuba's military hospitals (1854-1859) reflect that nearly half of all deaths were attributed to yellow fever. Burial records of Ponce's Protestant parish for 1876-1878, a more stable and acclimated population, show that yellow fever was still a leading cause of death, close behind heart diseases.¹⁶

Yellow fever epidemics, like the region's other natural curse, hurricanes, had their peaks during the hot, rainy months of the year. June, July, August, and September were particularly deadly.¹⁷ In an 1856 dispatch United States Vice-Consul Thomas Savage reported that within the "last six or seven weeks almost everyone of our vessels has had a greater portion of the crew in the Hospital." He added that three masters, eleven mates, and thirty-four seamen had died during that period.¹⁸ Another United States consul, Alexander M. Clayton, writing two years earlier, stated that upon his arrival in the middle of July he found "the yellow fever raging as an epidemic, in an unusually malignant form, and attacking every unacclimated person, in a very short time." Consul Clayton lost a dear friend during the sickly season and returned to the United States within four months, asserting that he was

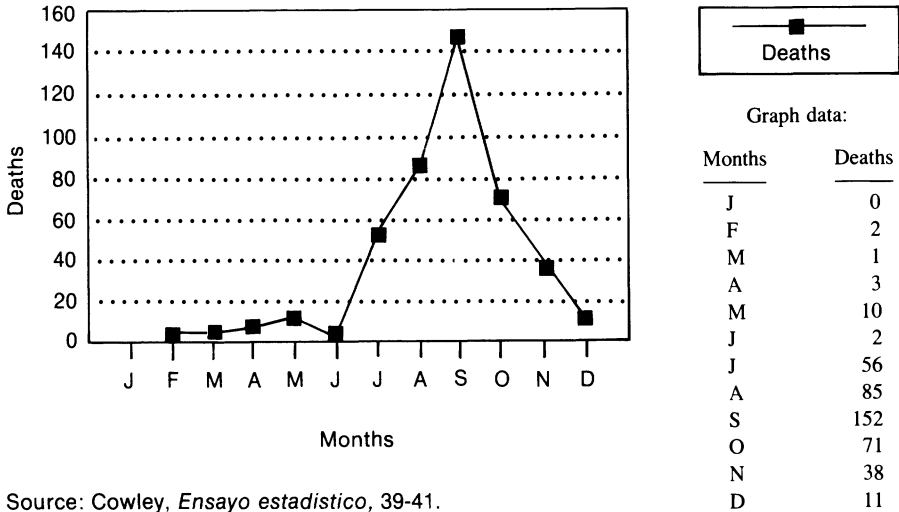
¹⁵ See Marrero, *Cuba*, IX, 176; and "1857 Sick to Hospitals of Havana from American Vessels," NAWDC, DUSCH-RG59.

¹⁶ Archivo de la Iglesia Santísima Trinidad, Ponce (hereafter cited as AISTP), Records of Holy Trinity Church of Ponce, I, Burials 1872-1878.

¹⁷ Dr. Tomás Romay, Secretary of Cuba's White Immigration Board, recommended in 1819 that unacclimated Europeans should plan to reach the island between the months of October and February. Marrero, *Cuba*, XIV, 66.

¹⁸ Thomas Savage to Marcy, Aug. 3, 1856, NAWDC, DUSCH-RG59.

GRAPH 1
YELLOW FEVER DEATHS, BY MONTH
DIOCESE OF HAVANA, 1843



Source: Cowley, *Ensayo estadístico*, 39-41.

“unwilling either to live apart from [his] family, or take them to such a climate.”¹⁹ In Puerto Rico the proportions of deaths attributed to yellow fever were also high. Consular reports there suggest that yellow fever was the leading killer and show that most deaths attributed to it occurred during the summer months.²⁰

The most vulnerable category of all foreign groups visiting the Hispanic Caribbean consisted of those who brought health problems of their own. Every year, thousands of so-called invalids escaped the rigors of the long, frigid winters of the north, finding their way into the Caribbean’s health resorts. One North American physician, who organized health trips to Cuba, advised: “[T]he invalid should hasten to a southern clime, before the first cold spells of winter have aggravated his affection. He who resides in the more northern states, should leave his home in September. . . .”²¹ The ailing were also advised to avoid staying in the Caribbean during the sum-

¹⁹ “The Relations of the United States and Cuba in 1853 & 1854, by A.M. Clayton,” Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, N.C., Claiborne Papers, file 151.

²⁰ See, for example, Jourdan to Seward, Dec. 10, 1868, NAWDC, RFSPSJ-RG84, vol. 7228; Jourdan to Seward, Jan. 15, 1868, NAWDC, DUSCPR-RG59.

²¹ John George F. Wurderman, *Notes on Cuba* (Boston, 1844; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1971), 3; Andrew Blythe to Cass, July 20, 1857, NAWDC, DUSCH-RG59.

mer months and to stay away from Havana and its environs. Güines and Matanzas stood among the island's preferred destinations.²²

The number of travel guides for "invalids," specialized resorts, hot springs, sea baths and other services and accommodations for the ailing pilgrim are indicators of the extent and importance of the health resort business in Cuba and Puerto Rico. Mineral baths in Coamo, Ponce and Hato Grande in Puerto Rico were frequently visited; and so were the famous San Diego baths in la Vuelta Abajo, Cuba.²³ One North American traveler highlighted the latter's curative faculties against "rheumatism, strains of muscles, tumor, syphilis, gout, catarrh, bronchitis, leucorrhoea, and chronic diarrhea and dysentery."²⁴

The accounts of the period abound in description of these unfortunate pilgrims. They are described, en route to Cuba, as sitting pale, quiet and motionless on the decks of passenger ships, overdressed to avoid exposure to air currents. Some were so weak that they had to be propped with pillows or tied down to their chairs. Their hollow coughs made their condition evident to fellow passengers, and so did their sad countenances which harbored a vanishing glimmer of hope. Not surprisingly, these unfortunate travelers were among the least likely to return home alive. Contemporary sources indicate that many "invalids" died in the Caribbean and many others passed away during the return leg of their trips.²⁵

Health care facilities and medical services proved highly inadequate to the special needs of ill visitors and those of the foreign population as a whole. Most Anglos residing in or passing through the Hispanic Caribbean used the services of British or North American physicians and dentists, and went to clinics set up by their fellow countrymen. In mid-century Havana there were

²² Julia Ward Howe, *A Trip to Cuba* (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1860), 179; Ballou, *Due South*, 209; Turnbull, *Travels in the West*, 218.

