
Vagrants, Beggars, and Bandits: Social Origins of Cuban Separatism, 1878–1895

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FOR CUBA, THE PEACE OF ZANJÓN, which ended the Ten Years War (1868–78), marked the passing of an age. In the next two decades, social, political, and economic changes unleashed during the separatist struggle transformed the colony. By 1895, when the second rebellion against Spain began, many, like planter attorney Raimundo Cabrera, saw in the new uprising the coming of the Cuban revolution. “Without question,” Cabrera wrote to a friend in the United States, “this has not been like the Ten Years War—not in its origins, or in its means, or in its expansion, or much less in its social, political, and economic aspects. Cuba today is revolutionary. . . . Everything is undone and in transition.”¹

In the period between the wars, property relations and production modes were in transition, social formations in flux, commercial ties and political loyalties changing. The socioeconomic order of pre-1878 Cuba broke down, and efforts of Spanish administrators to restore order failed. What developed in Cuba was a type of outlawry similar to what Eric Hobsbawm has described as social banditry—lawlessness as social protest. Social bandits gained support from Cuba’s farmers and peasants—many driven from their lands by the planters’ expansion of their sugar latifundia in the post-Zanjón era. In particular, insurrection flourished in the rich sugar provinces of western Cuba—once the most faithful of the Ever Faithful Isle. By 1895, peasants across the island had united in a struggle for independence, and, as a result of the social and economic dislocation of the past two decades, a struggle to separate from Spain became a movement to reform Cuban society.

THE TEN YEARS WAR PROFOUNDLY DISRUPTED Cuba’s economy. Sugar estates operating before the war on marginal profits—run by planters lacking either the finances or the foresight to modernize their mills—were among the earliest

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¹ Cabrera to José Ignacio Rodríguez, September 18, 1896, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Manuscript Division, José Ignacio Rodríguez Papers.

casualties. Of 41 mills in operation around Sancti-Spíritus in Las Villas province in 1861, only 3 remained after the war; in Trinidad, only 16 of 49; in Santa Clara, 39 of 86; in Cienfuegos, 77 of 107. In Güines, almost two-thirds of the 87 mills operating before the war had disappeared by 1877. In some districts of the eastern provinces, the collapse of sugar production was all but complete. None of the 24 mills in Bayamo and the 18 mills in Manzanillo survived the war; in Holguín, only 4 of 64 mills remained in operation; in the district of Santiago de Cuba, 39 of 100; in Puerto Príncipe, 1 of 100. In all, the total number of mills declined from 2,000 in 1860 to 1,190 in 1877.² Sugar production also declined markedly. In 1868, Cubans had produced a record crop of 749,000 tons. Production decreased to 547,000 tons in 1871 and 520,000 tons during the last full year of war. Producers enjoyed a brief recovery in 1879 with a crop of 670,000 tons but suffered successive setbacks in 1880 (530,000 tons) and 1881 (439,000 tons).³

The end of the war did not end the crisis. Planters faced new problems. Capital was scarce and credit dear. In post-Zanjón Cuba, high interest rates diminished the ability of local creditors to underwrite economic recovery; rather, the interest rates all but guaranteed that foreign capital would be the principal source of credit for the heavy and long-term investments necessary to revive sugar production.⁴

These developments in Cuba had far-reaching international repercussions. The decline of Cuban sugar exports stimulated the expansion of sugar production worldwide. After Zanjón, therefore, Cuban planters faced greater competition, not only from new producers but also from old competitors. Rival international producers had not had as great an opportunity to extend their share of the world market since the end of the eighteenth century, when revolution in Saint-Domingue ended French supremacy over sugar production. They did not hesitate. In the United States, new varieties of cane were introduced in the South, while beet sugar production expanded in the West. Beginning in 1876 cane sugar from Hawaii entered the United States duty free. Sugar production also expanded in Latin America, most notably in Argentina, Peru, and Mexico. Many displaced Cuban planters resettled in Santo Domingo and helped increase production of Dominican sugar. But it was in Europe that production, in the form of beet sugar, soared. By the mid-1880s, France, Austria, and Germany had become the largest suppliers of sugar for the world market. Production of beet sugar, in 1853 only some 14 percent of the total world production of sugar, by 1884 made up 53 percent of the international supply. Even metropolitan Spain was not immune to the lure of profits from beet sugar. In 1882, two beet factories began operations in Granada and Córdoba; two more opened ten years later in Zaragoza and

² José R. Alvarez Díaz *et al.*, *A Study on Cuba* (Coral Gables, Fla., 1965), 91–92; Ramiro Guerra y Sánchez, *Sugar and Society in the Caribbean: An Economic History of Cuban Agriculture* (New Haven, Conn., 1964), 63, and Guerra y Sánchez *et al.*, *Historia de la nación cubana*, 7 (Havana, 1952), 153; H. E. Friedlander, *Historia económica de Cuba* (Havana, 1944), 432; Francisco López Segrera, *Cuba: Capitalismo dependiente y subdesarrollo (1510–1959)* (Havana, 1982), 124–26.

³ Susan Schroeder, *Cuba: A Handbook of Historical Statistics* (Boston, 1982), 261. Manuel Moreno Fraginals used slightly different figures but recorded similar fluctuations. See Moreno Fraginals, *El ingenio: Complejo económico social cubano del azúcar*, (Havana, 1978), 37.

⁴ Alvarez Díaz, *Study on Cuba*, 93.

Aranjuez. Spanish beet production increased from 35,000 tons in 1883 to 400,000 in 1895.⁵

In addition to new sources of competition and loss of old markets, Cuban planters confronted a precipitous decline in the value of their principal product, even as they prepared to resume production. In 1884 the price of sugar plummeted to a new low, dropping from eleven to eight cents a pound. The drop in sugar prices occurred simultaneously with the transition from slave labor to wage labor and the imposition of a new series of taxes. Heavy taxes assessed against agriculture and livestock, municipal taxes on land, sales taxes, transportation taxes, duties on imported equipment and food—"everything that the people eat comes from abroad," U.S. Vice Consul David Vickers noted—threatened the planter class with extinction. Vickers continued, "Through want of frugality and foresight and with enormous taxation, added to the competition of other sugar countries, the planter, to meet all demands, has discounted his crops at such ruinous rates of interest, piling mortgage upon mortgage, that today he finds himself irrevocably involved in debts equal to at least one year's excellent crop and in some instances much more. In the event of a poor crop, he would not have enough money either to pay current expenses or even to commence grinding his cane when the harvest begins, and no one to loan it to him."⁶ Early in 1884 the U.S. consul in Havana reported, "Out of the twelve or thirteen hundred planters on the island, not a dozen are said to be solvent."⁷

Before the war planters had worried about producing large harvests as a hedge against disaster. During the 1880s they produced good crops, but the postwar problems—fewer markets, falling prices, a dwindling labor supply, rising taxes, increased operating costs—forced many into bankruptcy. Within a ten-year period, the U. S. consul in Cienfuegos wrote in 1883, "almost every sugar estate [in] the jurisdiction of Cienfuegos has either changed ownership by reason of debt or is now encumbered with debts to an amount approximating the value of the estates."⁸

By the mid-1880s, Cuba was in a depression. Businesses closed, banks collapsed, and seven of the island's largest trading companies failed. Credit, dear after Zanjón, was almost nonexistent a decade later. In October 1883 the Bank of Santa Catalina closed. In March 1884 the most important savings institution in Havana, the Caja de Ahorros, suspended payments, ostensibly because of the suicide of the bank's president. "It is more probable," the U. S. consul in Havana speculated, "that the Director committed suicide because the bank was unable to meet its

⁵ Hugh Thomas, *Cuba, the Pursuit of Freedom* (New York, 1971), 272.

⁶ Vickers to Assistant Secretary of State John Davis, October 24, 1883, National Archives, Washington, D.C., General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, Despatches from United States Consuls in Matanzas, 1820–1899 (hereafter, *Despatches/Matanzas*).

⁷ Adam Badeau, "Report on the Present Condition of Cuba," February 7, 1884, National Archives, Washington, D.C., General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, Despatches from United States Consuls in Havana, 1783–1906 (hereafter, *Despatches/Havana*).

⁸ William P. Pierce to Assistant Secretary of State John Davis, August 10, 1883, National Archives, Washington, D.C., General Records of the Department of State, Record Group 59, Despatches from United States Consuls in Cienfuegos, 1876–1906 (hereafter, *Despatches/Cienfuegos*).

engagements.”⁹ Two weeks later the Caja de Ahorros went into liquidation. In the same month, runs on the Banco Industrial and the Banco de Comercio forced both institutions to close. Two months later, the Banco Industrial went into liquidation. The Bank of Santa Catalina was closely linked to agricultural interests, and its failure principally affected planters. The Caja de Ahorros, on the other hand, served a much broader clientele, including professionals, merchants, shop owners, and workers, and when it failed small depositors of all kinds faced catastrophe.¹⁰ In the first three months of 1884, business failures totaled some \$7 million. “The entire population is reduced . . . to blank despondency and universal ruin,” the U.S. consul reported.¹¹

Similar conditions prevailed in the provinces. In March 1884 the prestigious house of Rodríguez in Sagua la Grande—together with its affiliate in Havana, Miyares and Company—failed. In the once-opulent city of Trinidad, businesses closed, and retail shops were abandoned. The vital rail link to Casilda, the port of Trinidad, ceased operation because of disrepair of the track.¹² A news brief from Santiago de Cuba reported, “Failures, extra-judicial arrangements, and the liquidation of commercial houses follow each other in rapid succession.”¹³ In Matanzas, the surplus of unsold sugar mounted as prices dropped and markets declined. By 1885 planters could not sell their crops for enough to defray the cost of production.¹⁴ Some three hundred estates faced imminent ruin. “Firms are going into bankruptcy every day,” Vickers reported in July 1884. “Planters are discharging their laborers and threaten—to save themselves further disaster—to abandon their estates; gold fluctuates two and three and sometimes ten points a day; all credits are denied even to the most substantial, and men are wondering how and where they will obtain the means to live; and in many cases relatives are doubling up apartment style to save expenses.”¹⁵ A month later, according to Vickers, conditions had deteriorated further. “Every day the situation is becoming more and more serious and the condition of the people more and more sad. All credits are being suspended, labors are unpaid, plantations being abandoned. . . . House owners are receiving little or no rent. In a word the condition of all classes, rich and poor alike, is most lamentable; and what is worse, there is not hope in the future.”¹⁶

Foreign travelers confirmed this generally bleak picture of late nineteenth-century Cuba. Maturin M. Ballou, traveling across the island east to west, encountered dislocation and despair everywhere. In Santiago de Cuba, Ballou found the local gas monopoly “on the verge of bankruptcy, like nearly everything else of a business character in Cuba.” In Cienfuegos, one planter told Ballou that

⁹ Adam Badeau to secretary of state, March 6, 1884, Despatches/Havana.

¹⁰ Gaston Descamps, *La crisis azucarera y la Isla de Cuba* (Havana, 1885), 143.

¹¹ Adam Badeau, “Report on the Present Condition of Cuba,” February 7, 1884, Despatches/Havana.

¹² *El País*, November 26, 1889.

¹³ *New York Times*, July 17, 1884.