²³ Wurderman, *Notes on Cuba*, 3-5; Robert W. Gibbes, *Cuba for Invalids* (New York: W.A. Townsend & Co., 1860); *El Siglo*, April 14, 1864, 3; Samuel Hazard, *Cuba with Pen and Pencil* (Hartford, Conn.: Hartford, 1871), 53-54; De Ronceray to Cass, Jan. 6, NAWDC, RFSPSJ-RG84, vol. 7228.

²⁴ Hazard, *Cuba*, 378-379; See also Turnbull, *Travels in the West*, 256-257.

²⁵ George W. Williams, *Sketches of Travel in the Old and New World* (Charleston: Walker, Evans & Cogswell, 1871), 8; Abiel Abbot, *Letters Written in the Interior of Cuba* (Boston, Bowels & Dearborn, 1829), 27; Howe, *Trip to Cuba*, 112; Richard Henry Dana, *To Cuba and Back* (Boston: 1859; reprint, C. Harvey Gardiner, ed., Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), 3-15; note dated Baltimore, May 11, 1840, with letter of John Smith to Nicholas Trist, Library of Congress, Manuscript Department, Washington, D.C., Trist Collection, reel 7.

at least three such clinics, one of which contained more than two hundred beds.²⁶

Seamen and officers of United States ships constituted the most numerous group of patients in the clinics. The United States dominated shipping into and out of the region and every year thousands of North American officers and crewmen visited Cuban and Puerto Rican ports. Between 1854 and 1857 a yearly average of more than 15,000 sailors visited Cuban ports, in many cases staying two or three months while their ships were loaded. Estimates for Puerto Rico suggest that as many as 8,000 North American sailors visited the island each year.²⁷

The clinics that these sick seamen attended were described by one United States consul as “lonely hospitals in . . . putrid swamps.” Their operators charged four, three, and two dollars per day for treatments as unusual as they were inadequate. Fever patients were commonly bled with leeches and given borage tea; their feet were covered with mustard paste and a plaster of bread, oil, vinegar and pepper was applied around the neck and head. One amused visitor jokingly commented that patients were “seasoned . . . and stuffed with herbs, [made] fit for roasting.”²⁸ Ice, which had to be imported from New England or Canada on the return trip of sugar trading voyages, provided another common treatment for feverish patients. Less fortunate were the ailing slaves, who were offered much less sophisticated remedies: a strong cigar and a generous dose of rum.²⁹

All of the circumstances outlined above produced very high mortality rates among immigrant groups and unacclimated visitors to the Hispanic Caribbean. It is difficult to establish accurate death rates for such groups because information on fatalities is fragmentary and, more importantly, is seldom broken down by nationality. To further complicate matters, the records kept by the various foreign consuls do not distinguish between

²⁶ For examples of newspaper ads by North American and British doctors see *El País*, Feb. 1, 1867 and *The Cuban Messenger*, March 20, 1861. See also Robertson to Marcy, Sept. 1, 1855 and Helm to Cass, April 28, 1860, NAWDC, DUSCH-RG59.

²⁷ Blythe to Cass, July 20, 1857, NAWDC, DUSCH-RG59. Calculation for Puerto Rico based on 16 men per ship and data from De Ronceray to Cass, July 29, 1859, Department of State, *Despachos de los cónsules*, 390.

²⁸ Undated [1858?] note by Blythe, and Robertson to Marcy, July 27, 1854, NAWDC, DUSCH-RG59; Howe, *Trip to Cuba*, 200; Taylor, *The United States and Cuba*, 103.

²⁹ Robert L. Paquette, *Sugar Is Made with Blood* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), 59. Some visitors prescribed themselves preventive treatments and medications such as castor oil, “Kelley’s Vegetable Health Pills,” and Indian cannabis cigarettes. William J. Karras, “Yankee Carpenter in Cuba, 1848,” *the Americas* 30:3-7 (1978), 22; *El Siglo*, Feb. 28, 1867, 8.

TABLE 3.

BAPTISMS, MARRIAGES AND BURIALS IN PROTESTANT COMMUNITIES OF THE CARIBBEAN

<i>Place</i>	<i>Years</i>	<i>Baptisms</i>	<i>Marriages</i>	<i>Burials</i>	<i>Bapt.-Burial Ratio</i>
Havana	1875-76	23	2	125	1-5.4
Ponce	1872-79	106	76	56	1-.53
Port-au-Prince	1878-80	21	6	20	1-.43
Buteau	1878-80	15	3	4	1-.27
Samaná	1870	70	14	13	1-.19

Sources: See notes 30-31.

foreign residents and foreign visitors; they do not differentiate between, say, a New England sailor who dies on his way to Mayagüez and a long-established Ponce planter dying of old age.

One way of attempting to fill the void in mortality data of the foreign populations is to compare the birth-marriage-burial ratios of various native and immigrant populations. Parish records of the first Protestant churches in the Hispanic Caribbean, and particularly those predominantly serving immigrant and transient populations, show higher burial-baptism ratios. The different demographic make-up of immigrant and transient populations, the fact that it was easier to avoid or to seek abroad the sacraments of baptism and marriage, and other cultural restraints, are only partial explanations to this phenomenon. The 1876 report of Havana's only Episcopalian missionary, for example, includes 23 baptisms, 2 marriages and 125 burials for a 5.4:1 burial-baptism ratio.³⁰ The registers of Ponce's Holy Trinity Church, an Anglican parish serving mostly the foreign element, also reflect high burial-baptism ratios. These, however, are not as high as in the Cuban case. Conversely, the data from other Caribbean Protestant parishes serving predominantly native populations show that baptisms radically outweighed burials, in some cases by five to one.³¹

³⁰ Edward Kenney, "To the Friends of Our Christian Work in the Island of Cuba, Sept. 21, 1876," Maryland Diocesan Archives, Baltimore (hereafter MDA), Cuba fol. V.

³¹ United States Commission of Inquiry to Santo Domingo, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1871), 226; "Triennial Report of the Haitian Mission from August, 1878 to July, 1880," in *Journal of the General Convention of the Bishops, Clergy and Laity of the Protestant Episcopal Church* (Boston: Franklin Press, 1881), 388.

FUNERALS AND BURIALS

The death of ailing Protestant immigrants and visitors marked the end of their sufferings but it also marked the beginning of a very sad, difficult and frustrating period for their friends, relatives, concerned compatriots and consular representatives. Numerous obstacles were encountered by those survivors seeking decent funerals and adequate burials for their non-Catholic dead. One United States consul summarized the predicaments of deceased Protestants in the region when he bluntly advised his compatriots: “Don’t Die in Cuba.” In the words of another contemporary observer, “[a]ll that accompanies death . . . in Cuba is particularly repulsive. Difficulties are thrown in the way of the becoming burial of those who die out of the communion of the Holy church of Ferdinand VII and Isabella II.”³²

Justifiably, many Protestant visitors and immigrants were highly concerned about the possibility of dying in the Catholic islands. This was particularly a pressing preoccupation among “invalids” and ill seamen. As Consul Blythe put it, “[t]he knowledge on the part of a sick person that his remains will be uncared for is calculated to produce a morbid effect upon the mind unfavorable to his recovery.”³³ Some foreigners wrote testaments leaving specific instructions with friends and consuls in which they spelled out what was to be done in the event of death. One North American visitor, after returning from a sobering tour of Havana’s cemetery, instructed his hotel manager that if he were to die in the island, he must be buried at sea. “[A]nywhere,” he added, “but in a Catholic country.”³⁴ Another visitor, a New Yorker suffering from consumption, was horrified by the mere thought of dying in Cuba. His only wish was that the *Cahawba* would arrive on time so that he could die on board rather than in the island.³⁵ A few years earlier, Francis Harrison, the United States consular agent in Santo Domingo, requested that, in the event of death, his corpse was to be packed in a barrel full of rum and shipped to his hometown, Philadelphia, for an appropriate burial.³⁶

Relatives of Protestants who died unexpectedly sometimes made efforts to have the remains of their loved ones transported to the United States or Europe for burial. Many obstacles, however, were thrown in the way of

³² James William Steele, *Cuban Sketches* (New York: Putnam’s Sons, 1881), 185; [William Henry Hurlbert], *Gan-Eden: Or, Pictures of Cuba* (Boston: Jewett & Co., 1854), 136-137.

³³ Blythe to Cass, July 20, 1857, NAWDC, DUSCH-RG59.

³⁴ Williams, *Sketches*, 55.

³⁵ Dana, *To Cuba*, 102-103.

³⁶ Alfonso Lockward, ed., *Documentos para la historia de las relaciones dominico americanas* (Santo Domingo: Corripio, 1987), 64-68.

such attempts by the colonial state and the Catholic Church authorities. Those bodies already buried with Catholic rites had to be disinterred also with Catholic rites at great expense if relatives sought their relocation. In 1828 the remains of a Lieutenant Allen were exhumed at a cost of six ounces (one hundred U.S. dollars).³⁷ Another provision stipulated that corpses could not be disinterred before a two-year-period had elapsed and that no other remains could be disturbed in the process.³⁸ Relatives of some who died in the Hispanic Caribbean opted to have the remains embalmed for shipment to the United States. In 1860 physicians charged the astronomical amount of \$500 just to have a cadaver embalmed.

According to Spanish and church law, funeral services were reserved exclusively for those dying in communion with the Catholic Church. To begin with, there were supposed to be no Protestants in the Spanish colonies before 1869. Moreover, until 1871 in Cuba and 1873 in Puerto Rico there was no resident Protestant minister to conduct Protestant funerals in the Spanish colonies of the Caribbean. Because their religious activities and mere presence was illegal, Protestants residing in Cuba and Puerto Rico lived and died as Catholics until the early 1870s. Many of them partook of the sacraments of baptism, marriage and extreme unction within the Catholic Church. The records of the Catholic Church in Ponce and other records of the Archdiocese of San Juan are filled with documents attesting to Protestants' participation in Catholic rites. Between 1869 and 1871 Catholic priests in Ponce baptized the children of the Lee, Salomons, Wiechers, Eckleman, Bazanta, Miraihl, Van Rhyn, Dodd, Oppenheimer, Pender, and other Protestant families. They also joined in holy matrimony the sons and daughters of the Van Rhyns, Wiechers, and Oppenheimers.³⁹ Certificates of bachelorhood and spinsterhood required before the solemnization of the marriage between two Ponce residents, Robert Graham and Elizabeth Spense and which was witnessed by Thomas A. Dodd, William Lee and George Finlay, are also indicative of Protestant participation in Catholic ceremonies. In the 1870s, with the relaxation of religious restrictions, the Grahams, Dodds and Finlays had their children baptized by an Anglican

³⁷ Abbot, *Letters*, 17.

³⁸ Jourdan to Seward, May 6, 1867, NAWDC, RFSPSJ-RG84, vol. 7228.