¹⁴ *Diario de Matanzas*, January 18, 1885.

¹⁵ Vickers to Davis, July 2, 1884, Despatches/Matanzas.

¹⁶ Vickers to Davis, August 27, 1884, Despatches/Matanzas.

he would use his molasses as fertilizer on cane fields rather "than send it to a distant market and receive only what it cost." The planter vowed to permit "thousands of acres of sugar cane to rot in the fields this season as it would cost more to cut, grind, pack, and send it to market than could be realized for the manufactured articles." "Mercantile credit may be said to be dead," Ballou noted on his arrival in Havana, "and business is nearly at a standstill." As he prepared to leave Cuba he wrote, "Financial ruin stares all in the face."¹⁷

Government revenues also diminished during the depression. As a result, public services declined, sanitation services decreased, public works programs were suspended, and public administration deteriorated, not least because administrators were without pay. "Employees of the Government and municipalities have received no pay for months," wrote Vickers from Matanzas in 1884. "As a sample, this city is in arrears to the Gas Company over \$95,000—to the schools about eighteen months, the police nine months. Even the public hospital—which collects a tax of \$2—has been obliged to beg bread from the *bodegas* [grocery stores], and from door step to door step."¹⁸ In Havana the press reported that public officials were obliged to pawn their furniture in one last desperate effort to stave off destitution.¹⁹ The city also had a staggering utility bill of \$400,000—and a threat from an impatient Spanish-American Light and Power Company in New York to suspend gas service for city street lights unless the debt was speedily and satisfactorily settled.²⁰ Ballou reported:

The streets, even about the paseos [promenades], are so impregnated with filth, here and there, as to be sickening to the senses of the passer-by. Once in 3 or 4 weeks somebody is awakened to the exigency of the situation, and a gang of men is put to work to cleanse the principal thoroughfares. . . . We were told that the reason for this neglect was that no one was regularly paid for work; even the police had not received any pay for seven months; and many refused to serve longer. The soldiery had not been paid their small stipend for nearly a year.²¹

During the 1880s the unemployment rate soared. Jobs were few and competition fierce. In Havana some twenty thousand workers were unemployed. In 1885 the once-thriving Havana naval yard closed, leaving hundreds without work. The decline of cigar exports in the late 1880s and early 1890s wrought havoc on one of the major labor intensive sectors of the Cuban economy. Repercussions were immediate and far-reaching. Cigar production had provided employment for more than one hundred thousand people in agriculture and manufacturing, the vast majority of whom resided in the two western provinces of Pinar del Río and Havana. The cigar factories alone employed some fifty thousand workers. As cigar

¹⁷ Ballou, *Due South; or, Cuba Past and Present* (Boston, 1886), 39, 43, 45, 49, 51–52, 168.

¹⁸ Vickers to Davis, August 27, 1884, Despatches/Matanzas.

¹⁹ *La Lucha*, March 18, 1889.

²⁰ See Ramon O. Williams to James D. Porter, January 12, 1887, Despatches/Havana; and F. Moreno, *Cuba y su gente (apuntes para la historia)* (Madrid, 1887), 158–59.

²¹ Ballou, *Due South*, 133.

exports decreased, the number of factory closings increased. By the early 1890s, thirty-five thousand cigar makers were unemployed, and the remainder were reduced to part-time.²² Moreover, during these years, the abolition of slavery was completed, and thousands of former slaves joined the Cuban labor force as free wage earners.

Already dismal employment prospects for Cubans were exacerbated by the Spaniards' continued monopolization of public office. These were hard times in Spain, too, and, from political necessity, imperial ministers viewed public administration in Cuba as a source of relief for unemployed Spaniards. Cuba late in the nineteenth century remained very much what it had been early in the sixteenth century: a place for the destitute of Spain to start over. Public offices and political appointments in the colony were considered both a perquisite of empire and an overseas extension of the patronage system in Spain—from which Cubans were by and large excluded.

But *peninsulares* monopolized more than public positions. They also owned most private property, controlled trade and commerce, presided over banking and finance as well as industry and manufacturing. Spaniards owned the factories and farms, managed the plants and plantations, were the retail shopkeepers and wholesale merchants as well as the moneylenders and land brokers. Spaniards also worked in the professions, in the trades as artisans and apprentices, in the offices as clerks, and in the fields as day laborers. Most of all they controlled the jobs, and, whether by formal contract or by informal consensus, Spaniards preferred to hire Spaniards, a private practice that coincided with public policy. Spain actively encouraged immigration to Cuba as a comparatively convenient and cost-effective method to reduce the size of a socially unstable population at home and increase the number of loyalists in a politically unreliable population in Cuba.

Beginning in 1886, Madrid formally adopted a policy of subsidizing travel costs for all Spaniards seeking employment in Cuba. And they arrived in shipload after shipload. In the decades after Zanjón, one-quarter million emigrated to the island.²³ Not only did more Spaniards come but they also differed from earlier arrivals. The new immigrants were from the north, mostly from Galicia and Asturias. Destitute, often desperate, strong-willed and self-possessed, and, most of all, determined to make it, they worked hard and long, often for meager wages. It was a labor market in which many Cubans could not compete.

In the decades after the Peace of Zanjón, there seemed to be no place for Cubans in Cuba. For many members of the planter class, peasantry, professions, and proletariat, Spanish administration revealed itself incapable of discharging the central clause of the colonial social contract: the opportunity for livelihood. Cubans seemed in danger of becoming a superfluous population, unemployable and expendable, outsiders and outcasts in the society they claimed as their own. They

²² See *Diario de la Marina*, August 16, 1892; and *El País*, August 24, 1892.

²³ Rafael María Merchán, *Cuba, justificación de sus guerras de independencia* (1896; reprint edn., Havana, 1961), 38; Duvon C. Corbitt, "Immigration in Cuba," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 22 (1942): 302–08.

faced all at once exclusion, expulsion, and expatriation. Indeed, emigration was symptomatic of the crisis in colonial Cuba in the late nineteenth century. Thousands of working-class families emigrated to Key West, Tampa, Ocala, and Jacksonville. Some ten thousand cigar workers found employment in the expanding cigar industries of Florida during the 1880s and early 1890s, creating in exile a flourishing community in which Cuban emigres found a livelihood.²⁴ During the last third of the nineteenth century, approximately one hundred thousand Cubans, in all occupations and professions, of all ages, from all classes and races, emigrated to Europe, the United States, and Latin America.²⁵

IN RURAL CUBA THE CRISIS of the 1880s found its most dramatic expression. A new stage of capitalist organization transformed sugar production and with it all of Cuba. Sugar mills continued to go bankrupt after the war, and producers recognized that reorganization of the production system and restructuring of property relations were necessary to regain Cuba's premier position in sugar exports. Their response was swift and the effects sweeping. Not since the first third of the nineteenth century had Cuban sugar producers expanded so aggressively and with such speed as they did in the decade after Zanjón.

The incentive for greater concentration of land originated with the Ten Years War. Property destroyed in war was property discounted in peace. Farms vacated by the forced relocation of rural families, as well as the property of owners killed in the war, provided additional opportunities for alert and ambitious landowners to expand their holdings. Many farms abandoned or destroyed were simply seized. Municipal records were also destroyed and titles lost, and inevitably land claims became confused and contested. Then, too, the property of many Cubans who had joined the separatist cause was expropriated and subsequently auctioned as a means of financing the war.

During the war years expansion was haphazard and fortuitous, sporadic and scattered, more a response to opportunity than the result of organization. But, during the 1880s, planters undertook far-reaching changes—mobilized into action by international developments. Greater efficiency was needed to market sugar profitably under the existing conditions of international competition and falling prices. Production strategies shifted from increasing the number of sugar mills to increasing the production capacities of those already in operation. New credit, fresh capital, and new ownership, principally from the United States, provided larger enterprises with the resources necessary to expand.

Improved varieties of cane, innovations in manufacturing techniques, and other technological and industrial advances became generally available to planters by the

²⁴ Eusebio Hernández y Pérez, *El período revolucionario de 1879 a 1895* (Havana, 1914), 57.

²⁵ Fernando Portuondo del Prado, *Historia de Cuba* (6th edn., Havana, 1965), 434. Also see José Rivero Muñiz, "Los cubanos en Tampa," *Revista Bimestre Cubana*, 74 (1958): 5–140; and José Luciano Franco, "Panamá: Refugio de la rebeldía cubana en el siglo XIX," *Casa de las Américas*, 15 (1974): 16–26.

late 1880s and provided Cuban producers an opportunity to respond aggressively to new conditions. New machinery to extract maximum sugar from cane and efficiently grind the increased volume of harvested cane was introduced. New vacuum pans, boilers, and centrifugal equipment were installed to distill and crystallize more sugar from improved strains of cane. By the late 1870s the Bessemer steel process had reduced substantially the cost of railway construction, and the expansion of rail facilities relieved the bottleneck created when increased production overloaded the transportation system. The two-wheeled wooden carts drawn sluggishly by a yoke of oxen (*carreta*) over dirt roads, many in wretched condition, could not have accommodated the growing needs of expanded sugar production. The new rail system promised to increase efficiency of operations and reduce costs at a time when Cuban planters were in dire need of economy of production. The railroad also served to widen the export market by linking hitherto isolated sugar regions with ports. It encouraged, lastly, the expansion of sugar cultivation and hence increased the land devoted to sugar cane. Producers acquired rapid and reliable access to new lands—this at the expense, however, of smaller farmers.²⁶

The shift in production strategies led immediately to a sharper division between field and factory. These developments made growth and specialization not only attractive but also imperative—a condition of survival. Planters unable to meet the growing capital requirements of sugar manufacturing abandoned the industrial end of production altogether and devoted themselves exclusively to growing cane. The system in which the grower milled his own cane gave way to a new specialization of operations and, increasingly, separation of ownership in which the mill owner concentrated on manufacture and the planter tended to cultivation.

Modernization also led to new and greatly enhanced production capabilities of Cuban mills. Planters more than doubled their output in the decade between 1883 (460,000 tons) and 1892 (976,000 tons). Two years later, Cuban planters harvested a crop of one million tons. These advances placed additional pressures on those sectors, including transportation and storage, that supported production. Not only railroad but also wharf and pier construction expanded, and warehouse facilities increased. But, most important, more land was essential.²⁷ If the newly renovated

²⁶ Fe Iglesias, "Algunos aspectos de la distribución de la tierra en 1899," *Santiago*, 40 (1980): 152–54; and Félix Goizueta-Mimó, "Effects of Sugar Monoculture upon Colonial Cuba" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1971), 91–98.