³⁹ Archivo Parroquial de Ponce (hereafter cited as APP), Book of Baptisms, 1869-1874, and Book of Marriages, 1864-1866 (microfilms in Centro de Investigaciones Históricas de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, Río Piedras). See also certificate of Catholic Baptism of Carlos Bazanta (age 28) required of him before his marriage to Hortensia Miraihl. The records of the Holy Trinity Church show that on June 24, 1873, the Bazantas christened their daughter with Anglican rites. See Archivo Histórico Diocesano de la Archidiócesis de San Juan (hereafter cited as AHDASJ), Justicia, Prácticas Legales, Certificados de Soltería, Ponce, box J-182.

minister.⁴⁰ There is also evidence suggesting that before the 1870s crypto-Protestants dying in Ponce were buried as Catholics. The Salomons, for example, who are credited with hosting the city’s first Protestant service in their mansion, owned a splendid mausoleum in Ponce’s Catholic cemetery. Interestingly, in 1878 the Salomons requested to exchange it for a similar plot in the new Protestant cemetery.⁴¹

Other crypto-Protestants in Cuba and Puerto Rico, however, refused to participate in the Catholic rites. They either went without christening their children and without solemnizing their marriages, or sought such ceremonies from visiting Protestant ministers or traveled to New Orleans or the Virgin Islands to have them performed there.⁴² In the 1860s, for example, Evelina Bazanta, daughter of the British consul in Ponce, traveled to St. Thomas to marry Fernando M. Toro with Protestant rites. A few years later, the marriage of her sister, Josephine Bazanta, to Thomas Edward Lee was solemnized during a visit to Ponce by the Anglican bishop of Antigua. According to Lee’s son, it was a “naturally quiet social event.”⁴³ Contemporary records also show that a Mr. Valton and a Ms. Quilmain of Vieques sailed to St. Thomas to be married under the auspices of the Church of England. Hundreds of other sacraments were illegally administered by visiting Protestant clergymen and by chaplains of United States and British ships anchored off Havana, Ponce, and other ports in the Hispanic Caribbean.⁴⁴

These alternatives, however viable regarding baptisms, confirmations, and marriages, were of little consolation to dying Protestants. A parent seeking to christen his or her child with Protestant rites or a couple wishing to marry Protestant might have had the option of waiting for a visiting minister or traveling abroad in search of the sacrament; dead Protestants could do neither.

The Catholic Church in the Hispanic colonies of the Caribbean held firm control over funeral services, burials, and cemeteries. In the words of one

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Archivo Histórico de Ponce (hereafter cited as AHP), Índice del Cementerio Antiguo, vol. 1, 166.

⁴² Antonio de las Barras y Prado, *Memorias, La Habana a mediados del siglo xix* (Madrid: Ciudad Lineal, 1925), 84.

⁴³ Albert E. Lee, *An Island Grows: Memoires of Albert E. Lee, 1873-1942* (San Juan: privately printed, 1963), 3-9.

⁴⁴ AHDASJ, Gobierno, Correspondencia Parroquia-Obispo, Vieques, box G-29; Henry B. Whipple, *Lights and Shadows of a Long Episcopate* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1899), 358-359. Even Catholics were prohibited to travel abroad to be married. See case of Luis Bonafoux and Clemencia Quintero of Guayama, whose Catholic marriage in St. Thomas was declared null in 1860, in Archivo General de Puerto Rico (hereafter cited as AGPR), Audiencia Territorial, Real Acuerdo, box 34, expediente 19.

critical contemporary, “[t]he Mother Church is the mistress of ceremonies of all kinds. She owns the cemeteries practically, is interested in the sale of coffins and management of hearses, buries the dead, licenses the inhuming and exhuming of all bodies. . . .”⁴⁵ Crypto-Protestants and nominal Catholics who either avoided Catholic rites or received Protestant sacraments were well aware of this situation and, not surprisingly, many of them were either converted to or returned to the Catholic faith during their last days. Abraham Nicolas Soquin, a Swiss agriculturalist settled in Puerto Rico, faced the disturbing prospect of dying outside the communion of the colony’s official religion. He abjured his faith and converted to Catholicism a month before his death in the capital’s military hospital.⁴⁶ A few years later, while awaiting execution, the Cuban Protestant-revolutionary Luis Ayestarán y Moliner reembraced the religion into which he had been born. For her part, Tomasa Hernández of Ponce requested, on her deathbed, absolution for the sin of having been married by a Protestant minister. She and her husband, Jaime Roura, attested that they were carrying a “great weight on their consciences and that they felt disturbed.”⁴⁷ They justified their actions on the grounds that the certificate of *soltería* (being unmarried) required by the Catholic priest was expensive beyond their means.⁴⁸ As documented in the Ponce parish records, dozens of Catholics living in common law marriages sought to solemnize their vows shortly before their deaths. The prospect of being denied a Catholic burial was certainly at the crux of most of these decisions.

The Catholic Church’s wealth, political influence, and credibility among the general population deteriorated dramatically in the Hispanic Caribbean during the nineteenth century. This was part of a worldwide crisis aggravated in the Caribbean by the secularizing demands of agrarian capitalism. In this context, the Church retrenched and became more jealous of its control over the most important landmarks in people’s lives: birth, marriage, and death, consequently baptism, marriage, and funeral fees increased their relative share of Church’s revenue. Control over the sacraments, funerals, and cemeteries also became key weapons in the Church’s struggle against religious dissidence, particularly the growing presence and influence of Protestantism and Freemasonry.

⁴⁵ Steele, *Sketches*, 174.

⁴⁶ “Crónica religiosa: Una conversión,” *Boletín Eclesiástico*, 1:19 (1859), 219.

⁴⁷ Ramiro Guerra y Sánchez, *Guerra de los Diez Años* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1972), II, 29.

⁴⁸ AHDASJ, Justicia, Procesos Legales, Validación Matrimonios, Ponce, box J-218.

As one Bostonian traveler in mid-nineteenth century Cuba put it, “[t]he charities of the Cubans, such as they are, do not extend to the bodies of dead Protestants. . . .”⁴⁹ North American and British foreigners were denied funeral ceremonies and burial in consecrated grounds unless their surviving friends and relatives could produce evidence of Catholicity. Since licenses granted by local curates were required before any corpses could be interred in the cemeteries, the authority to determine who could and who could not be buried lay strictly within the Catholic Church. Not even the most prominent members of the foreign consular corps could claim exemption from these requirements. In Santiago de Cuba the body of Consul Parsons was barred from the city’s consecrated burial grounds. Years later, the remains of his counterpart in Ponce came close to a similar fate, which was avoided by the fact that during the course of the day a document was found among the deceased’s papers attesting to his Catholicity. In the end, the reluctant curate carried out the complete ceremonies: “solemn double services, with chanted vigil and accompaniment to cemetery” of the body of the sixty year old Philadelphian.⁵⁰ Other compatriots of the deceased consul were not as fortunate. Wilbert M. Clifford, a twenty-nine year old North Carolinian, for example, died of yellow fever in Ponce during the summer of 1871, and the local ecclesiastic and civil authorities would not allow his remains to be buried anywhere on the island. Instead, they ordered his body to be interred on the neighboring key of Isla Cardona.⁵¹

Most foreigners suspected of not being Catholic were buried in so-called potter’s fields, unfenced makeshift cemeteries in desolate and remote places. A host of North American and British travelers have left poignant testimonies about these burial grounds. Richard J. Levis described a potter’s field near Havana in these terms:

Here the space for burial is so limited that the defunct have even but a temporary occupancy of this channelhouse, and a new incumbent cannot be deposited without turning out previous occupants. As a consequence, therefore, the ground is strewn with the bleaching relics of mortality, and in one corner is a heap, most of skulls, several yards high.⁵²

⁴⁹ Howe, *Trip to Cuba*, 178.

⁵⁰ Demoticus Philateles, *Yankee Travels through the Island of Cuba* (New York: D.A. Appleton, 1856), 251, 222; Marcos Antonio Ramos, *Panorama del Protestantismo en Cuba* (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Caribe, 1986), 77; Jourdan to Seward, June 2 and July 19, 1866, Department of State, *Despachos de los cónsules*, 707, 719.

⁵¹ AHP, legajo 35, expediente 14.

⁵² Richard J. Levis, *Diary of a Spring Holiday in Cuba* (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1872), 109.

Another visitor described similar scenes: “thousands of bones lie either in heaps or scattered over the burying grounds, exposed to the scorching rays of the sun, or bleach in the dews of night. . . .” Of Protestant burials, yet another contemporary observer wrote: “uncoffined and unshrouded, for the most part, the dead are flung into shallow graves, where they will soon be jostled by their successors in the endless procession.” A few years later the sight of the Protestant burial ground in Matanzas inspired Reverend John F. Young to write: “for the first time in my life I saw and realized what is implied in the phrase ‘the burial of a dog.’” Speaking of dogs, many Protestant graveyards were said to be profaned by “wild dogs” and by “filthy animals roaming there in the night.”⁵³

The fact that Catholic cemeteries were closed to Protestants led, on the part of those setting up facilities for non-Catholic burials, to abuses and speculation. United States and British consuls remained alert to such situations because it was their responsibility to dispose of the remains of their compatriots and take care of their testaments and debts.⁵⁴ This led to tense relations between United States consuls and Dr. Charles Belot, owner of one of the lowland clinics mentioned above and operator of a seamen’s potter’s field. Dr. Belot, it so happened, could not only bury his mistakes but could also make a profit on them. In 1858 Consul Blythe denounced the practices of the lowland clinics stating that their proprietors obtained “a large part of their profits” from burying the dead. He pointed out sardonically that patients were better customers dead than alive; for each death produced a net profit of seventeen dollars.⁵⁵ Blythe’s successor, Charles J. Helm, continued to express concern over this issue. In a letter to Dr. Belot, Helm “represented the evil growing out of the charge of \$25.50 for the burial of the destitute seaman,” underscoring “the effect upon the mind of the patient, the impression that it was more profitable to kill than cure him, and especially the injury which might result to his own reputation” Dr. Belot finally yielded to the mounting pressures and consented to “surrender all profit in the futur [*sic*] from the private cemetery attached to the hospitals.” He agreed to “only exact the church fee \$7.50, the charge for digging

⁵³ Lewis Leonidas Allen, *The Island of Cuba* (Cleveland: Harris, Fairbank & Co., 1852), 17; [Hurlbert], *Gan-Eden*, 136-137; John F. Young, “A Statement of Facts Respecting Church Work on the Island of Cuba and Its Immediate Need,” *Spirit of Missions*, 49 (Oct. 1884), *passim*; Jourdan to Seward, July 19, 1866, NAWDC, RFSPSJ-RG84, vol. 7228; Torrente, *Política ultramarina*, 198-201.

⁵⁴ See E. Seaman to W. Derrick, Sept. 29, 1851, NAWDC, DUSCH-RG59. See also law of March 1857 making the Royal Decree on Foreigners extensive to the Spanish colonies in *ibid*.

⁵⁵ According to Blythe, costs were \$7.50 for priest’s license, \$1.00 for conveyance, and the fee charged was \$22.50. Blythe to Cass, July 20, 1857, NAWDC, DUSCH-RG59.

the grave \$2 and cost of the interments [*sic*] and ground \$2, making in all \$11.50, the coffin to be furnished by the ship mate or the [consulate].”⁵⁶

To be an ill or moribund Protestant in the Hispanic Caribbean had always been particularly problematic. It became, however, an even more serious matter during the convulsed era of the late 1860s and 1870s when the issue of Protestant funerals and burials became a critical point of contention between a number of forces in conflict. The 1868-1878 revolutionary cycle was characterized by a sharpening of political polarization within the Spanish empire both in the metropolis and the colonies. Moreover, it was a period of intensified international struggle over the Hispanic Caribbean with the United States increasing its commercial and political influence in the region. This growing influence included the spread of a package of principles consisting of abolition, representative democracy, free-trade and religious toleration.