²⁷ The sugar latifundia expanded at the expense of all other agricultural units, sugar and nonsugar alike, throughout the western regions. In the region of Remedios in Las Villas province, the new regimen of land concentration swiftly established the preeminence of the sugar latifundia. In Yaguajay, the new mill Narciso (1891) absorbed older and less efficient mills, including Soberano, Oceano, Encarnación, Aurora, Urbaza, and Luisiana. In the rich zones of Matanzas-Cárdenas-Colón, sugar planters expanded at a frenetic pace. The revolution in land ownership during the 1880s also transformed the region around Sagua la Grande. Technological improvements and cultivation of new land increased the production of Sagua's six major mills by 50 percent. Nowhere, however, did land concentration occur as suddenly or as spectacularly as in the Cienfuegos region. Between 1884 and 1891, thirteen new mills were organized. These new mills, destined to dominate Cuban sugar production for the next quarter-century, included Constancia, Soledad, San Lino, San Agustín, Lequeito, Caracas, Hormiguero, Parque Alto, and Cieneguita. See Guerra y Sánchez *et al.*, *Historia de la nación cubana*, 192–94; and Friedlander, *Historia económica de Cuba*, 436–38.

mills were to operate at optimum efficiency and a maximum level of production, they would require much greater quantities of cane, which was possible only by expanding the zones of sugar cultivation. Hence, the first requirement for planters was acquisition of more land; second, cheap labor. The abolition of slavery in the 1880s forced planters to find workers. And, as the scope of sugar production increased, so did the planters' need for a reliable supply of cheap labor.

Sugar planters attempted to secure new land and cheap labor at the same time. First, they had to eliminate rival agricultural enterprises and competing land tenure systems and appropriate units incompatible with sugar production. Immediately, therefore, planters wanted land devoted to tobacco, coffee, fruit and vegetables, and grazing converted to cane and attached to the sugar latifundia. They also wanted the abolition of diverse forms of land ownership. These conditions invited the privileged and powerful to move against the poor and powerless, and circumstances in the decade after Zanjón made these opportunities irresistible. Family farms, commercial estates, and livestock pastures were swallowed up. Unincorporated land was absorbed. But, most important, the *hacienda comunera*, the system of communal farming in which ownership of land was distributed in allotments and held in common by communities in the form of shares (*pesos de posesión*), was threatened. The *hacienda comunera* was one of the principal forms of traditional land tenure in Cuba, consisting of a tract of land owned jointly by any number of individuals and families, the value of which was assessed and ownership allocated in the form of *pesos de posesión*. Tenure of *posesión* guaranteed an owner (*comunero*) title to a certain portion of the tract but was not a clear title to any specific part. *Pesos de posesión* granted a right to land within the larger boundary of the original grant (*merced*). When an owner died, the assessed value of the land was allocated among heirs. The original land grant remained intact, but the right to land was divided in direct proportion to the fixed dollar share. The number of shares in any given tract increased with the passage of time, as each successive generation willed its shares to new heirs or sold its portions to new owners. Rights to the land multiplied in the course of time, and ownership became hopelessly confused and continuously contested. *Pesos de posesión* were willed, sold, and otherwise transferred without regard to the proportion of land corresponding to each share.²⁸ A special commission examining the surviving *haciendas comuneras* in 1901 reported:

In so far as the real nature, the location and the area, and the boundary thereof are concerned, there prevails the greatest confusion which can be imagined. The actual title-deeds of said properties are scarce, doubtful, and even unknown. Neither the number nor the real names, nor the exact location, nor the area of the greater part of said undivided properties are known. In many instances, not even those who name themselves tenants in common know if they are really such tenants, nor why they are called tenants in common.²⁹

²⁸ For a general discussion of the *hacienda comunera*, see Francisco Pérez de la Riva, *Origen y régimen de la propiedad territorial en Cuba* (Havana, 1946), 61–66; and Leopoldo Cancio, "Haciendas comuneras," *Cuba y América*, January 1902, pp. 227–36.

²⁹ Carlos Párraga and Domingo Méndez Capote to Rafael R. Govín, December 26, 1901, National Archives, Washington, D.C., Records of the Military Government of Cuba, Record Group 140 (hereafter, MGC/RG 140), file 4167–1901.

Land grants were rarely surveyed, and inevitably boundaries were inexact, unofficial, and almost always unprovable. It was precisely this ambiguity that made the *hacienda comunera* wholly incompatible with the requirements of sugar producers. Because ownership of any tract of land was claimed by large numbers of people holding *pesos de posesión*, transfer of the entire unit was all but impossible. The only recourse was litigation to challenge ownership, and for the vast numbers whose titles were imperfect, incomplete, or otherwise flawed the adjudication process was the first step toward displacement. Valid titles, too, were often challenged, and not infrequently the judicial survey (*deslinde*) so reduced the size of a legal claim as to make subsistence agriculture nearly impossible. Court proceedings tended to favor large planters, who could retain talented attorneys, and bribery and corruption often had as much to do with a final judgment as the legal merits of a case.³⁰ Holders of invalidated claims were required to abandon the land, taking with them livestock, crops, and personal property located within the boundaries of the tract. Immovable property, specifically gardens, planted fields, and orchards, was to be appraised and the owner adequately indemnified.³¹

However vague and imprecise, *pesos de posesión* represented a legal right to the land. For a comparatively modest sum of money, farmers obtained *posesión* and secured the attending right to work some part of the tract. This was *minifundista* farming on a vast scale, a source of subsistence and livelihood for generations of small farmers without the requirement of a large outlay of capital. By the end of the 1880s, this form of land ownership was well on its way to extinction in western Cuba.

Capitalization of agriculture required not only transformation of the existing system of land tenure but also elimination of the peasant as an independent farmer. Persistence of traditional forms of land tenure and the continuance of marginal agricultural production obstructed both monopolization of land and consolidation of the latifundia. But control of ownership through concentration of land gave planters more than control of land use. Monopolization was also a means of coercion to obtain control over the workers of land. Farmers and peasants able to provide for their own subsistence were not inclined to work for depressed wages. The purpose of monopolization was not so much to use land as to withdraw its use, to transform the self-sufficient farmer into a wageworker. The unreliability of the local labor supply was an important motivation for territorial expansion by planters, who often appropriated land they could not and did not intend to cultivate. The effect was to compress peasants onto land incapable of producing enough for subsistence; peasants were then obliged to work on the sugar latifundia.

The expansion of sugar production thus had two interrelated objectives: first, the expropriation of peasant lands to increase the output of sugar and, second, the appropriation of peasant labor to decrease the cost of production. Planters were

³⁰ Lowry Nelson, *Rural Cuba* (Minneapolis, 1950), 96–97. Also see Rogelio de Armas y Herrera, *Estudio sobre deslindes* (Baracoa, Cuba, 1913); and Antero Regalado, *Las luchas campesinas en Cuba* (Havana, 1979), 47–48.

³¹ "Haciendas comuneras," MGC/RG 140, file 4167–1901.

successful on both counts. Land and labor served production, and the increased need of the latter was a function of the increment of the former.

The capitalization of agriculture and the proletarianization of peasants transformed the character of the rural political economy. Commercial farms, communal lands, and family farms passed under the control of the latifundia. These developments affected all regions of Cuba in varying degrees, but the effects were most pronounced in the sugar zones of the west. Through the late 1880s and early 1890s, tens of thousands of Cubans, white and black, appeared in the census records as landless agriculturalists, working on the sugar estates in Matanzas and Santa Clara.³²

THE DISLOCATION OF THE POPULATION IN RURAL CUBA had begun with the Ten Years War. The separatist conflict caused havoc in the countryside, forcing thousands of families to migrate to the cities in search of sanctuary and security. Spanish military policy, which forcibly removed some families to urban reconcentration centers, exacerbated dislocation in the countryside and congestion in the cities. Rural refugees became urban indigents. Dislodged from their homes and dispossessed of their property, the displaced families of the war were deprived of a livelihood in peace. The result was immediate pauperization.

The end of the war did not end the crisis. The modernization of mills and expansion of sugar estates meant that displacement of the rural population continued.³³ To the swollen ranks of those who had no reason to leave the cities after the war were added those who had no reason to remain in the countryside after the peace. More rural families migrated to the cities but found their conditions materially worse than the ones from which they sought escape. Unemployed workers, displaced farmers, and emancipated slaves competed with Spanish immigrants for a decreasing number of jobs.

By the end of the 1880s, vagrancy and mendicancy reached unmanageable proportions. For many of the destitute, mendicancy was the only recourse. For

³² Rebecca J. Scott, "Class Relations in Sugar and Political Mobilization in Cuba, 1868–1899," *Cuban Studies/Estudios Cubanos*, 15 (1985): 21. These developments in late nineteenth-century Cuba were similar to and simultaneous with events occurring elsewhere in the world. "In disparate parts of the world ruled by different states and empires," wrote Joel S. Migdal, "small freeholding peasants almost simultaneously faced catastrophic changes in the rules of land tenure in their societies. It is most striking that these land tenure changes came in a number of countries almost at the same moment in history. . . . Wherever enacted . . . one prime purpose of such laws was to facilitate changes in agricultural production that would increase yields and that would lead to the planting of crops suitable for export. Simultaneous changes in land tenure in seemingly unrelated parts of the globe came in large part because of increased demand in Europe and the United States for cotton, sugar, coffee, jute, indigo, and a number of other select crops. . . . New production techniques for specific crops that were developed at this time also increased the pressure for consolidating land so as to gain greater economies of scale. . . . Whatever the precise purposes and rationalizations for changes in land tenure, they precipitated eruptive, universal dislocations whenever enacted. They signaled changes in agricultural production and class relations that entered so deeply into the fabric of societies that their effects are often still discernible today." Migdal, "Capitalist Penetration in the Nineteenth Century: Creating Conditions for New Patterns of Social Control," in Robert P. Weller and Scott E. Guggenheim, eds., *Power and Protest in the Countryside* (Durham, N.C., 1982), 60–61.

³³ Guerra y Sánchez, *Sugar and Society in the Caribbean*, 85–93.

some, the threshold between marginality and criminality was easy to cross. Entire sectors of the urban population passed from chronic poverty to permanent indigence. Illness and disease spread through the destitute in Havana. Mortality rates suggest a grim and unremitting life and death struggle in the capital throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century. Epidemics struck again and again: yellow fever, cholera, smallpox, typhoid fever, dysentery, and malaria. Asiatic cholera struck in 1868, raising the annual death rate in Havana to a staggering 51.75 per 100,000 inhabitants. Between 1873 and 1879 and again in 1895, a yellow fever epidemic occurred; in 1871–72, 1874–75, 1878–81, 1887–88, 1891, and 1894, smallpox. Pulmonary tuberculosis claimed some 1,200 lives in 1886. Between 1881 and 1890, the Havana death rate averaged 34.18 per 100,000 inhabitants.³⁴

Destitute men and women tended to drift aimlessly from job to job: the women from domestic service to peddling to prostitution, the men from day labor to unemployment to crime. Many lived by their wits, through petty pilfering and swindling but mostly through begging and stealing. By 1885 there were some two hundred registered brothels in Havana. Beggars became a permanent feature of the urban landscape, and robberies, assaults, and petty theft of all kinds spread across the island.³⁵ “Personal security in Cuba is a myth!” one Spanish traveler complained in 1887. “No one there who leaves his house knows if he will be able to return alive and well. Robbery occurs as much on the most central streets of Havana, at any time of day or night, as in unpopulated areas.”³⁶ Wrote a Cuban in the same year: “In the cities we have the rapacious land sharks, the pickpockets, the snatchers of watch chains—the terrifying cry of ‘your money or your life,’ assailing the ear of the defenseless passer-by at every obscure corner; the stabbings, the shootings, the cries, the incessant alarms, the rushing to and fro—everywhere a bloody picture of shameful and abominable barbarities.”³⁷ An American correspondent exclaimed: “Havana has more police to the square foot than any other city on earth. People are often waylaid and robbed in the streets, and there is much wailing in Havana . . . because with all this great protection the thieving cannot be stopped.”³⁸

Few who traveled to Cuba during these years could fail to notice conditions in the cities; what they noticed most were the beggars. Visiting Cienfuegos in the mid-1880s, Ballou wrote:

It was very pitiful to behold the army of beggars in so small a city, but begging is synonymous with the Spanish name. Here the maimed, halt, and blind meet one at every turn. Saturday is the harvest day for beggars in the Cuban cities, on which occasion they go about by scores

³⁴ *Census of the Republic of Cuba, 1919* (Havana, 1919), 258. In Europe, mortality rates had not been this high since the end of the seventeenth century. See Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400–1800* (New York, 1969), 62–63.

³⁵ Raimundo Cabrera, *Cuba and the Cubans* (1887; reprint edn., Philadelphia, 1896), 141. See Benjamin de Céspedes, *La prostitución en la ciudad de La Habana* (Havana, 1888); and Ignacio D. Ituarte, *Crímenes y criminales de La Habana* (Havana, 1893).

³⁶ Moreno, *Cuba y su gente*, 179–180.

³⁷ Cabrera, *Cuba and the Cubans*, 236.

³⁸ *New York Times*, March 12, 1893.

from door to door, carrying a large canvas bag. Each family and shop is supplied with a quantity of small rolls of bread, specially baked for the purpose, and one of which is nearly always given to the applicant on that day, so the mendicant's bag becomes full of rolls. These, mixed with vegetables, bits of fish, and sometimes meat and bones when they can be procured, are boiled into a soup, thus keeping soul and body together in the poor creatures during the week.³⁹

"Numerous mendicants," wrote one American journalist, "are daily seen in nearly all the principal streets, clothed in filthy rags, and soliciting alms with much impunity."⁴⁰ The U.S. consul in Havana wrote often of the "numerous vagrants infesting this city," attributing the widespread "vagrancy and kindred social evils" to the "scarcity of employment for its people."⁴¹ English historian John Anthony Froude, visiting Havana during the mid-1880s, described legions of beggars crowding the capital's narrow streets. Squalor and destitution were everywhere.⁴² Some years later American tourist Richard Davey struck a similar tone: "Never . . . have I seen such terrible beggars as those of Cuba. They haunt you everywhere, gather round the church doors, whining for alms, insulting you if you refuse them and pestering you as you go home at night, never leaving you till you either bestow money on them or escape within your own or some friendly door."⁴³

Not all of these problems were new. Vagrancy had caused authorities concern during the Ten Years War. Their expectation that the end of the war would relieve the urban congestion and destitution, however, proved short-lived. Within a year after Zanjón, Spanish authorities undertook a thorough policy review of the relationship between vagrancy and rising incidents of lawlessness. It was a connection readily established, if not easily ended. What initially preoccupied officials was a search for a remedy for the causes of vagrancy as a means of reducing its effects. Attributing vagrancy to idleness and unemployment, colonial authorities adopted three courses of action, each designed to meet problems associated with a specific age group among vagrants. First, vagrant youths under twenty years of age were to be assigned to local factories and farms as a way to promote a work habit and provide them with a trade. In a second program, the government established a workhouse for beggars and vagrants on the Isle of Pines. In the *protectorado del trabajo*, as the Isle of Pines project became known, vagrants between the ages of twenty and fifty were to be sentenced to work rehabilitation programs with minimum compensation. Third, vagrants over the age of fifty were to be assigned to local town councils (*ayuntamientos*) as day laborers in public works and government service with compensation adequate for their upkeep.⁴⁴

In the best of times, these would have been ambitious programs. In post-Zanjón Cuba, they were impossible. The *protectorado del trabajo* was hardly launched when

³⁹ Ballou, *Due South*, 49.

⁴⁰ *New York Times*, December 19, 1890.

⁴¹ Ramon O. Williams to George L. Rives, November 24, 1888, Despatches/Havana.

⁴² Froude, *The English in the West Indies* (London, 1888), 301–06.

⁴³ Davey, *Cuba, Past and Present* (New York, 1898), 137.

⁴⁴ "Memoria sobre la represión del bandolerismo y destino de los vagos," December 16, 1879, Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Havana (hereafter, ANC), Fondo Gobierno General, file 584, no. 28863.

revenue deficits forced its suspension. By the early 1880s it was no longer feasible to condemn the idle to work when workers were condemned to idleness. Nor could municipal government bear the rising cost of subsidizing antivagrancy programs at a time of declining revenues and deepening indebtedness. Public payrolls were already hopelessly in arrears, which all but foreclosed new municipal expenditures.

Through the 1880s, authorities resorted to a variety of measures to end vagrancy, all of which had one feature in common—failure. As early as 1881, the civil governor of Santa Clara organized the Junta de Represión de la Vagancia designed to halt the rising crime rate through the systematic and summary arrest of all vagrants.⁴⁵ In 1888, deteriorating conditions in Havana led to the promulgation of severe measures. “The disagreeable spectacle offered by the great number of individuals of all classes who are continually found asleep or given over to idleness, in the promenades and other public places, when not to worse acts,” the civil governor of Havana, Carlos Rodríguez Batista, proclaimed, “must not and cannot be tolerated any longer.” “The measures adopted by this Civil Government,” he continued, “on different occasions for the disappearance of such scenes were intended also to guarantee individual security, particularly at night, when people on foot are easily surprised and attacked by criminals under the disguise of peaceable persons, thus originating the commission of crimes that were it not for those circumstances would be easy for the police to prevent.” Rodríguez Batista decreed the arrest of “every person without occupation or known address found in the parks, streets, and other public places of the city.” Vagrants were sentenced to mandatory employment in public works projects in Havana, without compensation.⁴⁶ At the same time, the colonial government sought to revive the *protectorado del trabajo*, this time imposing a tax levy on each province to subsidize the program.⁴⁷

These measures had little immediate effect. Within months, a new governor complained of rising incidents of crime and no decrease in vagrancy. In 1889, Governor Manuel Salamanca pledged his administration to create new jobs as an antidote to vagrancy, “the single largest cause of crime.”⁴⁸ But Spanish authorities knew that colonial revenues were not adequate either to promote public works projects or to create jobs. Nor could officials expect relief from private quarters, for the Cuban economy continued in depression. The colonial authorities devised still another plan—the expulsion of vagrants and criminals. Beginning in the late 1880s, and continuing through the early 1890s, Spanish authorities offered moral encouragement and material incentives to “undesirable” Cubans to emigrate to Florida. Convicts received the choice of prison on the Isle of Pines or passage to

⁴⁵ Emilio Calleja, Santa Clara, to governor general, January 27, 1881, ANC, Fondo Gobierno General, file 584, no. 28863.

⁴⁶ *Diario de la Marina*, November 24, 1888.

⁴⁷ Antonio Pérez, secretary, Audiencia of Havana, to administration section chief, January 9, 1888, ANC, Fondo de Asuntos Políticos, file 81, no. 23. Also see Gobierno de la Isla de Cuba, “Circular: A los Gobernadores Civiles de las Provincias de esta Isla,” January 19, 1888, ANC, Fondo de Asuntos Políticos, file 81, no. 23.

⁴⁸ Salamanca, “Circular,” May 12, 1889, ANC, Fondo Gobierno General, file 584, no. 28863.

Key West. Fugitives at large were offered pardons on the condition that they surrender to authorities preliminary to their emigration. A new population of Cubans thus joined the growing expatriate communities in Florida, and, although it is impossible to determine the number of Cubans emigrating to Florida under these circumstances, the figure was large enough to prompt the major of Key West in 1888 to protest Spanish policy to the State Department.⁴⁹

NOT ALL FARMERS MIGRATED TO THE CITIES. And not all who remained in the countryside either acquiesced in their impoverishment or accepted the new order. Some were prepared to endure grinding poverty but few the collapse of the world as they knew it. Discontent increased, slowly at first, and resentment mounted. Within a decade after Zanjón, banditry had reached epidemic proportions in the countryside, a palpable expression of the crisis in rural Cuba. Many displaced farmers and dispossessed peasants refused to submit to the regimen of the plantation and enter the service of the planters, choosing independence and life outside the law. But banditry was more than a condition of individual rebellion and personal revolt. It was also an expression of collective resistance by communities threatened with the loss of a traditional way of life.

The increase in lawlessness during the 1880s was in part a result of the insurgency of the 1870s. The Ten Years War had disrupted the lives of thousands of Cubans, and for veterans and noncombatants (*pacíficos*) alike the requirements of peace were often more exacting than the rigors of war. Peace gave many Cubans little incentive to abandon arms. Jobs were few, agriculture in ruins. Even when farms could be reclaimed, the destruction of crops, the dispersal of livestock, and the disrepair of equipment were so complete and the cost of beginning anew so great that all but the most determined were discouraged from returning to the land. Many had no place to return to or did not want to return, and for them it was preferable to seek survival as unrepentant fugitives than to scratch out a living as indigent farmers.⁵⁰

But the Ten Years War as the effective explanation for increased lawlessness is neither sufficient nor satisfactory. The war was fought largely in eastern Cuba. The eastern population had suffered most from the military campaigns, and there the war had been most destructive and disruptive. But nothing comparable to the conditions of lawlessness in the west occurred in the east. Postwar banditry was not unknown in Camagüey and Oriente, but in the course of a thirty-month period, between May 1885 and November 1887, the governor of Camagüey reported no instance of banditry. Not until June 1888 did authorities in Camagüey record the first occurrence. In Oriente, acts of lawlessness were confined to scattered cases of arson and sporadic instances of assault.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ramon O. Williams to George L. Rives, January 28, 1888, Despatches/Havana. Also see Williams to Rives, February 3, 1888, Despatches/Havana.

⁵⁰ Portuondo del Prado, *Historia de Cuba*, 502.

⁵¹ "Expediente promovido sobre las proporciones que van tomando el bandolerismo de Puerto Príncipe," March 31, 1887, ANC, Fondo de Asuntos Políticos, file 81, no. 15; and "Expediente

The disruption produced by the separatist war, hence, does not alone explain the increase of lawlessness in the western provinces. A more direct and relevant correlation is to be found in the different patterns of land tenure and tenancy between the two regions of the island. Vast areas of eastern Cuba remained uninhabited and unchartered. More land was available to more people in Oriente than in the west, and the availability of land mitigated the effects of postwar disarray and destitution. Access to land provided individuals with subsistence and communities with sustenance, which eased the transition from war to peace.