The rights of foreign and native Protestants, particularly their fundamental right to adequate funerals and decent burials, thus became enmeshed within the complex political and geopolitical struggles in and over the Hispanic Caribbean during the 1870s. On the one hand, revolutionaries and progressives on both sides of the Atlantic deemed religious toleration a measure whose time had come. Of marked anticlerical orientation, the Spanish revolution of 1868 led to a number of extreme measures against the traditional powers and prerogatives of the Catholic Church. Religious organizations were disbanded, some churches and convents were demolished and the clergy’s stipends were slashed in half.⁵⁷ Liberals and separatists in Cuba and Puerto Rico also embraced anticlerical stances. The end of religious intolerance was one of the few items on which liberal delegates from both islands agreed in 1867; a year later, insurgents participating in el Grito de Lares and the Cuban Ten Years’ War, also placed freedom of religion high on their agendas.⁵⁸ They based their stance not only on political principles and geopolitical considerations but also on the clear recognition that the Spanish colonies – essential to the fiscal soundness of the metropolis – had become integrated into the trade circuits of the Protestant Northern Atlantic. Consequently, continuation of a closed religious system would inevitably hurt the economies of both the colonies and Spain.

⁵⁶ Helm to Cass, April 28, 1860 and Belot to Cass, April 27, 1860, NAWDC, DUSCH-RG59.

⁵⁷ Carr, *España*, 304-334.

⁵⁸ El Grito de Lares was an aborted separatist revolt, which took place in the mountain municipality of Lares, September 23, 1868.

On the other hand, the forces of reaction became even more intransigent, adhering more than ever to the tenets that strengthened colonial loyalty toward Spain: the continuation of slavery, the region's militarization and the preservation of the so-called three unities (national unity, unity of monarchy and unity of religion). Reaction to liberal reforms in Spain and the Caribbean took the shape of a conservative virtual rebellion against the Spanish state. In Cuba, the terrorist ultraconservative *Voluntarios* engaged in wholesale destruction and murder and were responsible for the resignation of at least two governors and scores of local functionaries. Their counterparts, in less-polarized Puerto Rico, organized riots, terrorized liberals and almost succeeded in putting one liberal governor on a ship heading for Spain. In both cases the clergy openly sided with the forces of reaction, following Mariano Torrente's prescription that "the ecclesiastical arm, as it should, shall not only be the defender and promoter of the doctrines of Christ, but also a mighty auxiliary to secular authority."⁵⁹

One of the first measures of the Spanish revolutionary government was to establish religious freedom in the Peninsula and colonies. Although many of the radical anticlerical decrees were reversed with the restoration of the monarchy in 1874, the steps taken in the late 1860s and early 1870s paved the way for the emergence of organized Protestant communities in Ponce, Havana, and Vieques. All three communities evolved along clearly distinct patterns of social composition, goals, and links to Protestant organizations abroad. Closer attention to the first two will suit the purposes of this article.

Ponce's Anglican parish of the Holy Trinity was composed of some of the municipality's wealthiest families, most of whose members had lived and died as closet Protestants until the publication, in Puerto Rico, of the religious toleration decree of September 23, 1869. The censuses of the period show that three out of the municipality's fifteen wealthiest people were active in the Church's organization.⁶⁰ The Ponce church also included a numerous working class component of colored skilled and unskilled laborers, most of them immigrants from the Lesser Antilles.⁶¹ The organization of Ponce's Protestants into a formal religious community was a spontaneous and autochthonous process. They began to meet in November 1869. On the 20th they wrote and began to circulate a document entitled "Appeal to Protestants" in which they requested subscriptions for the purpose of erect-

⁵⁹ Mariano Torrente, *Bosquejo económico de la Isla de Cuba* (Madrid: M. Pita, 1852), I, 202.

⁶⁰ "Padrón de Riqueza Territorial, Ponce, 1871-1872," AHP, box 30-C, legajo 31, expediente 310.

⁶¹ Lee, *An Island Grows*, 17; AISTP, Records of Holy Trinity Church of Ponce, vols. 1, 4, 6, *passim*.

ing a place of worship. A week later the Ponce group held its first formal service under the direction of a visiting clergyman from St. Thomas.⁶² Because of geographical proximity and commercial and familial ties with the Lesser Antilles, the Ponce congregation solidified links with the Anglican community of Antigua whose bishop periodically visited Ponce for confirmations and other special services. In 1873 the congregation celebrated the inauguration of its temple, the first non-Catholic place of worship erected in the Spanish colonies.⁶³

In contrast, the first Protestant church in Havana primarily served the large transient foreign population, among whom North American seamen predominated. In 1879 the congregation’s first missionary, Edward Kenney, described it as “composed of people in moderate circumstances – many of them . . . poor.” Another difference separating the two communities was that, unlike the work in Ponce, the Havana congregation was basically a missionary enterprise, an initiative of North American bishops with the financial backing of United States businessmen. Thus, the work in Havana was linked to the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States rather than to the Church of England, a reflection of Cuba’s relatively stronger commercial ties with the United States.⁶⁴

The two processes of Protestant penetration also differed in the degree of Catholic resistance that they faced. The establishment of Protestant institutions was a much more difficult task in Havana than in Ponce. This was partially due to the fact that Cuba was in a state of war and the island’s reactionary elements viewed the propagation of Protestantism as a weapon of anti-Spanish separatism. They were not totally off the mark. For decades, Cuban separatists had been calling for religious tolerance and the separation of Church and state. A good number of them embraced Protestantism while enduring exile in the United States. The Ponce efforts also faced a less

⁶² There are few works dealing with the early Protestant communities in Cuba and Puerto Rico. See Víctor Bursset, “The First Fifty Years of Protestant Episcopal Church in Puerto Rico” (Thesis, Union Theological Seminary, New York, 1957); Juan Jorge Rivera Torres, *Documentos históricos de la Iglesia Episcopal Puertorriqueña* (Santo Domingo: Editora Lozano, 1983); Leopoldo J. Alard, “Proceso histórico de la Iglesia Episcopal en Cuba” (paper presented April 8, 1966, Seminario Episcopal del Caribe, Carolina, P.R.); and Ramos, *Panorama del Protestantismo*, 1-158; see also Lidio Cruz Monclova, *Historia de Puerto Rico (siglo xix)* (Río Piedras: Editorial Universitaria, 1952), 1, 853.