Long after communities of small farmers had declined in the west, communal ownership and individual farms continued to flourish in the east. Whereas the sugar latifundia emerged as the principal agricultural form in the west, mixed small farms continued as the prevalent form of land tenure in the east. Even as late as 1899, Oriente contained the largest number of independent farms with the smallest average acreage. Only 0.5 percent of the farms in Oriente were over 330 acres, and they comprised only 26.9 percent of the total area under cultivation. The average size of the 21,550 farms in Oriente in 1899 was approximately 83 acres. Oriente claimed not only the highest number of individual landowners but also the highest number of renters, a total of 43,721. The contrast with the western sugar regions in 1899 was remarkable. Matanzas had the fewest number of farms—4,083—with the largest average acreage—247; followed by Havana, 6,159 farms, each averaging 135 acres; and Santa Clara, 16,129 farms averaging 115 acres.⁵²

Peace, not war, disrupted community organization and property relations in the west. Not only did consolidation of the sugar latifundia displace farmers from the land and transform peasants into a rural proletariat but capitalization of agriculture also created a labor force for which there existed neither permanent employment nor steady work. Employment was seasonal, and the length of the season was always subject to the vagaries of the world market. During the harvest (*zafra*), typically between late autumn and early spring of every year, work was available and often plentiful. The aptly named “dead season” (*tiempo muerto*), occurring during the tropical summer, followed the harvest and brought instant unemployment on a vast scale and with devastating consequences. For all the vaunted labor requirements of the latifundia system, plantations were incapable of providing employment to all workers all year long. A labor surplus in the rural population resulted, which caused destitution among workers where once there existed self-sufficiency and subsistence among farmers.

Farmers earlier tied to the land, preoccupied year round with matters of planting, harvesting, and marketing, acquired a new mobility once they became wage laborers. Without work, the newly mobile ex-farmer could take—and was often required to take—temporary leave of field and family in pursuit of

promovido para reunir los estados de hechos criminales cometidos por partidas de bandoleros en las seis provincias de la Isla,” n.d., ANC, Fondo de Asuntos Políticos, file 82, no. 1.

⁵² U.S. War Department, *Informe sobre el censo de Cuba, 1899* (Washington, D.C., 1899), 554–56; and Robert B. Hoernal, “Sugar and Social Change in Oriente, Cuba, 1898–1946,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 8 (1976): 221–26. Also see Iglesias, “Algunos aspectos de la distribución,” 126.

alternative sources of income. Banditry offered a way out of privation, an adequate if hazardous means of subsistence. "Laborers on the plantations," the U.S. consul in Matanzas reported in the summer of 1884, "have turned into highwaymen."⁵³

Brigandage had existed intermittently throughout western Cuba from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Indeed, fugitive outcasts had operated outside the law almost as far back as the century of conquest.⁵⁴ But the banditry of the late nineteenth century differed in marked ways from older forms of brigandage. Banditry after Zanjón was a localized phenomenon and did not affect all regions of Cuba equally. In those districts where banditry flourished, it was something of a ubiquitous presence—ambiguous and amorphous but persistent and proliferating. It was, in fact, rebellion—more in response to local injustice than to colonial inequities, more parochial and communal than patriotic and national. It flourished through communal collaboration and local countenance. In form and function, at its source and in its scope, banditry gave expression to popular rejection of the new order. It was an assault against property, property owners, and inevitably the authorities charged with their defense. Bandits came from among those expelled from the land or those seeking escape from destitution. Banditry was different, too, in that bandits operated in comparatively large and close-knit groups and not as lone highwaymen. The size of the fifteen distinct bands operating in post-Zanjón Cuba averaged between fifteen and thirty men, bound together by shared values in common activities against shared sources of oppression—a collective form of peasant dissidence.⁵⁵

DEVELOPMENTS IN WESTERN CUBA after Zanjón conform generally to those conditions that Eric Hobsbawm has suggested engender a specific form of rural protest identified as social banditry: peasants transformed into outlaws of a special type who enjoy the support of local residents. Social bandits operate with the acquiescence, often with the approval, of peasant communities and always within the bounds of the moral order of rural society. They are perceived as heroes, who plunder from the prosperous to provide for the poor. They are avengers, redressing grievances and righting wrongs. Banditry as an expression of premodern protest, Hobsbawm suggested, reaches epidemic proportions during times of pauperization and economic crisis. More specifically, banditry "may reflect the disruption of an entire society, the rise of new classes and social structures, the resistance of entire communities or peoples against the destruction of its way of life."⁵⁶ Peasants take up banditry, Hobsbawm wrote elsewhere, to protest oppression and impoverishment, as an outcry against the advent of agrarian capitalism

⁵³ Vickers to Davis, August 27, 1884, Despatches/Matanzas.

⁵⁴ See Francisco López Leiva, *El bandolerismo en Cuba (contribución al estudio de esta plaga social)* (Havana, 1930), 7–22.

⁵⁵ Tesifonte Gallego, *La insurrección cubana* (Madrid, 1897), 198–200; Alvaro de la Iglesia y Santos, *Manuel García (el Rey de los Campos de Cuba): Su vida y sus hechos* (Havana, 1895), 18, 34–37; and López Leiva, *El bandolerismo en Cuba*, 24.

⁵⁶ Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (New York, 1969), 18.

that comes to them from the outside, "insidiously by the operation of economic forces which they do not understand and over which they have no control."⁵⁷

Bandits operated across western Cuba throughout the 1880s and 1890s, involving at the height of rural unrest an estimated eight hundred men.⁵⁸ A few former soldiers and former slaves joined the displaced farmers and landless laborers in outlaw bands. Bandits ranged in age between twenty-five and thirty-five years old; some were younger but few older.⁵⁹ Bands under Juan Vento, José Inocencio Sosa ("Gallo Sosa"), and Manuel García ("el rey de los campos de Cuba"), the most famous leader, operated in Havana province. Victoriano and Luis Machín dominated the Vuelta Bajo region in Pinar del Río. José Plasencia, José "Matagás" Alvarez, Nicanor Duarte, Regino Alfonso, Desiderio and Nicasio Matos, and Aurelio Sanabria ranged across the interior districts of Matanzas province. In Santa Clara, Florentino Rodríguez and Bruno Gutiérrez eluded Spanish authorities for more than a decade.

During the late 1880s and early 1890s no planter or plantation was safe. Attacks against planters expressed first the social content and later the political context of peasant grievances. Planters were subjected with increasing frequency to kidnapping and ransom demands. Between 1883 and 1888, government authorities in Matanzas province reported nineteen abductions involving ransom payments in excess of seventy thousand pesos in gold.⁶⁰ Similar conditions were reported in Havana province⁶¹ and Santa Clara.⁶² Between November 1886 and May 1887, the kidnapping of planters in the provinces of Pinar del Río, Havana, and Matanzas occurred at the rate of one per month.⁶³ The patriarchs of some of the most prestigious and powerful planter families, including Nicolas Pérez Artilles, Antonio Galíndez de Aldama, Pedro Sardiña, and Antonio Fernández de Castro, fell captive to kidnapers and were released only after the delivery of substantial ransom payments.⁶⁴

Attacks against property also increased. Bandits attacked plantations, destroyed buildings, sacked supply stores, and confiscated livestock.⁶⁵ But most of all, and

⁵⁷ Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (New York, 1965), 3. Also see Anton Blok, "The Peasant and the Brigand: Social Banditry Reconsidered," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 14 (1972): 494–503.

⁵⁸ See Ballou, *Due South*, 97.

⁵⁹ For brief biographical sketches of some of the more prominent bandits, see Eduardo Varela Zequeira and Arturo Mora y Varona, *Los bandidos de Cuba* (2nd edn., Havana, 1891), 25–63; and Iglesia y Santos, *Manuel García*, 34–37.

⁶⁰ "Expediente sobre datos de bandolerismo en Matanzas," 1888, ANC, Fondo de Asuntos Políticos, file 82, no. 5; and Antonio Pirala, *España y la regencia: anales de diez y seis años (1885–1902)*, 3 vols. (Madrid, 1904–07), 2: 250–53.

⁶¹ "Expediente promovido para reunir datos de bandolerismo de la provincia de La Habana," January 3, 1888, ANC, Fondo de Asuntos Políticos, file 81, no. 21.

⁶² "Expediente promovido para reunir datos sobre el bandolerismo de la provincia de Santa Clara," January 9, 1888, ANC, Fondo de Asuntos Políticos, file 80, no. 21.

⁶³ "Expediente promovido para reunir los estados de hechos criminales cometidos por partidas de bandoleros en las seis provincias de la Isla," n.d., ANC, Fondo de Asuntos Políticos, file 82, no. 1.

⁶⁴ See "Expediente promovido con motivo del secuestro del Exmo. Sor. D. Antonio Galíndez de Aldama," 1888, ANC, Fondo de Asuntos Políticos, file 82, no. 4; and "Telegrama sobre el secuestro del hacendado Antonio Fernández de Castro, por la partida de Manuel García," September 22, 1894, ANC, Fondo de Asuntos Políticos, file 84, no. 7. Also see Iglesia y Santos, *Manuel García*, 107–09.

⁶⁵ For a detailed account of one attack against the town of Nueva Paz in Havana province, see *Diario de la Marina*, November 14, 1889.

most often; they torched the cane fields. Miles of open, unprotected fields made arson all but impossible to prevent. The vulnerability of cane fields to the torch made arson easily the most common, and frequent, expression of peasant discontent. During the harvest of 1891, which lasted about one hundred fifty days, Spanish authorities reported a total of 461 cane field fires.⁶⁶

These conditions made planters vulnerable to still another type of harassment—extortion. Bandits routinely exacted annual tributes from planters in exchange for guarantees of security. Manuel García was particularly successful in collecting levies.⁶⁷ Indeed, many planters settled directly with bandits rather than risk property damage or interruption of the harvest. American planter Edwin F. Atkins later recalled that many landowners in the Cienfuegos region paid García, although Atkins preferred “to incur the expense of maintaining a strong field guard to paying tribute.”⁶⁸

Beginning in the 1890s, García expanded his operations to include the Ferrocarriles Unidos de La Habana, the major railroad service in Havana province and the principal source of transportation of sugar and plantation equipment. The railroad shared one fateful similarity with the plantations—miles of unprotected property in the form of tracks and isolated stations. When, in 1891, officials of Ferrocarriles Unidos ignored the demand for ten thousand pesos in annual tribute, García attacked the Ferrocarriles Unidos, alternately derailling trains, destroying rail stations, and assaulting railroad crews.⁶⁹

Banditry made the Cuban countryside something of a war zone. Travel in rural Cuba soon became hazardous, and few travelers of means ventured very far into the interior without adequate security. “There are many lawless people—banditti, in fact,” commented Ballou, “who make war for plunder both upon native and foreign travelers, even resorting in some cases to holding prisoners for ransoms. . . . It is, therefore, necessary to carry arms for self-defense upon the roads in some parts of the island, and even the countrymen wear swords when bringing produce to market. Residents having occasion to go any distance inland take a well-armed guard with them, to prevent being molested by the desperate refugees who lurk in the hill country.”⁷⁰ Vickers reported from Matanzas in 1884 “an alarming increase of brigandage all over the Island. In a year it has been unsafe to go into the country unless armed like a pirate, and even then one is constantly

⁶⁶ Camilo G. Polavieja, *Relación documentada de mi política en Cuba* (Madrid, 1898), 212. Governor General Polavieja claimed that most of these fires were accidental, and undoubtedly many were. During the 1892 harvest, however, an American correspondent in Cuba reported, “Without doubt . . . outlaws have been the cause of the frequent fires among the cane fields which are daily reported”; *New York Times*, April 4, 1892.

⁶⁷ See Iglesia y Santos, *Manuel García*, 55.

⁶⁸ Atkins, *Sixty Years in Cuba* (Cambridge, Mass., 1926), 150–51.

⁶⁹ *Diario de la Marina*, August 9, 1890; “Expediente promovido para reunir los datos relativos a hechos bandalicos entre los cuales figuran el incendio del paradero del ferrocarril de Quivicán, por la partida de bandidos capitaneados por Manuel García,” 1890, ANC, Fondo de Asuntos Políticos, file 82, no. 24; and “Expediente promovido por consecuencia de oficio de la Empresa Ferrocarriles Unidos de La Habana, dando cuenta de que en el kilómetro 64, de los bandidos de la partida de Manuel García, levantaron un carril, descarrilando un tren de carga e hicieron fuegos al maquinista y conductor,” 1890, ANC, Fondo de Asuntos Políticos, file 82, no. 24.

⁷⁰ Ballou, *Due South*, 63–64.

in danger of assassination. Owners of estates cannot visit their plantations without running the risk of kidnapping, and the cities are becoming as dangerous as the country."⁷¹

More than the safety of travelers was at risk. Deepening social tensions in western Cuba threatened the most productive agricultural regions of the island with ruin. Trade and commerce suffered; transportation was disrupted. And there was no evidence to suggest that order would soon return. On the contrary, incidents of banditry increased in frequency and grew in audacity. By the 1890s, sugar estates once immune from banditry by their nearness to the capital were increasingly under attack. In January 1893, Ignacio Herrera, a prominent planter and the son of the count of Barreto, was kidnapped within the Havana city limits and held for ten thousand pesos in ransom. In 1895, the sugar mill Portugalete, located almost within view of Havana, was attacked and destroyed by Manuel García.⁷² The U.S. consul in Havana described the growing sense of urgency among local residents. "Small bands of marauders have often existed in Cuba," wrote Ramon O. Williams as early as 1887, "but heretofore the Government has always succeeded in speedily capturing or dispersing them. Never before, however, have they been so bold and defiant as now."⁷³ The Havana daily *Diario de la Marina* similarly denounced the "lamentable plague" of banditry. The increasing incidents of planter kidnappings in particular aroused editorial ire and prompted the newspaper to demand quick official action. "The evil is a very grave one, and it is necessary to stop it, for the personal tranquillity of many families and of thousands of persons in the country is involved, all of whom ask for support and protection against these thieves and murderers. . . . Special energy is required for the extinction of this plague."⁷⁴

But it was not for want of government efforts that banditry flourished. Indeed, it may very well have increased as a result of those efforts. Few other issues between 1878 and 1895 so preoccupied colonial authorities, for social unrest in the countryside had far-reaching political and economic implications. The assault against the planter bourgeoisie struck at the linchpin of the colonial system, threatening the vital interests of the class upon whose continued collaboration Spain depended for successful rule in Cuba. The inability to defend the persons and property of the planter class frightened administrators, already on the defensive against growing political dissent and deepening economic dislocation. The mere existence of bandit groups, particularly the number that flourished in post-Zanjón Cuba, weakened the moral authority of colonial government and undermined the prestige of Spanish administration. The authorities, beleaguered planters complained, could not provide even minimal guarantees of security to the producing classes, which made the prospect of economic revival uncertain.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Vickers to Davis, August 27, 1884, Despatches/Matanzas.

⁷² Gallego, *La insurrección cubana*, 247.

⁷³ Ramon O. Williams to James D. Porter, March 26, 1887, Despatches/Havana.

⁷⁴ *Diario de la Marina*, March 24, 1887.

⁷⁵ Governor General Polavieja was concerned with ending banditry not only to restore stability to rural Cuba but also to restore credibility to colonial government. Throughout his administration he feared that the persistence of outlawry would undermine Spanish authority on the island. See Polavieja, *Relación documentada de mi política en Cuba*, 85, 195–97.

Disorder in the rich agricultural zones of western Cuba, moreover, threatened to thwart efforts to recover Cuba's former primacy in sugar production and thereby threatened the planter class with ruin.⁷⁶

These conditions encouraged annexationist sentiment among planters, who increasingly believed that union with the United States would bring the security and order absent under Spanish rule. Planters in increasing numbers were experiencing a crisis of confidence, and more than a few publicly questioned the efficacy of remaining a Spanish colony. These were portentous developments, and no one misconstrued the portents. "Many are already talking of resistance and annexation to the United States," reported Vickers from Matanzas as early as 1884, "not that they love Spain less, but their interests more."⁷⁷ "Annexation to the United States," the Havana daily *El Popular* predicted confidently in 1887, "would make Cuba a rich, enlightened, and tranquil country."⁷⁸ Wrote the U.S. consul in Havana, "A great many persons here, who years ago hooted the idea of annexation to the United States now advocate it, as the only remedy for the preservation of public order and the attainment of future commercial prosperity in the island."⁷⁹

The government was not slow to respond to rural lawlessness. Across the western interior, the government military presence increased. As early as 1884, in an attempt to provide better protection to planters in Matanzas during the harvest, colonial authorities augmented the number of Guardia Civil detachments.⁸⁰ In 1889, Spain established a Rural Guard Corps, organizing the unit into a network of permanent rural outposts throughout the sugar zones.⁸¹ In the same year, Governor General Manuel Salamanca ordered all Guardia Civil posts on the island linked together by telephone to facilitate communication and coordinate operations against outlaws. Salamanca subsequently authorized the establishment of telegraph lines between the larger sugar estates and provincial headquarters of the Guardia Civil.⁸² Government efforts also included more surveillance and collection and analysis of intelligence. The authorities continued to alternate offers of amnesty with the posting of generous rewards for information leading to the capture of known fugitives.⁸³

The most ambitious government undertaking took the form of full-scale military operations. In 1888 the most formidable Spanish military offensive since the end of the Ten Years War was launched in response to a sudden increase in kidnappings of planters and, consequently, rising public impatience. Governor

⁷⁶ López Leiva, *El bandolerismo en Cuba*, 28–29.

⁷⁷ Vickers to Davis, July 2, 1884, Despatches/Matanzas.

⁷⁸ *El Popular*, February 11, 1887.

⁷⁹ Ramon O. Williams to James D. Porter, May 18, 1887, Despatches/Havana. For a discussion of annexationist sentiment during these years, see José Ignacio Rodríguez, *Estudio histórico sobre el origen, desenvolvimiento y manifestaciones prácticas de la idea de la anexión de la Isla de Cuba a los Estados Unidos de América* (Havana, 1900), 243–86.

⁸⁰ *Diario de la Marina*, December 24, 1884.

⁸¹ "Expediente promovido para crear en esta Isla, el Cuerpo de Guardias Rurales," 1889–90, ANC, Fondo de Asuntos Políticos, file 82, no. 19.

⁸² Gobierno de la Isla de Cuba, "Decreto," August 8, 1889, ANC, Fondo Gobierno General, file 584, no. 28863.

⁸³ *La Lucha*, April 17, 1889; and Francisco Figueras, *Cuba y su evolución colonial* (Havana, 1907), 289–90.

Sabás Marín proclaimed a state of war in the four western provinces of Pinar del Río, Havana, Matanzas, and Santa Clara, placing the administration of justice entirely under the jurisdiction of military authorities.⁸⁴ The offensive continued through 1889 without much effect and was subsequently ended during the brief administration of Governor Manuel Salamanca. But, with the appointment of Camilo G. Polavieja as governor general in 1890, military operations resumed. Within weeks of his arrival in Havana, Polavieja mounted a second and even more formidable offensive against bandits. Some ten thousand troops were amassed in major but again ultimately futile military operations.⁸⁵

Certainly not all government efforts were ineffective. Many bandits were captured by the police and killed in military operations.⁸⁶ Indeed, between 1889 and 1891, some of the most prominent bandit leaders, including Sixto Valera, Andrés Santana, and Domingo Montolongo, were captured by the authorities. Public executions were revived, ending a longstanding moratorium on capital punishment—evidence of Spanish determination to end banditry. They were calculated to give maximum publicity to the meager progress made by the government—a public demonstration to calm public disquiet. Between 1889 and 1891, hangings proceeded at the rate of one a month.⁸⁷

But success against individual bandits in the field and convictions in the courts failed to establish order in the provinces. Outlaw bands were neither defeated nor dispersed. After almost ten years, and nearly as many different colonial administrations, the mightiest of Spanish efforts had failed to end what was officially referred to as “the plague.” Banditry was a condition that would not go away. As colonial officials knew only too well, military authorities faced more than the task of catching outlaws. They were engaged in a low-level war, not only against bandits but also against communities of thousands of peasants and laborers who served as the natural allies and loyal accomplices of fugitive bands. Either by passive acquiescence or active participation, local residents formed a complex support network, involving men, women, and children who provided outlaws with aid and alibis, protection and provisions, sanctuary and support. In the dispersed villages

⁸⁴ Sabas Marín, “Bando,” July 3, 1888, ANC, Fondo Gobierno General, file 584, no. 28863.

⁸⁵ “Expediente promovido para reunir las disposiciones que se dicten sobre bandolerismo durante el mando del Excmo. Sor. Gobernador General D. Camilo Polavieja,” 1890, ANC, Fondo de Asuntos Políticos, file 82, no. 26. Also see Polavieja, *Relación documentada de mi política en Cuba*, 199–200; and López Leiva, *El bandolerismo en Cuba*, 22–25.

⁸⁶ See “Relación nominal de bandidos muertos por la fuerza pública desde 1^{ro} julio de 1887 a 28 marzo de 1888,” March 28, 1888, ANC, Fondo de Asuntos Políticos, file 81, no. 18.

⁸⁷ See Iglesia y Santos, *Manuel García*, 170; and Polavieja, *Relación documentada de mi política en Cuba*, 211–12. The publicity value of public executions was underscored by the following press despatch: “Deep alarm reigns all over the country in consequence of the daily increase of all sorts of crimes, the perpetrators being encouraged in their actions by the complete immunity they enjoy. In spite of daily assassinations, the public never learns whether the assassins are punished, and an execution has not taken place since the days when political prisoners were occasionally garroted.” *New York Times*, July 12, 1883. The bandits captured and subsequently executed by Spanish authorities between 1889 and 1891 included Victoriano Machín; Cristóbal Fernández Delgado; Eusebio Moreno y Suárez; Joaquín Alemán; Federico Acosta; José Manuel Martín Pérez; Dionisio Guzmán Pérez; Manuel and José de León Ortiz; Nicanor Duarte Ramos; Venancio, José, and Carmelo Díaz Ramos; Felipe González López; Francisco Paz; Pedro Boitel; Pedro Macías Ortall; José Estrauaman Daria; Valentín González López; Guillermo Pérez Cruz; José Sánchez Ortega; Pablo Cantero; and Teodor Galano.

and hamlets of rural Cuba the military's task became impossible. Bandits were themselves local men, whose familiarity with the remote terrain in which they operated accounted in part for the ease with which they eluded the authorities.