⁶³ *Ibid.*; “Proclamation of the Bishop of Antigua, dated July 23, 1879,” Archivo de la Iglesia de Todos los Santos, Vieques.

⁶⁴ Edward Kenney to William Tatlock, Aug. 9, 1879, in Edward Kenney, *The Mission of The Protestant Episcopal Church in the Island of Cuba* (New York: Cuba Church Missionary Guild, 1879), 7.

stringent opposition because of the higher social status of its congregation; they were more politically and economically powerful than their counterparts in Havana. Moreover, while the Cuban congregation was in the island's capital, a bastion of state authority, reaction and Catholicism, the Puerto Rican congregation sprang up in Ponce, a hotbed of liberalism with a more limited presence of the state and its official church.⁶⁵

It is not surprising, then, that Reverend Edward Kenney and other Protestants had a more difficult time in Havana than Reverends Alfred Giolma, Vall Spinosa and others in Ponce. Kenney arrived in Havana in late November 1871, and described the situation there as one of "excitement and confusion growing out of the trouble occasioned by the volunteers."⁶⁶ Because of the ongoing insurrection and the United States policy of avoiding any real or apparent sympathy toward the anti-Spanish forces, Kenney also had to deal with his government's indifference toward the missionary work in Cuba. "Mr. [Hamilton] Fish," he later wrote, "discouraged our attempt of work in 1871, and it has been the same ever since."⁶⁷ Once in Havana, Kenney, like his predecessors, was refused permission to hold services on the lame justification that the Spanish government had not sent regulatory instructions along with the decree of religious toleration. Thus, Kenney was forced to retrench to the U.S.S. *Terror* where he held services for about a year. He later received permission to hold services in Havana as long as he kept a low profile and directed his ministry exclusively to the foreign population. While Ponce's congregation of the Holy Trinity was, in 1879, celebrating the sixth anniversary of its temple, Kenney was reporting that "it seemed unwise to push the matter [building a Protestant place of worship] to a decision until the island of Cuba shall be fairly represented in the Spanish Cortes. . . ."⁶⁸ The colonial government in Cuba also ignored the modified religious tolerance decree of 1876, accepting it finally in 1884, eight years after its promulgation and five years after the island's pacification.

For both Protestant communities the right to celebrate funeral ceremonies for their dead and the right of access to adequate burial grounds were of primary concern. These preoccupations peaked in the 1870s once Protestants became aware of the religious tolerance decrees. Protestants in the

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*; Kenney, *Report of Our Mission*, 4-15.

⁶⁶ Kenney to Whittingham, Nov. 23, 1873, MDA, Cuba fol. IV.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, Jan. 18, 1879.

⁶⁸ Kenney, *Mission*, 4.

Hispanic Caribbean, just like slaves throughout the New World and other culturally oppressed people throughout history, were particularly zealous and militant regarding their rights to pay the last respects to their dead and to bury them properly. By the same token, aware of the potentially explosive situations surrounding funeral ceremonies, those who have held power in slave-based or authoritarian regimes have traditionally sought ways to restrict the place, size, time, and rites of funerals of those whom they oppress.⁶⁹

The extent and importance of the Protestant’s struggle for funeral and burial rights in Cuba and Puerto Rico emerges in the writings of British and North American visitors to the region. It is rare to find a traveler’s account or diary not covering this topic, describing the sad fate of agonizing Protestants, the gruesome sights of the potter’s fields and the unyielding intolerance of the officials of the Catholic Church. United States and British consuls were also active denouncing the situation, and continuously reported to their superiors the pressing need for adequate hospitals, churches and cemeteries for their ailing and dead compatriots. Consul Robert Shufeldt referred to the subject as “a matter due to humanity.”⁷⁰

Not surprisingly, the most vociferous advocates of Protestant burial rights were visiting Protestant clergymen, many of whom traveled to Cuba for health reasons. The Protestant Episcopal Bishops Henry Whipple, Milo Mahan and John F. Young were all moved to start Protestant missions after witnessing the ordeals of their dying compatriots in Cuba. Bishop Whipple painfully reminisced in his memoirs that the granddaughter of a fellow bishop had passed away in Havana “without Anglican ministrations.”⁷¹

One of the main justifications for the creation of the Cuba Missionary Guild and the establishment of a mission in Havana was to tend to the

⁶⁹ In “And Die in Dixie: Funerals, Death and Heaven in the Slave Community, 1700-1865,” *Massachusetts Review*, 12 (Spring 1981), 163-183, David Roediger documents and examines a variety of mechanisms used by the planter class to regulate the funeral activities of blacks. Such mechanisms included banning preaching and drum playing, keeping the number of participants small, and in extreme cases not allowing the funeral or even the burial of the deceased. Aware of the enormous spiritual significance and potential danger of slave funeral and burial practices, some masters engaged in acts of “spiritual terrorism” – I owe the term to Michael Craton – which included mutilating the corpses. See royal decree of 1857 banning the delivery of eulogies in Francisco Ramos, *Apéndice al prontuario de disposiciones oficiales* (San Juan: Imprenta González, 1867), 30. See also Marrero, *Cuba*, XIV, 89, for an example of similar regulations in Cuba.

⁷⁰ Blythe to J. Appleton, May 17, 1858; Blythe to Cass, July 20, 1857; Helm to Cass, April 28, 1860; and Shufeldt to Seward, Jan. 25, 1862, NAWDC, DUSCH-RG59.