More important, however, were the ties of kinship and friendship that bound outlaws to the rural communities. Bandit groups represented a cross section of the people among whom they lived. They shared common experiences and traditions but most of all shared similar grievances. They gave form to local resistance to the new socioeconomic order and the old political-military system. Attacks were directed principally against sources of local oppression, and each deed had symbolic content. "The peasants continue protecting Manuel García," an exasperated Polavieja reported in 1891, "for they see in him, not the bandit, but the partisan up in arms against Spain."⁸⁸

Bandits were supported generally by entire communities but especially by those peasants who were themselves caught mid-way between the peasantry and the proletariat—forced inexorably toward wage labor but still clinging to the land.⁸⁹ The abduction of planters, the attacks against the plantations, and the assaults against the railroads were actions readily understood by rural communities. On occasion, bandits passed the spoils of war on to the rural population. Manuel García frequently used ransom money to buy food, supplies, and equipment for peasants and rural workers.⁹⁰ This gesture may have been motivated as much by practical considerations as political conviction, for it served to foster goodwill among the people upon whose support bandits depended for survival.⁹¹ And the villagers responded in kind. About García, runaway slave Esteban Montejo later recalled: "He was a friend of the *guajiro* [peasant], a real friend. If they ever saw the police getting close to a place where Manuel was, they used to take their trousers off and hang them on a rope waist down. This was the signal for Manuel to get moving, and that must be why he lived so long as an outlaw."⁹²

Colonial authorities were not unaware of the magnitude of this collaboration. Nor were they unmindful of its implications. Indeed, Spanish intelligence reports provide a comprehensive and detailed account of the extent of the aid that farmers gave to fugitives. One military intelligence report from the town of Madruga in eastern Havana province contains a lengthy list of local residents who assisted bandit leaders. These included Rafael Almeida, who sheltered the bandit

⁸⁸ Polavieja, *Relación documentada de mi política en Cuba*, 205.

⁸⁹ Guillermo R. Fort, chief of operations, Guardia Civil, Madruga, "Relación," December 19, 1894, ANC, Fondo Gobierno General, file 584, no. 28863.

⁹⁰ Esteban Montejo, *Autobiography of a Runaway Slave*, trans. Jocasta Innes and ed. Miguel Barnet (London, 1968), 113. Also see Eduardo Zamacois, *La alegría de andar* (Madrid, 1920), 153–54; and Manuel García to José Lachambre, n.d., in Varela Zequerira and Mora y Varona, *Los bandidos de Cuba*, 212.

⁹¹ This practice was one way that Brazilian bandits garnered support from the peasantry. See Linda Lewin, "The Oligarchical Limitations of Social Banditry in Brazil: The Case of the 'Good' Thief Antonio Silvino," *Past and Present*, 82 (1979): 137–38.

⁹² Montejo, *Autobiography of a Runaway Slave*, 119. Montejo's account is corroborated by the testimony of Lorenzo Yanes, a farmer in Melena del Sur, who at the age of ninety-two recounted several instances of peasant support for Manuel García. See Lorenzo Yanes and René Batista Moreno, "Retratos de una vida hazañera," *Bohemia*, January 22, 1971, pp. 98–99. Also see López Leiva, *El bandolerismo en Cuba*, 27–29.

Asunción Muerte; Victoriano Jacomino, who provided bandit José Plasencia changes of clothing; Miguel Mesa, who supplied Manuel García with food and horses; Joaquín Chávez, who regularly gave bandits shelter, supplies, and fresh horses; Manuel Hernández, whose home was a meeting place for several bandit groups; José Mario Brito, who acted as a purchasing agent for supplies; Severino Méndez and Matías Domínguez Fundora, who served as intermediaries during kidnapping negotiations and ransom transactions; Juan Luis Bello, who acted as messenger among various bandit groups; Tomas Hernández, who sheltered Manuel García, José Plasencia, Vicente García, and Gallo Sosa and served as a collector of ransom funds for Antonio Santana. All had a role in the rural drama. Some provided intelligence information concerning the strength of local army units, and others reported the movement of government forces.⁹³ But all steadfastly professed ignorance of the activities or whereabouts of the outlaws. "He is protected absolutely by the country people," Polavieja wrote of Manuel García.⁹⁴

Nor was the collaboration of the country people restricted to passive support. Occasionally some served as auxiliary members of an outlaw band, participating in special operations that required augmented forces. "Every group of bandits," Polavieja later wrote, "counted upon a certain number of peasants who joined them armed for important actions, and who subsequently returned to their homes as peaceful citizens and ignorant of everything."⁹⁵ This practice was especially prevalent during the dead season, when the unemployed sought relief from the combined effects of idleness and indigence.

The government's fight, hence, was not primarily with the outlaw bands but with the communities that aided them. Increasingly, and inevitably, the full weight of government frustration fell on the country people suspected of collaborating with fugitives. The imposition of martial law in 1888 and 1890 and subsequent military operations were directed as much against the local rural population as against the bandits themselves, who, in any case, routinely eluded even the most widespread military operations. During periods of martial law peasants and rural workers were arrested and tried by courts martial. Arrests were indiscriminate. Peasants detained for questioning disappeared. Some were beaten to death; others were subjected to the *ley de fuga*: "shot while trying to escape." Survivors told of beatings and torture. The Guardia Civil became a source of terror, deepening the estrangement between the country people and colonial authorities.⁹⁶ Each military campaign meant the disruption of local life, and communities dispersed in anticipation of new and sustained periods of government operations. Village

⁹³ Fort, "Relación," December 19, 1894, ANC, Fondo Gobierno General, file 584, no. 28863. Another intelligence report of comparable detail is available for the town of Quivicán in central Havana province. See Justo Pardo González, Operations, Guardia Civil, Quivicán, "Relación," December 18, 1894, ANC, Fondo Gobierno General, file 584, no. 28863; and Varela Zequeira and Mora y Varona, *Los bandidos de Cuba*, 44.

⁹⁴ Polavieja, *Relación documentada de mi política en Cuba*, 211.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 88. Throughout his memoir, Polavieja complained of peasant support of bandits and how this collaboration made the Spanish task all but impossible. See *Ibid.*, 87, 195, 213.

⁹⁶ Luis Estévez y Romero, *Desde el Zanjón hasta Baire*, 1 (2d edn., Havana, 1975), 311; and Portuondo del Prado, *Historia de Cuba*, 502.

marketplaces were destroyed, and local trade and agriculture suffered. The homes of suspected peasant collaborators were burned and razed. "The government has had at times as many as six thousand troops," one Cuban wrote, "besides the rural police [Orden Público] and volunteers, in pursuit of these brigands, and yet for every bandit captured or killed, the newspapers are filled with complaints from poor farmers who are beaten and insulted as harborers of criminals. All this show of force has been another source of squandering and tension as a result of the summary executions in unpopulated regions, on the pretext that suspects resisted arrest or tried to escape."⁹⁷ Villagers abandoned their homes and fled deeper into the remote interior in search of sanctuary. Some sought temporary safety with outlaw bands. Indeed, in 1889, Manuel García announced that government military operations had increased his band of nineteen to a battalion of four hundred.⁹⁸

The failure of the colonial government to defeat bandits led to greater efforts to dominate the peasants who supported them. Responsibility and punishment for the actions of bandits were transferred to the country people, without whom, authorities insisted, fugitives could not long sustain their depredations. And, increasingly, it was against the rural communities that authorities directed their actions. Many country people, the civil governor of Havana province, Luis Alonso Martín, warned in November 1887, "either through culpable complicity, or from lack of energy and courage, contribute to making more difficult, when not completely defeating, the action of the authorities, by maliciously concealing the passage of bandits through the fields, or reporting it too late, and in many cases withholding information of important matters." Martín proclaimed that all persons had an "imperative duty" to report the presence or passage of fugitives in local communities. Delay in communicating information, moreover, "if it exceeds the time deemed necessary in the judgment of the authorities," would be construed as "shielding the malefactors," and appropriate action would be taken.⁹⁹ In April 1888, only days after the kidnapping of planter Antonio Galíndez de Aldama, the Havana daily *Voz de Cuba* exhorted the government to prosecute all participants in the crime, particularly those who sheltered the outlaws. "Let the penalty for kidnapping," the editorial demanded, "be executed not only upon the bandits, but upon their harborers and accomplices, and upon all engaged in this detestable plot to ruin our agricultural wealth."¹⁰⁰ In proclaiming martial law in 1888, Governor Sabas Marín pledged to proceed with an equally "strong hand against the leaders, accomplices, and harborers of these crimes." Enjoining his field commanders to move against communities suspected of providing aid and comfort to bandits, Sabas Marín vowed: "I am resolved to exact of them the responsibility they incur, if they neglect to lend their moral and material support to the government, which their duty as citizens imposes upon them." Indeed, it was

⁹⁷ Merchán, *Cuba, justificación de sus guerras de independencia*, 88.

⁹⁸ Varela Zequeira and Mora y Varona, *Los bandidos de Cuba*, 79.

⁹⁹ Luis Alonso Martín, "Circular from the Civil Governor of Havana Concerning the Suppression of Highway Robbery," November 14, 1887, in Cabrera, *Cuba and the Cubans*, 305–06.

¹⁰⁰ *Voz de Cuba*, April 8, 1888.

precisely the growing collaboration between bandits and villagers, Sabas Marín explained, that required the government to impose martial law. "The aid given . . . in a part of the island by a few deluded persons," he stated, "converting themselves into aiders and abettors, compels the adoption of extraordinary measures to put an end to disorders."¹⁰¹

Governor Manuel Salamanca demanded more legal action in the courts and enjoined government attorneys (*fiscales*) to prosecute vigorously all suspects charged with aiding bandits. "Without doubt," Salamanca predicted in 1889, "the active and well-directed efforts of the military forces against the bandits that infest the rural districts will have little effect if the attorneys entrusted with their prosecution do not display all the zeal and intelligence necessary not only for the discovery of crimes but also for the bringing of accomplices, aiders, and abettors to trial, regardless of their social rank or motive of relationships with those subject to the action of the court and with those whom they help escape punishment and thereby directly or indirectly impede the administration of justice." Salamanca concluded:

It is of great importance that these functionaries should take into consideration that one of the most efficient means for the destruction of banditry and the prevention of bandits from having their own way is the punishment of all persons who lend them help, and the exaction of due responsibility of those who sympathize with them, for it is an undeniable fact that if the bandit who respects neither life nor property finds no assistance in the districts where he exercises his criminal profession, nor finds even shelter afforded by the sentiment of indifference toward his acts, he would feel the dangers of his isolation and in a short time would be obliged to abandon the fields of his habitual incursion.¹⁰²

Not all peasants and workers collaborated with bandits willingly. Any peasant discovered by the authorities to have fed and sheltered bandits would have been wise to claim coercion, but some aided the outlaws only under duress. "Parties of these bandits," wrote U.S. Vice Consul Henry A. Ehringer in Cienfuegos, "numbering from 5 to 10 go about the country relying on the sympathy or toleration of the inhabitants of whom they exact food and horses, extorted in many cases by threats of personal violence or destruction of their property." Ehringer continued:

A party visits the house of a countryman and demands food, money, or horses. The person called upon dares not refuse them. Afterwards there arrives a party of troops or police in pursuit of these outlaws, and hearing that they have been there, they arrest the already suffering countryman on the charge of having given aid and shelter to the bandits. In many cases taking into their own hands the punishment of those persons who acted from self-preservation.¹⁰³

The bandits' use of coercion was often disregarded by the authorities. As a result, peasants faced a dilemma. Those known to have assisted the government were

¹⁰¹ Sabas Marín, "Circular," *Diario de la Marina*, April 19, 1888. Also see *La Lucha*, April 17, 1888; and Sabas Marín, "Bando," July 3, 1888, ANC, Fondo Gobierno General, file 584, no. 28863.

¹⁰² *Gaceta de La Habana*, April 3, 1889.

¹⁰³ Ehringer to James D. Porter, December 29, 1886, Despatches/Cienfuegos.

frequently the victims of assassination—a lesson not lost on country people.¹⁰⁴ The authorities that could not protect the powerful planters could hardly be expected to protect the powerless peasant. In a curious way, the crisis of confidence that gripped the propertied also affected the propertyless. The colonial regime revealed itself incapable of providing even minimal guarantees for persons and property. It had become irrelevant to the reality of Cuban society.

BANDITRY PERSISTED through early 1895, when in February Cubans across the island rose up in the name of Cuba Libre. The forces released during the Ten Years War and the economic dislocation and social distress in post-Zanjón Cuba had contributed to deepening colonial discontent and served as the source for the renewal of armed struggle. The new separatist movement was, however, dissimilar in character and different in composition from the earlier rebellion. One difference was planning. Another was preparation. Furthermore, in 1895 the Cubans were united and organized. A broad coalition of Cubans had organized under the Cuban Revolution party (PRC), sustained during times of enormous adversity by an indissoluble commitment that by the late nineteenth century had assumed fully the proportions of a political faith.

But neither preparation nor organization, however vital to the success of Cuban separatists, was the decisive difference in 1895. Rather, the ideological content of separatist thought and the social origins of separatist leadership were the key factors. Cuba had changed from the “Grito de Yara” in 1868 to the “Grito de Baire” in 1895, and in the intervening years the sources of Cuban grievances no longer emanated exclusively from the rule of the distant European metropolis. By the late nineteenth century, Spain was neither the principal beneficiary nor the primary benefactor of the colony. Inequity in 1895 had a peculiarly home-grown quality. That the sources of oppression in Cuba were more internal than external, more social than political, served as the central premise around which separatism took shape during the 1880s and 1890s. The separatists were committed to more than independence. The movement subsumed a social imperative into a vision of a free Cuba. What was different in 1895 was the recognition that inequity was principally caused not by Spanish political rule, for which independence was the obvious solution, but by the Cuban social system, for which the transformation of Cuban society was the only remedy. Cubans continued to speak of independence, but they now spoke too of war as a method of redemption and a means of social revolution. Political separatism had expanded into revolutionary populism, committed as much to ending colonial relationships within the colony as to ending the colonial connection with the metropolis. The separatist enterprise was conceived as both

¹⁰⁴ Polavieja wrote of one incident in which a peasant couple dutifully reported a visit from Manuel García to the authorities. The couple was subsequently killed by the bandit. The best that Polavieja could do was to secure public charity for the orphaned children. On the body of the dead man, García had left the following note: “Hernández had been my friend since boyhood. I killed him because he tried to deliver me to the Guards. I have never before killed a woman, but I killed his wife because she induced him to betray me. I hurt only those who hurt me.” Polavieja, *Relación documentada de mi política en Cuba*, 206–07; and *New York Times*, October 6, 1891.

a rebellion against Spanish political rule and revolution against the Cuban social order.

The vision of Cuba Libre remained admittedly imprecise. Cubans spoke more to aspiration than action, promise rather than program. Concerns were expressed in thematic rather than programmatic terms. The separatist leadership did not develop a program as much as it identified the problems and committed the future republic to their resolution. But these vague commitments established the articles of faith around which Cubans gathered. Separatism evolved into an endeavor to change Cuban politics fundamentally by creating new ways of mobilizing and sharing political power. The sources of Cuban discontent—social, economic, political, racial, historic—converged into a radical movement of enormous force. To the historic objective of national liberation was added a social imperative of national revolution, and a movement dedicated to the establishment of a new nation became a movement devoted to shaping a new society.

Different, too, were the social origins of separatist leadership. A new constituency organized around Cuba Libre: the politically powerless, the socially displaced, and the destitute—Cubans for whom armed struggle offered the means through which to redress historic grievances against the colonial regime and its local defenders. A dispossessed peasantry, an expatriate proletariat, former slaves and farmers responded to the summons to arms. Many were men of color. Some 40 percent of the senior commissioned ranks of the Liberation Army was made up of Afro-Cubans.¹⁰⁵ These were Cubans for whom the old regime was as much a social anathema as it was a political anachronism. They had committed themselves to a movement that promised not only to free them from the old oppression but also to give them a new place in society, a new government they would control, and a new nation to belong to. The Cuban emigre communities in Key West, Tampa, Ocala, and Jacksonville also gave focus and force to the stirrings of Cuba Libre. The expatriate proletariat was a vital constituency around which the PRC organized.¹⁰⁶

As banditry had served to express local grievances, thereby keeping the rural population in more or less a state of continuous resistance to the colonial regime, it had also transformed rural Cuba into a theater of permanent military operations. Local discontent with government military actions and the post-Zanjón economic order—which generalized into resistance against the colonial political system—enhanced enormously the appeal of separatism. Local communities soon found their grievances with the old political regime overtaking their discontent with the new agrarian regimen. Independence offered one solution to both problems.

In the early 1890s, bandit activities had acquired distinctive separatist undercurrents. Individual bandit chieftains found the passage from social protest to

¹⁰⁵ See Matías Duque, *Nuestra patria* (Havana, 1923), 143; Kenneth F. Kiple, *Blacks in Colonial Cuba, 1774–1889* (Gainesville, Fla., 1976), 81; Rafael Fermoselle, *Política y color en Cuba* (Montevideo, 1974), 26; and Donna M. Wolf, "The Cuban 'Gente de Color' and the Independence Movement, 1879–1895," *Revista Interamericana*, 5 (1975–76): 403–21.

¹⁰⁶ Louis A. Pérez, Jr., "Cubans in Tampa: From Exiles to Immigrants, 1892–1901," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, 53 (1974): 129–40.

political rebellion easy, if not inevitable. Manuel García was an ardent supporter of Cuba Libre. He had been one of those criminals who earlier had accepted a Spanish subsidy to emigrate to Florida. And it was in the course of his two years as a cigar worker in Key West that García's conversion to the separatist faith occurred. When he returned to Cuba in 1888, he did so as an agent of the Revolutionary Club of Key West and often invoked the slogans of Cuba Libre during his assaults against property.¹⁰⁷

During the 1890s, too, funds obtained by bandits from ransom payments increasingly found their way into separatist coffers. Much of the money collected by García during these years served to support the revolutionary activities of his former associates in Key West. The ransom obtained for the release of planter Antonio Fernández de Castro in 1894 was donated to PRC organizers in Havana. During the 1890s an estimated seventy-five thousand pesos were given to revolutionary organizations in the United States. Money was used, too, to buy arms, ammunition, and supplies, all of which placed entire districts of rural Cuba on a war footing. Between them, Manuel García and José "Matagás" Alvarez managed to collect some five hundred arms.¹⁰⁸

Banditry gave way to a war of liberation, and both offered a means to right old wrongs. Many identified the struggle for independence with the fight for land. Nor was this an incorrect perception. In 1896, in what was tantamount to a sweeping land reform decree, the insurgent army command proclaimed:

All lands acquired by the Cuban Republic either by conquest or confiscation, except what is employed for governmental purposes, shall be divided among the defenders of the Cuban Republic against Spain, and each shall receive a portion corresponding to the services rendered. . . . All lands, money, or property in any and all forms previously belonging to Spain, to its allies, abettors, or sympathizers, or to any person or corporation acting in the interest of Spain or in any manner disloyal to the Cuban Republic are hereby confiscated, for the benefit of the Cuban Army and of all the defenders of the Cuban Republic.¹⁰⁹

Furthermore, a change of government, particularly a change to which individual bandit leaders contributed, promised to end the fugitive existence for many. Only a month before the outbreak of the 1895 war, Manuel García acknowledged that his support of the separatist cause was in part motivated by the hope of obtaining from the new republic a pardon allowing him to return to peaceful pursuits.¹¹⁰

García was not alone. Scores of outlaw bands passed directly into armed insurgent ranks. José Inocencio Sosa in Havana, José "Matagás" Alvarez in Matanzas, Nicasio Matos in Santa Clara, and Lino Mirabal in Camagüey immediately seconded the call for independence and integrated their followers into the

¹⁰⁷ Varela Zequeira and Mora y Varona, *Los bandidos de Cuba*, 86.

¹⁰⁸ See Octavio Ramón Costa y Blanco, *Juan Gualberto Gómez: Una vida sin sombra* (Havana, 1950), 118-19; Emilio Reverter Delmas, *Cuba española: Reseña histórica de la insurrección cubana en 1895*, 1 (Barcelona, 1897), 3; and Rafael Gutiérrez Fernández, *Los heroes del 24 de febrero* (Havana, 1932), 144-56.

¹⁰⁹ Headquarters of the Army of Liberation, "Proclamation," July 4, 1896, in Joaquín Llaverías y Martínez, ed., *Correspondencia diplomática de la delegación cubana en Nueva York durante la guerra de 1895 a 1898*, 5 (Havana, 1946), 176-77.

¹¹⁰ Iglesia y Santos, *Manuel García*, 200.

columns of the Liberation Army.¹¹¹ In 1895 the bandits became patriots. By themselves bandits had failed to develop an adequate organizational structure for a struggle of liberation. They possessed neither the capacity for political mobilization nor a program for revolutionary change. But they were successful in sustaining protest. Perhaps more important, bandits represented defense of the traditional agrarian order and hence served to embolden regional resistance and encourage individual rebellion. Their example was emulated by many peasants and workers. These were men who responded to injustice and persecution with armed protest and reprisal, men who rejected the passive social role of the submissive peasant and engaged on its own terms the coercive authority of the state. Their mere existence offered a remedy to oppression. Bandits demonstrated that justice was attainable and that the propertyless were not powerless. When later in 1895 the central columns of the Liberation Army invaded Santa Clara, Matanzas, and Havana, they joined a local uprising already a decade in progress.¹¹² In ten months Cubans secured what they had failed to accomplish in the Ten Years War: participation of the west in the struggle for independence. A regional stirring for social justice had been transformed into a national struggle for self-determination.

¹¹¹ See Oswaldo Morales Patiño, *El Capitán Chino: Teniente coronel Quirino Zamora; Historia de un mambí en la provincia de La Habana* (Havana, 1953), 131; and Miguel Angel Varona Guerrero, *La guerra de independencia de Cuba, 1895-1898*, 2 (Havana, 1946), 836.

¹¹² For accounts of the invasion, see José Silveira Llorens y Maceo, *Con Maceo en la invasión* (Havana, 1928); Juan J. E. Casasús, *La invasión: Sus antecedentes, sus factores, su finalidad; Estudio crítico-militar* (Havana, 1950); and Francisco Ponte Domínguez, "La invasión," in Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, ed., *Curso de introducción a la historia de Cuba* (Havana, 1938), 343-50.