⁷¹ Whipple, *Lights and Shadows*, 358.

spiritual needs of agonizing Protestants and to secure proper funerals and solemn burials for the dead. The pamphlets of the Cuba Missionary Guild underscored among its goals the care of those lying sick in the foreign hospital and the establishment of “a God’s acre.”⁷² Kenney, for his part, emphasized his ministry among the dying. He referred to such matters continuously in his reports and correspondence, particularly when he pleaded for funds and the appointment of one or two assistants.⁷³

Kenney proved a dedicated missionary, his work among the agonizing eventually taking a toll on his own health. He personally visited thousands of ill Protestants. In 1875 he reported to Bishop William R. Whittingham that in the previous two years his visitations to the infirm had exceeded four thousand. His 1878 annual report included 2,700 visits to the sick and 125 burial ceremonies.⁷⁴ According to a contemporary account, Kenney “ministers to their spiritual and body necessities; prepares the dying for death; decently shrouds and coffins the body; and with the offices of the church, buries the poor unfortunate in a proper grave.”⁷⁵

Kenney’s correspondence is filled with moving descriptions of his work among the dying. On July 1, 1879 he wrote: “[Y]esterday I buried a darling boy from Scotland, only twelve years of age, who called piteously for his father and mother in his last moments. . . .” On another occasion he wrote about an agonizing Protestant who died “in a terrible condition. He was crazy even in his last moments.” He described the death of yet another fellow countryman, a captain who “had been dying for three days, and decomposition had set in long before he breathed his last.” He added that “at the burial his body was in a terrible state beyond any description. Only by the constant application of camphor could I get through the service.”⁷⁶ All of these vivid images of a Protestant minister struggling in a context of Catholic intolerance proved instrumental not only in gaining support for Kenney’s work but also in reinforcing animosities between Catholic Spain and Protestant North America. The religious rights of foreign Protestants were part of a long ideological war over the Hispanic Caribbean, a war that eventually turned hot and culminated with United States intervention in Cuba’s War of Independence in 1898.

⁷² See *The Cuba Guild*, 1:2 (July 1880); and Kenney, *Report of Our Mission*, 6-13.

⁷³ Kenney to Whittingham, Nov. 27, 1873, MDA, Cuba fol. V.

⁷⁴ “Circular of Havana Church Committee and 1878 Report to Friends of Christian Work,” in *ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Churchman* (June 30, 1877), 703.

⁷⁶ Kenney, *The Mission*, 5; *passim*.

The Catholic Church was equally firm in its stance regarding funeral and burial rights for Protestants. Acceptance of non-Catholic burials in Catholic cemeteries or elsewhere not only would have reduced an important source of church revenue, it would have also allowed opportunities for the public display of ceremonies other than those of the Roman Catholic Church. The Church also feared the proselytizing impact of such public displays. Moreover, baptismal, marriage, and funeral fees, collected by Protestant ministers in Ponce, Havana, and Vieques, were much lower than those exacted by Catholic priests, a situation that further aggravated antagonisms. Market forces eventually forced Catholic curates to reduce their funeral and burial fees. Dismissing charges of abusive fees, the bishop of Havana reported in 1887 that “the parish priests are exhibiting an exemplary generosity . . . one of them issued fifty-four burial licenses in one month and charged for only two.”⁷⁷

In the midst of these struggles the Spanish colonial state assumed the role of an arbiter, seeking to conciliate the traditional privileges of the Catholic Church with the secularizing demands stemming from the region’s growing ties with the Northern Atlantic. Cuban authorities allowed Kenney to care for sick foreign seamen in an old military hospital and to run a modest potter’s field as long as he abstained from proselytizing the Spanish and Cuban population. In Puerto Rico, where authorities could be more sympathetic to the spiritual needs of foreigners, special burial grounds for Protestants were set in various municipalities, sometimes within the Catholic cemeteries.⁷⁸

Closer attention to the controversial burial of a Canadian captain in the summer of 1876 reveals the importance of these issues for both Protestants and Catholics, the international implications of the matter and the mediating role played by the colonial state. Captain A. Gavin died of a heart attack in the high seas on his way to Puerto Rico. Upon the arrival of his corpse the Protestant priest in charge of the Holy Trinity church, Reverend Spinoso read his funeral services. On its way to the municipality’s public – so-called Catholic – cemetery the police stopped the hearse and refused it entrance to

⁷⁷ Bishop of Havana to nuncio in Madrid, Dec. 23, 1887, in Manuel Maza Miguel, *El alma del negocio y el negocio del alma* (Santiago, Dominican Republic: Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra, 1990), 70-72. For an interesting document with data on fees collected for “dispensas matrimoniales” see AGPR, Audiencia Territorial, Real Acuerdo, box 20-B, expediente 20. For funeral fees see “Aranceles funerarios,” overseas minister to the governor of Puerto Rico, Oct. 4, 1866, in Ramos, *Apéndice*, 90-91.

⁷⁸ Jacinto Aldosa to the bishop of Puerto Rico, June 22, 1875, AHDASJ, Gobierno, Correspondencia Parroquia-Obispo, Vieques, box G-29.

the burial grounds. Church and local authorities would have perhaps allowed the body to be quietly buried in the public cemetery had it not been for the fact that the mourners insisted on celebrating a Protestant funeral. Having no other option, the hearse then conveyed the corpse for burial outside the cemetery against the eastern wall of the enclosed grounds, where a makeshift fence around the fresh tomb was erected. The consular corps protested the actions of the local police and the controversy led to the construction of a new cemetery for Protestants a year later.⁷⁹

We know more about Captain Gavin, the corpse, than we know about him as a living man. Little did he know that his unexpected death would have led to so much controversy and that his remains would have left such a permanent mark both in the terrain and the history of the region. Out of necessity, the Spanish state had recognized decades earlier the inevitability of opening the islands' economies to direct interaction with the Northern Atlantic, particularly the United States. Then came the foreigners, with their ships and goods, speaking of republics and abolition, and of a different faith. They lived, worshiped and died in the Caribbean; there they were buried and Protestant cemeteries that still stand today sprang up around their makeshift graves.

*Colgate University
Hamilton, N.Y.*

LUIS MARTÍNEZ-FERNÁNDEZ

⁷⁹ AISTP, Record of Ecclesiastical Duties; AHP, box 42-B, legajo 44, expedientes 12, 17.